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Sessions with Joel Feigin

ANTON ROVNER

I met with the American composer Joel Feigin recently in Moscow for a series of questions.

ROVNER: Could you tell us something about your early development as a composer, about the composers that you studied with, and who influenced you as teachers and mentors?

FEIGIN: I studied with Roger Sessions at the Juilliard School, where I received a Master's degree and then a Doctoral degree. He was a wonderful teacher. His method was that he used to probe into the details of pieces that I would bring him and make some comments such as, "Wouldn't it be better if this eighth-note were a quarter-note?" Helpful hints like that led to a greater number of ideas on how to continue pieces. I also studied with Nadia Boulanger at Fontainebleau for four summers. She was wonderful to work with, being in many ways a spiritual teacher. She was a devout Catholic and regarded herself as a nun for music; she regarded music in a spiritual way and conveyed that to her students, while at the same time she was very much connected to the craft of music and was very attentive to the way a composition was constructed technically and whether the composer heard the music in terms of pure solfège. In her manner of teaching she also paid attention to basic elements of music, like "what is that note and how does that connect to the whole piece?" I am very grateful for all of her influences, not only musically but also in the many ways she set me on a spiritual path. The last teacher I had was Otto Luening, during the last period of his life. He was more of a mentor and even a friend than a teacher. He never took any money; I merely visited him when I had a piece to show. In many ways, similarly to Boulanger, he had basic qualities of a guru. He was very helpful in developing clarity of gesture. Once, when I brought him a piece, he said "There are many good things in it, but if I were a conductor, I wouldn't be sure what to do." This seemingly superficial remark was in fact very helpful for me and gave me some insight on how to change the piece and make it comprehensible. As a teacher, he was the opposite of Sessions, who was very conscientious about details. Otto examined pieces more in terms of an overall view and made general comments, which were very relevant.

ROVNER: What kind of musical styles or trends did you follow throughout the course of your compositional career? I am aware that you wrote 12-tone music, then you switched to a more tonal style and, finally, you developed a personal style, which frequently combines different styles, trends, and musical languages, in one piece. Could you elaborate on how you achieve this "interstylism"?

FEIGIN: The most general thing I could say about my music is that I basically write what I hear. I know that anything else is madness and a lack of integrity. I hear many different sorts of music and, hence, I write in many different styles. I hear many different sorts of music floating and pouring into each other and that, basically, expresses what I have to express. I went through a brief 12-tone period in my youth, which gradually passed into a phase of free atonality. One memorable event happened which enhanced this change. I was writing a piece, during my studies with Sessions, where I treated the 12-tone writing very freely and suspended it at times. Sessions asked me: "Do you have a row in this piece?" and I answered: "I do, but I treat it very freely and occasionally deviate from the row." He remarked: "If what you write starts getting that complicated, then just forget the row and write what you hear." That marked a change in my writing. Though the 12-tone row was definitely a part of that piece, I started writing very freely in my next piece. My next phase was that of freely atonal music, more in the line of Alban Berg. Once I ended up having a lullaby in E major. I was very reluctant to show it to Sessions, but when I overcame my fears, he said: "Who would worry about it at this day and age?" The tonal part owed its power to the text I was setting. Since then, I have gradually developed a more personal type of tonality. In my opera *Mysteries of Eleusis* most of the music is atonal, but when the events develop in a dramatic way at the end, the music becomes more tonal and triadic. I was pleased with that piece, more than with my previous tonal pieces. I felt that this was more "my" piece. After that I began using tonality more frequently. I made the acquaintance of composer Robert Savage, who was a much more adamant tonal composer. While both of us got involved in Zen studies, the results were distinctly different. Robert started writing more freely atonal music, while I wrote tonal music more readily. As a result of these studies, we came close to that which we dreaded in the past, though the studies led us in opposite directions. Since then, I have written many pieces, which are very tonal, yet which are indeed my own music and not derivative. I have given much thought to integrating tonal and atonal elements in music, as well as symmetric and asymmetric, into each other. I started writing music in which one phrase would be clearly tonal and the next atonal, without a slightest jolt. I wrote a vocal cycle to the texts of Rilke where I went even further in that direction. What I can say in general about my music is that for me it is an expression of myself and a communication of my emotion to others.

Any musical language has inherent in itself different possibilities of emotional expression. For instance, the high Baroque musical language is magnificent for religious opera and not good for comic opera. The style of high Classicism, for instance Mozart, is good for comic opera and not good for religious music. It is not accidental that the two greatest highly religious works by Mozart, his *Mass in C Minor* and *Requiem*, are in all essence an adaptation of the Baroque style. The Romantic style is adaptable for big emotions (in such pieces as *Tristan* and *Otello*) and not too effective for comic opera (such as *Meistersinger*). Verdi's great comic opera *Falstaff* is clearly an evocation of past styles. *Falstaff* also has the additional features of being a very original and forward-looking in its styles: it takes formulae of Mozart and Haydn and then gives them a fresh new development. The trend of stylistic juxtaposition -- what Schnittke called "polystylistic style"-- expresses in a basic way the world in which we are living: a world not limited to geographic area. In the past, German and Italian opera were quite distant from each other geographically and thus developed differently stylistically. Now that is not possible any more in light of contemporary communication. So this interstylistic trend is a natural result of emotions that we feel and naturally express in music.

ROVNER: Could you give some examples of your pieces which follow this interstylistic trend?

FEIGIN: My first opera *Mysteries of Eleusis* is a crucial piece for me. It was written in 1985 and 1986, and was first performed in 1986. It was the first piece that I felt very good about the way I was introducing tonal elements. This was a turning point in my development as a composer, after which I really felt that all of my previous pieces were "early" pieces. I feel myself very much as a vocal composer, i.e. a composer of operas, song cycles and other related genres. Of course, I write a lot of instrumental music, but I write for the voice most effectively and express myself in music for the voice. I was fortunate in this respect, in terms of experience in the field, as I did a lot of playing the piano for diction teachers, to earn a living. At Mannes College I played the piano for the singer Dorothy Uris, who is famous for having written a book called *How to Sing in English*, which has become a standard diction book for singers in American English. The aim of the book is to help singers get a natural diction in English, which would project in opera or song. I was able to get some sense of how the English language appears from the point of diction. I was also able to let the exaggeration inherent in English develop naturally, differently from spoken English. I would work at the individual syllables and sounds and would extend the vowels -- they would be long vowels with open words.

Text setting in itself is an essential element in vocal music, but still it is only one half of vocal writing, while the other half is writing the vocal part well. I owe a lot in my knowledge of vocal writing to Christine Schadeberg, who was the first singer to sing the role of Demeter in *Mysteries of Eleusis*. I worked together with her on revising a piece. We took a song cycle in which I was having text-setting trouble. Chris's voice was perfect for singing this work-in-progress. I said, "Let's revise this piece, so that it will suit your voice." In the process, I worked on writing more carefully for the voice. Chris turned out to be a fine teacher and explained patiently where any problem might occur. She had a sense of the composition, and she would guess what I had in mind when text-setting and how the developing music would fit in the overall piece. The libretto for *Mysteries of Eleusis* was written by Jaime Manrique. Chris and I worked together with Jaime to shape the libretto. The only real outside source of which was the Homeric hymn to Demeter, to which we added a few lines from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The myth of the mysteries of Eleusis carries a very profound sense of life and death, of healing and renewal.

Another piece I can discuss is *Mosaic in Two Panels*, which exists in two versions: for string quartet and for string orchestra. This is a very important piece for me and my musical development, since in this piece I explored for the first time the sense of juxtaposing elements of classic forms in very unexpected ways. The form presents a juxtaposition of sonata form with a four-movement classical form. For instance, I might have a development in the middle of the slow movement or a recapitulation in the Rondo-Finale. Such experiments with modifying classical forms are easier to carry out in triadic music, which could punctuate the different sections of the various forms in many different ways. Since at that time I was writing tonal music, that was something which was very fit to do. Nevertheless, the forms were juxtaposed in very bizarre and intense ways. That piece was written when I was in a very "classisizing" mood. I wrote it straightforwardly from the beginning to the end, after which I shifted parts of the music around, did some cutting and pasting, destroyed some elements, moved elements in odd ways, and what came out turned out to be quite interesting.

I explored these themes even further in my *Horn Trio* and my *Six Sonnets to Orpheus*, for mezzo soprano and piano, to texts of Rainer Maria Rilke. In the latter, I was able to combine much more subtle interpretations of tonal and atonal elements than I had ever done before. The aim was to express most effectively the subtle and iridescent texts of Rilke. The cycle has a subtly carried out formal aspect, too. Constantly varied recurring motives throughout the cycle, by means of which I try to express the cross-references from one sonnet to another.

Then there is *Veränderungen* ("Variations") for violin and piano. The title is German, because the piece was commissioned by friends of mine who were in Germany. This is a very personal piece, since it was written in memory of a dear friend who died of cancer. The piece gradually develops to a great climax and ends by dying away in a triadic chorale. On the whole, it tends towards atonality. This arose from the need to express anguish, conflict, and sometimes awe. I have yet to hear a joyous atonal piece. Though I must say that I have a distinct feeling that the finale of Schoenberg's *Suite* op. 29 could in fact express the state of joy. *Veränderungen* was my first atonal piece after many years of tonal music, and it fulfilled an expressive need. This piece remains one of my favorites, and I was very lucky that it received two excellent performances -- one by Speculum Musicae and the other by the Oros Ensemble in Boston.

One of my latest is the *Schoenberg Variations* for piano, which I wrote on a commission from Leonard Stein. Usually when you write for Stein, you deal with Schoenberg. I took the sixth movement of *Six Little Piano Pieces* op. 19, which is just about my favorite piece by Schoenberg, and wrote a set of variations on it. In this composition, the very last bar is identical to the very first -- when the whole piece returns to its source (i.e. Schoenberg), it ends.

Presently I am very excited about the opera I am writing, which is a setting of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night or What You Will*. When the Opera Studio at Moscow Conservatory suggested that I write an opera particularly for them, I immediately suggested *Twelfth Night*, which is one of my favorite plays, and they approved my suggestion.

ROVNER: What kind of musical activities did you pursue upon graduating from Juilliard, and where did you teach?

FEIGIN: After graduating from Juilliard I received a Mellon Post-Doctoral Fellowship from Cornell University. The composition and, subsequently, the performance of *Mysteries of Eleusis* happened because the new director of the Drama Department at Cornell University, David Felshuh, suggested writing this opera. After that I got a job at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City. However, after staying there for a year, I decided that the position was right for me. I left to be a free-lance accompanist in New York. Around that time, I started involving myself with Zen with a famous teacher, named Genpo Sensei.

The question I had at that time was: "should I leave this secure job for a risky adventure?" Genpo thought that I should do what I felt, leave the job and return to New York. Years later I was studying with Mayezumi Roshi, who was Genpo's teacher, and my colleagues in the field of Zen said: "Roshi would never have told you that. Genpo never had a secure job in his life, so that was why he bid that you follow his example." A few years later, I got a job teaching at Manhattan School of Music, and, finally, in 1992 I got my present job at the University of California in Santa Barbara, where I presently reside.

ROVNER: You have been to Moscow a number of times and your music has been performed here recently. When was the first time you came to Moscow, and, as the saying goes, "Do you come here often?"

FEIGIN: I started coming here in 1995, when in November of that year pianist Elena Ivanina performed my piece at the Moscow Autumn Festival, together with flutist Alexander Korneyev. The piece is called *Nexus* and it is a tribute to Bach. Next year Ivanina played my *Four Meditations from Dogen* on the subsequent Moscow Autumn Festival. I came to Moscow on a Fulbright Fellowship in 1998-99, where I taught English diction, and during that time *Mysteries of Eleusis* was performed by the Opera Studio at Moscow Conservatory in April, 1999. I also had a whole concert devoted to my music at Moscow Conservatory, performed by the Conservatory's Studio for New Music Ensemble. Then Mikhail Rachlewski conducted the world premiere of the string orchestra version of *Mosaic in Two Panels* in Moscow with the Kremlin Chamber Orchestra. I also came in November 1999, to attend a conference on Schoenberg's music. My wife, musicologist Severine Neff, participated in a performance of my *Echoes from the Holocaust*, for piano, viola, and oboe.

ROVNER: Does your music receive many performances in Europe? Do you go there often to attend performances of your pieces?

FEIGIN: My *Schoenberg Variations* have been performed in Germany a number of times. I have performed *Four Elegies* for piano in Saarbücken, Germany. Other than that, my music has been performed occasionally in Spain, Denmark, Bulgaria and France. Outside of Europe, my music had been performed in Korea, Taiwan, Canada and Armenia. One of my pieces was recently performed in Riga, Latvia, and greatly enjoyed staying in that country and meeting its musicians.

Some Questions for Augusta Read Thomas

DAVID BÜNDLER

Augusta Read Thomas (b. 1964, New York, NY) is a professor on the composition faculty at the Eastman School of Music, and she is currently Composer-in-Residence with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra through May 2000. She studied at Northwestern University with Alan Stout and Bill Karlins, at Yale University with Jacob Druckman and at the Royal Academy of Music. Seven years after graduating from the Royal Academy of Music, she was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music (ARAM, honorary degree). In 1998 she received the Distinguished Alumni Association Award from St. Paul's School in Concord, New Hampshire. In 1999, she received the Award of Merit from the President of Northwestern University. Her work is currently self-published by A.R.T. Musings Publishing Company. She was recently named winner of the Ernst von Siemens Music Prize 2000, which will be presented at a ceremony on June 20 by the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts at the Cuvilliés Theater in Munich, Germany. In addition, the Chanticleer album *Colors of Love*, containing two works by Thomas, won a Grammy Award at the February 2000 ceremony in Los Angeles for "Best Recording by a Small Ensemble, with or without conductor." Recent and upcoming premieres include *Invocations* for the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival and the Miami Quartet (March 19, 2000); *Aurora: Concerto for Piano and Orchestra* for Daniel Barenboim and the Berlin Philharmonic (June 10, 2000); *Oboe Quintet* for Alex Klein and the Vermeer Quartet; *Ring Out Wild Bells to the Wild Sky* for the Washington Choral Arts Society (February 25, 2000); *Fugitive Star* for the Caramoor Chamber Music Festival and the Avalon String Quartet; an as-yet untitled new work for orchestra and chorus commissioned by the Cleveland Orchestra (June 2000).

I spoke with Augusta Read Thomas on February 10, 2000. Much of the conversation concerned her new string quartet *Invocations*, which was to receive a performance by the Miami String Quartet on March 21, 2000 in Orange County, California. She was kind enough to consent to this interview despite the fact that she had spent much of the week jetting back and forth between her home in New York and her family home near Boston to visit her father, who was in the final stage of a terminal cancer.

BÜNDLER: I was looking over the works listed on your website (www.augustareadthomas.com) and noticed that there's a piece that the Philadelphia Orchestra played called *Glass Moon* that's not among the list. Are those just the works that you have self-published and not your complete repertoire list?

THOMAS: Correct. Basically, what I did is I just picked my best works. *Glass Moon* I like, but I wrote it when I was about 27, so I figured I would try to promote other orchestral works instead because *Glass Moon* was played a lot. Dallas did it. Seattle, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and some other places. So I figured I'd go for different pieces.

BÜNDLER: Los Angeles did it? The Philharmonic did it?

THOMAS: I think they did.

BÜNDLER: My impression was that, while your music has been played extensively, Southern California had not really heard a lot of your music.

THOMAS: I think Los Angeles did it with Hans Vonk in 1990. He took it to Dallas, and then to L.A. and Seattle.

BÜNDLER: Other than this, has your music been heard much in Southern California?

THOMAS: No. Unfortunately not.

BÜNDLER: Any speculation as to why that might be? Why you get exposure on the East Coast or pretty much everywhere else but not Southern California?

THOMAS: Well, in part it's because, being self-published, I don't do any promotion. I don't send scores out. I don't write letters asking people if they'll do my music or anything of the sort. So I guess unless people were to contact me, then... Basically, I'm just not known that much out there.

BÜNDLER: That's curious because I thought your reputation would draw people to you like a magnet. People out here, that is.

THOMAS: I do get lots of calls every day, lots of interest in lots of performances. Things have been done out there, but I haven't had a big performance of my music or a big feature in any way or a big commission from Los Angeles or San Francisco or Seattle.

BÜNDLER: Oh, the whole West Coast not just Southern California then.

THOMAS: Yes. Or Arizona.

BÜNDLER: That's a strange regional disparity. It seems to be true of Los Angeles that composers who are well known and much more often heard in the East don't seem to get a lot of play out here. The L.A. Philharmonic tends to be more directly connected to Europe than it is to the East Coast.

THOMAS: Yes. That's right.

BÜNDLER: Are you interested in getting into this market?

THOMAS: Yes, very much. I'd like to work with Esa-Pekka Salonen because I really respect him. I admire him as a conductor and a musician and a composer. And also, I think my music and his music are on the same page. We're in similar worlds of sound. You know what I mean by that -- in the most general sense. Therefore, I think there would be a natural sympathy if he ever met me or heard my music.

BÜNDLER: So you have never met him then?

THOMAS: Well, no. And I've never sent him anything either. I'm not saying anything negative like, "Why hasn't he played my music at all?" I've just never sent him anything.

BÜNDLER: Well this new piece that the Miami String Quartet is playing may be the first piece of yours that's being performed in Orange County. Can you tell me a little bit about the piece? How did it come about, and what's the meaning of the title *Invocations*?

THOMAS: Marc Neikrug, who's the artistic administrator of the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, called me and asked if I would consider receiving a commission from them to write a string quartet for the Miami Quartet for a very specific date and what not. I said, "Yes, I'd be completely honored and delighted," of course. And then I set about writing the piece, so I knew all along what to expect. You know, sometimes you get commissions and you don't know what the ensemble will be or when the premiere will be or what not. But this one I knew everything all along. They had said they wanted a piece in the 8 to 10 minute range because they knew also what the rest of the program would be. I started composing the piece not necessarily knowing how many movements it would be -- it turned out to be a two-movement work -- but I did know certain things about the piece. The writing in the piece is very contrapuntal, if you will. There's a lot of bouncing off of each other. One instrument will play something and then somebody else comes in with something else and then somebody else is doing something else. It's very athletic in a way. But there's always the sense of calling toward something or invoking something, and what gives it that sense for the most part is the strong sense of line. You can really hear a voice speaking through this one line in the piece as if it was calling out to you or calling across a canyon screaming the message to you or sending you a message in a bottle, so to speak. It's music that's very dramatic and it's very intense. It's very passionate. It's very hot. It starts with all sorts of passion and never stops. It just keeps going until it ends, and there's an immediacy about that passion that's required in the playing. The first movement -- and I don't have the score in front of me because I'm not home at the moment -- but the first movement largely features the solo violinist who soars above the ensemble, pulling the ensemble again with this passionate line which is almost ecstatic or illuminated because it's in a high register. It's just fluttering and moving forward, and the rest of the quartet supports that in the most general sense. Of course, they're also picking up on the first violinist's lines and moving them into different places. And then it comes down to a very quiet and elegant, reflective coda.

The second movement takes right back up with the same energy -- in fact with the same lines -- but it's in a lower tessitura and the line is broken out all the time between the four instruments, so it's in a tighter cluster that this line is condensed and, as I said, rather athletically and passionately passed around until it reaches a moment where they fall into this kind of rhythmic perpetual motion. I can hear it running through my head right now. Just going, going, going, driving all with a sort of chromatic line and then these chords that spill off that are pizzicati. It just picks up momentum until it has nowhere else to go but return to something resembling the beginning of the second movement. It's not necessarily an ABA form, but it resembles one.

BÜNDLER: So invocations -- we're not talking about something in the spiritual sense or a quiet message in a bottle.

THOMAS: Well, no I think it's very spiritual. I'm a very spiritual person or a very religious person in the general sense. It's almost like -- well if I say this, it sounds so ridiculous, but let's say you can almost hear a person screaming out from their stomach what they need to say. Maybe they're screaming to their god or maybe they're screaming to the universe or maybe they're screaming their faith. But it's very centered music. It's very integrated. It's very self-reflective. It's very carefully built. It's not just a spewing of emotion, and yet at the same time, it should sound completely alive and passionate. I think of it as a screaming voice coming out of someone's heart and in that sense, it is religious to me in that way or very spiritual.

BÜNDLER: Now, have you heard the Miami Quartet working on this piece?

THOMAS: No.

BÜNDLER: You mean you just turned over the score, and off away they go, and whenever comes out is what comes out?

THOMAS: Exactly. That is, my scores are really clearly located. It's very, very straightforward. I notate everything.

BÜNDLER: So you have not heard rehearsal tapes or anything like that.

THOMAS: I have not. Basically, we were going to try to meet, but my schedule is completely crazy and theirs is too, and we couldn't find a city that made sense to meet in. So I asked them about a week ago in an e-mail if they felt that they could send me a cassette tape of just a rehearsal. I told them just something informal. It doesn't have to be perfect. They could stop and start. I'm not going to do anything with this tape, just maybe suggest a few tiny little tweakings or something. And they said they would, but I haven't received it yet.

