

# 21ST CENTURY MUSIC

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JULY 2000

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# Onward Christian Wolff

## MARK ALBURGER

Christian Wolff (b. 3/8/34, Nice, France) moved to the United States in 1941 and became associated with John Cage, Earle Brown, and Morton Feldman in New York in the early 1950's. Almost entirely self-taught as a composer, he studied classics at Harvard University (Ph.D.), remaining there as a teacher until 1970, when he was appointed professor of classics and music at Dartmouth College.

I checked in with Christian Wolff at a hotel lobby in San Francisco on March 16, the day before the performance of his *Melody* and *Burdocks* during the Other Minds Festival.

ALBURGER: How are the rehearsals going?

WOLFF: O.K. We had a session all afternoon.

ALBURGER: There's a lot of performer choice in *Burdocks*. What kinds of choices are being made?

WOLFF: A whole range! The piece has 10 parts. The first choice is which parts to do.

ALBURGER: It's not required that all 10 parts be performed.

WOLFF: Absolutely not! Otherwise, you'd be there all night!

ALBURGER: Are these 10 parts in terms of sections, or lines of music?

WOLFF: They're sections -- almost pieces, or movements. Each one is pretty distinctive. It was meant to be that way, at least. So that, once you have an idea what's going on, you can immediately spot, "Oh, yes, this is that one." Each part has basically one idea. Your first choice is which of these 10 parts to do.

ALBURGER: How many are you doing?

WOLFF: We're doing just three -- possibly four -- I haven't decided whether I'm going to do a fourth one.

ALBURGER: So that's not a performer's choice; that's a composer's choice.

WOLFF: Not necessarily. I mean, I'll run it by them. If they don't want to do it, I won't do it! It's a negotiation!

ALBURGER: The non-hierarchical approach.

WOLFF: Exactly. The other choices are not only which parts to do, but also in what order, and whether or not to overlap them or do some simultaneously. So it's a modular situation, where you have a lot of material, but with which you can do many things. For example: we have seven players, so we're doing a chamber music version.

ALBURGER: Is there a maximum number of performers?

WOLFF: No. It's been done by as many as 60. I've thought of it as an orchestra piece. The orchestration is also open. Another choice is, who's going to play? What instruments? What sound sources are you going to use? In the present ensemble there is an interesting situation that I haven't encountered before. The constituency of the group has been more or less determined by Fred Frith. The ensemble includes Bob Ostertag, who works with the computer. This music was written before computers were in common use. Perhaps not surprisingly, the music is not particularly idiomatic for a computer performer! We had a funny moment in the first rehearsal, where he suddenly realized that he couldn't make a sound stop! Which is sort of a basic condition of doing this piece!

ALBURGER: Silence, of course, is important in your work.

WOLFF: Yes, exactly. Also, there are notations in this piece that say, "play until this point, and then stop." And he couldn't get the damn thing to stop! Bob came to me and said, "I'm a little uneasy about all this. Should I be doing this piece?" I told him to take the material and just work out what he thought he could do, and just do that. That's another element of choice in the piece. Depending on which part you're in, a number of parts have choices from among the material. You can just pick out items that are most appropriate or interesting for you. You can avoid things that are unidiomatic or impossible technically for certain instruments.

ALBURGER: Is the score traditionally notated?

WOLFF: Not really, no. The score is simply notated in prose instructions on what to do. Sometimes, they're not even instructions; they're just suggested remarks. One of the 10 parts simply consists of the instructions to make about 511 sounds -- all different. Obviously, there are many ways to do that.

ALBURGER: And that's for each performer?

WOLFF: Again, that's open. You could decide as a consortium, as it were, or between us that we're going to make 511. And then work out how we're going to do that. The 511 sounds could be done by one person. Or they could be done by six people each doing the entire range of sounds all at once -- 511 x 6, etc.

ALBURGER: Is the time frame determined?

WOLFF: Yes. In this performance, we have three basic parts we're doing. I'm not in the first part, and I'm thinking about possibly doing the 511-event one while the first part is occurring. I'm thinking about it. I would play mostly percussive sounds. I'll try it this afternoon and see whether it works, because I have to get done in time to join them for the next two parts. The first part that the rest of the ensemble is doing is like a chorale. It's three simultaneous sounds in a sequence, the first of which is short and the last of which is short. What sounds you make are free. The only restriction is that you play together, like chords, and that you follow the lead of one of the specified players. You can repeat these gestures indefinitely. Once you're in them, you have to go through to the end; they're not very long. When you come to the end, the person who is in charge can either start up immediately again, wait for a long time, move on to the next section, etc. So that's that part. The music for that part is grouped in trios. There are six of them doing it, and that leaves one left over.

ALBURGER: And that person sits out.

WOLFF: That's the thing. In rehearsals it was me. I would rather not be in the trios, because in performance I will have just finished playing a solo for my melodica. In *Burdocks*, the melodica is also an appropriate instrument. It would be good, though, to give it a rest. So I would sit out for that one, and let them do the trios. On the other hand, if I have nothing else better to do, I could do the one with the 511 sounds, while they're doing the trios.

ALBURGER: The melodica is a wind instrument.

WOLFF: It's a combination. It's basically a monster harmonica. The principal is that of a harmonica. This particular one is a good one. It has a little over a three-octave range.

ALBURGER: It has keys.

WOLFF: It has keys, and usually people blow at one end and hold the keys vertically like, say, a clarinet. I find it easier to take a plastic tube and put it on the end, so that I have the instrument down in front of me like a keyboard. It looks a little weird, but it's great for me.

ALBURGER: I've never seen it that way!

WOLFF: It's a very convenient instrument, because it's relatively compact. It's not heavy; it doesn't require amplification or anything. In fact, it can really hold its own against an ensemble. The high register is a very piercing sound.

ALBURGER: The only piece I know for it is that Steve Reich piece, *Melodica*.

WOLFF: Oh, I don't know that one.

ALBURGER: This will be a fresh sound. I don't think there's ever been a melodica in an Other Minds Festival.

WOLFF: They turn up every now and again. I've been using it for years, and I'd never actually written a piece for it. Probably because I couldn't stand the sound! And then finally, the occasion arose where I had to produce some music in a non-music setting.

ALBURGER: It can be an instrument of last resort.

WOLFF: Well, that's what it was! And I tried to make the best of it. And actually I quite enjoy doing the piece which resulted. In fact, I have a whole set of these melodica pieces, which are optionally to be accompanied by percussion.

ALBURGER: And this is the solo *Melody* that you'll be doing.

WOLFF: Yes, it's not very long.

ALBURGER: And it's a fairly new work, from the 90's.

WOLFF: Yes.

ALBURGER: And it has something to do with *soggetto cavato* -- a "carved subject" derived from letters.

WOLFF: Of course, sure! I do that a lot: pieces for specific people, whose names I use.

ALBURGER: So this is part of an ongoing tradition.

WOLFF: Yes.

ALBURGER: And the duration of the notes is determined by your breath.

WOLFF: It varies, but most of the time it is my breath. There are melodic phrases that I have to get in all in one breath.

ALBURGER: Not notes in one breath, but phrases.

WOLFF: Yes. Otherwise, we'd be there all night. My breath isn't that good, but it would still be long.

ALBURGER: Particularly if you're dealing with a long name.

WOLFF: The melody-phrases vary from 3 or 4 to perhaps 15 or 16. The rhythmic figures are free within a phrase, but you have to get finished before you run out of breath. So you can kind of challenge yourself. You can make the long notes early and see if you can squeeze in the rest. Or you can do it in the opposite way, or in any mixture. That's a kind of improvisatory performance which I like. It's just a little bit dangerous, and gives the piece a little bit of a "stress factor." It gives the sound a quality, which you wouldn't get otherwise, that is not entirely comfortable. There's a focus to it.

ALBURGER: The pieces use the letters of people's names.

WOLFF: Yes, but the pitches go into transpositions pretty quickly.

ALBURGER: Do you generate tonal melodies, or...

WOLFF: Well, this technique certainly doesn't avoid tonality. I realized (it took me a little while -- slow!) there are only so many possibilities, because you have the letters A through G -- eight sounds. And then I stretched that, because if you use German names...

ALBURGER: You get a few more there: the Eb and Bb.

WOLFF: ... you get the "S" and "H." But still, that's it, for whatever name you get. So eventually you have the collection, which is always going to be more or less the same, regardless of whose name you're using.

ALBURGER: The letters that aren't part of that collection are just discarded?

WOLFF: Yes. But I subject the melodies to various transpositions, so other notes appear.

ALBURGER: But for someone whose last name is "Smith" -- the "m" would not be represented.

WOLFF: It would not. You'd have Eb for the "S" and B for the "H."

ALBURGER: There wouldn't be much there. I've done code pieces where I've given other letters of the alphabet tones.

WOLFF: I've done that, too, where you put numbers to the pitches. But in this one, no. It's pretty straight.

ALBURGER: It sounds like, from one performance to the next, the music would be clearly recognizable as *Melody*, despite the flexibility of the rhythm. What about *Burdocks*?

WOLFF: A similar situation. Although, it's conceivable that you could go to great lengths to disguise what it is you're doing. One of the parts that we're doing -- the fifth one -- is wheels with spokes, and then there's material in the spokes.

ALBURGER: There's a visual representation?

WOLFF: Yes. That was an afterthought to call them wheels, but there are spokes. There are lines connecting the wheels. Any player starts at any point in the piece, in any of the spokes, and then has the option of repeating or moving on to an adjacent spoke, clockwise or counterclockwise. But you can also move from wheel to wheel. The timing of moving from spoke to spoke or from wheel to wheel is either immediate or according to an indicated time. The time interval can be 5, 10, even 40 seconds. And you can stop playing any spoke at any time. You may hit things that you can't do or don't want to do, so you look for something else that is appropriate and you go to that. The material in the wheels is very various. Some is very specific -- just a pitch. All the pitches are readable in treble or bass clef.

ALBURGER: Five lines, but there is not a designation of clef. One could even read it on viola clef?

WOLFF: The rule of thumb is that you shouldn't read more than two clefs in the group. If you want to do viola clef...

ALBURGER: You'd need an ensemble featuring alto trombones...

WOLFF: Normally we just do treble and bass. So you have specific pitches, perhaps specific durations. There is an indication that you must change the color once.

ALBURGER: So this wouldn't be the case (perhaps an apocryphal story) of John Cage listening to some music at somebody's house and saying, "Oh, that's lovely. What is it?" And the person saying, "Well, John, that's one of your pieces!" Are there any pieces like that of yours?

WOLFF: Well, there could be. In this part of *Burdocks*, from the one-note figures, you can't tell much. But then there are triads, which are very tempting to play as loops, so they are immediately identifiable. But there's one part that simply has the number 7 on it. And then you decide what you're going to do with that. You make a sound or a sequence of something involving the notion of 7. It could be making a single sound 7 times, play a 7-note scale, any number of things. The most extreme interpretation I've heard of that, which responds exactly to the Cage story, which I would have had a problem identifying, was a particular performance which I could not attend. Morton Feldman was present, though. Suddenly in the midst of this music, somebody was playing a folk song. Morty said, "That's not Christian Wolff's music!" I thought, "Yes, he's right. How did that happen?" Then I discovered that this person was taking a fragment of a folk song and playing it seven times. So I can't do anything! I left myself open for that! Actually, I suspect it was very beautiful. Morty had problems with that kind of quotation. I think in the context of the group that was playing it (the Scratch Orchestra)...

ALBURGER: ...it was fine.

WOLFF: Yes. And there were about 30 other things going on at the same time. It's not as though suddenly everything stopped, and somebody played "Old Lang Syne" or something.

ALBURGER: So in the context it could have made sense.

WOLFF: Exactly.

ALBURGER: And with your political interests, you also have a side that is attune to folk music, and so on.

WOLFF: Yes. *Burdocks* is a transitional one. I had never written tunes. My music had been very pointillistic. I don't know how I got the notion, except that I knew that in *Burdocks* I was going to do different things. I wanted each part to be strikingly different, a challenge to write a different piece that will have an identity unlike any of the other nine pieces. And one notion was to make a tune, which would be unmistakable.

ALBURGER: So there are actually tunes in *Burdocks*?

WOLFF: One tune. I mean, you may hear others. To my ears, everything is a tune.

ALBURGER: Sure.

WOLFF: That's a notion I've had for a long time. But not tunes that people would normally regard as such, and certainly not those that are necessarily easy to remember or whistle. But this *Burdocks* tune is unmistakable. It's my first and some people might say my only tune. But anyway, I did it. And that's one of the other parts we're doing. In that part you have basically the tune and a couple accompaniment figures, which are just rhythms. There you are free to play either the tune or the accompaniment, and go back and forth between the two of them. The tune is also laid out so there are potential gaps in it. You can play just so far and then you have the option of observing a rest, then you can observe that rest for any number of beats that you want before you continue. You do also have to continue. The tune has two parts, beginning with a primary tune. At the end of the first part, you have the option of starting again, or moving around to the second part, and the same principles apply there. And you can play the entire tune as often as you want. Again, here the treble/bass distinction is important. The tune has a contour, but not necessarily the same pitches on different instruments, which I like. And this piece is quite difficult to do musically, because, usually, you're told what to do, and you just do it. But here, you have 5, 6, 7, 8 people; you need to make something out of it that somehow works. Because the tune is so in your face and it's so clearly a tune. You can't just "mess about" with it.

ALBURGER: And is this a tune of your own composition?

WOLFF: Oh, yes. Absolutely.

ALBURGER: Is it modeled on any folk music?

WOLFF: Nope, absolutely not. It's just a tune.

ALBURGER: Did you conceive it in treble clef?

WOLFF: Good question! I may have, yes. I find that, when I do this, I work either in one or the other clef, and then see how it turns out in the other. And I usually tend to like the one that I haven't conceived it in better! Because it's more surprising.

ALBURGER: Has there been something in your career that has involved a moving from a "classical" avant-garde stance back in the 50's, with the pointillism, and Cage, of course, and a bit of Webern, towards something involving an increased concern with social consciousness and melody?

WOLFF: Yes. And this was, in a way, a first step. About that time I became familiar with the Babenzelo Pygmy music, which is a communal music that I found absolutely wonderful. I had always had some sort of communal musical consciousness, but usually among a small number of performers. After hearing the Pygmy music, I wanted to extend my communal musical concerns to larger communities of performers. The nearest realization of the Pygmy situation which I knew about in our culture was the Scratch Orchestra, which consisted of about 30 to 40 people.

ALBURGER: A European group.

WOLFF: Located in London.

ALBURGER: Cornelius Cardew's group.

WOLFF: The first large-scale performance of *Burdocks* was by the Scratch Orchestra, which invited all these other music groups to join as separate entities. The other groups had all the material and prepared separately, and then they had a grand meeting, where they all got together and decided how they were going to put all of the parts together.