BÜNDLER: I wondered how much different is the finished work or the finished performance from the concept in your head. What's your experience? Is it pretty much right on or do you sometimes get surprised by balances and tonal colors that emerge that you might not have had in your head or had a little differently in your head at the time that you wrote it?

THOMAS: I would say that when I go to rehearsal or a concert of my music – let's say a rehearsal – there's a tape going through one of my ears of the piece that I wrote in my inner ear, and likewise, there's the tape of them playing it live. And I would say that they're 99 percent identical.

BÜNDLER: And as they rehearse, they're asking you if this is how you want it played?

THOMAS: Right. Or I might say, "Well actually, I heard that with an up bow." And they might say, "Well, I like it with the down bow." Things like that, but nothing big or structural. I can actually hear my music extremely clearly. I think that's one of my best strengths.

BÜNDLER: And you hear it while you're composing or before you sit down to write the music, or do you use a computer?

THOMAS: Oh, no. I hear it all in my head, and then I write it down on paper. I use pen and paper and whiteout. And I sit at a desk in a silent room and write it out. I don't use computers at all.

BÜNDLER: And you don't sit at the keyboard, either?

THOMAS: No. It sounds highfalutin', but it's really easy when you've composed like that your whole life. That's definitely the way I do it. I'm sure that what they will play and what I wrote and heard are 99 percent the same. I might tweak by .5 percent or they might alter by .5 percent.

BÜNDLER: Why did you become a composer? How did you come to make that choice?

THOMAS: Well, I think that I really didn't make that choice. And again, this may sound highfalutin' that I didn't choose composition. It chose me. Or rather, I don't think that it chose me, but for as long as I could remember -- since I was three years old lying underneath my mother's piano listening to her play or even further back than that -- I was completely attracted to music my entire life. I was attracted to a piano like a magnet. I was always playing, always wanting to go to music classes or music lessons or what not. My composing was just a natural extension of who I am. And of course, all of a sudden I was composing, and then I was composing more, and then people were playing it. Then all of a sudden I was a composer. But I never really made that big choice. It just is who I was.

BÜNDLER: You even wrote as a child?

THOMAS. Yes. Even since age 6.

BÜNDLER: And even at age 6, what you call pretty sophisticated songs?

THOMAS: No, it was garbage! It was child's play. It was poking around and writing things down. I think, though, because I did that, by the time I was in eighth or ninth grade, 12 years old or something, then things were perhaps more sophisticated than average.

BÜNDLER: Were you writing in the style of Mozart or were you off in some other corner?

THOMAS: No, I was in some other corner. I had good teachers who would encourage me to write things down, and one of the pieces I did in 8th grade was in F minor, and it was very "beautiful" in a lyrical and interesting kind of way. It was an F minor song, basically. It wasn't any earth-shatteringly original thing. But it was skilled, though, because I had been writing for all those years before that and I'd had good instruction.

BÜNDLER: I don't want you to take offense by this, but the program that the Miami Quartet is playing also contains music by Clara Schumann. Was it their intention to showcase women composers with this program?

THOMAS: You know, I really don't know. Marc Neikrug would be in charge of that department. He put the program together and he had the vision for what that should be. I was never given the impression that that's what the agenda was. They simply commissioned me to write the piece.

BÜNDLER: In your case, your career certainly hasn't suffered for your being (a) a woman and (b) a living composer. In your experience, have you ever had your works ghettoized in these so-called women's concerts where the whole raison d'être for the concert is to present music by women?

THOMAS: I don't really market myself that way at all. If somebody's put a piece of mine on some concert like that, I wasn't there and am not aware of it. I purposely and aggressively do not -- well, I don't market myself anyway, as I told you. I'm not sending stuff out. But if I were to, I wouldn't market myself that way because first and foremost, I'm a composer. I've been with music my whole life. I will be with it. It is my whole life. I have no other life. It is who I am. I happen also to be female. But for me, it's not primary in my mind because the passion to make music is so burning hot inside of me and it's so real. It's much more powerful than my gender or my age or my resume or anything like that. So I don't try to get on women's concerts. For example, in my bio and on my website, it doesn't say anything about gender. The word "woman" is not even on it. And nothing I've ever put out has ever had that word on it. I mean, I am a woman. But you don't go to a website of a male composer and find, "John Adams, male composer, wrote 75 commissions." So why should it say, "Augusta Read Thomas, female composer"? I know a lot of women would disagree with me and tell me that I should be doing things differently, but that's just the way I do 'em.

BÜNDLER: Obviously, what works for you has worked for you pretty well up this point.

THOMAS: I care deeply that people think of me as a composer. Period. That's actually the best testament I can be for the art or for my gender or for the human race. I mean, I'm a composer. You know how everything comes in these nice little boxes nowadays.

BÜNDLER: Right. This is the era of identity politics and identity art.

THOMAS: Exactly. And I don't want play into that. And certainly, people who know my music, it doesn't pander at all. It's hard-core. It's passionate. It's very gutsy. And so it all ties in together to me.

BÜNDLER: I'm curious about your Chicago Symphony residency, which I guess is coming to a close in a few months. This has been three years?

THOMAS: Yes.

BÜNDLER: What have your duties been? Are you perusing scores that come in or are you doing strictly writing and advising?

THOMAS: I have several duties there. First of all, I write music for them. There have been four pieces. The *Words of the Sea* I did before my residency. Then *Orbital Beacons*. Then *Ceremonial*. And now *Aurora*. So that's what I've been writing for them. On top of that, I'm always there when we have visiting composers, and we have a lot of them. Last year, I think we had 11 to 13 weeks with visiting composers. So I was there hosting them, going to rehearsals with them, doing the pre-concert lectures with them, radio shows, all of that. And that's an enormous amount of work and time and energy and effort on behalf of other composers, which is a great pleasure. I've had such a wonderful chance to meet all these fabulous composers and spend a week with them. Also, I go through -- anything that's sort of new music will come to my office. I have a full office there which is packed full of scores. I listen to the music and bring things to the attention of the artistic staff and Daniel Barenboim and Pierre Boulez. Things for commission. Things for performance. Things to consider for future commissions or performances or what not.

BÜNDLER: So, for instance, you look at the unsolicited manuscripts.

THOMAS: Oh, yes! I look at all of them. Actually, I believe that that's my job and I'm paid to do a job and I would do it anyway because of that. But I love to listen to music, and I'm very, very curious about what people are doing, so I'm actually one of the few that actually listens.

BÜNDLER: So you listen to composer's MIDI scores? Do composers send a lot of MIDI scores?

THOMAS: Whatever gets sent in. I listen to or I read the scores. I can read scores really clearly. So I don't always drop a tape in because sometimes they don't come with tapes or CD's. I've learned so much because I've listened to an enormous amount of repertoire, and repertoire that isn't necessarily out on CD. So that's been amazing. That's been a great part of the job. Then I also meet with the orchestra members and speak to them about things. And the board of directors.

BÜNDLER: When you look at new score, say, from your Eastman students, how do you recognize when it has the spark?

THOMAS: Well, there are several things. First of all, I look for musicality. A good ear is what I look for. I want to know that they're hearing when they're writing. The second thing I look for is honesty. You can tell when somebody's really putting their own soul out there, their own stomach, their own guts, when they're really going for it in their own honest way. It's not just another kind of regurgitated X, Y or Z piece. You know you can fill in the X, Y or Z with minimalist or 12-tone or movie music, whatever. You can tell that there's a real voice in there somewhere. Thirdly, I look for imagination in all facets whether it's imagination of a line or idea or motive or color or density or form, etc. And when all of that's together, you're already dealing with something pretty good. It's rare to have all of those in a piece. Especially by a young composer. But that's what I look for.

BÜNDLER: What I hear in your different answers is what I might call artistic integrity in your own personal work ethic or the way you sit down to compose. I'm not sure about the best way to ask this next question. I've heard it asked at composer-audience forums and seen it fall flat, but here goes. When you sit down to create a piece of concert music, do you feel a certain weight or gravity or sense of seriousness in writing a work for the concert hall, theoretically a work for the ages, that might not be there if someone were writing music for film or commercial consumption?

THOMAS: You know, I'm not sure. I think I'm too serious of a person to answer that question. I take everything seriously. Even if I'm cleaning wineglasses in my sink, I want to do it right. I'm a perfectionist in that sense. I can't imagine anyone wanting to do anything not seriously. I know it happens. It's just, for me, we live once and if we're given talents or energies, we ought to try to make our best of them. And I feel like if you give something, that the energy that goes out comes back -- like what goes around comes around but in a very cosmic or religious sense. If I give my best to something or to someone -- if I spend a week with another composer -- all of a sudden a tulip will come up in my garden that I hadn't expected. It doesn't come back directly. But there's a sort of cosmic energy, and I think that has to do with the seriousness because I feel like if I address everything and do my very best to it and give all that I can to it whether it's teaching or giving a lecture or speaking to the Board of Directors or you name it, I take it all very seriously. I think music and art and culture -- but especially music -- are the most beautiful things in the

world. I think music deserves to be caressed and loved and cared for and respected as you make it. In other words, I just don't want to slap-shot off anything. It doesn't mean the pieces are good. It doesn't mean they're bad. It doesn't mean quality or not. But it does mean that at least they've been made with a real honest dedication.

BÜNDLER: Do you write only on commission, or do you write simply because you've got this symphonic tone poem in your gut welling up inside that you've got to get out?

THOMAS: It's definitely the latter. I write because it's burning inside my body and I just have to get this music out. But coincidentally, everything I've done for the past at least 10 years has all been commissioned. Some composers say that if they didn't have a commission, they'd stop writing. And I want to be very clear that I'm going to write music until I die. If someone commissions me, great. But if they don't, I'm going to write it anyway.

BÜNDLER: O.K., you're not a Sibelius or Copland.

THOMAS: No. It's definitely my whole life, and it's not my profession, it's not my job. It's my life. There is a difference. I'm very close to my music. I'm very tied up in it. You feel like when you have your piece played, your soul is on the stage. Not just your piece. You get very close to this. I've turned down a lot of commission offers, so I feel very, very lucky that coincidentally I do make a living off this.

BÜNDLER: When you talk to your students at Eastman or other college residencies that you may have, do you speak with them strictly about theory or do you discuss the business of how to market yourself as a composer?

THOMAS: Pretty much everything. It depends on what their questions are. Sometimes they want to know how you built your tune or what the harmonies are. Sometimes they want to know what they should do to make their own publishing company. Sometimes they want to know how to write a cover letter. Or they may be asking should they go on for a degree. Students are great because they'll ask you pretty much anything that's on their mind. So in my composition lessons at Eastman, which I give weekly, we pretty much talk about the music. Their ideas, the integrity of them, their lines, their chords, their harmonies, their thoughts, what they're hearing, etc. And I don't really spend a lot of time on the business side because I think the time to talk about music is so valuable. But often they'll ask me and we'll spend an extra hour on another day and go through how to write a resume, should they enter this competition or whatever they might have on their mind. And I do a lot of university residencies, and people ask what is it like to be composer in residence for the CSO. They ask a lot of different things.

BÜNDLER: The sorts of things I'm asking, I suppose. Here's a question it has never occurred to me to ask a composer. Let me know if you feel uncomfortable answering it, but I have often been curious, as a frame of reference, what does a composer make on an average commission?

THOMAS: I think this is a frame of reference for an average composer who is working in the profession. Now I'm not talking about an exceptional one or somebody who's got tons of commissions and is turning them down right, left and center. But just an average person who has a degree and has made 10 or 12 pieces, and I'm not talking about a student. I would say, on average, you'll probably find that they're being paid about \$500 a minute for a chamber piece and about \$1000 a minute for an orchestral piece. Of course, that's average. There are differences -- for instance, are they paid travel and accommodations or not? Or are they paying the copying costs or not? It depends on the level of the composer. When you get into above-average people or people who are perceived as extremely successful -- you know, way above-average people -- the fees go up. My fees are higher than the ones I just quoted. A lot of average people might think, "Hey, maybe I should commission a piece!" and therefore, the numbers I just gave are fair on all sides. If somebody wants to commission a 10-minute chamber piece, it costs \$5000, and that's something that one spouse could give to the other for an anniversary or a special occasion or what not. These things are affordable, and I think the average person should be commissioning more. They just don't think they know how to or can't. Someone in the audience who's comfortable and loves music, they probably would love to commission a piece but they probably never realized that they could. Suppose you had \$5000 disposable income 20 years from now and wanted to give it as a tax deduction to the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival for a commission. It's tax-deductible to you. They get to use it as a commission, and the artist gets supported and culture goes forward. I think the average audience member ought to be informed that those are the kinds of fees that are out there.

BÜNDLER: If you look over your orchestral repertory -- the things that you've written -- obviously there are going to be some things that have greater difficulty, some things with less difficulty. Are there any works that you would say are playable by an amateur group, let's say a good high school orchestra or an average community college orchestra?

THOMAS: I have two pieces that fit that bill. One is the violin concerto called *Spirit Musings*. And the orchestral parts, which is a very small orchestra -- just a tiny little orchestra like one-to-a-part type of thing -- are very, very easy. But the solo violin part is extremely hard. To the audience, it looks like this really wonderful, magical, sparkling concerto. All the colors are flying around, but technically it's very easy and it was built that way so that an orchestra could do it on one rehearsal as long as the violinist is great. But to find any community that has a good violinist is pretty easy, and violinists love concertos. That would be one. The other is also a concerto, which is the piece *Eclipse Musings* for solo flute, solo guitar, and a very small orchestra. Those parts are easy. For both of those pieces, you need a very good harp. But most harpists are either good or they don't play anymore. Those are really doable pieces and they're both the right length. One is 12 minutes and the other is 13 minutes. They're for an average audience that isn't used to new pieces. And then you have the excitement of the soloists, which is always nice for an audience.

Nicholas Slonimsky

RICHARD KOSTELANETZ

Born April 27, 1894, in St. Petersburg, Russia, the musician/musical lexicographer Nicolas Slonimsky took his first piano lesson in 1900 and later studied harmony and orchestration at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. After the Revolution, he became a rehearsal pianist at the Kiev Opera before migrating to Yalta, Turkey, Bulgaria, and Paris, where he became a secretary to the conductor Serge Koussevitzky. Finally arriving to America in 1923, he held miscellaneous musical jobs, first in Rochester, then in Boston. Learning to write English, he contributed articles to Boston newspapers. Within ten years of his arrival here, he conducted concerts of avant-garde American music, not only in the U.S., but in Europe. Historians credit him with presenting the world premieres of Edgard Varèse's *Ionisation* (1931) and Charles Ives's *Three Places in New England*, which rank as two of the most pioneering works in the high modernist canon.

Temperamentally an unemployable free spirit, Slonimsky freelanced and house-husbanded around Boston until taking for five semesters at Harvard, in the mid-1940s, a full-time position teaching Slavonic languages and literatures. In 1962-63, after the death of his wife, the art critic Dorothy Adlow, he traveled through Eastern Europe, Greece and Israel, as he later wrote, "as a lecturer in native Russian, ersatz Polish, synthetic Serbo-Croatian, Russianized Bulgarian, Latinized Rumanian, archaic Greek, passable French, and tolerable German." Moving to Los Angeles, he taught music at UCLA for three years, until put out to pasture at 73. Little did he (or anyone else) think that 20 years later he would receive his first Guggenheim fellowship. Indeed, he worked to the end of his 90's, mostly on new editions of old books, and survived half way through his 102nd year.

The turning point of Slonimsky's professional career came with the publication in 1937 of his first big book, *Music Since 1900*, a tome that must be seen and held in one's hands to be believed, because there is nothing quite like it in the historiography of any art. Essentially it is a daily chronology of the most important events in modern music, from January 1, 1900. There was a second edition in 1938, a third edition in 1966, a fourth in 1971, a fifth in 1994 with 1260 pages. All entries were composed within the literary constraint of using only one sentence:

17 February 1970 Alfred NEWMAN, native American film composer, one of the few successful writers of cinematic music who was not born in Vienna, author of nearly 300 motion picture scores which transmogrified the most marketable elements found in the symphonies of Tchaikovsky, in the piano works of Rachmaninoff, and in the operas of Wagner, dies in Hollywood at the age of sixty-eight.

Other examples of his high style appear in the many faintly absurd plot summaries of the modern opera.

By 1946 he was hired to edit the next five editions of Thompson's *International Cyclopedia of Music and Musicians*; in 1958, he switched to edit the more prestigious *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, producing a 1,855-page Fifth Edition in 1958, the 1,955-page Sixth Edition in 1978, the 2,577-page Seventh Edition in 1984, and the 2,115-page, triple-columned Eighth Edition in 1992 -- typically done all by himself. No other name appears on the title page; no one else is acknowledged in the preface.

In between, Slonimsky wrote several other books, including *Music of Latin America* (1945) and *The Road to Music* (1947). He also compiled a characteristically prodigious *Thesaurus of Scales and Musical Patterns* (1948), a notation encyclopedia that likewise must be seen to be believed, and a *Lexicon of Musical Invective* (1952), which collects from several languages (with all translations by himself) "Critical Assaults on Composers Since Beethoven's Time," to quote its subtitle. Perhaps the strongest testimony to the continuing relevance of his books is that, even after his death, most are currently in print.

What distinguishes *Music Since 1900*, which I take to be his single most extraordinary book, is not only the accuracy of his prodigious research (Lord knows how he did it) but the quality of the writing. Since 1900 ranks among the few encyclopedias that can be read from beginning to end, simply for the pleasure of its prose; in its pages is also a wealth of facts unavailable elsewhere (e.g., 23 June 1939 "By the order of the War Department in Washington, the marching cadence of the United States Army is reduced from 128 to 120 steps per minute, effective as of September 1939."). Writing of this quality prompted this writer to edit for his centennial birthday an anthology selected for literary value: *Nicolas Slonimsky: The First 100 Years* (1994).

Since both *Since 1900* and the other encyclopedias have gone through several editions, he had ample opportunity to fine-tune the instrument by which the musical world knows him best. He characteristically began not with previous reference books, which he finds riddled with errors (and thus refuses to keep in his own house), but with magazines and newspapers housed in the Boston Public Library. Collecting information on 4" by 6" cards, he also wrote composers for their scores. Dogged in his research, he wrote archivists for birth certificates and autopsy records. Thus, he has the soprano Lily Pons born in 1898, instead of the "1904" found in previous books (He never queries journalists or musicologists, because, he says, they can be expected to consult the standard references that Slonimsky had already dismissed.)

The writer was also a composer, mostly of pieces that resembled his writing in audacious wit and intellectual gymnastics in short forms. By his own critical estimate in his own *Baker's*:

As a composer, he cultivated miniature forms, usually with a gimmick. . . . His only decent orchestral work is *My Toy Balloon* (1942), a set of variations on a Brazilian song, which includes in the score 100 colored balloons to be exploded fff at the climax. . . . A priority must be conceded to him for writing the earliest singing commercials to authentic texts from *The Saturday Evening Post*.

Among his approximately 100 compositions, all of them short, is a wealth of uniquely constructivist experiments that, in my

analysis, synthesize the intelligence of J. S. Bach with the inventiveness of his friend Charles Ives -- an opportune synthesis that no other composer has realized as well before or since.

The man I knew, beginning in his mid-90s, had the most capacious cultural memory I'd ever encountered -- not only for music but for languages. Even as he approached 100, he looked much younger, his eyes were lively, and his speech spikey -- among the scarce wonders of the world.

Reflections on Heitor Villa-Lobos

ALFRED HELLER

In 1957 Heitor Villa-Lobos was at the peak of his success. On the occasion of his 70th birthday, he was cited by Mayor Robert Wagner of New York "for distinguished and exceptional service." Wagner called Villa-Lobos a "talented interpreter of music: inspired teacher who led the movement to make the folk music of Brazil an important social force in the lives of her youth... original composer of first rank who has contributed to diverse branches of his universal art." On March 4, 1957, The New York Times honored him with an editorial stating that he was "one of the truly distinguished men of music of our time ... a remarkable figure in any age."

30 years later, this composer of about 1,500 works was almost entirely unknown, except for his *Bachianas Brasileiras No. 5* and his guitar music. In 1987, the centenary of his birth, Brazil finally rerecognized one of her greatest sons, and placed his portrait on the 500 cruzado banknote. In New York, under the aegis of the Americas Society, the Villa-Lobos Music Society began operating in an effort to revitalize and preserve an interest in his music, much in the same spirit as the Bach Society of Leipzig had done for its composer during the 19 century.

Why bother with a revival of Villa-Lobos? After all, many composers who were popular during their lifetimes have also been shunted aside, and their music is heard no more, or very rarely. Villa-Lobos is different. What he accomplished benefited the progress of civilization, not only through the open-hearted sounds of his music, but sociologically as well.

Villa-Lobos succeeded in combining the folk music of three races and many ethnic groups into a unified musical style. Villa-Lobos was, by his own declaration, "universal." In 1950 he included the following lyrics in his *Samba-Clássico*: "One is happy who lives in this holy land with no chosen race nor preferred creed."

Villa-Lobos had three humanitarian qualities: a love of folk and popular music, a love for children, and a sense of humor. He was uniquely skilled in adapting both folk and popular music. Rather than noting racial and ethnic differences, he noted human similarities. Hence, he was able to blend African, Amerindian, Portuguese, Spanish, French, Italian, German and Polish music in his "one-world" style.

One of the clearest examples of this mixture is the massive *Choros No. 10* for chorus and orchestra. After a strong attention-getting chord, a single clarinetist plays what sounds like an improvisation, creating the effect of a chorinho player (Carioca street musician). A short phrase follows, which becomes the germ of the entire composition. It is played and sung at different tempos and meters throughout. There are heavy African rhythms, Amerindian chanting, the sounds of insects and birds, as well as other jungle noises.

Amid all of this, a single trumpeter, perhaps on a lonely street in Rio, plays a jazzlike improvisatory passage. As the work moves relentlessly toward its ending, rife with African rhythms and Amerindian chanting, a heartrending Portuguese song is heard, "Rasga o Coraco," leading to a full-throated, crying-out, final minor chord. *Choros No. 10* leaves the listener breathless. Its premiere in Paris in 1927 brought Villa-Lobos great success there, after which it was choreographed into a very successful ballet. There are 15 *Choros* extant, ranging in forces from *No. 1*, a simple tango for solo guitar, to the incredibly beautiful *No. 11*, a 65-minute, nonstop concerto for piano and orchestra.

Villa-Lobos's second humanitarian quality was his love for children and his desire to educate them about good music. To Villa-Lobos, good music often meant popular, folk, and Johann Sebastian Bach. He composed two piano suites to be played by children, as well as the *Brazilian Children's Carnival*.

Villa-Lobos's last opera, *The Girl From the Clouds* (1957) is a fairy tale for children young and old. The libretto, by Lucia Benedetti, is somewhere between *Cinderella* and *The Wizard of Oz*, but instead of a slipper being the deciding factor, it is a cloth made from the rays of the moon given to the girl by the moon herself. The style of the music moves comfortably from samba to mazurka to a haunting Portuguese melody in Act III sung by the girl as an invocation to the moon.

Villa-Lobos's mentor, Artur Rubinstein, premiered the composer's *Baby Family, Vol. I* in 1922, which created international interest in Villa-Lobos. This in turn caused the Brazilian government to send him to Paris the following year.

In 1930 Villa-Lobos returned from Paris to Brazil, only to find that the system of music education in Brazil was in total disarray. It bothered him as well that no one in the north of Brazil listened to Bach. Villa-Lobos considered Bach's music to be a "universal fountain of folklore." The disarray of the educational system led him to restructure it entirely, and the latter situation brought him to compose the series of suites entitled *Bachianas Brasileiras*.

Villa-Lobos received permission from the federal government to conduct a two-year survey of the problem in music education in the state of Sao Paulo, and how they might be solved. At the end of this time, he determined that through folk music, children could learn to sing on pitch and in harmony, and through rhythmically emphatic music such as marches, they could learn to sing together.

In 1932, he became director of Superintendency of Musical and Artistic Education (SEMA). Out of this developed the *Canto Orfeonico (Orpheonic Song)*, two volumes of choral arrangements from which students could and did learn. He also published his *Guia Prático (Practical Guide)*, a collection of 137 folk songs arranged or adapted. Many of these are of mixed ethnic backgrounds. One song, "A Maré Encheu" ("The Full Tide"), is of Saxon, Hispanic, and African origins. In 1935, he assembled 30,000 students in a stadium in Rio de Janeiro and conducted them singing in four-part harmony.

Villa-Lobos's other educational project was to bring Bach to the north of Brazil. In the nine suites titled *Bachianas Brasileiras (Brazilian Bach)*, he combined baroque influence with indigenous folk music. Almost all the movements of the suites have two titles, one baroque and one Brazilian. For example, the term "Tocata" (Portuguese spelling) is used for the final movements of the *Bachianas Brasileiras No. 3* (for piano and orchestra) and the *Bachianas Brasileiras No. 2* (for chamber orchestra). In the case of the former, the Brazilian title is "Picapau" ("Woodpecker"), for the repeated tones of the piano soloist. However, this piece's Baroque title is equally apt -- Tocata, which means "touched," and in this case denoting the rapid touching of the keys. The other Tocata is the composer's second most famous composition, "O Trenzinho do Caipira" ("The Little Hillybilly Train"). This work is a picturesque ride through the Brazilian countryside to the rhythm of a samba. Here the piano is part of the orchestra and the tones are different, but the effect is somewhat similar to the previously mentioned work in the Baroque sense. What is different is that we hear train whistles, cattle, the train slowing down and speeding up, brakes, and steam.

When *Bachianas Brasileiras* is mentioned, one should take note of the aria from *No. 5*, as recorded by the great Brazilian soprano, Bidú Sayão. This one movement has proved to be Villa-Lobos's essential connection to posterity. Although it has been recorded by everyone from Joan Baez to James Galway, when Sayão sang it, it was otherworldly, a great spiritual experience.

The third humanitarian quality of Villa-Lobos was his extraordinary sense of humor, an ability to appreciate the absurdity of life, even in situations that involved him.

One of these situations occurred when Artur Rubinstein "discovered" him. In 1918 on a concert tour of Brazil, Rubinstein heard about a Brazilian composer who had written a great deal of piano music. He sought out this composer, and finally found him in Rio de Janeiro playing cello in a third-rate movie house called the Odeon. At the end of the film, Rubinstein approached the orchestra pit and introduced himself, saying that he had heard about Villa-Lobos and wanted to see some of his piano music. Villa-Lobos replied that Rubinstein could not play his music because he was a virtuoso, and virtuosos couldn't possibly understand it. Rubinstein left.

The following morning at 8:00, a group of street musicians, led by Villa-Lobos, burst into Rubinstein's hotel room. Villa-Lobos explained that although he and his friends were very tired from playing all night, they would show Rubinstein how to play his music. Needless to say, Villa-Lobos apologized for his behavior the previous night. This was the beginning of their lifelong friendship.

Another anecdote comes from Villa-Lobos scholar David P. Appleby. Villa-Lobos enjoyed testing the credibility of reporters. Once during a press conference in New York City, Villa-Lobos told reporters that his music contained Indian melodies of great antiquity. He also added that the present Indians of Brazil no longer knew them. A reporter asked Villa-Lobos how he had obtained these melodies if they were no longer known. Villa-Lobos explained, without batting an eyelash, that he had obtained them from parrots. He explained Brazilian parrots were the most intelligent in the world, and they had learned these melodies and passed them on from generation to generation; therefore, Villa-Lobos learned them from the parrots.

Villa-Lobos had a great distaste for formality, and often took the opportunity to poke fun at it. On one occasion, I was the object of his joke. One evening, feeling somewhat low, I telephoned him and asked if I could come over for a visit. The answer was yes. I explained that I hadn't shaved and did not appear particularly neat, so I asked if he had company. He said that no one was there. I went over, and upon arriving, he and his wife, Mindinha, bade me enter with big smiles on their faces and he said, "Alfredo, I want you to meet my friend Segovia."

As The New York Times stated, Villa-Lobos would be "a remarkable figure in any age." In the present age he is seriously needed, as the peoples of the world get closer and closer. The immigrant nations of the Western Hemisphere have a "one-world" standard-bearer in Heitor Villa-Lobos. Through his "universal" composing style, his love and concern for young people, and his ability to recognize social absurdities, including his own, he brought people of all backgrounds together in harmony and peace.

The Boston New-Music Scene: Present and Recent Past, with Special Emphasis on Composers in Red Sneakers

DAVID CLEARY

The recent history of Boston new music groups begins in the 1960's and 1970's. During a period of ten years, four major professional contemporary ensembles came into existence. These are Boston Musica Viva (1969, director Richard Pittman), Collage New Music (1972, founding director Frank Epstein), Dinosaur Annex Music Ensemble (1975, director Scott Wheeler), and Alea III (1978, director Theodore Antoniou). All consist of a more-or-less stable in-house collection of performers led by a conductor who may or may not also be a composer (Antoniou and Wheeler both write music). Only one of these groups, Alea III, was college-affiliated (Boston University) at inception; Collage New Music, historically containing a high percentage of Boston Symphony Orchestra members though never officially connected to that organization, forged a link with Suffolk University in the 1990's. These groups, all still active today, give music by composers based not only in the Boston area (all have featured a "Boston composers" concert as part of their seasons) but also beyond, and usually endeavor to present as wide a variety of composers as possible. A few Boston-based groups modeled on these examples were created in the late 1980's and 1990's, specifically Auros New Music (1992, directors John Mallia and flutist Susan Gall) and Phantom Arts (1994, director Andrew Rindfleisch), as well as the now-dormant Music Production Company (1987, director Rodney Lister) which also played some standard repertoire. Special mention should be made here of two presenting organizations, without resident ensembles, that filled important niches: Videmus (1986, director Vivian Taylor), which championed new music by women and minorities, and Newcomp (1981, directors Otto Laske and Curtis Roads), which focused on computer music, sometimes in combination with other disciplines.

In the 1980's, a plethora of new organizations appeared. Unlike their predecessors, these were composer-consortium groups. Meant primarily to provide a performance outlet for its members, they also presented works by guest composers. None contained a stable resident performing ensemble, though Extension Works and Griffin made short-lived attempts in that direction. The first of these, and a model for all such collectives (Boston based and not) that followed, was Composers in Red Sneakers. Formed in 1982 by then-recent New England Conservatory graduates Robert Aldridge, Roger Bourland, Thomas Oboe Lee, Gary Philo, Amy Reich, and Christopher Stowens, the organization materialized from what was originally to be a one-shot group concert in 1981. Reaction from audience members and local critics (most notably the Boston Globe's Richard Dyer, an early champion) was so positive that the sextet decided to incorporate and continue. During much of the 1980's, the group played to large audiences -- at one point, selling out Harvard's Sanders Theatre -- though audience size dropped to more modest new-

music standards later in the decade. Many members came and went during the course of the 1980's, including Michael Carnes, Richard Cornell, Marti Epstein, Jeffrey Fischer, Herschel Garfein, Jean Hasse, and Nancy Zeltsman. A later incarnation of the Sneakers dating from ca. 1995 included David Cleary, Beth Denisch, Howard Frazin, and pianist Kathryn Rosenbach. Common to the group's history from its earliest days to its most recent has been composer/pianist Herman Weiss. The Sneakers were unusual even within this category of presenter in that they adopted a uniquely irreverent concert persona and sometimes programmed works in non-classical genres such as jazz. Numerous Boston-based imitators materialized soon afterward, the most notable of these early collectives being NuClassix (1983), Extension Works (1983), Underground Composers (1984), and Griffin Music Ensemble (1985). Only the second of these is still active. Later examples included the groups Tricinium (1988, members included ex-Red Sneakers Carnes and Cornell), Crosscurrents (1990), Lumen (1990), and New Boston Composers Collective (1991), as well as two currently active entities, Just in Time (1995) and Public Works (1998).

Since the days of Serge Koussevitzky, the Boston Symphony Orchestra has presented little new music, especially by local composers. The Boston Modern Orchestra Project (1996, director Gil Rose) helps fill this badly needed niche, while a few community orchestras, most notably the New England Philharmonic under Ronald Feldman and Jeffrey Rink, have been new-music friendly. Other large groupings, such as the Cambridge Madrigal Singers, Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra and the string ensemble Metamorphosen, regularly commission or perform new works in addition to playing standard repertoire. Boston has little that compares with New York's "downtown scene" or CRI's "Emergency Music" concept; the closest approximation can be found at the performance space Mobius (1977), which presents not only experimental music and sound art, but also visual and performance art, video, and the like. The region's universities contain in-house student contemporary ensembles and similar outlets; while many are meant to serve its pupils and faculty, a few of these, such as the New England Conservatory's Contemporary Ensemble (director John Heiss) and Enchanted Circle Series (directors James Hoffman and Joseph Maneri) as well as Longitude (director Eric Sawyer, based at the Longy School of Music), regularly play works by outside composers. Various small chamber groups past and present commission and play cutting-edge work, including the currently active quintet Arcadian Winds, Core Ensemble, and Row Twelve as well as the now-defunct Aequalis, Boston Composers String Quartet, and Marimolin. In 1995, the American Composers' Forum established a Boston-area chapter (Denisch has been its director since the outset); it remains a visible presence in the area.

Concert Reviews

Three Biblical Characters Find Operas

ANTON ROVNER

Voices of the Unseen. May 20, 1999, Helicon Opera, Moscow, Russia.

A notable event last year in Moscow was a performance of a triptych of operas by three different composers at the Helicon Opera house by soloists of the Helicon Opera. The Helicon opera is a smaller-scale opera company, set in a 19th-century mansion in the center of Moscow on the same street as the Conservatory. This triptych, entitled *Voices of the Unseen*, was a set of three monodramas each lasting about 30 to 40 minutes, for singer and piano. The set was unified as an orderly succession of works written on Biblical texts. All three were commissioned by the Sacro Art 99 Theater in Locum, Germany, and premiered in Moscow on May 20, 1999. The idea of this triptych as well as the libretti belong to Alexei Parin, who was the artistic director of this project. The first opera, *Eve*, was by Joseph Bardanashvili, a Georgian composer from Tbilisi, who in 1995 emigrated to Israel. The second, *Moses*, was by Vladimir Kobekin, an older-generation composer from Ekaterinburg on the Ural mountains. The third, *Annunciation*, was by Alexander Shchetynsky from Kharkiv, Ukraine, a one-time close associate of Edison Denisov. The roles of Eve, Moses, and Mary were sung respectively by Larisa Kostyuk, Alexei Mochalov, and Tatiana Kuinji, while the silent roles of Lucifer in the first opera, Yahweh in the second opera and the Archangel Gabriel were "performed" by the pianist Yuri Polubelov, a champion of contemporary music and musical director of this project. Each of these operas depicted the effect of the active yet silent supernatural force (as demonstrated by the pianist, who merely played the piano and dramatically walked on stage, dressed in a long gray tunic) on the passive but singing humans (i.e. Eve, Moses and Mary) who expressed their respective emotional states by dramatic singing and gesticulating at the "divine" pianist (or "infernal" in the case of the first opera). All three of the operas really present not merely soloists singing to the accompaniment of the piano, but in all respects a duet between the human singer and the unseen and superhuman pianist.

In the first opera, the action opens with Eve sitting down as though in the midst of shrubbery with a wide assortment of fruit and flowers, which actually is part of a fancy dress, which also causes her to resemble a peacock. The music, largely tonal and Romantic, with a moderate share of extended chromaticism, is essentially post-modernist in merging different historical styles together into one work of art. It starts by being pastoral and idyllic as Eve sings about her innocent and lofty life in Paradise. The music, following the text, is rather sweetly tonal and Romantically idyllic. In the middle of the opera the pianist (representing Lucifer or the Serpent) dramatically walks past her, the tails of his tunic dramatically lifting (suggesting the allurements of Eve into sin). After this episode, the music changes, turning to minor, being essentially plaintive and supplicative in character, almost resembling recitative of Baroque opera (similar to Monteverdi or Purcell) with added lyrical elements of Verdi aria and Russian 19th-century art song. The singer sheds her peacock dress, resembling the shrubbery, stands up and walks away from her green turf filled with fruit and flowers, and walks around in a more plain dress of skin-color, suggesting her fall from grace and loss of her heavenly privileges. She sings mournfully, gesturing with her hands in a supplicative manner. There is no infernal or cataclysmic quality in the music to match the event which has happened, but the whole music, largely lyrical and elegiacally emotional, depicts the switch of emotions in a very gentle manner.

The second opera starts with Moses beating his stick against the ground, dressed in the black suit and hat of an Orthodox Jew. The music, also tonal and romantic for the most part, with a greater amount of chromaticism, invites comparison with the heavyweight, dramatic Russian 19th-century opera tradition, most notably, that of Boris Godunov. The work starts with unaccompanied synagogue chanting, accompanied by the beating stick. A couple of times an off-stage sound resembling a gong is heard, foretelling the divine revelation to come. After singing for a while, Moses falls asleep. The pianist enters, silently and dramatically, with a lighted candle, which he places in front of the sleeping Moses. The prophet wakes in rapture and starts singing ecstatically, accompanied by virtuosic piano music, essentially impressionist in harmony (emphasizing the whole-tone scale) and radiant in mood. Gradually, the music becomes more and more dramatic and ecstatic, its harmonies largely tonal with additional pungent dissonances (such as playing a combination of a major and minor tonic simultaneously, the combination of the major and minor third, causing the dramatic dissonance) and at its climax becomes totally atonal and chromatic, resembling Messiaen's bell-like piano textures, depicting God's glory. As the music subsides back into an elegiac mood, Moses sings "Oh, I am so weak and helpless."

At the very last section of the opera, as the music becomes more resolute, Moses sings "I understood Your command, and I will go fulfill my mission as I am required to" and, extinguishing the candle and putting it in a business-like manner into his brief-case, goes offstage, as the music gradually dissipates into silence.

Alexander Shchetynsky's opera is different from the previous two, as it is written in an atonal, chromatic language, following the traditions of Edison Denisov and of avant-garde European composers, and here the percussion instruments are used to a greater degree than in the first two operas. The opera starts with the Virgin Mary clothed in a nightshirt, sitting inside a large cocoon-shaped metal object, all wrapped in transparent cellophane wrapping paper. Unlike the previous two operas, the "divine revelation" occurs immediately as the pianist, dressed in the tunic, walks out on stage and gestures towards Mary in her cocoon, then sits down at the piano and starts by playing sparse sounds on the percussion instruments -- starting with the triangles and then going on to the tamtams and other instruments, while Mary wakes up, gradually starts tearing away at the cellophane paper, which enables her to open up her way out of the cocoon, symbolizing her spiritual awakening. She starts singing subdued vocal passages, gradually accelerating to louder ecstatic passages, singing "Who are you, wondrous visitor? You opened my eyes to things previously unseen!," while the piano begins to play crisp, dry, and sparse textures, which gradually expand to thicker, richly sonorous chords. The music continually changes, becoming alternately more introvertively subdued and more extrovertively dramatic. The piano gives way to occasional short solo percussion interludes. Intricately sparse chromatic weaving in the upper register yields to thickly chromatic and emotionally dramatic chordal passages in the middle register, which in turn reveal robust clusterry chords in the extreme low range. At a dramatic point Mary comes up the pianist, turns his right hand away from the piano and, after several such interferences, pounds upon one high note, playing it repetitively in short staccato rhythms. After a while, the pianist stands up and she sits down to play chromatic Messiaenesque chords. While she sings ecstatically "Blessed am I among women and blessed is the fruit of my womb," the pianist casually strums at the strings. At the end, the music becomes more and more sparse and subdued as Mary slowly and joyfully gets back into the cocoon-shaped object and falls asleep, her last joyful words sounding almost as a whisper, with which the opera and the whole triptych end.

Connections Round the Bloch

WALTER SAUL

10th-Annual Ernest Bloch Composers' Symposium. July 18, 1999, Newport, OR. Through July 24.

The coastal town of Newport, Oregon, connects to the rest of the nation through its two main highways. Its north-south artery, U.S. 101, has made about three-quarters of its way up the coast from Los Angeles, California, to Olympia, Washington. At the main traffic light in town, U.S. 20, the longest road in the United States, begins its 3,394 mile long journey across the country to Boston, Massachusetts.

For the intense, jam-packed week of the Ernest Bloch Music Festival in late July, Newport extends its connections worldwide. The Ernest Bloch Music Festival's artistic director, Neville Dove, originally from South Africa, is based in Germany. Kathryn Price, 1999's featured guest cellist, hails from Wales. And the Festival's namesake, Swiss-born Ernest Bloch (1880-1959), saw his career blossom in two continents, spending the last 19 years of his life in Agate Beach, just north of Newport, and now within the city limits.

While the Oregon Coast boasts several well-established summer music festivals, the Ernest Bloch Music Festival distinguishes itself in two ways: 1) it celebrates and features the music of Ernest Bloch through its several orchestral and chamber music concerts, and, 2) it includes the unique Ernest Bloch Composers' Symposium.

The Symposium was founded in the summer of 1990 by Greg Steinke, now at Marylhurst University. The Festival started alongside the Symposium that same summer with funding from the Bloch Music Festival association and the Oregon Coast Arts Council, chaired at that time by Sharon Morgan. The structure is as ingenious as it is simple. An eminent master composer is engaged for the week to counsel and dialogue with ten other composers, typically in mid-careers. These composers are selected nationwide through a call for submission of scores and proposals for works for the resident chamber ensemble. The Symposium's chamber ensemble consists of five or six superb, "quick-study" musicians from the Northwest. In 1999, this ensemble included soprano Brenda Baker, flutist Tessa Brinkman, violinist Marty Jennings, cellist Nancy Ives (a distant relative of Charles Ives), and pianist Jeffrey Payne. Typically, each composer writes a new work for this select ensemble, and the works are presented by this ensemble in two or three concerts spaced throughout the week.

This past year, the Ernest Bloch Composers' Symposium attracted ten composers from all over the country, including three from that antipode of Newport, Boston. Several other composers attended as auditors.