ALBURGER: A total of how many players?

WOLFF: Close to 60.

ALBURGER: Was the realization everything that you had hoped?

WOLFF: Oh, it was wonderful. Just extraordinary. Unforgettable.

ALBURGER: What does the name *Burdocks* signify?

WOLFF: It's a plant. It's a weed, actually -- a very noxious weed. For people who don't like weeds, it's very tenacious, extremely difficult to dig out of the ground. When burdocks dry, they have these thistle-like parts -- burrs that are very prickly and they stick to everything. If you really wanted to be unpleasant as a kid, you could throw a burr at somebody's hair, and you could never get it out again.

ALBURGER: Where do these grow?

WOLFF: They grow in the country -- New England, certainly.

ALBURGER: You were thinking back to your youth?

WOLFF: I was just there. We lived partly in Vermont on this farm, and there were plenty of burdocks there. It's a rather intricate plant, and it has this persistent quality about it. It won't let go; it won't leave you alone.

ALBURGER: So you find that in the music.

WOLFF: I like to think that there are qualities similar to that in the music: that it's, in some way, vaguely annoying, but it persists. Don't take that too literally! Another aspect about the plant is that it has all kinds of medicinal qualities. You can boil the roots and make a tea that's good for things that ail you. So it has that benign aspect as well. And the combination is very good. The title actually originally came in a context. I organized a couple of rural festivals of new music -- very rural and very modest as festivals, but we had a good time. We had some high-powered people up, who just wanted an excuse to come to the country. These were in the summer in the early 70's, and we called them the Burdocks Festivals. After the first festival, I wrote this piece, and premiered it at the second Burdock Festival. I'm very pleased that one of the people who played in that first performance was Gordon Mumma, in 1972. And now, here we are in the year 2000, and guess who's playing in the band?

ALBURGER: Great! I haven't seen Gordon in a while.

WOLFF: So we have two holdovers from almost 30 years ago!

ALBURGER: Interesting that in both *Burdocks* and *Melody* -- in one you talk about the noxious weed and the other the noxious sound. Yet you've also now spoken about the healing quality. Am I getting to something here?

WOLFF: Yes! Let me put it this way. To make really beautiful music, I think you have to go through ugliness. To me, something beautiful has to have a kind of grit to it. And I think I probably associate that as well with durability. For something to be tough, it's not going to be pretty, necessarily. It's got to have a little muscle to it.

ALBURGER: It has to aggressively assert its place.

WOLFF: Well, not necessarily: not so much assertion as persistence, and just being there. I've always thought that that was a possible connection with my other lifetime work, which is in classics.

ALBURGER: Because the classics endure.

WOLFF: The classics have done it. They've somehow survived, in a lot of mutations along the way, but still. And it's occurred to me occasionally that I've got this notion of making durable music. I don't want to call anything high-falutin'-like "classical," but just something that keeps working: that you get a lot of mileage out of it. And *Burdocks* is -- in a way, if I may say so -- a good example of that. That piece has been around a long time, and has been done by all kinds of different groups. Now we're doing it with a computer, and it seems to be able to keep working.

ALBURGER: Having worked in the classics and in some sort of large definition of "classical" music for a number of years, I wonder if you could speak to that dynamic of having a foot in two different camps for so many years now. You've become a classic yourself, enduring through these decades!

WOLFF: Yeah... Initially it happened by a kind of accident, but then a lot of what makes you what you are happens by a combination of accident and...

ALBURGER: Happens by... CHANCE?

WOLFF: By CHANCE! The classical author, Heraclitus, has a phrase that can be read in two ways. The phrase could be "Character is destiny." But it can also be read as "Destiny is character."

ALBURGER: Must be some funny verb in Greek.

WOLFF: There is no verb.

ALBURGER: It's just the two words.

WOLFF: The two words.

ALBURGER: No necessary hierarchy as to which is subject and predicate?

WOLFF: Yes. But, to get back to your question. Initially, being involved with both areas happened by a kind of accident or destiny. Because, at the time I started to work in music (even though I was quite fortunate in getting to hear my music very early), it was very clear to me (or at least I thought) that there was no way that I could do this as a life's work and survive. Certainly not and have a family and do the things that I had a notion that I would probably be doing. So I thought I really should have a practical application, and that music was not going to be it.

ALBURGER: Classics was your insurance!

WOLFF: Exactly. I mean, it was kind of a weird thing to go to.

ALBURGER: Anything is.

WOLFF: In those days, it should have been spot welding, or something like that. I had an interest in literature from an early age. It was partly in the family; my parents were both publishers; so there was a strong literary element in my upbringing. And I just took to it. I read a lot, and so forth. Initially I had to make a choice between going to college and going to conservatory. I was dissuaded from the conservatory. My initial ambition was to be a pianist, but it was clear that I just didn't have it by a long shot. So conservatory would have been a pretty trying environment. "So, O.K., not conservatory, I'll go to college and get a liberal education," and I would study literature and be an English major. And then I saw hundreds of people in those English lectures, and I thought, "I don't want to do that." And I had a very good Latin teacher in high school, so I just took a shot at a Latin course. And I did very well. This was Harvard. The department was always on the lookout for potential students. It's not a field that many people move towards.

ALBURGER: It's not a growth industry.



WOLFF: Exactly. So they were on my case almost immediately, and it was a very nice department, and they were very welcoming. And then when I got to Greek, that really turned me on. I thought, "This is great stuff." And that's how I came to do that. Even then I didn't know what to do with that.

ALBURGER: Well, one's options are nicely limited. Teaching.

WOLFF: Well, exactly, but I didn't know that I would necessarily do anything with it. But I noticed that a number of my teachers were not very good as teachers. They were eminent scholars, but they were terrible teachers. And I thought that this was just such a shame, because the material is so wonderful and so powerful. And I thought, "I can do this better," and that got me a kick in that direction. "Yes, I think I can do this." It was a kind of work where your schedule was fairly flexible. You teach two courses or three courses, but still a maximum of maybe 10-12 hours a week you were actually in a classroom. I had already discovered that that's deceptive, because for those hours, you may spend 20 preparing yourself. But still, the fact is those 20 other hours were up to you.

ALBURGER: As in your music, there's a bit of flexibility.

WOLFF: There's flexibility. And indeed there was flexibility to develop music and pursue some sort of work as a musician. So that's what I did. And initially I did classics full time at Harvard.

ALBURGER: You finished your degree and started teaching there.

WOLFF: And I must say, some of the time it was difficult. I look back on those years, and I might have produced one piece a year. Often I couldn't go to performances, because I couldn't leave work. So it wasn't easy, but that's what I did. And then when that job ran out, after about eight years, I applied for a job at Dartmouth, and by then Jon Appleton knew about me and heard I was coming to teach classics, and he said, "We would really like you in the music department as well." At least part of the time, it was acknowledged that I was, in fact, also a musician. And that's been very good. I just retired now.

ALBURGER: Last year?

WOLFF: Actually, I wound up teaching a little bit extra, because they needed someone.

ALBURGER: Congratulations! You got the gold watch, the whole works...

WOLFF: Well, sort of, yes.

ALBURGER: And that was a number of years, then, at Dartmouth.

WOLFF: Oh yes. 27... 28...

ALBURGER: The day to day dynamic was good? You were a respected member of both departments.

WOLFF: I think so, yes. I wrote articles in classics. I had my credentials. In music, I was always very welcome, and in classics, too. I had been very well trained... a super education. I sort of knew what I was doing. And I brought a lot of enthusiasm. I really like the stuff. And I enjoyed teaching -- that's the other crucial thing! That really was the essential factor.

ALBURGER: Did you teach composition?

WOLFF: Actually, very little. The Dartmouth music department has changed some, but it's not very big. There's no graduate program. This is a liberal arts college which is itself not very large. There are about 1200 kids. The people who are doing music were mostly doing classical music history or performance, and rarely, actually, composition, until about the last eight or ten years. For about the last six years, we have had a tiny graduate music program in electroacoustic music. It's a kind of music-and-technology program which has changed things considerably. It's small. There are only about eight students there at a time, but they are seriously interested in making music and maybe being professional musicians. But most of the time that I was at Dartmouth, I had hardly any composition students.

ALBURGER: Maybe one or two at a time?

WOLFF: Yes.

ALBURGER: Private lesson situation?

WOLFF: Yes, which was O.K. with me, because, frankly, I don't know what you teach when you teach composition.

ALBURGER: Terry Riley has said much the same thing.

WOLFF: Yes, so I'd much rather... What I did teach, most of the time, was either a course on 20th-century music... And that was O.K.

ALBURGER: Just O.K.?

WOLFF: It was good. It was nice, because, from about 1959, it was mostly first-hand knowledge. I knew the people, and so forth.

ALBURGER: I would imagine that, occasionally, you got to teach yourself.

WOLFF: Well, I kind of avoided that. But, on the other hand, they certainly got first-hand information about Cage and Feldman and Brown. Then the other thing that I taught, more than anything else, was a workshop in experimental music, which suited me perfectly. It was open to anybody -- not necessarily limited to music majors. You didn't even have to read music. You had to persuade me that you were going to do this seriously. Basically, we used that music of the late 60's and 70's, a lot of which can be done by anybody. To do it well is another question -- that's what we worked on.

ALBURGER: It was a hands-on course where people were creating new music. In a sense, it was partially a composition course.

WOLFF: Exactly. It was geared to performance. The primary aim of the course was that we did a public concert at the end -- preferably, not even on the campus, but somewhere else. So they learned about giving concerts; that was part of it: how you organize, how you advertise. If, in the process of doing all of this, if somebody felt interested in writing something for the group, that was fine.

ALBURGER: So there was not a requirement that one write.

WOLFF: It was an option. The main composition requirement was that you had to write something that the group could do. You might have 15 people -- six guitarists, a flutist, other people who didn't play anything -- what do you do to keep all those people busy? It's an interesting challenge.

ALBURGER: You've been at Dartmouth, before that at Harvard, yet you're associated with the New York School.

WOLFF: Well, I grew up in New York. And we didn't know we were the "New York School" for starters!. I still feel like a New Yorker. I live either in the country, or I live in New York, but I mostly live in the country, because that's where I ended up. I never thought of myself as a Boston person, even though I spent years there.

ALBURGER: You've moved from France at age --

WOLFF: -- seven.

ALBURGER: Do you have much memory of France?

WOLFF: Yes, I do, actually, because it was a very turbulent time. We got out in 1941, and the War was already on. My father was persona non-gratis, as far as the Germans were concerned. He had to get out. I was probably O.K., because I had French citizenship, but my parents were stateless. When they left Germany, their passports were cancelled.

ALBURGER: They were German?

WOLFF: Yes. But they left in '32-33, just in time. At first they thought they could make a life in France, but they eventually got out and moved to New York.

ALBURGER: Did you grow up in the town where you were born?

WOLFF: No. My early life was a lot of travel. I was born in Nice. And I think (I'm not sure of the chronology) that, within a couple of years, my parents moved to Italy, because they bought a property there. There were two farmhouses, and, to make some money, they would rent out one of them. So we stayed there for maybe two-and-a-half or three years, and then the Mussolini-Hitler pact happened.

ALBURGER: Where was this in Italy?

WOLFF: Near Florence -- just outside. So I grew up there for a while.

ALBURGER: And you have recollections of that?

WOLFF: Few.

ALBURGER: Your earliest memories would have been in Italian!

WOLFF: Exactly! Apparently I spoke Italian!

ALBURGER: Do you remember French?

WOLFF: French stuck with me, because then we went back, and I did a year of school in France, and my mother home-schooled me for a while, also in French. So I was a French kid.

ALBURGER: Back to Paris?

WOLFF: Yes, but first in Nice, and then for a while we were on the Riviera between Nice and Cannes. I'm not sure why, but it was really unsettled. And then we went up to Paris, and I went to school in Paris, and then the War broke out in earnest. The authorities evacuated all schools out of Paris. They were afraid it might be bombed. My group was sent down to school in La Rochelle. Yes, and then things got more complicated, because my parents, of course, being German were enemy aliens. Suddenly they were the enemy, and they were interred in camps. They knew they had to get out of France, but first they had to collect me. By then, life got even more complicated. My father was previously married, so I have a half-sister, quite a bit older than I am (actually, she's long dead). I ended up in occupied France. The Germans came in. I saw German soldiers in my part of France, and my parents couldn't get me. There was no way. They were in the Vichy part of France, so they had to get me out indirectly. What happened, actually, was my school year eventually came to an end, and the other kids went home and I was left there. They had to figure out a way to get me. Obviously, they did!

ALBURGER: Here you are!

WOLFF: That was an adventure! That part of my early life, I do remember, because it was so unusual. But at the time I just thought, "Well, this is the way life is." I didn't know any other way. Yet, it was exciting and different.

ALBURGER: So New York would have been a calming down experience.

WOLFF: Almost, yes. It was tough on my parents, because they arrived with nothing. We were in debt, just to pay for the tickets for the boat across. But, fortunately, they had friends, and my father was ready to go back to work as a publisher, and managed to do that within about six months of arriving. So he had an occupation, and then my normal life began, so to speak, with school in New York. And I was in school when I hooked up with John Cage.

ALBURGER: I was going to say, "How normal could your life have been after you met John Cage?!"

WOLFF: Yes! And it was not normal, because my parents had fairly heavy-duty friends. They had a really interesting circle of friends. Partly because of being publishers, they dealt with interesting people.

ALBURGER: They were publishers of literature?

WOLFF: Yes, actually also of some quasi-scholarly things. My parents worked very closely with authors, including people like Joseph Campbell and Alan Watts. Alan was someone I saw early on. The neighborhood was interesting, e.e. cummings lived around the corner, and I loved his poetry, so I got a chance to meet him through my parents.

ALBURGER: On what block did you live?

WOLFF: On Washington Square.

ALBURGER: In Greenwich Village.

WOLFF: And also around the corner... One day, there was a knock on the door, and this large man was there with a gift. My father opens the door, and this man says, "Je suis Varèse. Bien venue à New York." He had heard that these immigrants had come. His wife was a literary person. She was a translator, and so she must have known about my parents. Varèse had taken it upon himself to come over as a friendly European in exile, so to speak, and say "hello." I knew nothing at that time. It wasn't until a few years later that I learned and realized who he was, and I started talking to him. So he was the first big-time composer that I encountered.

ALBURGER: You encountered him, but you didn't get to know him right away.

WOLFF: No. I must have been eight by then. But, by the time I was perhaps 13, I had gotten on to the fact that this man was a very important composer.

ALBURGER: So you got to know Varèse a bit before you knew Cage.

WOLFF: Yes. He was my first.

ALBURGER: What was Varèse like as a person?