The master composer was Paul Dresher, a guitarist active in the San Francisco Bay Area and founder of the Paul Dresher Ensemble Electro-Acoustic Band, an eclectic, electric six-piece melange of violin, guitar, bassoon, keyboard, mallet percussion, and drums. Dresher's appointment as master composer may be an anomaly or harbinger of a sea-change in the patronage system of composers today. The late 20th century largely witnessed the colleges and universities of the Western world as the patronage system of art music composers, and the Ernest Bloch Composers' Symposium has reflected that in engaging master composers from academic settings -- until this meeting (Greg Steinke notes that Paul Chehara, 1995's master composer, took a 20-year hiatus from the university setting, but returned to academe immediately after the Symposium that year). In contrast to this, Dresher once held a teaching position at Cornish College of the Arts, but has since been an independent composer and performer. He and the Paul Dresher Ensemble have been highly successful in attracting grants from local arts agencies and councils to support their activities (His teaching is limited to a few adjunct appointments in area colleges).

Henry Mollicone, the current director (since 1998) of the Ernest Bloch Composers' Symposium, shares a similar background with Dresher. He holds an adjunct appointment as the music director and conductor of the Santa Clara University Orchestra, but is also largely an independent composer who has been heavily commissioned in North America, particularly for his operas. He also served as Composer-in-Residence of the Brevard Music Festival in North Carolina in 1999, immediately before the Ernest Bloch Composers' Symposium. The changing patronage system is also reflected in the ten composers chosen to attend this Symposium. Half currently hold full-time teaching appointments at universities or colleges. Another, Ilana Cotton, the only woman chosen to attend in 1999, has taught part-time at three institutions of higher learning and privately at her home. She represents the growing number of "freeway fliers" as colleges and universities replace full-time positions with part-time appointments.

An even more pronounced trend at the Ernest Bloch Composers' Symposium was the resurgence of opera. This was wonderfully celebrated in the works of Dresher, Mollicone, and three of the ten composers. The Festival featured two performances of Mollicone's one-act opera, *The Face on the Barroom Floor*, accompanied by the composer on the piano. As might be expected, the opera parodies ragtime and other popular American idioms to set the scene at the bar, but is not afraid to invoke complex counterpoint and ascending quartal harmonies as it unfolds the terrible shooting tragedy that is the legend of the Central City Opera. In Central City, Colorado, the opera house is actually located next door to the bar celebrated in this opera.

One of the three Symposium concerts featured three powerful and dramatic scenes from Tony De Ritis's opera-in-progress, which hurls the vocalists and instrumentalists into repeated frenzies as a working woman in the early 20th-century struggles with her response to romantic advances made by her boss.

During the composer sessions with Dresher, two scenes from his operas were shown, which featured the singing and acting soliloquies of Rinde Eckert. The video of one of those scenes also featured Dresher in the background playing his electric guitar in a constantly growing accompaniment loop as his collaborator mostly improvised the acting and singing of this scene.

Also heard was about 20 minutes of John Beeman's *Law Offices*, an opera dwelling on the corrupt legal practice of a famous lawyer (That opera was at one time produced near the San Mateo County Courthouse). Shaun Naidoo shared a scene from one of his operas concerning the evils of apartheid in his native South Africa.

The emphasis of compositional activity, however, remained with the chamber music, most of which was composed expressly for this Symposium. It was particularly encouraging to note the diversity of styles amongst the composers. The strident dissonances of John Genovese's *Check and Double Check* contrast starkly to the gentle sonorities of Ilana Cotton's many-hued *Flame* (all growing out of the major scale with its flatted 6th and 7th degrees). The humor of John Beeman's *El Sueño* and *La Vida Como un Sueño* (based on the round "Life is like a dream") formed a perfect foil to the ethereal, bell-like chords suspended between heaven and earth in Paul Davies' *Lydian Movements*. Sami Abu Shumays's *The Jocund Muse* cleverly recalled the music of 17th-century England in setting very secular poetry of the Episcopal priest Robert Herrick, while this writer's *The Lord is My Light*, set the opening verses of Psalm 27 in a more solemn, yet hopeful mood. Cliff Callendar's settings of two poems by e. e. cummings demanded virtuosity of the highest order by only the soprano soloist and a lone violinist. Tony De Ritis operatic scenes demanded the full quintet available and made those five performers sound quite orchestral.

The only regret about the Ernest Bloch Composers' Symposium and the Ernest Bloch Music Festival was the lack of connection between the two events. Although these festivals started in 1990 fairly independent of each other, they had become quite integrated, particularly in 1996, when George Crumb was the master composer. Crumb's work was featured several times in the Festival concerts, and there was a marvelous Elderhostel group that swelled the audiences for all the events. In 1999, because Dresher's music is conceived for atypical combinations, such as the Electro-Acoustic Band, the Festival orchestra and chamber groups did not include any of his music. One of his rare acoustic works, a trio for violin, 'cello, and piano, was included instead in a Symposium concert.

On the other hand, Paul Stewart, a visiting composer from Harvard University, was instrumental in organizing the first student composer program for the Festival. This gave several high school students from around Oregon the opportunity to sit in on Symposium and Festival concerts and discussions. We hope this program continues in 2000.

Word has come already from Symposium director Mollicone that this year's Symposium has attracted the most applications ever from composers around the United States. The upcoming Symposium and Festival are scheduled for July 23-30, 2000.

Microtonal Boston

DAVID CLEARY

Boston Microtonal Society presents a 72nd-birthday celebration in honor of Joe Maneri and Ezra Sims. January 16, Killian Hall, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA.

The Boston Microtonal Society presented a 72nd birthday bash in honor of the city's resident grand old men of microtonality, Joe Maneri and Ezra Sims. The concert provided an excellent overview of these composers' unique and wonderful portfolios. Especially notable was how natural and unforced the pitch languages sounded; one never thought "out of tune" or "weird."

Sims's compositions were all splendid listens, and *Quintet* (1987) for clarinet and strings is one of his finest efforts. The work's four movements are by turns percolating, expressive, energetic, and hushed. Careful craftsmanship, effective scoring, and an excellent dramatic sense can be numbered among the piece's many attributes. Violin and cello pairings sometimes sound thin and characterless, but *Duo* (1997) nicely avoids any such problems. The string writing is toothsome and sonorous, never bland or stodgy. *Flight* (1989) for flute and tape shows that Sims composes equally well in an electronic medium. Here, the tape part plays like a "super-organ" -- strongly pitch-centered rather than effect-laden, though timbrally colorful in the manner of organ stop pulling. The flute writing is most grateful and contains subtle, fetching melodic material.

In contrast to the often natty clarity of his colleague's offerings, Maneri's works tended to be more rawboned and heart-on-the-sleeve, though they proved to be equally wonderful hearings. *Ephphatha* (1971) was the first microtonal piece written by this composer. Dynamic, brash, and forceful with energy to burn, it's also skillfully paced and well orchestrated for its unusual grouping of piano, clarinet, trombone, and tuba -- a radiant work. Equally novel is *Feast of St. Luke* (1988), scored for two pianos tuned one quarter-tone apart and performed by a single player. This large, ambitious composition tends to chase one hand immediately after the other (each hand on a different keyboard), occasionally speaking in an echo-like manner. But its rather single-minded gestural sense is put in service to a nicely timed, well-wrought overall sense of shape. And the sound world here is very attractive, the pianos' heavily pedaled pitches often suggesting bells (a notion further reinforced by the non-equal-tempered partials that often fill the air in performance). The worthy soprano/tenor saxophone duo *Khotlyn* (1999) suggests non-Western liturgical chant with its ritualistic sounding vocal line and exotic text. And *Sharafuddin b Yah Ya Maneri, Makhdum ul-Mulk* (1995) is a soulful, rhapsodic pleasure, a solo work playable by either contrabass or flute (the former version was given).

Two delightful solo occasional pieces were also presented, each performed by its respective composer. *Study after Ezra Sims* (1995) for cello, by Arnold Friedman, is a ternary work based on the pitch techniques found in Sims's *Quintet*, while *Preface and Echo Verse for Joe Maneri* (2000) for two pianos/one player, by John McDonald, is a reply of sorts to *Feast of St. Luke*, a two-movement etude set that explores broken near-octaves and echo effects.

Many of the performances were impressive: McDonald's yeoman two-piano turn on *Feast*, Sue-Ellen Herschman-Tcherepnin's fine fluting in *Flight*, Chris Burns's excellent contrabass playing in *Sharafuddin*, and the stunning presentation by the fivesome that gave Sims's *Quintet*.

Sonatas and Fantasies

DAVID CLEARY

League of Composers/ISCM and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology present *Sonatas and Fantasies from America, France, and Egypt*, performed by pianist Geoffrey Burleson. January 24, Killian Hall, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA.

On many solo recitals, 20th-century music is a single component surrounded by standard repertoire, analogous perhaps to the spicy bisque or salad of exotic greens leading into an eagerly anticipated steak dinner. Pianist Geoffrey Burleson decided to make this past century's music the main course in his recent concert.

The pick of the evening was George Walker's *Sonata No. 2* (1956). It's a fine, somewhat Copland-like piece: compact, clean, and cogently argued. And unlike the recital's other selections, it possesses a convincing, organic sense of form and pacing. Leon Kirchner's *Sonata* (1948) is also a strong listen, highly energetic and very compelling gesturally -- all the better to surmount its frequently loose overall structural feel. The unfinished, bipartite *Sonata No. 3* (1957-), by Pierre Boulez, is a sonata in name only. The piece more closely suggests a series of vignettes, particularly in its "Trope" movement. The imaginative piano writing features intriguing use of harmonics and pedaling, but even considering its aleatoric milieu, the work exhibits little sense of contrast or direction. Betsy Jolas's music has always made a good impression; surprisingly, her *Pièce pour Saint Germain* (1980) often sounds rather cramped and aloof, with a less-than-engaging architectural sensibility. *Funeral Ceremony at the Pyramid of Mankara* (1990) by Riad Abdel-Gawad is brilliantly colorful, making telling use of stopped notes, string plucking, and (in its second movement) prepared piano effects. But Fibonacci controls notwithstanding, the work remains a series of attractive sounds, lacking a feel for form or movement closure.

Burleson played excellently, presenting the Jolas, Kirchner, and Walker from memory. His sound was substantive even in the softest passages, and in loud sections he played with a strong tone that was free of ugly pounding. The Boulez and Abdel-Gawad benefited mightily from this pianist's keen ear for timbral subtlety. Listening to the Kirchner and Walker with score in hand, Burleson's otherwise sturdy performance of the former occasionally came up short in a few technique-based niceties and small details of accent weights. But the pianist settled into a flawless groove after this opening selection. His performance of the Walker, for example, showed a perfect ear for both minutiae and larger concerns.

This listener did not always warm up to the main courses presented this evening -- but he knew full well that a master chef had prepared them for consumption. Bravos go to Burleson for his four-star musical cookery.

Just in Time

DAVID CLEARY

Just in Time Composers and Players. February 6, Seully Hall, Boston Conservatory, Boston, MA.

Boston has a nearly 20-year tradition of homegrown, self-presenting composer consortium organizations such as Composers in Red Sneakers and Extension Works. The Just in Time group is one of the more successful of the recent entries in this field. Their February 6 concert was an often pleasing, if somewhat uneven affair.

Best of show was *Odessas* (1999) by Haig Boyadjian. At times perfumed with hints of Debussy or Bartók, these short pieces were written as birthday occasional works for the composer's granddaughter. But these prove to be well-constructed, short entities of much substance, not frothy bonbons -- rewarding listens from start to finish. Pianist Karine Bagdasarian played them excellently.

Stephen James's *Piano Sonata* is an earnest, ambitious selection that has much to commend it. The first movement pleases most, being a smartly balanced construct that perfectly mingles minimalism with a chromatically oriented new-tonalist language. The second and third movements contain worthy passages but also wander at times. This is a highly idiomatic keyboard work, full of vibrant textures and dramatic contrast. And James peppers the work's often foursquare rhythmic flow with unexpected accents and intriguing phrase irregularities. The composer played, and played it well.

Marc W. Rossi's *Dreams in Rhythm* is the sort of thing one rarely hears at Boston new music concerts: equal parts jazz, Latin pop, and West Coast hip classical. While not a work evincing any sort of profound message, the piece does prove to be a charming, top-tapping delight and -- unlike many other such pieces -- keeps a careful ear for form and balance. The Really Eclectic String Quartet (aptly named, as contrabass is substituted for cello here) played excellently; violinists Mimi Rabson and Eric Bindman came forth with some first-class improvising.

Traveling to Magic for piano and percussion, by Pamela J. Marshall, proved to be two dance interludes from the composer's opera-in-progress *Melete's Quest*. The first movement is bouncy in a Bartók-meets-the-blues way, then later turns flowing and supple; the interplay between piano and vibraphone here is especially fetching. The finale, meant to depict a more deteriorated, threatening milieu, never shows its teeth menacingly enough for this critic. Pianist Karen Sauer and percussionist Gary Wallen gave it a clean, sensitive presentation.

John Sarkissian's *Five Songs on Poems by Anna Akhmatova* (1999) is difficult listening despite capable Russian text setting, able use of passacaglia technique in the third song, and sly quotation employment in movement four (snatches of Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 10* and the "Star Spangled Banner"). While the fault may lie partly in the work's curious mix of 12-tone technique and triadic harmony, the performance left something to be desired. Soprano Nouné Karapetian's not-so-well-enunciated voice was stuffy sounding and lacked high note sureness, while pianist Carmen Rodriguez-Peralta did not always do dramatic justice to the frequently flamboyant piano accompaniment. One reserves further judgement until a better presentation is heard.

While the music and performances this afternoon ranged from excellent to doubtful, one could easily find things to enjoy. And we can also respect the pluck of this group, a worthy follower in the footsteps of Boston's do-it-yourself tradition.

Rhymes of the African Mariner

MARY ANN MCNAMEE

Joseph Nocella's *The African Mariner Through Music and Story* (libretto by Roberta Cooks). February 6, Independence Seaport Museum, Philadelphia, PA.

What happens when a museum Vice-President of Interpretation, a compelling jazz-influenced classical composer, and an acclaimed "crossover" violinist come together? They produce something like the program that took place on February 6 at the Independence Seaport Museum in Philadelphia.

When Roberta Cooks, the above-mentioned museum executive, began researching ways that the Seaport museum could celebrate Black History month she found a rich history of African and African-American involvement with the sea. She drew on this history using the men's own words to create a fine narrative triptych: the mariners that were sent by the great King of Mali to explore a world they thought was round some 200 years before Columbus, the African-Americans who populated the whaling industry in the 19th century, and the heroic men of the USS MASON -- a navy destroyer escort from World War II.

These stories led her to commission Joseph Nocella to compose *The African Mariner*, and he created a work that engaged the audience from its beginning with his usual mastery. Nocella originally conceived of using a solo instrument as another narrative voice, and indeed he uses the violin in this way, but he also ultimately expanded his instrumental design to include piano and percussion. The music provides so strong a support that at times you are only subliminally aware of it, but the beautifully realized themes and motives are skillfully woven throughout the work, surfacing and submerging to create the total symmetry on which the story rests. Nocella uses percussion instruments such as congas, ocean drums, and rain sticks as well as the piano to supply the strong rhythmic interest; he lets the violin sing.

And of course, there are few musicians who can make the violin sing like Diane Monroe, a self-described "cross-over or alternative" music-maker with superb technique and fine ear to play many forms of music. In *The African Mariner* she served not only as the violin/voice but also as ensemble director cueing the musicians and narrators.

Mention must be made of the two splendid narrators who added so much to the performance, Charlotte Blake Alston noted as a storyteller and for her work with the Philadelphia Orchestra, and Thom Page from Freedom Theater. With creative artists and performers of this high a caliber, a program cannot fail to move, amaze, and entertain, and this concert certainly did all three.

The Law of Excellence with Pinkham, Kirchner, Harbison, and Schuller

DAVID CLEARY

New England Conservatory Contemporary Ensemble in music of Pinkham, Kirchner, Harbison, and Schuller. Jordan Hall, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA.

The most recent New England Conservatory Contemporary Ensemble concert presented music by four important elder statesmen. Interestingly, two of these composers were represented by works highly atypical of their *oeuvre*, another by perhaps the two most contentious pieces in his portfolio.

Much of the music by Daniel Pinkham has shown clear affinity to that of Barber, Rorem, Copland, and Piston (the last being one of his teachers). The song cycle *Called Home* (1997) thus comes as a major surprise. While still often containing pattern-based piano accompaniments typical of Americana-style song composers, the harmonic language utilized is quite dissonant, often downright expressionist in manner. This approach proves a good match for the unusually weighty Emily Dickinson poems set here. It's a worthy adventure, one of this composer's best works.

Equally exceptional are *Fanfare for Brass Trio* (1965) and *Illuminations* (1986) by Leon Kirchner. Both are brief, festive compositions for brass groupings, but instead of employing the densely chromatic idiom of his string quartets and piano sonata, these entities are consonant sounding. The fanfare heavily intermingles triads and stacked fourth sonorities with more dissonant verticals (at times suggestive of Copland), while the latter work reaches back even further to evoke influences of Debussy and Sibelius. Both pleased enormously.

John Harbison's two selections on the program can be counted among his more irascible ones. *Quintet for Winds* (1978) has proven very popular with ensembles of this kind, having been much played (in Boston by the Arcadian Winds in particular). While mildly Stravinsky-oriented in sound, the piece contains a grotesque quirkiness and structural tautness all its own. The song cycle *Simple Daylight* (1988) is perhaps his most highly charged: intense, emotional, sometimes despairing. In certain ways, it can be seen as a 20th-century response to Schubert's *Die Winterreise*. But make no mistake, feisty is fine -- both pieces proved to be wonderful essays.

In contrast, *Sonata for Saxophone and Piano* (1999) sounds like vintage Gunther Schuller, containing mildly jazzy twists in a dissonant chromatic style, clear though novel formal constructs, and idiomatic instrumental writing. The format employed is unusual for a sonata. The opening movement is slow and deliberate, more suggestive of chaconne than sonata-allegro; the center section is a leisurely-unfolding saxophone cadenza; and the finale is tripartite, with boisterous outer sections sandwiching a *misterioso* middle. The work's pacing is odd but effective. This was excellent music indeed.

The ensemble's student performers, ably coached -- and on *Illuminations*, conducted -- by director John Heiss, played superbly. Particular praise goes to sopranos Jessica Cooper and Jessica Bowers, saxophonist Eric Hewitt, and the NEC Honors Wind Quintet. And hats off to Heiss for programming a concert that showed some patriarchs performing unexpected and effectual tricks.

C'est Poulenc!

EDITH GÜNTHER

C'est Poulenc! with Claire Delmon, Patti Deuter, Michael Kimbell, Elizabeth Lee, Emil Miland, Anne Oliver, David Saslav, Melissa Smith and Kamala Stroup. February 26, Art Center, Palo Alto, CA.

The stage was decorated to give the illusion of the Paris cabaret-café world which Poulenc loved. Seated at a small bistro table narratrice Claire Delmon was a helpful tour guide in embarking on a fast-paced trip through the wonderful riches -- by turns mischievous, brash, mysterious, profound, and intensely lyrical but always engaging -- of some of Poulenc's piano, vocal and chamber music.

Melissa Smith's deft capturing of the wit and humor of *Trois novelettes* (1927, 1928, 1960) set the tone. In splendid collaboration with tenor David Saslav, this pianist offered a very dramatic and gripping rendition of three vocal compositions, each entirely different and ranging from grotesque black humor and surreal mystery to deeply moving tragedy: *La tragique histoire du petit René* (1935), *Le bestiaire* (1919), and *C* (1944).

Patti Deuter's meticulous and imaginative playing brought out the eerie night colors in the five numbers from *Nocturnes pour piano* (1929-39); *Bal fantôme* was particularly effective.

In the composer's last completed work, *Sonate pour piano et clarinette* (1962), Michael Kimbell and Elizabeth Lee brought out the complexities. This extraordinary composition is suffused with passion, its turbulent emotions roil beneath the seeming lightness of a debonair façade, especially in the haunting beauty of the middle movement.

Although *Histoire de Babar* was not included in its entirety, Saslav and Smith provided a delightful glimpse of its personality by recounting the origins of this most loved work.

Anne Oliver's lively and dramatic playing brought out the wonderful coloristic and haunting qualities of the *Napoli Suite* (1922-25).

In *La Courte Paille* (1960), Poulenc's last song cycle, Kamala Stroup, whose insightful interpretation was matched by Elizabeth Lee's sensitive warmth of tone and superb dynamic control, captured all the intensity and breadth of these deceptively simple songs.

Emil Miland and Anne Oliver dispatched two movements from the *Sonate pour piano et violoncelle* (1948) with great warmth of tone and fine dramatic flair.

Concluding with a rousing and exhilarating performance of the *Sonate à quatre mains* by Anne Oliver and Elizabeth Lee, the concert wonderfully demonstrated the enduring appeal and wide variety of Poulenc's work.

Original/American

DAVID L. BARRY

The San Francisco Contemporary Music Players perform Gunther Schuller's *Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano* (1999), Seymour Shifrin's *The Nick of Time* (1978), Ralph Shapey's *Kroslish Sonate* (1985), and Edgard Varèse's *Octandre* (1923). February 28, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA.

Gunther Schuller's *Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano* -- as performed at the San Francisco Contemporary Players concert on February 28 at Yerba Buena Gardens by Kenneth Radnofsky and Thomas Schultz -- seems to summarize various stylistic elements from the career of its creator. The work begins with slow sustained tones from the saxophone set against fragmented figures in the piano. The saxophone part develops in an ever more improvisatory manner with long stretches of solo playing in which the opening chromatic language allies itself increasingly with standard jazz utterances (some passages are marked "Parkerish" in the score.) Both piano and sax conclude the piece with a rousing accelerando.

The Nick of Time reveals not only Seymour Shifrin's fascination with the temporal element in composition but also poignantly signals his impending death. The piece develops as a colloquy in which the instrumentalists (in this case, flutist Leslie Chin, clarinetist William Wohlmacher, percussionist William Winant, Schultz, violinist Roy Malan, cellist Nina Flyer, and string bassist Steven D'Amico) weave their individual colors into a lightly textured web of highly animated thematic statements and short dialogues. The composer's goal of presenting complex musical ideas in a lucidly audible manner is fully realized in this work.

Ralph Shapey's *Kroslish Sonate* for cello and piano (named after initial performers Joel Krosnick and Gilbert Kalish) confronts the listener with an altogether different musical ethos. Shapey's uncompromising muse produces in this work three movements of aural sculpture, the hardness of which may almost be felt as much as heard. The work begins with a heavy Maestoso in which piano and cello hurl dissonant ostinati and assorted jagged figures into an alternately converging and diverging dialogue. The second movement proceeds with slow, quiet, and rather sad thematic statements passed between the instruments. The third movement produces a strident and asymmetrically rhythmic effect from five note phrases hammered on the piano. Throughout the work one is reminded occasionally of Shapey's admiration for Edgar Varèse. There are passages that evoke his teacher, Stefan Wolpe. There is also more than a hint of Brahms -- a not unpleasing taciturnity and classical crafting of phrase, applied to an individual serial idiom.

For Varèse's *Octandre*, the company of players added oboist William Banovetz, bassoonist Rufus Olivier, hornist Lawrence Ragent, trumpeter Charles Metzger, trombonist Hall Goff, to the aforementioned flute, clarinet, and bass players. This well-known eight-minute soundscape from 1923 could have provided an introduction to this program of *American Originals*. In the concluding position it functioned as a prophetic commentary on its aesthetic descendents.

Erling Wold's Dreams Take the Stage

ANDREW SHAPIRO

A Little Girl Dreams of Taking the Veil, a chamber opera by Erling Wold. March 1, ODC Theater, San Francisco, CA, Through March 12.

Erling Wold's chamber opera *A Little Girl Dreams of Taking the Veil*, is based upon Max Ernst's collage-novel, *Reve d'une Petite Fille qui Voulut Entrer au Carmel*. The program notes describe it as an opera that "interleaves the events of the little girl's dream with a surrealist narrative about the circumstances surrounding the dream including a rape, which the child transforms into a fantastic prize: the opportunity for her first communion."

This second production of the piece enjoyed a sizable stage area which allowed designer Amy Claire and director Jim Cave the opportunity to create a large and elaborate picture. The set, which looked something like a warped renaissance faire, kept viewers looking around throughout the duration of the performance at the details of the set design's components. We never tired of what we saw.

It is easy to agree with a 1995 review of the piece in the San Francisco Chronicle that describes Wold's music as one that is structured by "[using] moody repetitions of minimalism as a frame for more free-form interludes." Clearly, the strongest musical material is in the smooth running currents of Wold's minimalist language. These moments encouraged listeners to become part of the mystic abstraction on the stage; I filled the surrealist gaps in the story line with my own sensibilities that were influenced by the music.

Combined with the solid singing of the cast, Wold's sensitive orchestration produced a glistening surface to the repetitive grooves of material that left us wishing for more. When the music strayed from its minimalist frame into a more free-formed set of excursions, disappointment set in and one wondered why Wold chose to move away from material that was so successful.

A Little Girl Dreams of Taking the Veil is a special musical theater event that deserves to be seen elsewhere. We are happy to read that the show will be travelling to Austria for its third production in September 2000. Wold and his winning collaborative team are worthy of the praise and recognition that its first two productions have received.

March Madness

MARK FRANCIS

Little Women, an opera in two acts, by Mark Adamo. Houston Grand Opera. March 5, Cullen Theater, Wortham Theater Center, Houston, TX.

Mark Adamo's first opera, *Little Women*, takes a different approach to this long-time popular story. Premiered two years ago by the Houston Grand Opera, the work is more about Jo March's resistance to change, than her transformation into a writer of more than just "potboiler" novels.

The most memorable musical moments occur in the second act with Bhaer's lovely aria on a Goethe poem and a striking duet between Jo and her aunt. The main recurring motive of the opera is a rising whole-tone scale, which apparently symbolizes the unbreakable bond of sisterhood.

Little Women is not an easy work to turn into an opera since the original story has many scenes and settings. Some scenes are necessarily telescoped here to give an overall tauter sense of the story.

Fine Time

DAVID CLEARY

Fine Memorial Concert. March 11, Slosberg Recital Hall, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA.

Some people seek out "brand name" entities in stores and on concerts. Blind adherence to such devotion, however, can result in the overlooking of excellent products and composers. The music of Irving Fine, not so often heard these days, is a case in point. Fine can in fact be considered one of this century's most underrated American neoclassicists. And sadly, like Charles Tomlinson Griffes, he died young while in the midst of a potentially fruitful stylistic breakthrough.

Fine's earlier music is redolent of Stravinsky and Copland, but does not slavishly imitate either composer. The five-movement suite *Music for Piano* (1947) is Fine's major composition in this idiom. Sturdy, imaginative, and well balanced throughout, its lovely slow movement (a set of variations) is especially enjoyable. Evan Hirsch's performance was matter-of-fact, featuring solid technique and a lean, yet focused tone; interestingly, the variation movement exhibited much depth and tenderness through this somewhat detached approach. Rather than being a fiddler's showpiece, the *Sonata for Violin and Piano* (1946) belongs to the equal-partner duo tradition of works by Beethoven and Brahms. It too is a strong piece that deserves to be played more often. Hirsch and violinist Judith Eissenberg gave the outer movements with energy and precision, though the central *Lento* suffered at times from balance and intonation problems.

After 1952, Fine's stylistic voice became highly personal, an inimitable combination of the neoclassicist ethos and serial techniques. The four pieces programmed from this period, while drawn from the charming side of his portfolio, nevertheless made for excellent listening. *One, Two, Buckle My Shoe* (1959), written for a TV documentary, stands excellently on its own as a work of art for art's sake -- would that more television underscoring have this selection's verve and intelligence! *One, Two* also elicited the concert's best performance, vibrant and spirited, by Eissenberg, cellist Rhonda Rider, oboist Jennifer Slowick, and clarinetist William Kirkley. The *Romanza for Wind Quintet* (1959) is considered in some circles to be a bit of a poor cousin to Fine's better-known *Partita*, but listeners were much taken by the former's thrifty motivic sense and clean structure. Slowick and Kirkley, joined by Susan Gall (flute), Jean Rife (horn), and Margaret Phillips (bassoon), gave the work a tight, energetic reading. *Homage à Mozart* (1956) and the second set of *Childhood Fables for Grownups* (1955) are light, frothy confections, fun to hear. Hirsch's performance of the former was a model of sober excellence. Soprano Nancy Armstrong sang the latter well enough but was hampered by the singer-unfriendly acoustics of Slosberg Hall and Wayman Chin's garishly overwrought piano accompaniment.

In short, Fine's worthy music rewards those who search the epigrammatic "road less traveled." Received with thanks.

Three from 415

GENE REYNOLDS

Other Minds presents the Common Sense Composers' Collective's *Opus 415 No. 5*. David Del Tredici performs his *3 Songs for Baritone and Piano* (*Quietness*, *A Saver*, and *Matthew Shepard*); Jay Cloidt's *Life Is Good and People Are Basically Decent*, Paul Drescher's *Din of Iniquity*, Cindy Cox's *Into the Wild*, David Lang's *Follow*, Paul Hanson's *Pull of the Gold Rope*, and Randall Woolf's *Angel Dust*, performed by the Paul Drescher Ensemble; Joan Jeanrenaud and Mark Grey in the latter's *Blood Red*, Gamelan Sekar Jaya performing I Dewa Putu Berata's *Sekar Gadung*; John Bischoff's *Quarter Turn*; the Ashley Adams & Danielle DeGruttola Duo's *Song of the Bottomfeeders*; Dan Plonsky's *Sunburst (scenes 1-7)*; Elinor Armer's *Shivaree*; Katherine Shao's *Judgment Day*; Matt Ingalls's *Crust*; Dan Becker's *Tamper Resistant*; Melissa Hui's *Lacrymosa*; the Flandreau-Goodheart-Powell Trio in *No Melody for Wadada*; Brian Reinbolt's *Respirateur*; Michael Fiday's *Slap Back*; Mathew Burtner's *Portals of Distortion*; and Belinda Reynolds's *YAWP*; plus music by Citizen Band, IN34A Trio, and Wobbly. March 19, Theatre Artaud, San Francisco, CA.

Heading into Theater Artaud for the Opus 415 Marathon, I was eager yet apprehensive. In truth, there were few pieces that were totally satisfying on all levels. Yet, there were aspects of just about every performance that were noteworthy and that encouraged the audience to listen to and view each succeeding act more intensely. The overall experience was both challenging and entertaining.

There was variety not only of music, but of stage presence. Three performances in particular remain in the mind for dramatically different reasons.

One of the final performances of the first of four sets was by the trio Citizen Band, performing live electronics in *IN34A*. The piece opened with low rumbling noises that slowly increased in volume and then segued into a series of high-pitched sonar beeps. The three young Citizens, hunched over a mass of buttons and knobs, never looked up at the audience. The initial impression was that of a group of guys fooling around with weird noises. Yet as the piece continued, the sounds did not appear to be random at all. There was order, flow, intelligence, and movement. The low rumbling subway thrums that began the piece continued throughout, providing an electronic backbeat. There was a definite cadence to the piece, which created its own hypnotic effect. About midway through, the artists consulted amongst one other as the electronica continued to blaze away. It was a brief reminder that this was, in fact, live. The frenzied pace continued to build until a massive barrage of assaulting sounds. As slowly as the piece had built in tension, it likewise began to wind down. Finally, just as it had started there was only the low rumbling sounds and the high-pitched syncopated beeps.

The performance of Citizen Band couldn't have been less animated. Other than the brief consultation, there was almost no discernible movement -- just three computer nerds playing with their laptops. Yet the sounds they created had a stimulating effect of movement and tension in striking contrast to the immobility and placidity of the players.

The second set opened with the Paul Drescher Ensemble Electro-Acoustic Band, which host Dan Becker dubbed the "house band" for the event. As much as that label has a popular music connotation, Drescher and company did add more of vernacular flavor to the show. They performed two numbers: *Angel Dust*, by Randy Woolf, and *Pull of the Gold Rope*, by the ensemble's bassoonist, Paul Hanson. The ensemble played in a style that connected with jazz-rock, and was more listener-friendly than some of the other performances. *Angel Dust* was a schizophrenic musical trip in multiple sections that provided the opportunity for each musician to take the lead as the music built and crashed down. The keyboard segment definitely had the feel of someone running, trying to escape. It increased in intensity until all the instruments blared together like a massive head rush and then slowed down again to refocus on the keyboardist. Juxtaposed with this piece was *Pull of the Gold Rope*. The music was uplifting, soothing, and just what the audience needed in the rehab room after *Angel Dust*.

Near the close of the same set, a threesome laconically styled as Trio (two pianists and electric guitarist), performed a number equally-imaginatively entitled *New Work*. Sonically, I hated it! The piece seemed all over the place with frequent sharp banging on the piano. Despite this, I found the stage performance strangely intoxicating. The two pianists were a study in contradiction. Kui Dong seemed to be attacking her piano keys. She played with a physicality that was punctuated by sporadic elbow pounding that producing a sharp, startling crush of notes. Her partner in crime, Christian Wolff, played with his head down, focused purely on an inward music. His robotic style was in direct contrast to his animated counterpart. Then to throw the audience off, while still playing with one hand, Wolff would stand up, lean over his piano, and tweak the piano strings with his other hand. This produced a much tighter, restrained sound that seemed to further accentuate the contrast of his style. Between them, Larry Polansky sat on a chair, guitar pulled in tight, strumming on strings almost silently at times. He looked the mad scientist hovering over his musical brew. At times Polansky played crouched over the guitar, choking the strings way up on the neck of the instrument in an almost stranglehold position. This evolved into a more relaxed style, yet still intensely focusing on those guitar strings.

Unlike any other performance, Trio looked and sounded like three solo artists. Even the look of their stage set up helped enforce this image. The two pianos were set in opposite diagonals creating a triangle where at the apex sat Polansky. Set at this angle, and with both pianists playing with their piano lids up, it looked like each artist had been partitioned off from the others. The audience could see all three, but it appeared that the artists could not see each other. As the piece came to a close, the pianos, although playing in different keys, began to use a call and response technique that was tied together by Polansky's guitar. It wasn't until the very end of the piece that you felt all three were in fact playing together. The stark isolationism of the performance, and especially the keyboard assaults of Dong, made this performance stand out among all others.

From the electronic incantations of Citizen Band to the feel-good sounds of Paul Drescher through the quirky performance of Trio, a wide variety was experienced at Opus 415. With each performance, something new and unique was presented, resulting in a marathon of distinctive sounds and presentations.

A Streetcar in New Orleans

MARK FRANCIS

New Orleans Opera presents Andre Previn's *A Streetcar Named Desire* (libretto by Philip Littell after Tennessee Williams). March 25, Mahalia Jackson Theater, New Orleans, LA.

A Streetcar Named Desire came home to its location with a series of performances by the New Orleans Opera. Renee Fleming's role as Blanche DuBois was recreated by Sheryl Woods in a devastatingly emotional performance.

The opera could be compared to an out-of-control streetcar as it begins slowly and loses all sense of the tracks by the end. Though over three hours in length, it is never dull. Previn, thankfully, stays away from trying to recreate the sounds of New Orleans jazz or blues, instead focusing on the dark, decadent side of Blanche's family and personal life. The music is tuneful throughout, though very expressionistic. All the action takes place around the Kowalski apartment. The simple, dark set is brought to life by the looming shadows and the set's verticality that the lighting emphasizes.

Stanley Kowalski was played with remarkable viciousness by Franco Pomponi, who delighted in driving Blanche into madness. *Streetcar* is a truly memorable operatic experience.

Glass Piece

MICHAEL MCDONAGH

San Francisco Ballet dances to Philip Glass's *Violin Concerto*. April 2, War Memorial Opera House, San Francisco, CA.

Music and image are part and parcel of the theatrical experience in everything from the skating rink and TV wrestling to live theatre, opera, and film. Music and pictures, or in ballet's case -- music and gestures with backdrops, sets, and lighting -- can even tell coded stories of their own. And the best ballets, at least in recent times, have often been ones whose codes never seem completely finished or revealed. Such thoughts were occasioned by the last performance this season of the San Francisco Ballet's 2000 *Discovery* series.

With over 30 performances in the U.S. and Canada, and at least half that number in the last two years alone in Europe and South America, the Philip Glass *Violin Concerto* (1987), which was composed for Paul Zukofsky and has been recorded three times, could be on the way to repertory status. It has also been set by about 30 choreographers, including Christopher d'Ambois for the New York City Ballet in 1997 as *Circle of Fifths*, Betsy Erickson for the Oakland Ballet in 1998 as *Beneath the Waves*, Heinz Sporerli for the Deutsche Oper Berlin in 1999 as *In Sommernachtstraum*, and by Kit Nelson for ODC San Francisco in April as *Standing Here*.

Why is the *Violin Concerto* so popular with dancers? One reason might be that they see its variation structure as natural material for dance invention. Choreographed here as *Impetuous* by the Bulgarian Vladimir Anguelov for a corps of ten male dancers and two male soloists, there was power and erotic drive. Anguelov's take was alternately formal and abrupt, working with and against the music. The dolorous slow movement, a high-flying solo over a subtly shifting orchestral ground, played out the relationship between the two male leads -- Stephen Legate and Gonzalo Garcia -- which was sometimes anguished, sometimes poignant, and sometimes tentative. The first and second movements ended with the corps crouching en masse, facing the audience in a kind of provocation -- an ancient Greek frieze seen head on. This underpinned Anguelov's "story," drawn from Plato's three dialogues on love and beauty, and rhymed with the classical balance in the music. Sandra Woodall's scenic design, Robert Rosenwasser's costumes, and Kevin Connaught's lighting contributed strongly. Scott Speck conducted a detailed and accurate performance. Solo violinist Roy Malan had difficulties with intonation and the opening movement's rapid and high passagework, but ended up giving an expressive and engaging reading.

A Polish Vesper

MARK FRANCIS

From Chopin To Dutkiewicz. Andrzej Dutkiewicz, pianist and composer; Christine Allen, piano; Ruth Drummond, cello; Dan Santileces, violin; Northwestern State University Chamber Choir, Burt Allen, Conductor. April 5, Magale Recital Hall, Northwestern State University, Natchitoches, LA.

Andrzej Dutkiewicz is among a growing number of composers from Eastern Europe who are finally beginning to be heard on this side of the Atlantic.

The first two works of the evening by Dutkiewicz, *Toccata* and *Suite for Piano*, were quite virtuosic and colorful. Strikingly melodic use of forearm clusters is used in the "toccata" from the *Suite*. A Samuel Beckett-like dialogue takes place between the cello and the piano in *Tango Mon Amour*, a bleak, dark work. All works involving piano were filled with remarkable rhythmic drive and drama. Another notable moment was the ethereal chromaticism of the a cappella choral work, *Hymnus in Honorem Sancti Andreae*.

All of these difficult works were performed deftly and skillfully by Dutkiewicz and the faculty and students of Northwestern State University. This concert was a rare treat.

The Composer-Critic: a Critique

MARK ALBURGER

Kyle Gann. April 13, Center for New Music and Technologies, Berkeley, CA.

Since at least the time of Robert Schumann, composers have often doubled as music critics. Lou Harrison and Virgil Thomson were able exemplars of this tendency in the mid 20th century. Composer Kyle Gann, who has written for *The Village Voice* since 1985, continues this legacy, and presented his music for the first time in the Bay Area on April 13 in Berkeley.

The venue -- CNMAT ("Sinmat," The Center for New Music and Technology, which served as the headquarters for Thomas Buckner's renowned record company 1750 Arch, where Charles Amirkhanian and Conlon Nancarrow's important works were first recorded) -- suited the composer. Gann's music has a do-it-yourself intimacy that profited from the homey yet sumptuous surroundings (1750 Arch is located in a hilly residential section just two blocks north of the Berkeley campus).

So what does a composer who has reviewed the best of several generations of new music sound like? In this solo performance Gann revealed a post-minimal microtonal sensibility influenced by Native American and Country-Western music. In each piece, Gann's Proteus keyboard is tuned to a different pattern of intervals, reflecting "pure" and "just" intonational concerns (tuning systems based on natural harmonics, which date back to the time of the Greek philosopher Pythagoras) rather than the "equal" temperament that has become popular in Western European and American music since the time of J.S. Bach.

What does such microtonality sound like to the laymen? In the words of composer Philip Glass, "Sounds out-of-tune, doesn't it?" But to true believers, this music is truly in tune, and most of the classical and popular music to which we listen is the out-of-tune stuff.

Gann somehow splits not only the pitches (the distance between his adjacent notes is often much smaller than that which can be found on a piano) but the difference in at least acknowledging the unusual quality of his music, with such titles as *Fractured Paradise*, in which he notes that he "stole a bass line from a country song (never mind which one -- its own author wouldn't want it back after I've finished with it) and used enough pitches so that every chord would be exactly in tune. The result was a non-chromatic scale with 16 pitches to the octave." Not bad, considering that most of our music has only 12 pitches to the octave. Like Terry Riley's album *Shri Camel*, Gann takes commonplace patterns and makes them sound extraordinary.

And intriguing. And funny. The former occurs in *How Miraculous Things Happen*, as the music slowly slides microtonally from a minor to a major key, not through the typical change of one note (in C major, this would be from the adjacent notes E-flat to E-natural), but through several little notes squeezed into the same space. The funny occurs in *Ghost Town*, with sampled duck calls microtonally tuned. In each piece, Gann played sustained chords and let an automatic sequencing program bear the brunt of the faster, often arpeggiated music.

The pieces were permeated with the sounds of bells and flutes and drums, particularly in the one-man-opera *Custer and Sitting Bull*, which found Gann serving as vocalist for a moving portrait of both the general and the chief. Gann's text-setting sensibility proved astute, and he has a reasonable grasp of the work's theatrical potential. His rhythmic collage style is as canny as Charles Ives and Nancarrow in his simultaneous employment of disparate tempi and found musics. Gann's microtonal world is as convincing as that of Harry Partch and the composer-critic's own teacher, Ben Johnston.

Marin Symphony Goes All-American

MARK ALBURGER

Marin Symphony presents an all-American program. April 16, Veterans Auditorium, San Rafael, CA.

America has often taken a back seat to Europe in the realm of concert music. This is no longer the case, as shown yet again in a fine program by the Marin Symphony on April 16 at Veterans Auditorium. Music Director Gary Sheldon conducted a notable line up of works by American masters, including those of Aaron Copland, Charles Ives, Leonard Bernstein, Duke Ellington, and George Gershwin which inspired as well as entertained.