WOLFF: He was very impressive. He had a very impressive presence. He looked fantastic -- his leonine head.

ALBURGER: There's your literary side: his "leonine" head.

WOLFF: Well, I don't think I'm the first one to describe him that way. He was a little mysterious about his work. I kept trying to find out. I knew the earlier pieces. I don't think he had written anything for decades, or at least since the early 30's. He had these dreams of being able to work with electroacoustic equipment, which eventually happened.

ALBURGER: Right. I think it was '54 in *Déserts*.

WOLFF: So he was kind of treading water in a way.

ALBURGER: What did he do in the meantime?

WOLFF: I don't know! I don't think he did anything!

ALBURGER: He had the League of Composers.

WOLFF: I think all of that was finished. He was very active in that kind of work.

ALBURGER: Was he independently wealthy?

WOLFF: Not at all.

ALBURGER: He was independently poor?

WOLFF: I think his wife more or less supported him. That was my impression.

ALBURGER: Well, when you have that leonine look... That's what the lions do, anyway -- let the lionesses support them...

WOLFF: He had this extraordinary body of work, so people regularly went to see him. He had one student, and maybe a few others.

ALBURGER: Did your own musical inclinations start in Europe or America?

WOLFF: Oh, they started in America. My early years were so distracted. Among my parents' friends, apart from the literary ones, were musicians. My father was a friend of those in the circle of Rudolph Serkin. I would attend concerts with my parents, including house concerts. I wanted very much to play piano, so I started lessons eventually.

ALBURGER: Did you start writing your own music?

WOLFF: Not initially. At first I wanted to be a pianist. And I wanted to learn as much as possible about music. And I would get scores, especially of piano music that I couldn't necessarily play and just read through. And I went to a lot of concerts, particularly just the second halves, because I could sneak in free. So I spent a lot of time just educating myself. After a year of piano, I started writing at about 15. And my piano teacher said, "I know someone who might just be interested in what you're doing," and that was John Cage. And he said, "Come down and see me," and I did. He looked at what I brought him, and he seemed to like it. It was pretty quirky -- very strange music. There were various things, some of which he found less interesting. I think the ones he liked a lot were... I was into dissonance. Seriously. So that was a good start!

ALBURGER: So immediately you were doing fairly progressive work.

WOLFF: Yes. These friends of my parents would take us to Tanglewood. The Juilliard String Quartet had just formed, and they did one of the early performances of the complete cycle of Bartók quartets. And they did a concert at Tanglewood. Suddenly the veil was lifted, and I thought, "Yes! This is it!"

ALBURGER: That's quite Pauline, as in the apostle's conversion. I make that allusion since your first name is "Christian."

WOLFF: Yes, so I was affected by that, and eventually I sort of reinvented the 12-tone system for myself. What I did in these dissonant pieces would be that I would write counterpoint with very tight canons. I would give the lines to instruments in very similar registers or ranges. Basically the voices would come out as a series of clusters, in a mini version of Ligeti. This was 1949! So it was a funny thing for a kid to be doing. There was something else that pushed me. I had a context for this. Someone had given me a stash of the old New Music Publications of Henry Cowell. They were a mixed bag, but they had some very interesting things. There was music by John Cage, and it seemed very weird and bizarre.

ALBURGER: You were looking at it on the page.

WOLFF: Yes. There was Ives, there was Ruggles, there was Varèse. It was the first time that I saw the score to *Ionisation*. So I saw an alternative, musically. I thought, "Maybe I can get in on this, too."

ALBURGER: So you knew what you were doing. What were the names of these early pieces?

WOLFF: Someone did some research into my early pieces and came to me with a list of about 20 titles, most of which I didn't recognize. They actually are listed. The trouble is, the pieces are on a list somewhere and now I can't find it. My first pieces were mostly very short. That was my basic problem. I didn't know how to put a piece together. I knew how to get something started, but I didn't know how to go on from there.

ALBURGER: You were taking some of the New Viennese ideas on your own, and, in a sense, you were rediscovering Schoenberg's problem of how to extend a piece in a freely atonal language when there is no text.

WOLFF: The nearest I came to making a long piece was one on texts. Once the texts were gone, I was lost. John made structure crucial. He taught me about the rhythmic structures. That was the single most important thing I learned from John.

ALBURGER: What were your initial impressions of John?

WOLFF: Yes.... It's funny. It's hard... He was just who he was. Again, growing up in this rather specialized New York, I was used to unusual people. I took a lot for granted. John lived in this weird space, this hideous tenement building, except that his own apartment was absolutely immaculate and beautiful. But you'd run through -- his place was at the top of the building -- it was smelly, noisy.. It was on the Lower East Side, way, way down. The landlord was sleazy, and he let the place go to pieces. But it was very cheap, and the location was stunning. It's where Manhattan on the East Side bulges out, and you'd look down and see the Brooklyn Bridge.

ALBURGER: Was he living with Merce Cunningham?

WOLFF: No. In fact, Merce's place was above my piano teacher's place, and that's how she had gotten to know John, and they were all friends.

ALBURGER: Then, after meeting John, I assume soon after you got to know Earle Brown and Morton Feldman.

WOLFF: Yes. Morty first. John had just met Morty -- maybe a month before. They had both gone to hear the Webern *Symphony*, and been stunned by it. They both found themselves in the lobby afterwards (the concert hadn't ended), with dazed expressions and somehow recognized kindred souls and introduced each other. One of the things that Cage had me do.. He immediately found the music, and he and Morty had just started to analyze it, and he turned it over to me to finish the analysis of the first movement. So that was a project with him. But the actual instruction part of the relationship only lasted about five or six weeks, because he said essentially that he didn't think it was necessary. Cage felt the teaching was about learning discipline and learning about other musics, and that I seemed to be able to do that. But I continued to see him. We were approaching summer, and he said, "Well, come on down here." So I simply took to coming down about three or four times a week and we would talk. That was the most that I saw of him.

ALBURGER: And you were 19? 18? 17?

WOLFF: Oh, no. I was 15. 16. 17.

ALBURGER: You were his wunderkind.

WOLFF: I guess so! Yes. And then Earle came in '51. He had come, in fact, because of his wife, Carolyn Brown. They met John and David Tudor. Carolyn decided she had to work with Merce Cunningham in New York.

ALBURGER: So it was really when you were about 16 or so when the four of you -- John, Morty, Earle, and you -- were together.

WOLFF: Yes, and it didn't last that long, because I went off to Harvard.

ALBURGER: What would you consider your first mature piece?

WOLFF: I wrote a duo for two violins during this time. It may have been the first composition I presented John with.

ALBURGER: It was an extended piece.

WOLFF: Yes, about 6 minutes. It's two lines and it just has three pitches. Not pitch classes. Pitches!

ALBURGER: I imagine the reactions were as mixed as the notes.

WOLFF: I guess so. Mostly people didn't like it! Most people didn't like any of our work, so that's why we became a group. We supported each other. Of course, a lot of visual artists liked our work.

ALBURGER: The abstract pictorial artists, the composers.

WOLFF: Henry Cowell did a course at the New School on ethnomusicology, and John was a good friend of his. So he arranged to have one of my pieces done in class. And the reaction was, "There are only three notes in this piece." And Cowell would say, "You know, there's this tribe in Tierra del Fuego, and they have a music that only has one note, so consider yourself fortunate!"

ALBURGER: You were far away from your support group when you went to Harvard.

WOLFF: I had other support groups. Actually, quite early on -- 1956 -- I went away for a year, and stopped in Darmstadt, and there some kid stopped me and he said, "You're Christian Wolff, right?" "Yes." "Well, I'm going to see you. I'm going to be at Harvard," and that was Frederic Rzewski. So we hooked up during my first year of graduate school. And he had a very good friend there: David Behrman. David somehow managed to get himself named President of the Music Club at Harvard, which meant that he had total access to everything. So we just did concerts. Again people were outraged! I brought John up for a concert.

ALBURGER: During those years, are there other times that stand out?

WOLFF: I met Boulez also during these years -- fairly early on, actually in '51. My parents took me back to Europe for the first time, and John said, "If you're in Paris, you absolutely must look up Boulez." So I looked him up, and we had a very nice time.

ALBURGER: And you were how old?

WOLFF: I was 17. He introduced me to all his friends, and showed me his music, his ideas. He also said, "Why only three pitches?!" And my first response to that was a piano piece.

ALBURGER: So he didn't quite dig the three-note pieces either?

WOLFF: No, he thought I should move on. It wasn't that he didn't get it, but he was into hypercomplexity.

ALBURGER: He wanted to see the "structures."

WOLFF: So the next piano piece I wrote used all 88 notes! You want notes, I'll give you notes!

ALBURGER: How did that work out?

WOLFF: Well, you could see the rhythmic complexity. And the response to this richness in Boulez was a major factor in Cage's *Music of Changes*.

ALBURGER: So this richness was the next stage for you.

WOLFF: Yes.

ALBURGER: From the sublime to the ridi- -- or, rather, to the other sublime....

WOLFF: So back to Frederic and Harvard, we thought we were going to do a two-piano piece, which I was supposed to write. And it became clear that there was no way I could write and perform the complexity in the time which we had before the concert. This was a critical piece for me. We thought about this for a long time, then we came up with the idea of, "Why don't we try this?" First we'd make these time spaces, say two seconds. And we'd have some pitch material which would happen in this space, but we would decide ourselves what it would be. We wouldn't write it out. At first it was quasi-improvised. And we really enjoyed doing this. Basically, these were simply time frames, which were based on a rhythmic structure. Each of us had mostly the same material, but not at the same time. We just had a blast doing that. We found that we didn't have much time to decide. And as one was doing material, so was the other. Inevitably, it was fun. That's when I stumbled upon the notion that coordination was a critical factor. I wasn't interested in doing this to produce notes on paper, as opposed to John at the time, where once he had the notes on paper --

ALBURGER: While John's music is indeterminate, it usually isn't improvisational.

WOLFF: With few exceptions, improvisation was usually not something he wanted, with its connection with jazz. But I was still fairly interested in the possibility of things being fairly undecided until the instant it is played.

ALBURGER: There's that on the edge quality again.

WOLFF: Yes. And here I stumbled upon it.

ALBURGER: And part of your discovery was because of practicality.

WOLFF: Exactly. And the extraordinary good fortune of having another musician who was equally interested. That's been my luck all through life. John, Frederic.

ALBURGER: Fine associations.

WOLFF: And probably the next most important was Cornelius Cardew, whom I first met in 1960, and then saw a lot of in 1967-68 when I was in London during a sabbatical from Harvard.

ALBURGER: He had established the Scratch Orchestra by this point?

WOLFF: No, he started it at the end of the year that I was there. The main thing he was doing at that point was working on *The Great Learning*, which came to be associated with the Scratch Orchestra. And he was doing very interesting work with instructions. And this was crucial, that he was working with an improvisation group. I took to that like a duck to water. He worked with scenarios, generic instructions, ranges of possibilities, and the idea that everyone could do things together.

ALBURGER: How did you initially meet Cornelius?

WOLFF: In 1960 I was in the U.S. Army, stationed in Germany. Cornelius was in Cologne, as Stockhausen's assistant, but he was equally devoted to Cage. There was a concert of Cage's *Cartridge Music* and Nam June Paik's music. I happened to be in town. The band for *Cartridge Music* -- I don't remember them all -- [Imagining and gesturing] But there was David Tudor, there was John, there was Cornelius, there was myself, there was Mauricio Kagel. And there was Nam June Paik, who did a piece of his own, which was a very scary piece -- a performance piece, in which he suddenly appeared with this huge pair of scissors and headed for John Cage in the first row of this small space. John was just terrified! What I liked best about that piece, though, was the ending, when suddenly Nam June Paik wasn't there, and this phone rings!

ALBURGER: Sounds like the 60's.

WOLFF: By the late 60's a lot of the same people seemed to be moving in new directions. In my case, I thought my music was becoming too esoteric. I started moving back to material that more people would have thought of as "music."

ALBURGER: Away from the apocryphal *Turandot* characters, Plink, Plank, and Plunk?

WOLFF: Eventually. I was concerned how to connect my music to social concerns. I started writing music again with only notes and a text. But how do you connect music with social concerns and esthetics?

ALBURGER: Cardew --

WOLFF: Cardew took an extreme approach. He disowned his old music and also his old associates -- Stockhausen and Cage. He took a really hard line, that it was all "degenerate bourgeois music," that you should get rid of it, and that it was time to write music for the people. Which is, of course, easier said than done.

ALBURGER: And do the people accept this music?

WOLFF: Exactly. It was very interesting and important. He did one thing that was completely consistent in that he formed a band, which mostly did traditional political songs, and occasionally he would write a new one. You have to make sure you do it well.

ALBURGER: You can't hide behind, "Well, this is art, and you don't understand."

WOLFF: Or "This is politics, so the art doesn't matter" -- that's the other side.

ALBURGER: Did he go backwards?

WOLFF: No, he was much too good a musician to do that. It's true, some of his efforts -- he tried to write a quasi-rock song that I'll have to confess was not a success. I didn't like that. You have to be good at that stuff. You can't wing it. He also thought he could get at audiences that related to more bourgeois classical music by writing in a late 19th-century romantic style, which he did, and a lot of people dismissed the work as gross pastiche. I didn't think so, because it was Cardew. It had late romantic gestures, but... because he was a very good composer, somehow there was always something very unusual, and it wouldn't have been music that you would have heard in the late 19th-century, and I never had a problem with it. Some of it was very powerful.

ALBURGER: Even more than the 88 piece?

ALBURGER: Are you working with the same basic concerns to the present day?

WOLFF: Well, I keep changing! I've also dealt with folk music, but always politically connected.

ALBURGER: Dealing with found music.

WOLFF: Yes, but often, aside from the title, without listeners being aware of the source of the material

ALBURGER: So folk music as sound source.

WOLFF: Yes, but the text is still relevant. And I'm still doing similar work.

ALBURGER: Now that you are retired....

WOLFF: I've been moving in that direction from teaching for six or seven years. But still I'm lucky to make three or four pieces a year.

ALBURGER: What are you working on at present?

WOLFF: I just finished a percussion ensemble piece.

ALBURGER: Back to those Cageian roots.