Copland's *Fanfare for the Common Man* led off in inimitable style. The conductor thankfully chose to offer the piece in its original version (it is often replaced with similar, but far from the same music from the composer's "Symphony No. 3"). If the brass could not quite match up to the nobility of the percussion, they nevertheless provided an uncommon reading of an uncommon masterwork. And the mastery continued in Ives's brilliant and hilarious *Variations on "America,"* in the classic orchestration of fellow composer William Schuman.

Neither "Three Dance Episodes" from *On the Town* nor *New World A Comin* are top drawer endeavors from their respective composers -- Bernstein and Ellington -- yet both provide intrigue across the jazz-classical divide from their respective quarters. The Ellington proved particularly engaging, with its addition of saxophonists and drummer from the San Rafael High School Jazz Band. Ellington's sweet jazz horns provided the perfect cushion for pianist Joseph Joubert's semi-improvisational leaps and bounds.

The Gershwin *Variations on "I Got Rhythm"* featured the same forces and provided quite a contrast to the Copland *Lincoln Portrait* which followed. Sedge Thomson served as soloist in the latter, and nicely understated some of the campy non-Lincoln lines (why oh why did Copland include such flatfooted pretentious lines as "this is what he said. This is what Abraham Lincoln said"?) which are often set against fairly impressive music. The "Four Dance Episodes" from the composer's *Rodeo* concluded and if Sheldon had conducted the final number any faster, the cowpokes would have all fallen off their horses.

Record Reviews

On Beyond Neoclassical and Neoromantic

MARK ALBURGER

Robert Avalon. *Violin & Piano Sonata. Flute & Piano Sonata. Sextet with Soprano.* Centaur.

The *Violin Sonata* of Robert Avalon as found on a recent Centaur Records release is not neoclassical and is not neoromantic. It is classical and romantic in its excellent craft and emotive quality. Tuning in this music in mid-performance on the radio, one might not immediately identify its 20th-century origins, but perhaps that is part of the point of postmodernism. Perhaps music does not have to be cutting edge, but only good. Or perhaps cutting edge is once again a return, and certainly a different turn than earlier, for, unlike neoclassicism and neoromanticism, there is little apparent irony or "over the top" sumptuousness. Nostalgia, perhaps, and it may be that the circumstances of the *Violin Sonata's* creation do come into play.

I composed it while living in a one-room stone house located on a 50-acre parcel of land built in 1866 by a Civil War veteran and his wife. It was idyllic for a couple of years. Suddenly one morning, I awoke to the sounds of dynamite and a shower of stones pelting the roof. Hasty developers were lustily blowing up the rolling hills and large oak trees to make instant flat land for a shopping mall. I didn't make it easy for those guys. A Richter Scale monitor was placed on my porch. The house still stands. Less picturesque now, it is a storage shed for a neighborhood association.

One can certainly hear the 19th century of the composer's idyll. But one neoclassic connection is that, as in mid-period Stravinsky, one hears less of the turmoil associated with the idyll's demise, although the headlong rush of the last movement's octave doubled perpetual motion could be an earthmover's Messiaen announcing the end of non-developmental time..

The *Flute Sonata* has a more extended tonality, gestural palette, and timbral range that identify it clearly but gently as a product of its time. And the lush world of the *Sextet with Soprano*, settings of poetry by Julia de Burgos has an impressionist-neoromantic flavor both Spanish and French. There are accompaniment figures that even sneakily bespeak of minimalism, a few passages that are even a bit terse and nasty, and a somewhat jazzy neoclassic frolic toward the end with Bartókian bongos on the cello. It all adds up to a quite lovely whole.

Superparticular Gann

MARK ALBURGER

Kyle Gann. *Custer's Ghost [Fractured Paradise (Tuning Study No. 3) (1995). How Miraculous Things Happen (Tuning Study No. 4) (1997). Superparticular Woman (Tuning Study No. 1) (1992). So Many Little Dyings (1994). Ghost Town (1994). Custer and Sitting Bull (1998-1999)]*. Monroe Street Music.

During his CNMAT Berkeley concert on April 13, composer and Village Voice music critic Kyle Gann noted that his electronic music "didn't have much to do" with his acoustic music. In a similar vein, Gann's *Custer's Ghost* CD (Monroe Street Music -- the now vanished address of an absent John Cage) is quite distinct from his live performances. To be sure, there are commonalities.

The fractured -- sorry, pure -- tunings of *Fractured Paradise*, *How Miraculous Things Happen*, and *Ghost Town* remain. While absent of the viscera of live performance, the fidelity in these recordings is of the highest quality, drawing the listener into the music in a new way. Gann's voice in *Custer and Sitting Bull* has a booming, assured, and commanding presence that is very convincing.

New to these ears are the piercing particulates and pop panderings of *Superparticular Woman* (no, not a reference to the composer's wife). Also novel is the quiescent and evocative *So Many Little Dyings*, which features electric-bass-like arpeggiations, toy piano, sampled waves and birdchirps, and the haunting line from Kenneth Patchen, "There are so many little dyings... that it doesn't matter...which of them is dead."

But contrary to the Patchen sentiment, somehow this music all matters.

Mr. Green's Cycles

DAVID CLEARY

Gordon Green. *LightCycles and Other Music for Dancers.* Jupiter.

Gordon Green is a talented, emerging New York-based composer. His most recent CD bills itself as being "electronic music," and while this is true enough in the sense that synthesizer sounds (as well as samples) are utilized, this is not, to paraphrase the old car commercial, your father's electronic music. For one thing, Green's work presents an appealingly eclectic mix of styles incorporating anything and everything from organ-scored plainchant to high Romanticism to jazz inflections to Conlon Nancarrow "superpiano" idioms to "downtown" New York touches. For another, the composer's sonic world contains clear references to acoustic instrument timbres and sounds from nature. Anyone who thinks this music is a lazy, midi-based "substitute for the real thing," though, isn't listening very closely. Green embellishes his acoustic-instrument-oriented sounds with obviously electronic-derived filigree, thereby obtaining a strange, but telling timbre sheen impossible to achieve through the use of live players. The effect somehow suggests music derived from a shimmering, mildly automatized, slightly surreal parallel universe.

All the works on this disk were inspired by non-musical works of art (choreography, driftwood sculpture, video art) and are meant to be danced to. The music is simultaneously wonderfully evocative and energetically rhythmic, a mix which would seem to assure its success for such a purpose.

LightCycles is the CD's magnum opus. In a certain way, this 12-movement composition can be seen as updating the concept of the 19th-century descriptive or travelogue suite. Each movement is an elicitory, self-contained character piece that usually articulates one mood or approach, though more than one influence may be combined. Space permits listing only a few examples: "Spirals" suggests an electronic analogue to African drumming, "Tracery" combines jazzy combo sounds and Indian tabla timbres, "Flickering" sounds like dozens of music boxes fighting each other for prominence, "Sails" (an electronic piano based piece) manages to mix influences from Chopin, process music, and Joni Mitchell and sound perfectly natural. Most importantly, none of these wildly contrasted musics sound out of place next to each other; the collection hangs together surprisingly well, helped in part by the recapitulatory nature of the last two movements. The music unfolds slowly, in an improvisatory yet logical way, combining the best aspects of these seemingly contradictory approaches. It's a splendid listen.

By contrast, *Variations* can ultimately trace its roots back to the aphoristic piano miniatures of Schumann and Debussy. These five little movements are jewel-box charmers, evoking fractured jazz, funhouse waltzes, ersatz Impressionist harp music, and much more.

The last work, *Novella*, consists of four seemingly capriciously-constructed movements that follow one another without pause. This reviewer was initially perplexed, but a second hearing revealed the piece's special accomplishment. The opening plainchant melody is subtly varied and transformed throughout the composition, thereby achieving maximum contrast from limited material. This fine, challenging work does not divulge its secrets readily, but just as one needs to pry open an oyster to extract a pearl, this piece rewards those listeners who give it a fair shake.

In summation, this is terrifically good CD, a highly recommended purchase. Or to quote another old advertising slogan, "No home should be without one."

no Tver Yclea R(y)tiTles

DAVID CLEARY

Henry Gwiazda. *noTnoTesnoTrhyThms*. Innova.

This release bears the rare distinction of containing a body of work that is compelling, well made, and seemingly without real precedent. North Dakota resident Henry Gwiazda's fine music exhibits extremely oblique kinship to downtown New York electronic/sampled idioms, Frank Zappa's experimental albums, and the *musique concrete* tape works of Edgar Varèse and Luc Ferrari -- but the compositions on this disk are like nothing else this reviewer has ever heard.

These pieces consist of a plethora of sampled sounds presented in collage-like, yet deliberate fashion. Through this basic platform one frequently finds snippets of music played by a soloist; much of the time, the instrument that appears is electric guitar, though other timbres sometimes occur. These are not concerti, though. The player here is merely another element in the general schema, kept on an equal footing with the sampled sounds. Gwiazda's sonic palette is widely varied, but extremely appealing. There is none of *Poème électronique's* gritty angst here. In fact, much of this composer's work shows a winsome charm, energetic flair, detached sense of seclusion, or impish sense of humor.

Despite their fragmentary nature, these pieces are not haphazard dadaist soundscapes. Gwiazda's music normally possesses a perceivable, if loose, sense of form. *WhErEyoulivE*, for example, is cast in an ABAB format, using beat-box type events to delineate the "A" divisions. A ternary schema is found in *afterglow*, with outer sections characterized by the use of percussive, banging sounds. The first half or so of the work *MANEATINGCHIPSLISTENINGTOAVIOLIN* conspicuously employs sharp, high-frequency sonic events such as pattering rain, buzzing bees, barking seals, snapping fingers, bubbling soda, shaking maracas, and crunching potato chips, then mostly avoids their use soon after the work's climax.

While Gwiazda has played many of these pieces live in concert, two of the selections here are listed as being virtual audio works. These are not meant for public performance, but instead are to be experienced by one listener in the privacy of home.

The fLute in the world the fLutist in the world is specifically created to be listened to with headphones, while *buzzing reynold's dreamland* is only to be heard via stereo speakers. The latter piece is prefaced by detailed verbal instructions telling the listener how to set the speakers up and where to sit to obtain the desired effect. This reviewer will attest that one's placement in relation to the speakers makes a huge difference; being a few feet off center washes out the desired effect dramatically. Here, Gwiazda takes his myriad sonic events and places them spatially in relation to the listener's ideal positioning. Sounds seemingly appear from everywhere, at times swirling about the listener's head. When properly situated, the effect is magical.

Performances by Jeffrey Krieger (electronic cello), Ann LaBerge (electronic flute), and Gwiazda (electric guitar) are excellent. Production values and sound quality are impeccable. Run, do not walk, to pick up a copy of this unique and wonderful CD.

Quick Review

DAVID CLEARY

Arthur Levering. *School of Velocity*. CRI.

The six pieces on this CD exhibit influences from many distinguished predecessors: rigor and conciseness from Webern and Babbitt, obsessive intensity from Varèse, lucidity from Poulenc, sparkling scoring from Boulez, and use of repetitive figures that find a middle ground between the ostinati of Stravinsky and the process textures of Reich. Arthur Levering's oeuvre combines all these disparate tendrils into a vibrant, compelling style very much its own -- in other words, these works show the perfect combination of rootsiness and originality.

Certain concepts occur in more than one piece here. Levering's fascination with bells, for example, is evident in such works as *Cloches II* and *Twenty Ways upon the Bells*, while layered ideas which are then teased apart and overlaid in countless permutations characterize both *Roulade* and the first movement of *Clarion/Shadowing*. Yet one never gets the sense that the composer is lazily repeating himself; each work is a unique, vital entity. In that sense, Levering manages to find as much variety from his idioms as Beethoven or Mozart coaxed from sonata form.

The two works for piano presented here best demonstrate this diversity of approach. *School of Velocity* consists of three showy, virtuosic studies, an updating of music in the best etude tradition of Debussy, Liszt, and Chopin (fortunately not Czerny, as the title might suggest). These are serious and substantial works, focused on a prescribed number of technical challenges and demanding of significant pianistic skill. The world of *Uncle Inferno* could not be more different; these are pieces for beginning players that display a clever, charming sense of humor. Their origins can be found in the practical keyboard compositions of Satie, Poulenc, and Stravinsky (note especially the Stravinskian utilization of tango rhythms in movement two, and the chucklesome use of polytonality, typical of *Les Six*, in all three movements). Despite the obvious contrasts, the two collections are alike in their thrifty use of material, formal tightness, clarity of gesture, and perfectly idiomatic keyboard writing.

Performances on this CD (many featuring the Dinosaur Annex Ensemble) come across as being uniformly excellent, including the two live-concert renditions presented here. Sound quality is fine and production values are top-notch.

In a city replete with world-class composers, Levering ranks among the very best that Boston -- or any other municipality, for that matter -- has to offer. This CD is an excellent sampling of his work, an essential and highly recommended purchase.

North By North

MICHAEL MCDONAGH

Alex North. *Bite the Bullet* (1975). Original soundtrack recording, conducted by the composer. Prometheus Records, Kon. Astridlaan 171, 28000 Mechelen, Belgium. scq@pophost.eunet.be.

Although Alex North's music sounds fine in Richard Brooks's movie western, *Bite the Bullet*, the soundtrack is much more impressive when heard on the Prometheus Records release culled from the original master tape. Part of the reason for this may be as Henry Brant has commented, "North's intricate, carefully balanced textures often suffered damage and were later distorted in the control room with false volumes by the sound engineer on instructions from the producer or director." Concert hall composers have to put up with conductors who ignore tempo indications and dynamic markings, but film composers apparently suffer more. They have to compete with dialogue, car chases, explosions, and -- in the case of *Bite the Bullet* -- trains and horses.

While North has an orchestra of over 70 players here (but only 22 strings), he scores transparently for maximum clarity. The instrumentation calls for winds and brass in fours -- including North favorites such as contrabassoon, euphonium, and saxophone -- and 15 in the percussion section, including timbales, keyboards (piano, celesta, and organ), and even an ondioline (which the composer first used in the 1960 *Spartacus*). Instrumental color cannot camouflage or compensate for poor ideas or sloppy musical thought. Fortunately, North never has such problems, and his music here is rich, varied, and vital.

One of the most imaginative cues is "Badlands." This begins with a syncopated ostinato figure played by 12 celli, punctuated by bleats from the tubas -- the rhythm marked by claves -- and a bleary cadence from the brass. The situation becomes more complex with the addition of timpani, coupled with vigorous figures on cello, bass, and piano, with tattoos, in spurts, on snare drum and cymbals. Rising string material, played non-vibrato, is overlain with an altered chord in mixed winds played 20 times, followed by many complex timbral/rhythmic shifts. North gets as much drama and contrast from his 4'39" as some would in an entire symphony.

Other cues are just as spectacular. The comic overture doesn't have your typical Hollywood Western sound; instead, it's a highly individual, joyful romp, with quick cross-cuttings amongst different instrumental choirs. North's light touch also appears in the rambunctious "Fun Ride" and the everything-but-the-kitchen-sink "Prisoners." His famous lyric side surfaces in the exquisitely mixed colors of "Foal," the guitar duo "Night Pause," and parts of other cues, which often have quickly shifting emotional climates. And North's timing is always right on the money. To be sure, the episodic nature of film music encourages a wide expressive range, but North surpasses most in depth.

Bite the Bullet goes from populist to experimental with no obvious sense of strain, and hangs together perfectly well. The Mexican source music and march suite, which round out this CD in arrangements by Hershey Kay, are given snappy renditions by North, who conducts with authority throughout.

Hollywood Keys

DAVID CLEARY

Miklos Rozsa. *Complete Works for Solo Piano*. Koch.

Miklos Rozsa is primarily remembered today as a highly successful Hollywood film score composer. His soundtrack music for movies such as *Spellbound*, *Double Indemnity*, *The Thief of Baghdad*, and *Ben Hur*, are beloved staples of the genre. Like Erich Korngold and Bernard Hermann, Rozsa also amassed a portfolio of concert music works, some of which are occasionally programmed today.

Rozsa wrote copious quantities of piano music, including two sets of variations, two character-piece collections, and a sonata. The *Variations pour Piano* op. 9 and *Bagatellen* op. 12, both composed prior to his Hollywood days, are stellar examples of triadic music spiked with mild dissonance. Echoes of composers as diverse as Debussy, Bartók, Kodaly, Rachmaninoff, Dohnanyi, and Prokofiev can be heard here, though these pieces are not style studies. Both compositions are meaty listens excellently written, with the *Bagatellen* being this listener's pick of the disk.

The composer's later pieces are of variable quality, though all possess at the very least a solid compositional technique and sparkingly idiomatic piano writing. Most are still resolutely tonal in sound. *Kaleidoscope* op. 19, while a capable enough set of miniatures with attractive moments, somehow fails to reach the special excellence of the *Bagatellen*. This likely results from three considerations: the work's tune-driven (as opposed to structure-driven) ethos, its somehow less kinetic, less supple sense of rhythm, and its at times rather film-score-like harmonic language (featuring prominent elements of filtered Ravel and Debussy which nowadays sound perhaps a bit too dated). *The Vintner's Daughter* op. 23, a set of variations that would be Rozsa's last work for piano, is a decidedly better listen. This composition nicely blends a French-derived folksiness (due in no small part to the theme's origin) with elements of *Les Six* and Bartók. Its primarily transparent textures are most welcome on this recording. And like good variation sets, it cogently clumps its smaller entities into a larger structural overview. The ambitious *Sonata für Klavier* op. 20 shows that Rozsa was equally adept at handling large-scale genres. This piece is the least triadic of all, redolent of dissonant-period Bartók and Prokofiev, yet possessing a distinctive voice. The work's earnest energy makes up for its occasionally blocky rhythmic sense; this is a fine composition indeed. The brief *Valse Crepusculaire* was originally written for the 1975 film *Providence* and scored for strings and keyboard; the initial piano sketch is played here. It's a slight, moody bauble with hints of Debussy and MacDowell.

Pianist Sara Davis Buechner's performances are first-class all the way, excellently combining attention to detail with fiery demonstrativeness. Except for a mild amount of distortion in the coda of the *Sonata's* finale, sound quality and production values are fine.

This CD is a pleasure to hear, greatly recommended to all and a must-listen for those seeking out worthy off-the-beaten-track triadic compositions.

Sollima Spasimo

DAVID CLEARY

Giovanni Sollima. *Spasimo Giungla*. NR 4218-2.

Giovanni Sollima is an Italian composer and cellist most likely based in Sicily (unfortunately, no composer or ensemble bios appear in the CD booklet, but the program notes and recording credits prominently refer to Palermo). The title selection on this release is a concerto for cello and small ensemble, a work that is heavily dominated by the soloist and contains an accompaniment usually reduced to a rudimentary, if sometimes busy role. A number of influences can be heard in this composition, including plaintive Eastern European "mystic minimalism" in movement one, atmospheric new-age stylings in the lengthy slow movement, energetic rock idioms in the perpetual motion second movement, and exotic Near Eastern melodic leanings in both movements one and four. Sollima's compositional strengths are twofold: an irresistibly bouncy sense of rhythmic drive in fast tempo selections and an ability to create attractive, often seamless slow-speed melodies. His attempts to stitch together smaller sections into larger formats prove less successful; for those movements in which it is essayed, there is little sense of large-scale direction or transition. Those movements, such as the fourth, that limit themselves to a single idea work best here. Conceptually, the finale is the weakest part of the piece; regrettably, Sollima is content here to repeat the opening movement's melodic figure at length, then segue into a passage from movement two rather than present either new material or significant variants on old material.

Il Tracciato di Marta also betrays a strong ambient music influence but surprisingly undercuts the idiom's inherent blandness somewhat by employing unusual chord progressions, some of which are far-flung enough to invoke echoes of Richard Strauss. The music of Keith Jarrett and Philip Glass clearly leave their mark on the bubbly, kinetic album closer *Sento il Canto in Curva*.

Performances are good. Sollima's cello playing, while sometimes betraying a rather thin tone in soft passages, is generally effective; his finger technique is fluidly capable and his sense of long line (imperative in music of this type) is keenly developed. Sound quality is okay and production is good.

Listeners who enjoy Górecki's *Third Symphony* and pop-influenced classical music will likely discover some things to enjoy here, while those keen on new-age music will find this release to be a step up from their usual fare.

Book Reviews

Shostakovichian Truth or Dare

MARK FRANCIS

Elizabeth Wilson. *Dmitri Redux Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.

Laurel E. Fay. *Shostakovich - A Life*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

There probably has never been a composer whose life and work were so tightly wrapped up with the political life of his country. Elizabeth Wilson's *Dmitri Redux Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* (Princeton University Press, 1994) begins to unravel the many mysteries and misinformation, through letters and interviews of Shostakovich's friends and contemporaries. The book doesn't attempt to deal directly with the music but does offer some insight into the perception and understanding of the music and the man, especially the composer's relationship to the Soviet government. Wilson was a student of cellist Rostropovich, a close friend of Shostakovich, from 1964-71.