# Max Exposure: An Interview with Peter Maxwell Davies

DAVID BÜNDLER

Sir Peter Maxwell Davies has published over two hundred works in every medium, many of which are continually performed all over the world. He was born in 1934 in Salford (now part of Greater Manchester). He lives in the Orkney Islands off the north coast of Scotland where he writes most of his music. He first visited Orkney in 1970, and the following year he settled in Rackwick Valley on the island of Hoy. His major theatrical works include the operas *Taverner*, *Resurrection*, *The Lighthouse*, and *The Doctor of Myddfai*; the full-length ballets *Salome* and *Caroline Mathilde*; and the music-theatre works *Eight Songs for a Mad King* and *Miss Donnithorne's Maggot*. His numerous orchestral works include concerti; light orchestral works, including *An Orkney Wedding, with Sunrise* and *Mavis in Las Vegas*; large-scale works for chorus, including the oratorio *Job*; and a number of symphonies. He is the Associate Conductor / Composer of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in London, the Composer/Conductor of the BBC Philharmonic in Manchester, and the Composer Laureate of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. He guest-conducts orchestras both in Europe and in the United States and has thirty-six compact discs entirely devoted to his music. Recent commissions have included *Concerto for Horn* for the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and his *Symphony No. 7* for the BBC Philharmonic and *Symphony No. 8 (Antarctica)* for the Philharmonia Orchestra, as well as the on-going narrative of orchestral works entitled *Sails in Saint Magnus* for the BBC Philharmonic, and a series of ten string quartets.

The following interview was a backgrounder for a feature article in advance of Los Angeles area performances of two of his works -- his *Violin Concerto*, performed by Isaac Stern and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the *Little String Quartet No. 2*, performed by the Alexander Quartet at a Coleman Chamber Concert in Pasadena.

BÜNDLER: Let me ask you about the *Violin Concerto* that is going to be performed here (in Los Angeles) by Isaac Stern. What can you tell me about it?

DAVIES: Well, for a start, I wrote it for Isaac so it's, I hope, a warm and lyrical piece. Also, I don't know if you know that I live in Orkney in the north of Scotland -

BÜNDLER: Oh yes, that's well known!

DAVIES: - which has got a very strong folk fiddle tradition, and the piece has got quite a lot of folk fiddle elements in it from that particular region of Scotland. It's the kind of thing you hear when you go to a pub there, you know, where there's a fiddle playing dance tunes. It's got a lot of that in it, particularly the tune in the slow movement. It could be a kind of folk tune although it isn't.

BÜNDLER: So you would say that this is actually a very listenable piece for your lay audience that might not be familiar with your earlier output.

DAVIES: Well, I think it probably is. They played it for a performance at the festival in Orkney, and I think people did enjoy it very much. And I just conducted a series of performances of it myself with an orchestra in Holland with (Ernst) Kovacic, the player from Vienna, and I think people really said oh yes, they enjoyed that -- that was fine.

BÜNDLER: Was that your first venture in the concerto form?

DAVIES: That was my first.

BÜNDLER: And now I understand you're going to write ten more.

DAVIES: Well, that's absolutely right. I think that I got bitten by the concerto bug. I got this offer from the Strathclyde region -- that's the Glasgow region of Scotland -- and they said, "Would you like to write some concertos for the principals of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra?" -- which I have a connection with anyway. And I said, "You bet!"

BÜNDLER: Have you written the first one yet?

DAVIES: I've actually written two of them!

BÜNDLER: You've written two. What, the oboe and?

DAVIES: One for oboe and one for the principal cellist.

BÜNDLER: Are these classical forms something of an oddball for you to come to -- writing symphonies as you've been doing for about the last 10 or 15 years -- and now concertos?



DAVIES: It's not something that I wouldn't have liked to have done before. I've always felt I didn't have the necessary technique to be able to control that kind of form. It's only the last 10 to 15 years, exactly as you put it, that I've had the confidence to think that, well yes, perhaps I can manage to say something with that very disciplined kind of formal thinking that the name symphony or concerto conjures up. One could write something and call it a symphony or concerto and it wouldn't have the discipline of form, and I don't think that would be anything but a cop-out! So I really do feel that this is something which can't help but be a challenge to a composer and a very worthwhile one, you see, if he's prepared to direct himself to the necessary compositional discipline.

BÜNDLER: It seems that you have a scholastic discipline that compels you to keep to traditional form. Are you making a concerted effort to stay within the constraints of, say, a Haydn or Beethoven?

DAVIES: Oh, not at all. I think it's a question of perhaps understanding what they did and why those forms worked for them and applying elements out of their discipline to the situation that I find myself in. I think I can illustrate this by saying that I'm not all that good at writing development sections, and one could say that development is one of the -- perhaps the most essential element in symphonic thinking. Perhaps some people would even define symphonic thinking as the capacity of being able to think of developmental treatment for the material which you state. And while I would agree with that, I think that I've perhaps sidestepped any problem by subjecting the material to transformation processes rather than developmental processes. I think of many instances, particularly, as I want to use very often textures in orchestration and the art of working with phrase shapes and so on in the small form, *kleineform* -- actually, I think these things in German as one's spoken in German all one's life -- I think that those things, they show perhaps that yes, one is taking classical forms as a springboard but doing something which I hope is relevant to my own situation and to the situation of our time rather than doing any kind of neo-neo-classicism. I think that would be very boring.

BÜNDLER: Let me ask you about some of those transformational techniques. You have used a technique using magic squares. Can you shed a little bit of light on that?

DAVIES: Well, you know that when you put numbers down in a certain order, say, 1 through to 81 and you arrange the numbers in a sort of order -- in certain permutations of 9 -- that if you go through those numbers and around the squares, they add up to the same number. If you write them down in a big square of 9 by 9, the squares (individual squares with a single number per square) will add up -- if you add all the numbers up -- to a number which is mathematically consistent throughout. Also diagonally and sometimes in other ways, too. If you use those old traditional magic squares -- and I'm thinking of one that I've just been using -- and you use that consistently, it gives certain symmetries because number patterns recur. It takes care of things like currents of notes. A phrase will balance itself. The notes will recur at a transition, and it's a very useful basis, a framework upon which to hang one's ideas. One thing I would like to point out, though, is that I don't sit there with a chart of paper in front of me working music with that. You learn the thing so that you can carry it around in your head; otherwise it would be tedious, I think, and a bit of a cop out. And that probably means that I sometimes make mistakes, which anybody really shouldn't doubt. It's really an aid to composition and an aid in one's structure work and symmetries -- both rhythmically and as far as the intervals go. It's not for the ornamental.

BÜNDLER: I guess I don't quite see how it works as a pitch device, but then one doesn't really need to understand it.

DAVIES: I really don't think that one needs to understand, for instance, in the Bach Little E minor Invention in Two Parts, the thing is a pyramid shape symbolizing the holy Trinity, so you can enjoy it as an exercise on your clavichord or your harpsichord without that.

BÜNDLER: One more question about magic squares. Does it bring a little mysticism to your music or is it purely a mathematical device?

DAVIES: I think it's probably both. But I think, too, one has to remember that numbers -- one, two, three, four and so on up to probably nine, but certainly the first four -- when they were originally used, I doubt whether they were used so much for counting as for their quality. I mean their almost religious quality. To actually count is already a magic thing. And numbers and certainly magic squares, they have got enormous magic quality and I think I'm very conscious of the magic of numbers. Although this does tend to become very debased when one counts one's change at the supermarket, but when you actually begin to think about the primary numbers and their application in computer techniques, then it again becomes magic.

BÜNDLER: Let me ask you about another work that we're going to hear locally in about a week or so. The Alexander Quartet is bringing the *Little String Quartet No. 2*. There's a little story about that, I hear, as to how that came about.

DAVIES: Well, this was asked for by Hans Henze for his festival at Montepulciano in Italy. I wrote this piece -- its first version -- and copied it all out and I kept the sketch, and actually, because it was very, very urgent -- in Orkney, of course, on the island there is no access to anything like a copying machine -- I sent the manuscript, which promptly disappeared in the Italian post. So there was no performance of it there. Meantime, I somehow mislaid my sketches and they came to light again and I worked them over and made this particular piece. I did that quite recently.

BÜNDLER: The piece that was lost was the *Little String Quartet No. 1*, I presume?

DAVIES: No. I've got the numbers mixed up now. I can't remember which is which. I wrote another one, and I can't remember which eventually Boosey & Hawkes called No. 1 or No. 2. (Laughs). I'm not sure it makes any difference. I knew once.

BÜNDLER: But this is the one that was lost in the post.

DAVIES: Yeah.

BÜNDLER: Early music figures very prominently in the large body of your works. Why is that?

DAVIES: I've always very been very interested. Even in student days, I used to go along to the cathedral in Manchester in Lancashire where I was studying, where they've got a very nice medieval cathedral. They had a very good music director there in Alan Wicks, who's now at Canterbury in the south of England. He used to do medieval music, and I really became hooked on this. It was quite, quite fascinating to go to the university and chase after the published editions that I could find, particularly the big complete Oxford publication of Tudor English music. I became very, very hooked on that. Particularly, I remember borrowing for ages and ages the complete church music of John Taverner.

BÜNDLER: Who has figured quite large in your work.

DAVIES: He eventually did. Yes. Ever since then, I have really been quite fascinated by that. Still am to the extent -- which I did just recently -- of actually digging out some plainsong manuscripts, of which I didn't know the origin. They turned out to have come from Portugal in the 15th century, and comparing the plainsongs from there with the standard ones from the *Liber Usualis*, I noted the differences and wrote a piece using the differences.

BÜNDLER: Would you say that early music was the major driving force or basis for your compositional creativity?

DAVIES: No, no. I think it's one of them. It's not the main one.

BÜNDLER: Let me ask you about the Fires of London. The Fires have now ceased to be an entity. Was that a difficult decision to disband?

DAVIES: Yes it was. It was extremely difficult. You know how things run in this country -- you don't get government subsidies for new music and there's precious little chance of getting much private money to help you out. And I found I was losing so much money that it became too much of liability. I was bankrupting myself. And I thought, "Well, this is nonsense."

BÜNDLER: So it was really a practical decision that brought about the end of the Fires.

DAVIES: Yes. Particularly as we had done some pretty ambitious productions and into these, I'd had to pump quite a lot of money. And especially as in Germany and Scandinavia and so on, these pieces are put on by the opera houses now and they're doing the rounds and doing quite nicely, I thought, well perhaps this has also -- as well as eating up my private money coming in from whatever royalties I get - outlived its function. Never mind Britain where things don't get done, but in Europe they do.

BÜNDLER: Let me ask you about Orkney. What's the place like?

DAVIES: Well, you probably know that it's a windswept group of islands off the north of Scotland. Pretty barren. Pretty remote. It has a long tradition of being rather independent from Scotland, together with Shetland, because it was a Norse colony, an old one belonging to Norway until the late 1400's. And then it became Scottish and then it came under the jurisdiction of Westminster in London. But they're still very independent. It's got many cultural features of its own and a very good literary tradition of storytelling and more recently, of actually producing novelists and poets like Eric Linklater, George Mackay Brown, Robert Rendall. Quite a few of them. And also, it's got quite a good folk music tradition as far as fiddle playing goes. Most importantly of all for me, 'twas a place which had an extraordinary kind of magic that was silent. One could hear nature. One could hear the heather rustle. One could hear the waves from the sea. And you didn't have engine noise. The house that I have is way away from any road. It's inconvenient in that you have to carry everything a mile on your back along a track. You can't even get a bike up it. I like it up there in that it is remote and it has this extraordinary magic in what you hear -- the sounds of nature -- and in the light, which is always quite extraordinary as I have it on a cliff overlooking south. I think the next land west is the coast of America. It does have that extraordinary kind of magic; I think it is as magic a place as you'll find in the whole of Great Britain.

BÜNDLER: And that's where you do all of your writing.

DAVIES: That's where I do my writing, and of course, I did -- with the festival there -- become very involved with the local community.

BÜNDLER: How big is the local community?

DAVIES: Where I am on Hoy -- the community there in the north part of the island, which is separated by about 25 miles from the other end of the island, and they hardly speak to each other -- there are 30 people. On the mainland of Orkney -- that's the largest island, which is a half hour boat ride away -- there must be... Well, there are two towns. There's Kirkwall, which has about thousand people and Stromness, which must have about 3000 now. Those are the two towns, and there are some villages.

BÜNDLER: But your community only has 30 people?

DAVIES: Yes. And in the part where I am, which is completely stuck on a limb all on its own on the end of a long road of about five miles, there are one... two... three... four... five... six including me.

BÜNDLER: That's remarkable. That doesn't seem to jibe with the life of the jet-setting conductor and composer.

DAVIES: That's right. Well, it's a sort of frantic time. I'm not all that jet-setting anyway, but when I come to London, I've got this little flat there. It's a springboard for traveling about like in one day's time, I go to Israel conducting with the Jerusalem Orchestra and then to Los Angeles and back -- and then to Orkney and then I've got some recordings to do Glasgow and, I think, Zürich -- I can't remember. But so it goes on. And then I have a period of a few months where I am in Hoy and I am writing music.

BÜNDLER: How much time do you spend in Orkney?

DAVIES: Normally about six months of the year.

BÜNDLER: Let me ask you about your life as a conductor. A symphony conductor.

DAVIES: Well, I'm laughing because this is all by accident. I've got no ambitions as a conductor, really, except that having done it, I do sometimes quite enjoy it. I conducted the Fires of London, but (once) James Conlon couldn't do a date with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, so I took it over like at a minute's notice. He had some -- I don't know -- emergency came up and I was just doing something of my own -- a recording it was. That's right! A recording of a piece of my own. So I did that. And they said, "Well, would you do some more?" so I did a bit more. And then it turned out that somebody couldn't conduct a concert, so I did some Mozart. And then somebody else couldn't conduct in Orkney, so I did the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in a concert with Beethoven's *Seventh Symphony* among other things - again, always doing it at a few days notice. And then just quite recently, at the Edinburgh festival, somebody fell out of doing a concert with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. So I found myself doing the "*Eroica*" *Symphony*. It seemed to go very well, some I'm getting asked to do the "*Eroica*" *Symphony* and various other things quite a lot.

BÜNDLER: Including here in Los Angeles, we'll get to hear your "*Eroica*," I guess.

DAVIES: (Laughs). Well it all makes me laugh because it's all by accident, but I must say it's very enjoyable.

BÜNDLER: I see. I thought you were following in the footsteps of Pierre Boulez.

DAVIES: I've got no such ambition. I do a bit of it because I enjoy it, but more than that, I don't want to. I must keep those six months of writing music because that's primely what I'm about.

BÜNDLER: Does the conducting bring anything to your composition, to your growth as a composer?

DAVIES: I think it does. I think it's very essential for a composer to interact with musicians. I always did have that working with the Fires of London and working with conductors, with other orchestras and opera houses or whatever. But actually doing it yourself, I realized pretty late in life, it's a very, very constructive thing. You hear all sorts of things. You've got a responsibility. It teaches you. It's the best composition lesson ever. I remember a few months ago when I found myself conducting a Mozart symphony for the first time in my life -- it was the "*Prague*" *Symphony*. In one of the performances -- it was the second movement -- I thought, "My goodness! This is actually as if I'm composing this as I go along." One had that illusion at the moment, and I found myself listening to this piece in a way that I'd never done before. I think it was the best composition lesson I ever had -- that particular performance.

BÜNDLER: That's very insightful. You've been conducting for a number of years now?

DAVIES: That's right. Yes.

BÜNDLER: Well, I think our time is up. I want to let you get on to your next engagement.

DAVIES: Oh, I've got no engagements today. Don't worry. I'm just sitting here -- I'm doing the "*Jupiter*" *Symphony* next week -- I'm just sitting here with the score of that. I'm enjoying it.

# A Tribute to Lucia Dlugoszewski

MIKE SILVERTON

Lucia Dlugoszewski, a splendid composer, died on April 11, 2000.

Who could have anticipated that a presence so disarmingly childlike, so flat-out ebullient, would so suddenly depart like any frail mortal.

One telephoned Lucy at the peril of one's composure. If the lady was out or occupied, her voicemail greeting, a prose poem that went on, it seemed, for weeks, drove one up and over the wall; the longest-running of these was a contemplation of the morning sky one day in early spring. Lucy could not be convinced that the telephone is a transactional device, not a further art opportunity. In her peculiarly pliant way, she'd say, yes, yes, I understand, you're right of course, and nothing changed. Lucy as the very model of a guileless, self-directed bohemian. Lucy's brio and naïveté was not of the cool Now but rather of an earlier generation or two. She was the sort of creative presence who, disregardful of impression, did, dressed, and behaved exactly as she pleased. Lucy was, alas, her own fashion consultant and, hoorah, her own aesthetician, as the best of all possible choices. She stands as a pinnacle of romantic-modernist sensibility, with its fierce devotion to the expressive self and, in Lucy's distinctive case, to pure abstraction. If one was not unique, one was nothing.

One admires Lucia Dlugoszewski for the brilliant individuality of her music, but equally -- perhaps by the same token -- for her indifference to broad public acceptance. If much present-day music addresses a failure of nerve, then Lucia Dlugoszewski serves as the measure against which accommodation shrinks.

If anything appears to guide Lucia Dlugoszewski's work, it's the sense of a standard she set for herself and no one else. Genius and contrariness can be opposite sides of the same coin.

Yet a question pervades her place in music. Why is Lucia Dlugoszewski not better known? While David Tudor, Earle Brown, and Christian Wolff's names will likely elicit recognition, Lucia Dlugoszewski's will likely not.

As a young, ambitious transplant (she was born in Detroit in 1931 or 1934 -- the references disagree), Lucy secured the approval of New York's avant-garde, albeit in a tangential and ultimately unfulfilling way. Frank O'Hara, Robert Motherwell, Ad Reinhardt, and John Ashbery were among her early supporters. The sculptor David Smith and painter Herman Cherry arranged for the composer's first New York appearance, in 1958, at -- of all places! -- the Five Spot Cafe, an important jazz venue. Composer-critic Virgil Thomson spoke of Dlugoszewski's art in terms of its "great delicacy, originality and beauty of sound [of an] unusually high level,

with intellectual and poetic aspects": an encapsulation that defies embellishment. Absent from this glittering circle are John Cage (whose approval Lucy sought but never secured) and, as perhaps an *éminence grise*, Morton Feldman. As she tells the story, Feldman turned Cage from the sort of approbation Lucy deemed significant to her career. Cage's withholding of approval may have had a legitimate foundation, at least in part, and may have had something to do with antipathy or perhaps even jealousy on Feldman's part. As a defense of indifference (not to mention an untoward display of fair-mindedness), Lucy surmised that Cage and Feldman judged her music's metaphysics too distant from the compositional systems that in effect bonded the figures of the New York School's music wing. It's a question perhaps of irreconcilable differences. One only has to listen. Lucy's art is as intuitive and constraint-free as her titles are hermetic.

On the one hand, then, she experienced disapproval of a philosophical or procedural nature, personal disdain, and jealousy, perhaps. On the other, there was an inexhaustibly loving bond with dancer-choreographer Erick Hawkins. She could not say enough about this relationship, but in similar wise to her reticence regarding Cage and Feldman, Lucy waxed vague about a most puzzling aspect of her marriage: that it remained secret for a number of years. It is clear, however, that under the dance company's aegis, Lucy required nobody's approval. This was her show.

In a sense, by immersing herself in a dance company, Lucia Dlugoszewski withdrew her name from consideration for an exquisitely specialized new-music pantheon (which, in the best of days, receives remarkably little attention anyway). After Hawkins' death, Lucy applied herself more deeply still to every aspect of the company's operation, including fund raising.

Lucy could not be urged, cajoled, or bullied away from such concerns. Yes, she'd say, you're right, I need to return to my music. Again that easy assent. Whether she completed the commission is an open question, since Lucy's time was in large measure consumed as Hawkins's surrogate choreographer. Her teaching role gave her great pleasure

In a sadly unsettled state of affairs, a forthcoming CRI release will serve as an invaluable addition to a remarkably skimpy discography. A two-disc mixed program on Vox Box CDX 5144 features Joel Thome's Orchestra of our Time in a wonderfully rewarding performance of the piece that earned her the Koussevitsky International Recording Award, *Fire Fragile Flight*, no less well produced in 1978 by Marc Aubort and Joanna Nickrenz's Elite Recordings, Inc. A live, somewhat scrappily recorded *Duende Quidditas* for bass trombone and timbre piano, Lucy performing, occupies a mixed-program entitled *David Taylor Bass Trombone*, New World Records 80494-2.

# Concert Reviews

## Collage of Artistry

### DAVID CLEARY

Collage New Music. November 7, C. Walsh Theatre, Suffolk University, Boston, MA.

In this listener's experience, it is not uncommon to encounter new music ensembles that exhibit a stylistic bias in the works they program. Finding, for example, a roughly equal number of recently-written tonal and non-tonal pieces on a concert presented by organizations of this type is unusual. The most recent Collage ensemble concert was just such a rare occurrence.

Both of the tonal works appeared on this evening's first half. *Berceuse* (1999), an attractive enough curtain-raiser, was the last piece completed by Donald Sur before his death earlier this year. This violin/piano duo's added-note triadic idiom and soothingly ecstatic feel strongly suggest Ravel and Messiaen. Violinist Ronan Lefkowitz and pianist Christopher Oldfather gave it a sensitive, nicely-nuanced presentation. Charles Fussell's *Goethe-Lieder* (1987-88) exists in scorings for voice with piano, orchestral, or chamber group accompaniment, and the last of these versions was presented this evening. The composition's language is triadic (if less obviously so than the Sur), at times mildly suggestive of Mahler. But this is no style study -- this first-rate piece speaks in a compellingly personal manner. Scoring and pacing in this large work are masterful, and text setting (in German) is flawless. Best of all, the wide range of moods here is bound together in service to a larger overall Romantic fervor. Soprano Janet Brown's performance was warm and understated without being mushy or wan. Conductor David Hoose coaxed wonderfully responsive playing from the accompanying ensemble.

The concert's post-intermission portion consisted of two fine atonal entities. *Eccentric Melody* (1998), by Oliver Knussen, is a brief solo selection written to celebrate Elliott Carter's 90th birthday. Melodic material here is highly disjunct, yet logically arranged. The composition's declamatory means of expression and colorful cello writing make for delightful listening. Joel Moerschel performed it excellently. As its title suggests, Carter's *Triple Duo* (1982) splits its Pierrot-and-percussion sextet into three paired entities. Despite this, the work never seems confused or schismatic -- in fact, this is one of Carter's most charming, engaging listens from this period. The three duo units exhibit not only obvious differences but also enough subtle kinships to make the work's discourse a coherent one. Instrumental writing is vibrant; local pacing and large-scale structure are top-notch. This reviewer, listening with score in hand, is happy to report that Hoose directed a performance nicely blending accuracy and insight.

Also presented was Narah Chung's piano trio *Korea* (1999), one of two winners of Collage's composition contest for high schoolers. The work, displaying an exuberant plethora of influences and some high-spirited risk-taking, suggests good things ahead for its creator.

Style agendas -- who needs them? This concert made a most convincing case for being a musical omnivore.

## Extension Chords

### DAVID CLEARY

Extension Works. November 12, First and Second Church, Boston, MA.

The literature for string quartet is deep, varied, and substantial, containing some of the important cornerstones of Western music. Remove one violin from this grouping and the gamut of pieces plummets drastically; only works by Beethoven, Mozart, and Schoenberg can be considered standard string trio repertoire. The November 12 Extension Works concert was devoted to music for this less-encountered configuration.

*Barcarolle* (1999) by Marti Epstein is one of this composer's finest works. The piece, a clever series of variants on a rocking eight-beat opening phrase, manages to transfigure its basic idea in astonishingly varied ways. Its sound world, lustrous and delicate, is enormously appealing. But the piece's beauty is not skin-deep; the phrase units employed gradually shrink and become more repetitive until work's end, when the figure is only five beats long and has settled into a gentle, fading ostinato. The long-range formal effect is magical.

Robert Carl's *Open* (1998) also possesses first-class structural virtues. The composition's three movements roughly exhibit a palindromic use of material, with its phoenix-from-the-ashes final melody being a logical outgrowth from the opening snippets. Triadic passages, slow-moving glissandi, and dissonant fragments complement each other surprisingly well, never sounding haphazard. This is strong, ambitious stuff, nicely leavened with a touch of quirkiness. It also showed oblique kinship to Alfred Schnittke's *String Trio* (1985), a piece which by rights should be an ineffective mess. The harmonic language veers capriciously from tonality to atonality, formal considerations appear arbitrary, and contrasts border on the perverse. Somehow, the work's melodic thriftiness, energetic and memorable discourse, and almost desperate hyper-Romantic gestural world bind the composition together and make for riveting listening.

The Adaskian String Trio performed excellently, exhibiting flawless intonation and a full, smoothly blended, unforced tone (except in the Schnittke, where their utilization of a heavier, more forceful approach proved ideal). These qualities were evident not only in the above-mentioned works, but also in their renditions of Sergei Taneyev's unfinished *Trio in B Minor* and a J.S. Bach encore. Hearty bravos go to this stellar ensemble and its astute presenting organization for showing that three string players can be every bit as viable as four.

## Merrill Recital Bullish on Rolf Schulte

### DAVID CLEARY

The Merrill Recital: Rolf Schulte, Violin. November 18, John Knowles Paine Concert Hall, Harvard University, Boston, MA.

Being *sui generis* invites notoriety, though by itself does not guarantee quality work; compare the excellence of Charles Ives' best music with the eccentricity of Luigi Russolo's. Rolf Schulte's performing approach and technique, while unlike that of any contemporary violinist, work wondrously well. This ambitious recital presented a wide-ranging cross section of this century's music.

Elliott Carter was represented by two late-period pieces, including the world premiere of *Fantasy—Remembering Roger* (1999). Written in homage to Roger Sessions, this stunning, virtuosic *tour-de-force* consists mainly of outsized, at times violently intense cadenza-like material which gets interrupted periodically by more sedate figures centered around special effects (thrown bow, left hand pizzicato, harmonics). It's a hugely impressive listen. In comparison, *Riconoscenza per Goffredo Petrassi* (1984) seems positively laid-back. This fine composition deftly intermingles lyric and hammered figures with still, long-held double stops.

Stefan Wolpe's *Second Piece for Violin Alone* (1966) is nowhere near as nondescript as its title. The work nicely alternates puckish, fractured sections with somewhat more lyric ones, yoking them in service to a larger, solid formal sense. *Fantasy* (1967) written by a then nineteen-year-old Steven Gerber, belies no trace of callowness. This is a brief, but commanding entity that handles its material confidently. Earl Kim's *Caprices* (1980), seven of which were performed this evening, show kinship to more traditional violin literature. These highly idiomatic, etude-like character pieces are evocative, worthy listens.

Schulte's playing is wonderfully imaginative and highly effective. His intonation, even in the *Riconoscenza*'s stark double-stop passages, is excellent, and his technique is clean and secure. Schulte employs a tight, fast vibrato that goes well with music of this century. His tone is not plush or round as is often the case with fiddle virtuosos -- rather, it is lean, focused, and sturdy. Most unusual of all is the bow technique used; Schulte grasps his bow approximately one-quarter up the stick, not near the frog as most modern-day players do. Among other things, this unorthodox hand placement allows him to exercise a remarkable level of control over bow strokes -- and surprisingly, long-held notes do not seem to suffer in the process.

His interpretations of the more traditional numbers on this program were both novel and right. An elegant, ethereal rendition of the "Melodia" movement from Béla Bartók's *Sonata for Violin Solo* (1944) proved most effective. *Elegie* (1944), the first of four Igor Stravinsky works presented, was given in a reserved, unsentimental manner -- and was all the more touching for it. *Duo Concertante* (1931-32) is a vintage slice of neoclassicism; the performance, while as dry as a good martini, was never unmusical. Two movements from *Le Rossignol* (1909/14, 32) as arranged by Samuel Dushkin were presented so as to emphasize the arcane weirdness of this music, while a selection from *Apollo* (1928, given as an encore) showed that Schulte can play an expressive tune with the best in the business. Pianist Christopher Oldfather joined the violinist in the last three numbers and proved to be a sensitive, supportive collaborator.

Kudos to Schulte for being unique in the very best sense of the word.

## Death Comes to the Family

### JAMES L. PAULK

William Mayer's *A Death in the Family* (libretto by the composer, after the novel by James Agee and the play by Tad Mosel [*All the Way Home*], conducted by David Gilbert, directed by Rhoda Levine, with Brian Dore, Tova Dodge, Corey Levinson, and Aaron Odom. December 10, Manhattan School of Music, New York, NY.

*A Death in the Family* had its premiere in 1983 at Minnesota Opera, and was performed by the Opera Theater of St. Louis in 1986, but this performance, at the Manhattan School of Music, is the first time it has been staged in New York (piano excerpts were performed at the National Opera Association convention here a year ago). It is an effective work, but also an interesting one in terms of the ongoing discussion about the direction of new opera today. It sometimes seems that opera audiences just want really good plays with some mood music: easy, nostalgic scores, not too fancy, nothing that might get in the way of the play. Such works do seem to have a considerable following. Not everyone succumbs to this pattern, and there have been some fascinating total digressions in the past few years. But some composers have managed to compromise, meeting the audience halfway. William Bolcom, whose *A View From the Bridge* was recently performed in Chicago, is certainly one, and Mayer is another. These composers have started with really great plays, something the audience seems to crave, but their scores, even if they look backwards, have insisted on a level of musical ingenuity that gives these works a wholly different balance. In each case, it might be possible to focus on the play and treat the score as background music (for that matter, I suppose it might be possible to do this at Verdi's *Otello*), but these are interesting and eclectic scores which permit a more complicated and ultimately more rewarding evening. To me, an opera isn't successful unless I find myself immersed in the music as well as the words, and on these terms, both of these works succeed. Like Bolcom, Mayer's score is eclectic and thoroughly lyrical, but while Bolcom is obsessed with mid-century pop music and jazz, Mayer hews more to a distinctly American folk sound, not unlike Barber or Copland at times, but with interesting diversions, a lot of dry modernity, sound effects, and a brief foray into electronic music (it was harmless, but seemed a bit self-conscious in this setting).