The 1979 publication of Solomon Volkov's *Testimony* began to unravel the "official" version of Shostakovich's life, and Wilson's book continues that process. This study offers new insights into the many contradictions of his life (good communist or closet dissident?) A clearer view of what may have been in Shostakovich's mind when he wrote various pieces or signed various documents emerges. The damage done by the years of threats finally takes its toll on his physical and mental health causing him to do and say things he would later regret.

This is a very thorough book with extensive footnotes and biographical notes on the many figures in Shostakovich's life. The book doesn't try to answer all the questions about Shostakovich but it does provide a more three-dimensional, human view of him. He can be seen as a man trying to act morally in an immoral situation, trying to take care of his family and remain creatively viable. This book provides the context to understand the situation in which Shostakovich wrote his music.

Laurel Fay's new book on Shostakovich is another of several books over the last 10 years that continues the process of separating propaganda from reality. This book does not attempt to analyze his music but to give a clearer picture of his life. One thing that is very clear is that not all the documents that could shed light on Shostakovich are available. Letters and other documents are still being uncovered. There is still a lot of fiction mixed up with the facts.

Fay's book gives us the most complete view of Shostakovich yet. It includes extensive endnotes, a glossary of names, a complete list of works and an index.

Now that Shostakovich's life is coming into focus, more time and effort needs to be spent on analysis of the music. Shostakovich was hardly the archconservative he is often made out to be. There is growing evidence that he was fonder of the music of the avant-garde than was previously believed. It will still take time to ferret out the truth from the propaganda but that process is well underway.

Conducted Tour

MARK FRANCIS

Michael Hall and Simon Rattle. *Leaving Home: A Conducted Tour of the Twentieth Century*. London: Faber and Faber, 1996.

Michael Hall's eight-chapter book on our century is based on the British television series of the same name. While the book obviously can't cover all the bases, it is relatively comprehensive. Chapter 1 gives an overview, touching on major musical and historical events that have changed the course of history and music. Chapters 2 through 4 discuss the various changes that 20th-century music hath wrought. The second, "Dance On a Volcano," deals with the Second Viennese School and the breakdown of functional tonality. Chapter 3, "Rhythm," notes rhythmic and metric changes through Stravinsky, Ives, and Carter. "Color," begins with Debussy and traces the timbral changes through the century.

Chapter 5, "Journey Through A Dark Landscape," chronicles the lives of Bartók, Shostakovich, and Lutoslawski -- all three of whom were touched by the harsh realities of politics and oppression. This is followed by "America from Ives through Adams" and "After the Wake: The Composer and Tradition," the latter of which talks of new formal techniques in the latter half of the century. The concluding "Music Now," covers recent trends and composers.

This book, aimed at concertgoers with some experience, is never shallow or cute. While going over well-covered ground, Hall and Rattle provide a clear view of the century in plain language that is valuable to musician and listener alike. The book is filled with art reproductions that capture the spirit of the times. This attractive and readable volume never gets bogged down in jargon, and forces readers to take issue with assumptions they may have about the times.

The 20th century was a confusing and eventful era that changed and challenged everything. If ever a century of music needed explicating, it is the 20th, and this book is a good start.

Calendar

June 1

David Rodwin's *Virtual Motion*. Venue 9, San Francisco, CA. Through June 10.

It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad King. Eos Orchestra in Davies's *Eight Songs for a Mad King*. New York, NY.

Seattle Symphony in Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 15* and Holst's *The Planets*. Seattle, WA. Through June 4.

June 2

NEC Youth Philharmonic Orchestra in the premiere of Wong's *Piano Concerto No. 2*, and Mahler's *Symphony No. 9*. Jordan Hall, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA. Repeated June 4.

June 3

Jaron Lanier's *The Navigator Tree* performed by Sonos Handbell Ensemble. Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church, Lafayette, CA.

American Composers Forum presents Jaron Lanier. Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA.

June 5

June in Buffalo. Foss's *For Toru*, Feldman's *Instruments II* and *The Viola in My Life IV*, and Felder's *In Between* and *Coleccion Nocturna*. State University of New York, Buffalo, NY. Festival through June 16.

June 6

Summer Carnival. North/South Consonance presents Stefania de Kenessey's *The Muse Is Not Amused*, Tacuchian's *Toccata Urbana*, Mendes's *Lovely Slow Samba*, Ziffrin's *Concertino for Piano*, and Lifchitz's *Latin American Mosaic*. Christ and St. Stephen's Church, New York, NY.

June 7

Atelier jeunes Luciano Berio. Cité de la Musique, Paris, France.

American Mavericks. Meet the Mavericks, with Michael Tilson Thomas. Babbitt's *Philomel*, Cage's *Credo in US*, Feldman's *Piece for Four Pianos*, and Riley's *In C*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA. Festival through June 24.

June in Buffalo. An Evening with Philip Glass. Concerto for Saxophones, Koyaanisqatsi, Glassworks, and a lecture by the composer. State University of New York, Buffalo, NY.

June 8

Kagel's *La Trahison orale* performed by Ensemble Intercontemporain. Cité de la Musique, Paris, France.

June in Buffalo. New York New Music Ensemble in Erb's *Sunlit Peaks and Dark Valleys*, Crumb's *Music for a Summer Evening*, Wuorinen's *Brass Quintet*, Carter's *Enchanted Preludes*, and Sollberger's *The Advancing Moment*, with Charles Wuorinen, Harvey Sollberger, and Donald Erb. Slee Hall, State University of New York, Buffalo, NY.

June in Buffalo. The Three [String] Basses. Ferneyhough's *Trittico per GS* (with Corrado Canonici), Erb's *Déjà vu*, Wuorinen's *Concert for Double Bass Alone* (with Michael Cameron), Xenakis's *Theraps*, and Druckman's *Valentine* (with Robert Black). Baird Hall, State University of New York, Buffalo, NY.

Seattle Symphony in Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* and *The Rite of Spring*. Seattle, WA. Through June 11.

June 9

Other Minds presents a *George Antheil Centennial*. Sarah Cahill interviews Charles Amirkhanian on George Antheil. KPFA, Berkeley, CA. Events through June 11.

American Mavericks. Maverick Icons, with Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony. Ruggles's *Sun-treader*, Ruth Crawford Seeger's *Andante for Strings*, Foss's *Time Cycle*, Meredith Monk's *ATLAS*, and Ives's *Symphony No. 4*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

June in Buffalo. New York New Music Ensemble in Yuasa's *Jo Ha Kyu*, Druckman's *Come Round*, Foss's *Echoi*, and Wuorinen's *The Great Procession*. State University of New York, Buffalo, NY.

June 10

NACUSA Concert. Kimbell's *Woodwind Quintet*, Deussen's *One of Nature's Majesties*, Hawley's *Sheep Trio*, Holmes's *Pu-Gesänge*, Cotton's *The Light of Darkness*, Simpson's *Toad Pizza*, and Alburger's *Adagio: Allegro molto e vivace ("Casino")*. Arts Center, Palo Alto, CA.

George Antheil Centennial. Sirens, Doorbells, Propellers: Antheil and the Birth of American Musical Modernism, panel discussion with Charles Amirkhanian, Benjamin Lees, David Raksin, and Paul Lehrman. Main Library, San Francisco, CA.

American Mavericks. Salute to the Duke, with Jon Faddis and the San Francisco Symphony. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

San Francisco Opera presents Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*. War Memorial Opera House, San Francisco, CA. Through June 29.

June in Buffalo. Cassatt String Quartet, with Nils Vigeland, George Crumb, and Joji Yuasa. Crumb's *Black Angels*, Vigeland's *Aurochs and Angels*, Yuasa's *Projection II*, and Erb's *String Quartet No. 3*. State University of New York, Buffalo, NY.

International Festival-Institute presents Ligeti's *Bagatelles* and the Texas Festival Orchestra in Copland's *Outdoor Overture* and Welcher's *Violin Concerto*. Roundtop, TX. Festival through July 15.

June 11

George Antheil Centennial / American Mavericks. Bad Boy of Music: The World of George Antheil, with Michael Tilson Thomas and the Abel-Steinberg-Winant Trio. *Second Sonata for Violin with Accompaniment of Piano and Drums, A Jazz Symphony*, and *Ballet Mécanique*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

San Francisco Lesbian/Gay Freedom Band in Higdon's *Freedom Dreams*. Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA.

A Tribute to Great Jazz Composers. Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY.

June 12

June in Buffalo. The Feldman Soloists, with Steve Reich. Feldman's *Crippled Symmetry*. State University of New York, Buffalo, NY

June 13

June in Buffalo. Music of Steve Reich. Clapping Music (featuring the composer), *New York Counterpoint, Sextet*, and *City Life*. State University of New York, Buffalo, NY.

Mark Polishook's *Electronic Chamber Opera*. Jack Straw Productions, Seattle, WA.

June 14

June in Buffalo, with Bernard Rands, Roger Reynolds, Augusta Read Thomas, and Harvey Sollberger. Rands's *Concertino*, Thomas's *Spirit Musings*, and Reynolds's *Transfigured Wind III*. State University of New York, Buffalo, NY

June 15

American Mavericks. Salute to Lou Harrison, with Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony. *Suite for Violin and American Gamelan, Organ Concerto*, and *Symphony No. 3*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

June 16

American Mavericks. American Underground, with Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony. Cage's *Dance Four Orchestras*, Cowell's *Piano Concerto*, Del Tredici's *Adventures Underground*, and Varèse's *Amérique*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

June in Buffalo. Feldman's *Crippled Symmetry*. State University of New York, Buffalo, NY.

International Festival-Institute presents Copland's *Vitebsk*, Spano's *Quaderno*, and Bolcom's *Sonata*. Round Top, TX.

June 17

Fresh Voices: An Evening of Love, War, and Sex. Anne Doherty's *Dan (Destiny)*, John Partidge's *The Soldiers Who Wanted to Kill Death*, Mark Alburger's *The Sidewalks of New York: Henry Miller in Brooklyn* (words by Mel Clay), Valarie Morris's *Amsterdam and Paris with a Side of Eggs*, and Mary Watkins's *Queen Clara: Fields of Glory, Rivers of Blood* (words by Lance Belville). Goat Hall, 400 Missouri, San Francisco, CA. Repeated June 18.

American Mavericks. Steve Reich and Musicians. West Coast premiere of *Hindenburg* (Beryl Korot), and *Music for Eighteen Musicians*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA. Repeated June 18.

International Festival-Institute presents Barber's *Mutations from Bach*, Riegger's *Nonet for Brass Ensemble*, and Janacek's *Capriccio*. Round Top, TX.

June 18

Pianist Brian Molloy performs Ravel's *Mother Goose Suite*. Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY.

Robert Spano conducts the Texas Festival Orchestra in Benjamin Lees's *Etudes for Piano and Orchestra*, with James Dick. Round Top, TX.

June 19

Pianist Roderick Clemmons performs Debussy's *Children's Corner Suite*. Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY.

June 20

American Mavericks. New World Symphony: From Ives to Electricity, with Michael Tilson Thomas and the New World Symphony. Earle Brown's *Cross Sections and Color Fields*, Steve Mackey's *Tuck and Roll*, and Ives's *Symphony No. 2*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

June 21

American Mavericks. New World Symphony: Adams to Zappa, with John Adams and the New World Symphony. Zappa's *Dupree's Paradise*, Adams's *Shaker Loops* and *Grand Pianola Music*, and Nancarrow's *Study No. 6*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

Composers Symposium, with Robert Kyr and Lou Harrison. Oregon Bach Festival, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR.

June 22

Nunes's *Lichtung I and II* performed by Ensemble Intercontemporain. Centre Georges-Pompidou, Paris, France.

June 23

American Maverick. A Copland Journey and [Earl Robinson's] Lonesome Train., with Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

American Composers Forum Salon, with choreographies of music by Thomas Day, William G. Ludtke, and JAB. ODC Theatre, San Francisco, CA.

Aspen Festival Orchestra in the premiere of Tsontakis's *Fanfare*. Aspen, CO. Repeated June 24.

Texas Festival Orchestra in *Homage to Aaron Copland*. *Nonet, Duo, Poems of Emily Dickinson*, and *Music for the Theater*. Round Top, TX.

June 24

International Festival Institute presents Copland's *Sextet*, Britten's *Metamorphoses*, Jolivet's *Five Incantations*, and Milhaud's *Sonatina for Viola and Cello*, plus the Texas Festival Orchestra in Adams's *The Chairman Dances*, Barber's *Violin Concerto*, and Prokofiev's *Symphony No. 5*. Round Top, TX.

June 28

Aspen Contemporary Ensemble in *A Tribute to Elliott Carter*. Aspen, CO.

June 30

NEW MUSIC HOUSE Open Performance Party. New Music House, 9 Crestwood Drive, San Rafael, CA.

Homage to the Second Viennese School. Webern's *Langsamer Satz*, Berg's *Four Pieces for Clarinet and Piano* and *String Quartet*, and Schoenberg's *Transfigured Night*. Round Top, TX.

Chronicle

April 1

Will Spiritual Robots Replace Humanity by 2100?, with Ray Kurzweil (inventor of electronic keyboards and author of *The Age of Spiritual Machines*). Stanford University, CA.

The Copland-Sessions Concerts: American Music Coming of Age, with Arthur Berger, Michael Boriskin, Paul Lustig Dunkel, Carol Oja, Vivian Perlis, Judith Tick, Anthony Tommasini, and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich. Weill Recital Hall, New York, NY.

The Cathedral Band, with "Blue" Gene Tyranny, DJ Tamara, John Kennedy, Charles Wood, and William Duckworth. Roulette, New York, NY.

Pianist Gerald Robbins in Hindemith's *Three Pieces*. Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY.

April Fool's Day Concert. Philadelphia Orchestra in Schickele's *Uptown Hoedown*, *American Birthday Card*, *What Did You Do Today at Jeffrey's House*, *Bach Portrait*, and *Eine kleine Nichtmusik*. Academy of Music, Philadelphia, PA.

April 2

Sarah Michael's *Arachne*, with Laurie Amat. Montclair Women's Cultural Arts Club, Oakland, CA.

Nancy Bloomer Deussen's *Reflections on the Hudson* performed by the Mission Chamber Orchestra. St. Marks Episcopal Church, Palo Alto, CA.

American Composers Orchestra in Antheil's *Ballet Mécanique*, Copland's *Short Symphony*, and Sessions's *Symphony No. 3*. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY.

Si-Yo Music Society in the premiere of Hsueh Yung Shen's *Trio for Oboe, Viola, and Cello*. Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY.

Colorado String Quartet and Marcantonio Barone in Schnittke's *Piano Quintet*. Lang Concert Hall, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA.

Philharmonia Northwest premieres Gavin Borchert's *Sweet Wines and Wines that Foam*. Town Hall, Seattle, WA.

April 3

Ensemble Intercontemporain conducted by Kent Nagano, in Benjamin's *Antara*, plus traditional music of South America. Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris, France.

Louis Goldstein performs Feldman's *Triadic Memories* (1981). Ensemble Room, Mills College Music Building, Oakland, CA.

North/South Consonance presents *Otto Luening's Centenary*. Karl Korte's *Wired Dance*, Rodolfo Coelho de Souza's *Colorless Green Ideas*, Ron Mazurek's *Peasant Voices*, James Correa's *Serenata*, Max Lifchitz's *Ethnic Mosaic*, Douglas Ovens's *She Sings*, and Otto Luening's *She Walks in Beauty*. Christ and St. Stephen's Church, New York, NY.

April 4

Christophe Desjardins and Odile Duhamel in Benjamin's *Viola*. IRCAM, Paris, France.

Stefano Scodanibbio presents his *Voyage that Never Ends*. Italian Cultural Institute, San Francisco, CA.

New Music for a New Century. Scelsi's *Okanagon*, the world premiere of S. Jones's *Out of Time*, the U.S. premieres of Fineberg's *Recueil de pierre et de sable* and Sciarrino's *Capricci*, and the New York premiere of Levinson's *Time and the Bell...* Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY.

Arnold Schoenberg Choir in the U.S. premiere of Manzoni's *Trame d'ombre*. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY.

April 5

Kyle Gann performs his *Fractured Paradise*, *Ghost Town*, *How Miraculous Things Happen*, and *Custer and Sitting Bull*. CNMAT, Berkeley, CA.

Boston Symphony Orchestra in Dutilleux's *Symphony No. 2 ("Le Double")*. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY. Repeated April 6.

Millennial Mishmash. Composer-pianist Denman Maroney and soprano Sheila Schonbrun in Maroney's *Music for Words Perhaps: Ten Songs for Voice and Piano Set to Poems by W.B. Yeats*. The Kitchen, New York, NY. Repeated April 6.

Pennsylvania Ballet dances to Copland's *Rodeo*. Merriam Theatre, Philadelphia, PA. Through April 9.

April 6

29th anniversary of the death of Igor Stravinsky.

Arnold Schoenberg Choir in Machaut's *Messe de Nostre Dame*, Messiaen's *Cinq rechants*, Xenakis's *Nuits*, Debussy's *Trois chansons de Charles d'Orléans*, and Ravel's *Gaspard de la nuit*. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY.

Philadelphia Orchestra in Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder*. Academy of Music, Philadelphia, PA. Through April 8.

Seattle Symphony in Barber's *Piano Concerto* and Harris's *Symphony No. 3*. Benaroya Hall, Seattle, WA. Through April 9.

April 7

Nevada County Composers Coalition presents music of Terry Riley, Howard Hugh, Darcy Reynolds, and Jay Sydman. Don Bagget Theater, High School, Nevada City, CA.

San Francisco Symphony in Bartók's *Miraculous Mandarin Suite*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA. Through April 9.

April 8

Andrew Imbrie's 79th birthday. Berkeley, CA.

Gordon Mumma: *Retrospective of Music for Chamber Ensembles, Pianos, and Electronic Media. Schoolwork, Than Particle, Faisandage et Galimafrée, Suite for Piano, 11-Note Pieces and Decimal Passacaglia, Stressed Space Palindromes, Cirqualz, and Pontpoint.* Mills College, Oakland, CA.

Continuum presents the New York premiere of Roberto Sierra's *Sephardic Songs*. Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY.

April 9

Nancy Bloomer Deussen's *The World is a Butterfly's Wing*. Art Center, Palo Alto, CA.

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center in an all-Stravinsky program. *Fanfare for a New Theater, Pastoral, Three Pieces for Solo Clarinet*, music from *Petrushka* and *Histoire du soldat*, and *The Owl and the Pussycat*. Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY.

April 10

Bassist Stefano Scodanibbio and trumpeter Markus Stockhausen. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA.

Earplay in Copland's *Piano Variations*, the West Coast premiere of Schober's *Variations for Sextet*, Sessions's *Six Pieces for Violoncello*, and Wuorinen's *New York Notes*. Yerba Buena Gardens, San Francisco, CA.

Left Coast Ensemble in Kurt Rohde's *Quintet for Horn and Strings*, Eric Zivian's *String Quartet*, Carlos Sanchez Gutierrez's *String Quartet*, Toru Takemitsu's *Towards the Sea*, and Kris Yenney's *Trio for Two Celli and Contrabass*. Green Room, San Francisco, CA.

Philip Glass at the Met. *Etudes for Solo Piano* and *Les Enfants Terribles for Three Pianos*, with Glass, Nelson Padgett, and Eleanor Sandresky. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY.

Lewis Spratlan wins the Pulitzer Prize in Music for *Life Is a Dream: Act II, Concert Version*. Columbia University, New York, NY.

April 11

Ernesto Diaz-Infante and W.O.O. Revelator. The Knitting Factory, New York, NY.

Ravel's *Sonatine*, Takemitsu's *Air*, Debussy's *Arabesques No. 1 and 2* and *Children's Corner Suite*. Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY.

Richard Toensing's *Responsoria*. Church of St. Luke in the Fields, New York, NY.

New Music for Quintet and Sextet, with Jim Knodle. Jack Straw Productions, Seattle, WA.

April 12

David Amram. Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY.

Pennsylvania Ballet in *Nine Lives: Songs of Lyle Lovett*. Merriam Theatre, Philadelphia, PA. Through April 16.

April 13

Kyle Gann performs his *Custer and Sitting Bull*. CNMAT, 1750 Arch, Berkeley, CA.

Omaha Symphony in Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 10*. Omaha, NB. Repeated April 15.

New York Philharmonic in Barber's *Andromach's Farewell*, Britten's *Four Sea Interludes from Peter Grimes*, and the final scene from R. Strauss's *Salome*. Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY. Through April 15.

Joan La Barbara's *Shaman Song de profundis* and Morton Subotnick's *The Key to Songs, Echoes from the Silent Call of Girona*. Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY.

Philadelphia Orchestra in Ives's *Second Orchestral Set*, Ravel's *Piano Concerto in G*, and Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. Academy of Music, Philadelphia, PA. Through April 15.

Seattle Symphony, with Evelyn Glennie, in a concert including Britten's *Four Sea Interludes from Peter Grimes* and C. Rouse's *Der gerettete Alberich (Alberich Saved)*. Benaroya Hall, Seattle, WA. Through April 16.

April 14

Oakland East Bay Symphony in Ludtke's *La Madre*. Paramount Theatre, Oakland, CA.