Mayer's libretto, drawn from James Agee's Pulitzer-winning novel as well as from Tad Mosel's play based on the novel, chronicles a family in 1915 Knoxville as it deals with the alcoholism of a young father, the tensions between him and his devoutly religious wife, and the aftermath of his death from a car wreck. This is not the most promisingly operatic of texts. It's slow moving and gentle, without the high drama we expect in the opera house. Sometimes there is an awkwardness when utterly normal conversations find a way of turning into song. And there are moments which seem ridiculous, as when a group of white southerners breaks into a black spiritual. But there is also a lot of richly poetic language in the libretto, and Mayer's score is sufficient to redeem the rest.

This is a work which runs the risk of being bland, and it needs the charisma of great singers to bring it to life. Dawn Upshaw starred as Mary, the wife, in the St. Louis production, and someone of her stature is desperately needed here. Manhattan School of Music is unrivaled as a champion of new operas, and does a stunning job bringing them to life, but this opera seems to beg for more. Still, the young cast was thoroughly professional, and the orchestra, under David Gilbert, was generally fine. Rhoda Levine's production was a marvel of simplicity and wit; she gets more bang for the buck than anyone I know. Mayer's fans, including this one, were absolutely elated to see this opera finally staged in New York. Third productions are rare and important, and this is an opera that deserves to keep moving.

## Songs with Words

### MICHAEL MCDONAGH

Pianist Eliane Lust performs Frederic Rzewski's *Melodramas for a Speaking Pianist*. April 28, Old First Presbyterian Church, San Francisco, CA.

Eliane Lust's recital on April 28 at Old First Presbyterian Church featured Frederic Rzewski's *Melodramas for Speaking Pianist*, commissioned by the performer. Rzewski (b. 1938, Massachusetts) -- as both composer and pianist -- is one of the most imaginative and technically accomplished of his generation. Rzewski's music is largely virtuosic and dramatic, and his new *Melodramas* follows in the footsteps, if not in the style, of his *De Profundis* (1992).

However, unlike the earlier work's forward motion, *Melodramas* is more patchy in construction and effect. The first part, somewhat suggestive of French music, sets seven poems from *Tales of Mother Goose* (1697). "The Road to Babylon" travels as a dreamy etude based on a chromatic row; "The Old Woman under the Hill" is wispy, while "Swan" consists of wide-ranging ascending and descending scales. These are succeeded by Andrew Marvell's 1681 poem, "To His Coy Mistress," which the composer adorns without a trace of irony, in a style reminiscent of an old American hymn. Rzewski manages a very direct and extended love song, in a musical language triadic, unaffected, expressive, and delicate. The two ensuing parts are drawn from Rzewski's work-in-progress *The Road*: "Abaddon" from Bulgakov's 1928-29 novel *The Master and Margarita*, and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Night Thought* (1885). These had strikingly different musical characters, the first dark and surreal, the second dramatic and pointillist. Lust performed persuasively in a work that required hissing, stamping, and singing.

## Fifth Philadelphia NACUSA

### DEBORAH KRAVETZ

NACUSA Fifth Anniversary Concert. April 30, Friends Meeting House, Lansdowne, PA.

Ah! A sunny Sunday afternoon in the suburbs for NACUSA's Fifth Anniversary Concert, which could have been subtitled: "From 1943 to 2000, Europe to America." The program opened with the premiere of *Sonata for Viola and Piano* (1990) by Leonard Klein. The tempo giusto movement features a lively contrapuntal exchange of themes that sometimes come together, but also includes silent spaces allowing the parts to meander off into separate places. Klein commented, "I write music for fun, so I don't always know where it's going to go." Yet the parts are drawn back together by the rhythmic piano motifs. "Lento" is an intense, almost-solo meditation for viola, with light chord ripples in the piano. The piano becomes more dominant with bell-tone chords as both fade into echoes. "Con moto" returns to the lively discord of the opening, with greater energy. The piece was written for violist Peter Nocella, who performed it with the composer.

Before the performance of *Phases* (2000), composer Paula Diehl stated, "It is written with no sense of expectation, and is based on closure and placement of fourths that go back to where they start, with no modulation." There were strummed chords and repeated plucked note sequences. This is the first work of Diehl's I've heard written for guitar, and the acoustic instrument played by Michael Higgins adds a softening effect to her characteristic style.

Karl Husa, a Czech who studied with Arthur Honegger and Nadia Boulanger in Paris, wrote *Sonatina for Piano* in 1943. At some points it is closer to Ravel's humor than you would expect for that time. It has colorful pianism, portions reflective of Debussy's *La Cathédrale Engloutie*, implying, perhaps, a remembrance of pre-war civility, particularly in view of the final allegretto marziale movement whose urgency creeps up under a light romanticism.

In songs by Paul Stouffer performed by soprano Barbara Nyce accompanied by Nozomi Takashima, the composer's own text of *Eternal Love* (1992) is expressed in dreamy leisure with free-floating melodic phrases. *Lullaby* (1991) has an easy, rocking piano accompaniment to go with its sweet, soothing melody.

The same performers opened the second half with songs by James Marshall. *Whispers of Heavenly Death* (1999) and *After the Dazzle of Day* (1999) were originally scored for a cappella chorus. It is not easy to change vocal chords to soprano with piano, and I can only imagine they might be even more interesting, more impactful, in the original format, with the greater range and color of SATB voices; Whitman's text almost requires the majesty of massed voices. *Nocturne* (2000), the composer's own text about song, is well suited for solo art song.

The program ended with *Variations on a Strut for Piano and Orchestra* by Fred and Marie Gaertner, performed by Paul Fejko with synthesized orchestra. *Strut* is a rollicking romp, perfectly set up for balletic interpretation, with its varying patterns, rhythms and colors, and sweeping melodies reminiscent of the American West, more lush and more fun than Copland's vision. Where is Agnes deMille when you need her?

## A Standard Is Born

### MARK FRANCIS

*Cold Sassy Tree*, music and libretto by Carlisle Floyd, performed by Houston Grand Opera. April 30, Brown Theater, Houston, TX.

Carlisle Floyd's new opera, *Cold Sassy Tree*, is based on the novel of the same name by Olive Ann Burns. This three-act opera takes place in Cold Sassy Tree, Georgia at the turn-of-the-century. The story is narrated by Rucker Latimore's grandson. The town is dominated by Latimore, a merchant who has recently lost his wife. He has decided to marry a young woman, Love Simpson, whose background is not entirely known. She will take care of his home in exchange for the deed when he dies. The townspeople and his family are scandalized by his actions. Love redecorates, bringing more light and life, not only into Rucker's home but his life; gradually the two fall in love. Love confesses a childhood secret that she was molested by a neighbor and has always felt unworthy. This confession only cements Rucker's love for Love and they finally consummate their marriage. In the final act Rucker is mortally wounded trying to foil a robbery of his store. On his death bed Love tells him she is pregnant with his child. The final scene is a celebration of Rucker Latimore's life. Love announces she is pregnant and finally resolves her differences with Rucker's family and the townspeople.

Floyd's music is tuneful but not trite or predictable. His skillful orchestrations never overpower the voice and set a variety of moods from tenderness to comedy. The work is a balance between a numbers opera and a non-spot music and action opera. There are arias but they are part of the on-going flow of the opera. Nothing seems forced or for the sake of itself. The most striking scene among many striking scenes is the duet at the end of Act 2 between Rucker and Love as they declare their love for each other. It will remind the listener of the love duet from *Otello*. Overall, I was struck by the skill and control Floyd displays throughout the opera.

This is Carlisle Floyd's fourth commission from the HGO and the 25th commission overall by the HGO since 1974. General Director David Glockney is primarily responsible for these commissions and is to be praised. His actions have added greatly to the repertoire of opera in the last quarter of our century.



## Time and Place with the Oakland East Bay Symphony

MARK ALBURGER

Oakland East Bay Symphony. May 12, Paramount Theatre, Oakland, CA.

The Paramount Theatre has always seemed like the perfect venue for the Oakland East Bay Symphony -- both entities have been remarkably restored over the years, the latter having risen phoenixianly from the ashes of the former Oakland Symphony. Time and place were called to mind in the present ensemble's shining performances of works by Jean Sibelius, Sergei Rachmaninoff, and newcomer Jonathan Mordechai Leshnoff on May 12.

Conductor Michael Morgan led off the program in the present with a reflection of Israel as *Hadran*, a title alluding to the past (the Aramaic word in the Talmud means, "to return"). Far from a curtain-raiser throwaway, Leshnoff's contemplative work was one of much substance. Its fairly predictable arch form moved from Coplandesque sustains through more animated Eastasian-tinged exoticism, to a return to stasis in a convincing and beautiful post-minimalist style.

Sibelius's *Symphony No. 5* is another composition imbued in time and space. This is a weird northern world of cold forests, warm interiors, and fiery nationalism. By this point in his career (1915), Sibelius had moved beyond the relative listener-friendly ease of his first few symphonies. The stern and crabbed Fourth behind him, the composer provides more light in his four-sectioned Fifth, but leaves plenty of challenges in the extensive and ruminative opening movement. Only in the final Allegro molto does the Finn allow us to hold onto a heroic bell-tone ostinato, often delivered by brass, that measures up to the challenge posed to anyone daring to write a Symphony No. 5 post-Beethoven. And even here the finale still doesn't ring quite true; there's a sense of thwarted expectations, of a promise not-quite-delivered, of a purposeful hollowness akin to that found in the analogous symphony of Sibelius's younger Russian contemporary, Dmitri Shostakovich. In both cases the craft is there, the invention is there, but something remains askew, indeed if not deeply awry.

Sergei Rachmaninoff was another Russian perhaps lost in space. In his case, the composer-pianist found himself, at least in 1912, in Switzerland immersed in the writings of an American. Go figure. But Edgar Allen Poe has been a hard writer to ignore, for both musicians and the public alike. And Rachmaninoff's response was the great four-movement choral symphony, *Kolokola*, performed wonderfully by the orchestra, in consort with Magen Solomon's Oakland Symphony Chorus. Hardly a Hawaiian soft-drink, the Russian title translates as "The Bells," and the composer wastes no time putting us in the right seasons and ages of human experience. "The Silver Sleigh Bells" of youth are graced with silvery orchestral bells; "The Mellow Wedding Bells" are harmoniously wedded with golden chimes; "The Loud Alarum Bells" are brassy with brass. Only "The Mournful Iron Bells" fails to deliver a literal instrumental analog, but the overall canny orchestration, retouched with the earlier glockenspiel, certainly suffices. The first, second, and fourth songs featured three capable soloists. If the bronzed tones of tenor Richard Nickol were a little over-burnished and the solid timbres of baritone Michael Preacely were a tad under-powered, the beautiful soprano Christina Lamberti provided every warmth to her essay in matrimonial bliss.

## Amazin' Sarah

JANOS GEREBEN

Michael Tilson Thomas conducts the San Francisco Symphony in Prokofiev's *Violin Concerto No. 1* (with Sarah Chang) and Varèse's *Amériques*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA. May 17, Through June 4, St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Saratoga.

Amazin' Sarah Chang did something impossible on May 19 in San Francisco's Davies Symphony Hall. She made superb music out of the Prokofiev *Violin Concerto No. 1*. She met the basic challenge, of course, playing through the tough piece flawlessly, and without showing the slightest effort (as she has done every time since I first heard her when she was 9), but then on top of that, she imbued Prokofiev's sophisticated circus music with Stravinsky's pulse, Tchaikovsky's ardor, and Shostakovich's depth. In other words, she didn't "just" perform the music; she made it better.

I don't know where that enormous sound comes from, that organ hidden in the small wooden box, but that power and projection identify Sarah immediately, and this is increasingly true as she is physically "growing up" -- although she has always been a grownup, musically and in her impeccable stage manner. I have known few violinists, especially of her age, with her consistency of excitement and excellence.

Michael Tilson Thomas was a restrained and supportive partner and accompanist, and then he too performed Sarah's value-added trick. Just as the Prokofiev represents a physical challenge, Varèse's *Amériques* can be an ordeal -- but Thomas's genuine love for the work, his total certainty about it, and his mind-meld with the orchestra resulted in a superior performance. And, unlike the not unusual audience reaction to *Amériques* (sour faces mixed with respectful applause), the well-justified San Francisco response was a standing ovation with a thunderous sound very much in the Varèse fashion.

Thomas and orchestra also dazzled in the Debussy *Images*, the reverse order of "Gigues" / "Rondes" / "Iberia" smooth as silk and yet powerfully engaging. The end of last year's San Francisco Symphony season was notable for the way music director and orchestra reached great heights together; this year is even better. The orchestra is at its best.

## Portrait of the Artist as a Tormented Young Composer

### JANOS GERE BEN

San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra in Cheung's *Portrait of the Artist as a Tormented Young Madman* and Stravinsky's *Firebird* (1910). May 21, Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA. .

Anthony Cheung, who gave up on conventional tonality when he was 13, received applause approaching ovation today in Davies Hall at the premiere of his *Portrait of the Artist as a Tormented Young Madman*. He wrote the brief work for an orchestra of Mahlerian proportions two years ago, at age 16. By then, he passed beyond the stage of "beyond tonality": he was writing good, exciting music, "new" and yet instantly accessible to the "family audience" in the hall today.

The San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra, conducted by Alasdair Neale, outdid its brilliant self in performing the work by one of its own. The densely-structured, rhythmically challenging work came across without a hint of the blood, sweat and tears that its preparation must have cost. (First reading of *Portrait* was six months ago, in the Berkeley Symphony's *Under Construction* series, with George Thomson conducting, Kent Nagano hosting the event.)

Cheung, born in San Francisco on January 17, 1982 (the day of San Francisco Youth Orchestra's inaugural concert), has been composing since age 7. He has completed two string quartets (influenced by Schoenberg), a piano quintet, *Elegy for the Victims of Nanjing* for solo viola, a large-scale cello concerto, incidental music for Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, and most recently, a sonata for violin and piano, which is a realization of Proust's fictitious Vinteuil sonata as described in *Swann's Way*. Cheung is now graduating from the San Francisco University High School, planning to attend Harvard in the fall.

*Portrait* opens with a trumpet call (again reminding the listener of Mahler), followed by the violas' lyrical response. The first violin (Yixing Xu) and principal flute (Irina Alexeev, shining brightly through the concert) are among instruments introducing new themes, until a ferocious (and Straussian) tutti builds to what the composer correctly describes as a "large mass of sound," which in this context led perfectly to Igor Stravinsky's *Firebird*.

However young the composer is, *Portrait* is a superbly mature piece that has its say.

## Scelsi: The Cinque in Thomas's Armor

### JANOS GERE BEN

Michael Tilson Thomas conducts the San Francisco Symphony in Scelsi's *Konx-Om-Pax*. May 25, Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA. Repeated May 27.

Giacinto Scelsi and his five surviving orchestral works: in the city of St. Francis, we have two down and three to go. I yield to no one in my admiration for Michael Tilson Thomas' brave, imaginative, clever programming -- he plays genuinely new music, honors neglected American composers of old, commissions the creation of exciting compositions, and presents novelties and unusual works. Best of all, he keeps filling Davies Hall's 2,700 seats! In all my years of watching the American new-music scene, I have not seen such a combination of doing good (for music) and doing well (for the box office and contributions).

Three years ago, the San Francisco Symphony had the first-ever North American performance of any work by Scelsi, *Aion*. On May 25, in the season-closing concert, there was more Scelsi, the 20-minute *Konx-Om-Pax*, from 1969. True to late 60's, the title consists of the word "peace" in Assyrian, Sanskrit, and Latin, respectively. When you have something to say, the use of Assyrian seems especially expeditious. An otherwise perfectly sane writer, found *K-O-P* nothing less than "a fascinating and wonderful display of musical individualism." Perhaps my problem is due to a kind of ethnic conflict: Scelsi, you see, forbade in perpetuity the performance of his works in his native Italy, going as far as ordering that they should not even be played elsewhere if there are Italians in the audience. Scelsi's love for the repetition of single notes makes the ostinati of minimalism a riot. The composer's inevitable crescendo and unholy racket at midpoint between slow and long unison passages are not even disturbing -- just inconvenient. Or, it could all be an elegant counterpoint between life and composition. When Scelsi suffered a mental breakdown in the 40's, he found the only therapy helping him was to sit at the piano and strike a single key again and again. What might have led him back to sanity (up to a point) now serves to create the opposite effect for some in the audience, even with a full orchestra and large chorus ("Om," they hum, "Om").

# Record Reviews

## Cageian Seasons

LAURIE HUDICEK

John Cage. *The Seasons*. American Composers Orchestra, conducted by Dennis Russell Davies, with Margaret Leng Tan (prepared and toy pianos). ECM New Series.

Not often does one find a CD recording that actually utilizes all of its space, but it is found in ECM's new release *The Seasons*, with more than 76 minutes of John Cage's music. To add to the wonderfully full meal the contemporary music listener will consume, are pages of beautiful photographs of John Cage, rehearsals of Davies, and rare pictures of Margaret Leng Tan in the act of preparing her instrument. The entire experience is documented, not only aurally, but also visually.

The first piece on this recording is *Seventy-Four*, for orchestra composed the year of Cage's death, 1992. This piece was commissioned by the performers, Dennis Russell Davies and the American Composers Orchestra; Cage died before its first performance. This music seems to be Cage's swan song in some respects, for it is similar emotionally to Barber's *Adagio*, but somehow more profound. One would never guess upon only listening that this piece "consists of separate orchestral parts without any score. Each part is simply a sequence of single notes," played within "flexible time-brackets." (taken from Keith Potter's liner notes) A clock takes the place of the conductor. Is this Cage or Fellini? Dynamics as well as other musical ideas are left up to the discretion of the performer.

With all of the freedom Cage gives, one might expect the classically trained musician to crawl in a hole clutching fiendishly his fully composed Beethoven score. However, this is not the case on this recording, the performance is extraordinarily confident and heartfelt. The performers give a second performance of the piece, later on the recording, which lacks the profundity of the first. There is such a concept as too much of a good thing.

*Seventy-Four* is certainly one of Cage's most insightful works for orchestra. It is, perhaps, that through this utter sadness, Cage was predicting his own death.

*The Seasons*, composed in 1947, is a four-movement work for orchestra (also arranged for solo piano by Cage, himself). In the words of the composer, taken from the liner notes, this work "is an attempt to express the traditional Indian view of the seasons as quiescence (winter), creation (spring), preservation (summer), and destruction (fall). It is based on a number sequence using the Cageian "gamut" of sonorities. Each of the movements, which is accompanied by a prelude, is extremely characteristic of its season, fall being the wonderful dance of death.

This work is too non-Cageian on the surface to be fully appreciated. The liner notes only give a brief hint to Cage's composition techniques, which is all it really can give since the notes are the size of a small Tolstoy novel. The performance, although seemingly traditional in sound, is true to the composer's complex genius.

The *Concerto for Prepared Piano and Chamber Orchestra* (1950-51) is again a piece directed by a number sequence. In three parts, it is a mix between "fixed" music organized by a chart and "free" music. Performances of this piece vary greatly from performing group to performing group, and this performance seems to have captured all of the human emotions, ranging from amusement to haunting fear. With the preparation of the piano, one may often question what instrument he is experiencing, and may need to allow time for his disorientation to subside. What other composer can pull forth such uneasy emotions? This piece also allows for the listener to hear the serious side of pianist, Margaret Leng Tan.

The final two pieces, or one piece and its orchestration, sum up Cage in a wonderful nutshell. The piece is the *Suite for Toy Piano*. No Cage recording would be complete without a charming performance of Margaret Leng Tan on her toy piano. With over an hour of grown-up music, hearing this piece is like finding a lollipop in a bowl of Brussels sprouts. One no longer needs to long for the relief of being an adult!

The second version of the *Suite*, orchestrated by Lou Harrison, seems too forced, perhaps similar to the vision of an adult attempting to recapture the joys of childhood by tumbling recklessly down a hill: artificial, awkward, and somewhat embarrassing. The performance itself is magnificent, but, perhaps, the back to back recording of these two versions reminds one of the loss of childhood not the celebration of such as the toy piano does.

If it were to stand on its own, that is without the title *Suite for Toy Piano* and not directly after the original Cage version, Harrison's orchestration would certainly be viewed differently. Extracting this piece from the recording to listen to it, not as an orchestration, but as an orchestral composition is suggested in order to obtain a more pure experience. Harrison seems to have taken this simple piece too seriously. In the words of Freud, "sometimes a cigar is just a cigar." This is Cage at his simplest. There is no defining him in this piece, for his intentions are as clear as crystal. Where is the simplicity of childhood to be found in the harmonized, colorful, precisely-tuned, mature orchestra? The performance is highly romanticized, and one might take a few guesses before realizing the composer is Cage.

As a whole, this recording will more than likely become one of the classic Cage recordings. Thank ECM for allowing all of this wonderful music to be recorded on a single CD!

## Return of the Native

### MARK FRANCIS

James Guthrie. *Voice of the Mountains*. Mysterium 37911973-1 JmsMGU3@aol.com.

James Guthrie's electronic tone poem, *Voice Of The Mountains*, is a monumental, 12-movement, 54-minute work of simplicity and patience. "First Light" begins with the glistening sounds of held chords as the light penetrates the shadows of the mountains. "Contemplation I" has a techno-pop-like approach. Its ostinato is interrupted by two held chords, one a positive idea, and the other a dark, disturbing one as if the realization of some unhappy truth. The two chords rock back and forth in a cosmic dance.

"Mystery I" goes from a single pitch to a cluster, then back again. "Contemplation II" is a variation and reorchestration of some of the ideas from "Contemplation I," especially the rocking chords. The machine-like sounds of "Mystery II" seem to come from a steam engine and an elephant. "Beings Of Light" starts from a sine wave before giving way to crescendo and decrescendo of machine-like sounds interrupted by blips and beeps very much like a 50's sci-fi movie. "Mystery III" begins with two ostinati before a third is stacked on top.

"Voice Of The Mountains," the central and longest movement, starts quietly with the rocking chords in an organ-like orchestration. These slow moving chords depict the quietness and serenity of the mountains. It is very much like Górecki's *Symphony No. 3*. These chords are eclipsed by music from the opening movement which finally takes over. Time seems to be suspended throughout.

"Mystery IV" explodes from the quietness with wild ostinati broken up by machine noises. "The North Slope" uses frantically plucked string sounds as pedal points with a voice whispering, "V-H-1." "Mountain Dance" is Miami Vice techno-pop. "From Here To There" closes out this CD with breath-like organ chords that slowly fade into the mists.

Most of the textures of this work are very thick and cloud-like. Guthrie is an organist and much of the music has the quality of the organ in big, static chords.

## Omnivision

### MARK FRANCIS

Mark Applebaum. *The Janus Remixes*. Innova 532.

Mark Applebaum's *Janus Remixes* are based on recordings of 11 of his acoustic pieces processed through a computer. They will remind the listener of musique concrète, especially the improvised, through-composed quality of each movement.

"Narcissus" use a solo marimba for a sound source. It is processed a variety of ways, from speeding up and slowing down, to phase shifting and retrograding. A percussion ostinato is occasionally interrupted by bursts of sound. "Mount Moriah" comes from a string quartet and is full of concrete -like string sounds. "Dead White Males," originally an orchestra piece, begins quietly while speeding up and slowing down with insect-like string sounds. The second part of this piece has a punch-in/punch-out sound of the orchestra in a Varèse-like sound collage.

"Triple" is from a concerto for piano and mixed ensemble. It sounds much like a Penderecki choral piece as a very mysterious and searching work. While in common time "Anesthesia," for solo viola, feels like a waltz with its ballet ostinato. The second half is a mixture of bird sounds, machine sounds and randomly plucked strings.

"Elegy" begins with a two-note ostinato that also speaks of Penderecki. It's hard to believe the opening is derived from the sounds of a carillon. *Sargasso* is also surprising in that Applebaum derives such percussive sounds from the cello. The second half of this work has sounds that will remind the listener of the Beatles so-called "White Album."

"Scipio" comes from a mixed ensemble of acoustic and electronic instruments, and sound samples. It has an underwater quality like a submarine prowling the depths. "Tlon," a work for three conductors and no performers, uses the sound of the turning pages and the shuffling feet of the conductors as its sound sources, which are transformed into something like bass flopping around in a shallow pool. "Chameleon" is constructed of several tracks of violin forming an ostinato cluster against which there are randomly plucked strings. "Janus" closes this recording with the manipulation of a chamber ensemble of ten performers. Many of the sounds and ideas from the previous works are summed up.

All these interesting pieces have a mysterious, searching quality and are very unpredictable. Despite their many contrasts, they all seem to make sense.

## Krzywonderful

### HARRY HEWITT

Jan Krzywicki. *String Quartet*. *Starscape for Solo Harp*. *Sonata for Trumpet and Piano*. *Four Songs after Rexroth*. Jan Krzywicki, conductor. Albany Records, 1999. TROY 337.

Jan Krzywicki is unable to write less than his best. He is a master composer and editor. Krzywicki's mastery is such that he is able to transmit motifs from one work to another to achieve striking family resemblances among diverse pieces. On a new release from Albany, his *String Quartet* receives a magnificent performance from the superb Colorado Quartet: violinists Julie Rosenfeld and Deborah Redding, violist Francesca Martin Silos, and cellist Diane Chaplin. The *Quartet* is uniquely designed. "Nervoso" (7:18) is aptly marked. The interlocking of the very vocabulary of this work is brilliantly managed. There are stunning harmonic effects which are perfectly suited to the character of the music. "Misterioso" (3:32) is filled with mysterious birdlike whisperings and is exactly the right length for what it has to say. "Mesto" (2:30) is essentially a viola solo which resonates eloquently against a background of strummed chords, creating a briefly intense mood of haunting melancholy. "Agitato" (8:02) is filled with more powerful and extensive passages and increasing use of pizzicati. "Liberamente" (2:48) is the cellist's moment of glory. A second "Mesto" (3:16) creates a final period of quiet benediction.

The *Sonata for Trumpet and Piano* (1994) is here performed by Terry Everson and Susan Nowicki. Its "Prelude" (6:19) opens with muted smears in trumpet (throughout this work a variety of mutes are brilliantly employed) with more open structure in piano. This resolves into a three-note motif embellished with very impressive effects of pedaling. There is much fanfare-like material interspersed with buzzing and overblowing on the part of the trumpet. All quiets down to a very eloquent melodic passage in trumpet with variants of the opening bell sounds in piano. The music becomes increasingly quiet, moving through a very eloquent and moving passage without break, directly into the next movement. "Interlude and Cadenza" (3:59) is a haunting muted trumpet melody against themal variants from the piano. There is a passage of the most expressive melancholy, almost a dirge which soon is enveloped in a fanfare-like cadenza of power and drama. This is music filled with the passionate heartbreak at the center of the world which poets express and humankind endures. The "Finale" (5:09) is in the same darkly passionate mood.

*Four Songs after Rexroth*, (1995) is written for mezzo-soprano (Emily Golden), harp (Elizabeth Hainen), piano (Susan Nowicki), and percussion (Anthony Orlando). The opening "Star and Crescent" (4:57) features the full ensemble. The poem is filled with twilight images, and the music moves seamlessly into "A Ringing Bell" (4:36), Rexroth's version of a Ch'ang Yu original. Again uninterrupted, comes "Deep Night" from a Pao Ch'ao. Golden is at her most eloquent here. Her richly colored, multi-layered mezzo seems perfectly suited to the ambience of the poems. The work concludes with "The Fall of Ch'ou" (5:02). Overall, this is a passionately eloquent work of neo-romantic eloquence. The accompanying artists are all admirable in every way.

Perhaps of lesser importance, but none-the-less beautifully written is *Starscape* for solo harp (1983) (6:52.) This work is based on a six-tone scale pattern stated simply, soon developed into a melodic line in trills surrounded by harmonics and glissandi. As always with this composer, the technical effects are the servants, not the master of the music. Swathed in wisps of harpish colors, the composition diminishes into a melange of bell-like sonorities, fading away into a brief re-statement of the original. It should become a classic of its repertory. In its own way, it is as eloquent as any other work on this CD.

## The Electro-Acoustic Annual

### MARK FRANCIS

*Music From SEAMUS, Volume 9.* EAM-2000

The Society of Electro-Acoustic Music's ninth annual CD begins with Andrew Walters' *IN-->EX*, a two-channel tape work of successive crescendos. The work depicts the feelings and stresses of a machine through its use. This sonic rainbow seems to be trying to give a soul to the machine. Andrew May's *The Twittering Machine*, after Paul Klee, is for flute and interactive electronics. The work gets its title from a painting by Paul Klee. Though highly improvised it has the sound of 50's total serialism.