April 15

Contra Costa Chamber Orchestra in the premiere of *Nordic Realms (Chamber Symphony No. 1)*, plus Sibelius's *Finlandia*, Barber's *Adagio for Strings*, and Kodály's *Dances from Galanta*. Los Medanos College, Pittsburg, CA. Repeated April 16, Regional Center for the Arts, Walnut Creek.

Earle Brown's *Cross Sections and Color Fields* performed by the New World Symphony. Miami, FL. Repeated April 16.

Philadelphia Orchestra in music from Prokofiev's *Lieutenant Kije Suite*, Copland's *Music for the Movies*, and Villa-Lobos's *Bachianas Brasileiras No. 2*. Academy of Music, Philadelphia, PA.

April 16

Happy 100th!... An American Century: Ives, Copland, Ellington. Marin Symphony in *Duke Ellington Fantasy* (arr. Herman), Ives's *Variations on America*, Gershwin's *I've Got Rhythm Variations*, and Copland's *Fanfare for the Common Man* and *Lincoln Portrait*. Veterans Auditorium, San Rafael, CA. Repeated April 18.

San Francisco Chamber Music presents the premiere of John Marvin's *Music from the Night*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

Stravinsky's *Serenade in A* and *Mavra*. The New York premiere of James Adler's *Memento mori: An AIDS Requiem*. Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY.

Kennedy performs his *Melody in the Wind*. Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY.

April 17

Debussy's *Sonata No. 2* and *Six Epigraphes*, and Saariaho's *NoaNoa* and *New Gates*. Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris, France

San Francisco Contemporary Players in Bergman's *Concertino da Camera*, Salonen's *Second Meeting*, Lindberg's *Clarinet Quintet*, Saariaho's *Adjo*, and Pohjannoro's *The Birds of Yesterday*. Yerba Buena Gardens, San Francisco, CA. "Second meeting came off as a dizzying kaleidoscope of melodic ideas, rhythmic shifts and pure exuberant fun" [Joshua Kosman, San Francisco Chronicle, 4/19/00].

April 18

Ensemble Intercontemporain in Narboni's *El Gran Masturbador* and Torstensson's *Urban Songs*. Cité de la Musique, Paris, France.

Gil Shaham and Akira Eguchi in Bartók's *Rhapsody No. 2*, Strauss's *Rosenkavalier Waltzes* (arr. Prihoda), Copland's *Ukulele Serenade*, and Bolcom's *Graceful Ghost Rag*. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY.

The Final Work of Morton Feldman. Ensemble 21 in *Piano, Violin, Viola, Cello* (1987). Miller Theatre, Columbia University, New York, NY.

Ciampi String Quartet plays Prokofiev's *Quartet No. 2*, Davidovsky's *Quartet No. 5*, and Zhou Long's *Soul*, with pipa player Min Xiao-Fen. Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY.

April 19

Ensemble Intercontemporain in Huber's *Schattenblätter*, Kurtág's *Sept pièces*, Zimmermann's *Tempus Loquendi*, Grätzer's *Alquimia*, Steinke's *Durchbrochene Räume*, and Reudenbach's *Szenen, Standbilder*. Goethe-Institut, Paris, France.

Throat Singers of Tuva, Siberia. Julia Morgan Theater, Berkeley, CA.

Ninth Annual New Music Festival. University of California, Santa Barbara, CA. Festival through April 22.

Stanford Symphony in Copland's *The Tender Land Suite* and Bloch's *Schelomo*. Dinkelspiel Auditorium, Stanford University, CA.

April 20

Throat-singer Arjuna. Presidio Chapel, San Francisco, CA.

April 21

CCRMA/CNMAT Exchange Concerts. 1750 Arch Street, Berkeley, CA. A second program is offered on April 22.

Ninth Annual New Music Festival. Crumb's *Night of the Four Moons*. Glass's *Prelude to Endgame*, Reich's *Music for Pieces of Wood*, C. Rouse's *Ogoun Badagris*, and Feigin's *Meditations from Dogen*. University of California, Santa Barbara, CA. Festival through April 22.

newEar presents Fred Ho. Lawrence Arts Center. Lawrence, KS. Repeated April 22, Kansas City (MO).

April 22

Evelyn Glennie. Herbst Theatre, San Francisco, CA.

Omaha Symphony presents the Omaha premieres of Still's *Ennaga*, Dvorák's *Legends* [!], and Haydn's *Symphony No. 22* [!!], and the premiere of Navok's *Spanish Songs*. Omaha, NB.

Legacy of the American Woman Composer, with Laurel Ann Maurer and Joanne Pearce Martin. Larsen's *Aubade*, the premieres of Higdon's *Legacy* and M.B. Nelson's *Songs of the Moon*, plus Tower's *Hexachords* and V. Fine's *Emily's Images*. Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY.

April 24

Four Nights of Piano with Marino Formenti. France. Pierre Boulez's *Notations*, selections from Messiaen's *Vingt regards sur l'enfant Jesus*, the U.S. premiere of Brice Pauset's *Three Canons* (1989), and Jean Barraqué's *Piano Sonata*. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA. Programs through May 4.

April 25

Clark Supryniewicz's *Samalhaut* performed by the Del Sol String Quartet. St. John's Church, Berkeley, CA.

Piano Century. Vierk's *To Stare Astonished at the Sea*, Birtwistle's *Harrison's Clock's*, Carl van Ruin[Alvin Curran]'s *Endangered Species*, Shapey's *Sonata Profondo*, Adès's *Traced Overhead*, Kernis's *Superstar Etude No. 1*, Danielpour's *Night from Enchanted Garden*, Zwilich's *Snoopy Does the Samba*, Carter's *90+*, Murail's *Cloches d'Adieu, et une Sourire*, and Harberg's *Fun with Compulsive Behavior*. Paul Recital Hall, Juilliard School, New York, NY. "Aaron Jay Kernis's *Superstar Etude No. 1* went over the top, down the other side and all the way over the top again" [Paul Griffiths, The New York Times, 4/27/00].

North/South Consonance presents *Music from the American Composers Alliance*. Austin's *Klavier Double*, Nielson's *There is a Gate*, Lessard's *The Pond in a Bowl*, Schwartz's *Phoenix*, and Tannembaum's *Winds, Woods, and Things*. Christ and St. Stephen's Church, New York, NY.

New York Philharmonic in Gubaidulina's *Two Paths: Music for Two Solo Violas and Symphony Orchestra*. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY.

The Juilliard School announces that it is beginning a curriculum in jazz. New York, NY. "Juilliard has never offered a specific jazz curriculum, although Miles Davis, Wynton Marsalis, Fats Waller, [and] Thelonious Monk . . . studied there" [Ben Ratliff, The New York Times, 4/26/00].

Houston Composers Alliance presents *Light Bending Forward* (1999) by Patrick Clark, *Vagvisa För Mitt Ofödda Barn* (1994) by Howard Fredrics, *Film Project* by Johannes Birringer, *Todesbanden (In Memoriam Reed Holmes)* (2000) by Arthur Gottschalk, and *Quest* (1994) by George Crumb. Houston, TX.

April 26

Ensemble Intercontemporain in Kurtág's *Játékok* and Bartók's *Out of Doors* and *Nine Pieces for Piano*. Cité de la Musique, Paris, France.

Philadelphia Opera Company presents Richard Strauss's *Salome*. Academy of Music, Philadelphia, PA.

April 27

Four Nights of Piano with Marino Formenti. Italy. Dallapiccola's *Quaderno musicale di Annalibera*, Sciarrino's *Piano Sonata*, Bussotti's *Five Pieces for David Tudor*, and Nono's *...sofferte onde serene...* Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA. Programs through May 4.

San Francisco Symphony in Stravinsky's *Petrushka* (1911). Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA. Through April 29.

Cleveland Orchestra in Bartók's *Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta*. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY.

New York Philharmonic in Hindemith's *Nobilissima Visione*. Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY.

Villa-Lobos Society Chamber Players in an all-Villa-Lobos program. Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY.

Philadelphia Orchestra in Barber's *Overture to The School for Scandal* and *Violin Concerto*, Sibelius's *Symphony No. 7*, and the premiere of Rautavaara's *Symphony No. 8 ("The Journey")*. Academy of Music, Philadelphia, PA.

Seattle Symphony in Elgar's *Introduction and Allegro* (1901-5) and Vaughan Williams's *Symphony No. 6* (1944-47). Benaroya Hall, Seattle, WA.

April 28

Britten's *Albert Herring*. Cowell Theater, Fort Mason, San Francisco, CA. Through May 6.

Songs With & Without Words. Eliane Lust in the premiere Frederic Rzewski's *Melodramas* for a speaking pianist. Old First Church, San Francisco, CA.

Cleveland Orchestra in Ives's *Symphony No. 4*, Adams's *Century Rolls*, and Varèse's *Amérique*. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY.

Del Tredici and Rochberg: Serialism and After. Sequitur presents Del Tredici's *Night-Conjure Verse* (1965) and the premiere of Miz Inez Sez, and Rochberg's *Serenata d'estate* (1954) and *String Quartet No. 3*. Miller Theatre, Columbia University, New York, NY. "Mr. Del Tredici's comments about the response to his change of musical language are . . . emotional. 'It was polarizing Whereas before I had been a respectable composer, I became either a loved or a hated one' [Allan Kozinn, The New York Times, 4/28/00].

April 29

Tara Flandreau Quartet. Lefort Recital hall, College of Marin, Kentfield, CA.

John Cage Memorial Barbecue. Concert Hall, Mills College, CA.

Voices of the Century: France. Debussy's *Trois Chansons*, Milhaud's *Babylon* from *Les Deux Cités*, Ravel's *Trois Chansons*, Messiaen's *O Sacrum Convivium*, and Poulenc's *Figure Humaine*. Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY.

Boston Symphony Orchestra in Messiaen's *Turangalila-symphonie*. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY.

April 30

Community Symphony Orchestra in Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder*. Fine Arts Theatre, College of Marin, Kentfield, CA.

Memorial Tribute to Joseph Fuchs. Paul Recital Hall, Juilliard School, New York, NY.

Comment

Cagean Bigger Is Cagean Better

RICHARD KOSTELANETZ

I've suggested elsewhere that the very strongest John Cage works are longer, larger, and/or denser than his others and thus that his reputation as a composer ultimately rests upon five masterpieces -- *Sonatas and Interludes for Prepared Piano*, *Williams Mix*, *Roaratorio*, *HPSCHD*, and *Europa*. Whereas four of these five works are an hour or longer in duration, the last, *Williams Mix*, is much, much denser, with hundreds of discrete musical events compressed into a few minutes.

Consider as well that the strongest works by Petr Kotik and the S.E.M. Ensemble are likewise long -- not only of Kotik's own *Many Many Women*, which runs for nearly six hours, but the performances of Morton Feldman's late pieces, which likewise run beyond the length of a standard concert. Given this affinity for extended durations, it seemed appropriate that Kotik should conduct a masterful performance of Cage's *103* for orchestra which is, like the Cage film *One* (1992), 90 minutes long.

For background to *103*, consider that the only content of the silent film, a minimalist masterpiece, is various shadings on a continuous white field. At the first New York public screening, I found the presentation too slow to bear, constantly deserting my audience seat for friends with whom I could talk about the work. Yet I returned to *One* more than once, for progressively longer durations, eventually staying to the end. It resembled *4'33"*, the piece devoid of intentional sound that was first presented four decades before. Whereas *4'33"* was a container for miscellaneous noise, so *One* was a screen for continuous subtle intrusions of shadows.

I admired Cage for creating in his 80th year, just before his death, an artwork that could be so superficially unacceptable. *One* is a film I'd like to see again, not on a video screen (for which it was originally composed) but in a theater that could show a 35 mm. print. Whereas the best Cage music is, to repeat, maximal, this was fundamentally minimal, which was another theme of Cage's music; but *One* was minimalism made maximal through its great length.

While initially composed simultaneously with the film, *103 for Orchestra* (1991) stands as the strongest instrumental work of Cage's last years, which were filled with slighter pieces mostly delivered in response to requests and commissions from various performing organizations around the world. Generous to a fault, as well as pleased with late-career success, Cage liked to give all of his admirers something new -- if not in concept, at least in detail. *103* stands above those other casual pieces.

The Musical Illiteracy of Literary Intellectuals

RICHARD KOSTELANETZ

Well over four decades ago Aaron Copland broke his avuncular prose to suggest that when a literary person puts together two words about music, one of them is likely to be wrong, suggesting that beneath the veneer of self confidence was often a propensity for error. Sometimes the errors are so technically minor they would escape an otherwise diligent copyeditor; yet they reflect musical illiteracy. When Herbert Leibowitz edited *Musical Impressions: Selections from Paul Rosenfeld's Criticism*, the title of Edgar Varèse's most notorious early composition, *Ionisation*, is consistently misspelled "*Ionization*," which would be more appropriate to American orthography but wrong in fact. The literary analogy for this musicological error would be adding an apostrophe to *Finnegans Wake*, where James Joyce has none. Both spelling mistakes, while superficially trivial, become implicit Red Flags, ignored by most readers but reminding everyone more knowledgeable that the author or such mistakes hasn't progressed far in his or her understanding of modern music or literature. The epithet commonly used to characterize this sort of subtle error is litmus test, because it never fails.

Lest Leibowitz, who likes to deprecate me, think I'm picking only on him, consider Susan Sontag's reference, on p. 346 of *A Susan Sontag Reader* (1982), to Arnold "Schönberg's *Moses and Aaron*." The first illiteracy here is that Schoenberg spelled the second name as "Aron." Otherwise, the title of his opera would have 13 letters and he was notoriously triskaidecaphobic, fearing the numeral 13. (Indeed, he died on the 13th day of a month at the age of 76, the sum of whose numerals is 13). Sontag's choice of the English translation for a title customarily kept in its original German, *Moses und Aron*, seems affected. I know of only one other place where it appears in the English -- on the spine and only the spine of the original Columbia lp record set, where everywhere else, including the record's cover, favors the German title. Needlessly sophisticated, Sontag reverses her linguistic bias with the Germanic spelling for Schoenberg's surname, even though the composer insisted upon dropping the umlaut during his American years! (Given her taste for scrambling preferences in German and English, she should call herself Susanne Sunday.) With four peculiarities in only four words, she is batting minus 1,000, which is a world record. Imagine how much illiteracy about music such as slugger could display at longer lengths.

By the Numbers

Number of days of the 4-day Other Minds Festival sponsored events covered by the San Francisco Examiner

1

Number of days of the 4-day Other Minds Festival sponsored events covered by the San Francisco Chronicle

2

Number of days of the 4-day Other Minds Festival sponsored events covered by the Los Angeles Times

4

Total number of reviews of contemporary classical music in 8 major daily U.S. papers (New York Times, Boston Globe, Chicago Tribune, San Francisco Chronicle, Los Angeles Times, Philadelphia Inquirer, Washington Post, and Atlanta Journal-Constitution), Wednesday, March 22, 2000

0

Total number of reviews of the preview of Elton John's *Aida* in 8 major daily U.S. papers (New York Times, Boston Globe, Chicago Tribune, San Francisco Chronicle, Los Angeles Times, Philadelphia Inquirer, Washington Post, and Atlanta Journal-Constitution), Friday, March 24, 2000

6 (only the Boston Globe and Philadelphia Inquirer -- interestingly, the next-nearest papers to New York -- lack reports of the production on this day)

Number of operas by living composers performed by the Washington Opera in its 2000-2001 season

0

Items

I could never conduct this score. It would never fit on my bookshelf, let alone fit in my briefcase on transatlantic flights. See this score by Frank Zappa? It's the largest I can do.

Kent Nagano

on William Susman's *Pentateuch* for large divisi orchestra, three choral groups, and soprano (1984).

I had to fight for your score. None of the other judges wanted to look at it because it wouldn't fit on the table we were using to peruse scores. I was the only one willing to spread the score out on the floor and take a look at it.

Earle Brown

on William Susman's *Pentateuch* for large divisi orchestra, three choral groups, and soprano (1984), commenting in 1985 at the BMI awards reception.

The Oscars are going to sound a lot different this year, as producers Richard and Lili Fini Zanuck try to "contemporize" the music with the help of co-musical directors Burt Bacharach and Don Was. How different? Instead of a single orchestra, which has been the norm for more than half a century, this year's Oscar telecast on Sunday will utilize at least four different ensembles: one for Bacharach's overture, a pit band led by Was, a small combo playing music during commercial breaks, and a large orchestra to perform at least one of the nominated songs. Shaking up the status quo, however, has sent shock waves through the Hollywood musical establishment. Initial reports that there would be no traditional orchestra were met with disbelief by studio musicians, composers and arrangers. Veteran Oscar music director Bill Conti, who has done the show more than a dozen times since the mid-1970s, routinely used an orchestra of about 50 players. In fact, much of the show will be played by acoustic musicians, but used in unorthodox ways. According to Was, "This year's texture is not so much pageantry and Elizabethan pomp and circumstance. It's lyricism set against a hard groove." Lili Zanuck hopes that the Oscar night music will reflect what's going on in the film music world. "All soundtracks today are not done as they were in the old days, by an orchestra. You now have synth soundtracks, you have bands, all kinds of instrumentation. We thought that our band should reflect that. It's not less musicians, it's just different configurations."

Jon Burlingame

Los Angeles Times, 3/20/00

Writers

MARK ALBURGER began playing the oboe and composing in association with Dorothy and James Freeman, George Crumb, and Richard Wernick. He studied with Karl Kohn at Pomona College; Joan Panetti and Gerald Levinson at Swarthmore College (B.A.); Jules Langert at Dominican College (M.A.); Roland Jackson at Claremont Graduate University (Ph.D.); and Terry Riley. Alburger writes for *Commuter Times* and is published by *New Music*. He is Editor-Publisher of 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC, and has interviewed numerous composers, including Charles Amirkhanian, Henry Brant, Earle Brown, Philip Glass, Lou Harrison, Alan Hovhaness, Meredith Monk, Pauline Oliveros, Steve Reich, and Frederick Rzewski. An ASCAP composer, he has recently completed a violin concerto.

D.L. BARRY studied composition with Henry Onderdonk, Wayne Peterson, and Richard Festinger. He has composed for a variety of resources besides standard instrumental combinations, including environmental installations and electronic media. Recent works include a chamber symphony and a string quartet. He received an M.A. in Music from San Francisco State University.

DAVID BÜNDLER is the pen name of Byrwee Ellison, a freelance writer and a Los Angeles Correspondent for 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC.

DAVID CLEARY's music has been played throughout the U.S. and abroad, including performances at Tanglewood and by Alea II and Dinosaur Annex. A member of Composers in Red Sneaker, he has won many awards and grants, including the Harvey Gaul Contest, an Ella Lyman Cabot Trust Grant, and a MacDowell residence. He is a staff critic for *The New Music Connoisseur* and 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC. His article on composing careers is published by Gale Research and he has contributed CD reviews to the latest *All Music Guide to Rock*. His music appears on the Centaur and Vienna Modern Masters labels, and his bio may be found in many *Who's Who* books.

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RICHARD KOSTELANETZ has published several books about Cage, beginning with a documentary monograph *John Cage* (1970; reprinted 1991), including *John Cage (ex)plain(ed)* (1996) and *Thirty Years of Critical Engagements with John Cage* (1996), both of which he authored; and *Writings About John Cage* (1993) and *John Cage, Writer* (1993, 2000), both of which he edited. He has also edited many books about modern music, including *Nicolas Slonimsky: The First 100 Years*, *A Portable Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, *Classic Essays on 20th Century Music*, *A Frank Zappa Companion*, *A B. B. King Companion*, and *Writings on Glass*.

MICHAEL MCDONAGH is a San Francisco-based poet and writer on the arts who has done two poem/picture books with artist Gary Bukovnik, *Before I Forget* (1991) and *Once* (1997), the former being in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, The Berkeley Art Museum, and the New York Public Library. He has also published poems in journals including *Mirage*, and written two theatre pieces -- *Touch and Go*, for three performers, which was staged at Venue 9 in 1998; and *Sight Unseen*, for solo performer. His critical pieces have appeared in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *San Francisco Review of Books*, *3 Penny Review*, *California Printmaker*, *Antiques and Fine Art*, *The Advocate*, *High Performance*, and *In Tune*. He writes for *The Bay Area Reporter* and heads the Bay Area chapter of The Duke Ellington Society. He co-hosted nine radio shows on KUSF with Tony Gualtieri with whom he now shares a classical-music review website -- www.msu.edu/user/gualtie3. McDonagh wishes to express his thanks to Warren Sherk, at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Margaret Herrick Library, for consulting the original score to *Bite the Bullet* in the North archive and faxing information on instrumentation.

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He has participated and his music has been performed in such music concerts and festivals as the Composers' Concordance contemporary music series in New York, the Moscow Autumn Music Festival, the Alternativa festival in Moscow, the International Forum for Young Composers in Kiev, the Nicolai Roslavetz Music Festival in Bryansk, Russia, the 3rd International Contemporary Music Festival Europe-Asia in Kazan, Russia, the Contrasts festival in Lvov, and the Moscow Forum\Dutch-Russian Music Festival in Moscow. His theoretical articles, interviews with various composers and reviews of contemporary music concerts and festivals have been published in such music journals as *Myzykal'naya Akademiya* and *21ST-CENTURY MUSIC*. He is a member of the American Music Center and the Composers' Guild of New Jersey.

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