Michael Pounds's *Release*, for percussion and tape, begins with a Mannheim rocket and evolves into an intense emotional experience. The tape dominates the first part of the work, the percussion the second. *Pipeline Burst Cache*, by Craig Walsh, utilizes cello samples, in a style reminiscent of Penderecki's *Capriccio* from the late 1960's. Unlike the other works on this CD, this concerto-like work has a sense of meter as the tape pushes the performer to greater virtuosity.

Jon Christopher Nelson's *Other Terrains* is mostly unpitched percussion and tape. Surprisingly this is a rather quiet work, without a lot of banging. The tape and ensemble blend well in a style connecting to serial compositions of the 60's and 70's. *Into the Maelstrom*, by James Moberly, begins with repeated plucked piano strings gradually picking up steam as the chaos grows in the taped accompaniment. Pablo Furman's *Matices Coincidentes* is for flute, clarinet, cello, piano and electronic sounds. This has the feeling of 1960's pointillism, of rapidly changing colors and phrases.

# Video Review

## Much Video About Shostakovich

MARK FRANCIS

Dmitri Shostakovich. *Lady Macbeth Of Mtsensk*, a film by Petr Weigl. The London Philharmonic Orchestra and The Ambrosian Opera Chorus, conducted by Mstislav Rostropovich.

Peter Weigl's film version of the controversial Dmitri Shostakovich opera, *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, is not a high-budget affair along the lines of a Zeffirelli production. However, the story still comes through with great impact and drama. It is a bit difficult to see what was so offensive about this work in the 1930's Soviet Union; it may have been the opera's lack of any real political content. The characters in the film are actors, not singers. They lip-sync to the score. This is not always convincing and takes some accommodation.

The orchestration is usually sparse with the full orchestra used only occasionally. The music is distinctively Shostakovich, full of wildness one moment and overwhelming sadness the next. Katerina's aria in the final act contains the motive from "The Suicide," one of the songs in the *Symphony No. 14*. It is also orchestrated in a similar fashion with the voice accompanied only by solo English horn and solo oboe.

The film appears to have been made in 1992 but only released in the United States in 1999. The gray, bleak quality of the landscape contributes greatly to the overall feeling of desperation and hopelessness of the story. Never dull, it is easy to see why this opera is making a comeback and why the film deserves an audience.

# Calendar

July 1

American Composers Forum Meeting, with Jennifer Higdon. Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA.

July 4

Premiere of Higdon's *Freedom Dreams*. Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA.

July 7

89th birthday of Gian Carlo Menotti

July 8

Centenary of the birth of George Antheil.

July 9

85th birthday of David Diamond.

July 11

U.S. premiere of Louis Andriessen's *Writing to Vermeer* (libretto by Peter Greenaway). New York State Theater, New York, NY. Through July 15.

*Bang on a Can*. National Design Museum, New York, NY.

*Messiaen Celebration*. Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY.

July 12

Louis Andriessen and Peter Greenaway discuss *Writing to Vermeer*. Lincoln Center, New York, NY.

Asko/Schoenberg Ensembles and Vox Vocal Ensemble in Messiaen's *Trois petites liturgies de la Présence Divine*, Varèse's *Deserts*, and the U.S. premiere of Ford's *Salome Fast*. Alice Tully Hall, New York, NY.

July 13

49th anniversary of the death of Arnold Schoenberg.

San Francisco Symphony and Chorus in Orff's *Carmina Burana*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA. Repeated July 16.

Messiaen's *Le Merle Noir*, the first all-electronic performance of Riley's *In C*, and the world premiere of S. Johnson's *Worth Having*, with Robert Moog and Pauline Oliveros. New York Society for Ethical Culture, New York, NY.

July 14

Sarah Cahill performs Antheil's *Jazz Sonata* and Ornstein's *Suicide in an Airplane*, *Impressions of the Thames*, *Solitude*, *A Morning in the Woods*, and *Rendezvous at the Lake*. Old First Church, San Francisco, CA.

St. Lawrence String Quartet in R. Murray Schafer's *String Quartet No. 6*. Campbell Recital Hall, Braun Music Center, Stanford University, CA.

Varèse's *Poème électronique*, Stockhausen's *Gesänge der Junglinge*, Xenakis's *Bohor*, Smalley's *Vortex*, Barriere's *Chreod*, and Lansky's *Night Traffic*. Columbia University, New York, NY.

July 15

Cage's *Imaginary Landscape No. 5*, the premiere of Mesina's *String Quartet for 4 Turntables*, and Kolabz's *William Tell Overture*. New York Society for Ethical Culture, New York, NY.

July 16

Villa-Lobos Chamber Orchestra. Old First Church, San Francisco, CA.

July 18

Meredith Monk's *Songs from the Hill* and *Music for Voice and Piano*, with the composer and Nurit Tilles. New York Society for Ethical Culture, New York, NY.

July 21

Meredith Monk's *Atlas* (selections), *Quarry*, *American Archeology*, and *Facing North*. Alice Tully Hall, New York, NY.

John Zorn and Masada. Meany Hall, University of Washington, Seattle, WA.

July 22

CCRMA presents *Concert Under the Stars*. Knoll Courtyard, Stanford University, CA.

July 23

Meredith Monk's *Our Lady of Late*, *Turtle Dreams*, and *Dolmen Music*. LaGuardia Concert Hall, New York, NY.

July 25

Aspen Percussion Ensemble in Ginastera's *Cantata para América mágica*, Byrne's *Ava* from *The Forest*, Glass's *Train to Sao Paolo* from *Powaqqatsi*, Sejour's *Martian Tribes*, De May's *Table Music*, C. Rouse's *Bonham*, and Fitkin's *Hook*. Harris Concert Hall, Aspen, CO.

# Chronicle

May 1

Master Class with George Crumb. Birmingham-Southern College, Birmingham, AL.

*Austria.* Pianist Marino Formenti in Webern's *Variationen*, Haubenstock-Ramati's *Catch 2*, and Haas's *Hommage à G. Ligeti*. Los Angeles County Art Museum, Los Angeles, CA.

Soprano Beatrice Broadwater sings Berg's *Seven Early Songs*. Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY.

May 2

ACF Composer in the Schools Concert, with David Meckler and Earplay. Knuth Hall, San Francisco State University, San Francisco, CA.

May 4

New Century Chamber Orchestra in Ives's *The Unanswered Question*, Musgrave's *Orfeo II*, and Copland's *Quiet City*. First Congregational Church, Berkeley, CA. Through May 7, Jewish Community Center, San Rafael, CA.

*America.* Pianist Marino Formenti in Cage's *One*, Feldman's *Piano*, Stalvey's *Changes*, Ives's *Piano Sonata*, and Antheil's *Airplane Sonata* and *Sonata Sauvage*. Los Angeles County Art Museum, Los Angeles, CA.

New York Philomusica presents Shostakovich's *Quartet No. 11*, Kodály's *Intermezzo*, and Schoenberg's *Trio*. Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY.

May 5

Merce Cunningham Dance Company. Zellerbach Hall, University of California, Berkeley, CA. Repeated May 6.

*San Francisco Electronic Music Festival*, with Alvin Curran, Miya Masaoka, Carl Stone, and Dan Joseph. CellSpace, San Francisco, CA. Festival through May 7.

May 6

Pacific Sticks premieres Ilana Cotton's *Women's Voices, Women's Words*, with Laurie Amat. Twin Pines Cultural Center, Belmont, CA. Repeated May 21, San Mateo County Historical Association Museum, Redwood City.

American Composers Salon. Kingman's *Songs of Solitude and Exultation*, Deussen's *The Pegasus Suite*, Wold's *Albrechts Flügel*, Meckler's *Apollo 14, A Space Opera*, and Erickson's *Prayers of Thomas Merton*. Trinity Chapel, Berkeley, CA.

*San Francisco Electronic Music Festival*, featuring Steev Hise, Dan Joseph, Carl Stone, and Pamela Z. CellSpace, San Francisco, CA.

Orchestra 2001 in Bright Sheng's *Two Poems from the Sung Dynasty* and PDQ Bach's *The Stoned Guest*. Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA. Repeated May 7, Philadelphia.

May 7

Kronos Quartet, with Dawn Upshaw. Zellerbach Hall, University of California, Berkeley, CA.

*San Francisco Electronic Music Festival*, with Donald Swearingen, Laetitia Sonami, Kenneth Atchley, and sensorChip. CellSpace, San Francisco, CA.

Renée Fleming, André Previn, and Aaron Jay Kernis in Previn's *The Giraffes Go to Hamburg*, Kernis's *Valentines*, R.I. Gordon's *Night Flight to San Francisco*, C. Harris's *The Hill Has Something to Say*. Alice Tully Hall, New York, NY. "Valentines [is] based on four sardonic and bracingly feminist poems by Carol Ann Duffy. Mr. Kernis's music here is like some spiky American version of Alban Berg expressionism. At times it has a ferocious intensity, and the harmonic language is thickly chromatic and wildly wayward. So when the music turns reflective -- clearer, simpler, more diatonic -- the effect is doubly powerful. The highly charged vocal writing is nevertheless lyrical, at least as sung by Ms. Fleming, radiantly" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 5/0/00].

May 9

Brice Pauset performs his *Six Preludes*. Ircam, Paris, France.

*Composer Spotlight: Janice Giteck*. Jack Straw Productions, Seattle, WA.

May 10

84th birthday of Milton Babbitt.

Michael Tilson Thomas conducts the San Francisco Symphony in Schoenberg's *Five Pieces for Orchestra*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA. Through May 13. "Five Pieces . . . [was given a] focussed performance . . . Thomas and the orchestra tackled these pieces with clear-cut dedication, and it paid off in brisk, vital readings (in the first and fourth pieces especially) and shimmering elusiveness in the famous 'Colors'" [Joshua Kosman, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 5/12/00].

Elizabeth Keusch presents Britten's *Les Illuminations*. Jordan Hall, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA.

Avalon String Quartet performs Berg's *Lyric Suite*. Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY.

May 11

Ensemble Intercontemporain in Zender's *Hölderlin Lesen I and II*. Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France. Repeated, with Berg's *Lyric Suite*, May 13.

Jubal Trio. San Francisco State University, San Francisco, CA.



ACF and New Music Works present a discussion with Henry Brant and Lou Harrison. Kuumbwa Jazz Center, Santa Cruz, CA.

*Interpretations: Tom Hamilton.* Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY.

May 13

John Beeman's *The Answering Machine, Law Offices, Foam, and Dear Composer.* Art Center, Palo Alto, CA.

New Music Works presents Ives's *Violin Sonata No. 4*, R.C. Seeger's *Music for Small Orchestra*, Harrison's *Suite for Violin, Piano, and Small Orchestra*, Feldman's *I met Heine on the rue Fürstenberg*, and the world premiere of Brant's *Glossary*. University of California, Santa Cruz, CA. Repeated May 14, San Jose State University, San Jose.

Bang on a Can All-Stars perform *The People's Commissions*. Miller Theatre, Columbia University, New York, NY.

May 14

83rd birthday of Lou Harrison.

Patti Deuter plays Debussy's *Pour le piano* and *La plus que lent*. Le Piano Studio, San Francisco, CA. Repeated May 16, The Sequoias, Portola Valley.

The Studio Club presents William Grant Still's *From a Lost Continent*. Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY.

May 15

Left Coast Chamber Ensemble in the premieres of Bauer's *Trio for Clarinet, Viola, and Piano* and Horst's *Passacaglia for French Horn and Strings*, plus Riley's *El Hombre for Piano Quintet*. Green Room, San Francisco, CA. Repeated May 15, University of California, Davis.

Mosaic. Los Angeles County Art Museum, Los Angeles, CA.

May 17

San Francisco Symphony, with Michael Tilson Thomas and Sarah Chang, in Prokofiev's *Violin Concerto No. 1* and Varèse's *Amériques*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA. Through June 4, St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Saratoga. "The virtuosity was most viscerally gripping at the end, in the orchestra's eardrum-rattling rendition of *Amériques* . . . Completed in 1921, this was one of the first large works that Varèse wrote after relocating to New York . . . It's a brash, pugnacious ode to the New World from a French avant-gardist with the sounds of Rite of Spring still ringing in his ears. The score's blend of European and American strains (together with a weird Middle Eastern riff toward the end) is one of its most pungent features. The sheer scale of the piece . . . [includes] quintuple woodwinds, wide phalanxes of brass and an arsenal of percussion (including timpani, countless drums and . . . siren) that requires a total of 11 players" [Joshua Kosman, San Francisco Chronicle, 5/19/00].

New York Philharmonic, with Evelyn Glennie, in the New York premiere of Daugherty's *UFO for Solo Percussion and Orchestra*. Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY. Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY. Through May 19, with Masson's *Snare Drum Concerto* and Stravinsky's *Symphony of Wind Instruments*. "[Daugherty] captured Ms. Glennie's ebullient personality -- spontaneous and improvisational, theatrical as well as musical -- in its teeming fullest" [James R. Oestreich, The New York Times, 5/23/00].

Violist Jeanne Mallow in Milhaud's *Sonate*. Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY.

May 19

Death of composer Gideon W. Waldrop (b. 9/2/19), who served for 24 years as dean of the Juilliard School, at age 80. New York, NY.

May 20

Death of Jean-Pierre Rampal. Paris, France.

ACF presents Handbell Ensemble Sonos, Gamelan Pusaka Sunda, and San Jose Taiko in Jaron Lanier's *The Navigator Tree*. First Congregational Church, Berkeley, CA.

Big Sur Experimental Music Festival, Big Sur, CA. Through May 21.

Empyrean Ensemble. Arts Center, Davis, CA.

ACF presents the Camellia Symphony Orchestra in the premiere of Han Yong's *Pictures of Years (Nianhua)*. Westminster Presbyterian Church, Sacramento, CA.

Peninsula Women's Chorus in music of Larsen, Holmes, Meckler, and Mechem. Grace Lutheran Church, Palo Alto, CA. Repeated May 21, Mission Santa Clara, Santa Clara.

Nancy Bloomer Deussen's *Ascent to Victory* performed by the Kona Community Symphony Orchestra. Kona, HI.

*ZOOM.* Golijov's *The Passion According to St. Mark*. Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY.

Seattle Philharmonic Orchestra and Jack Straw Productions present the premiere of Janice Giteck's *Tikkun - Mending*. Washington Middle School, Seattle, WA. Repeated May 21, Meany Hall, University of Washington

May 21

San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra in Cheung's *Portrait of the Artist as a Tormented Young Madman* and Stravinsky's *Firebird* (1910). Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

Lee Chai in Stravinsky's *Three Pieces for Solo Clarinet* and Copland's *Clarinet Concerto*. Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY.

May 22

*Berio/Boulez 75th Birthday.* San Francisco Contemporary Players in Berio's *Sequenza III* and *V*, and Boulez's *Piano Sonata No. 1* and *Improvisations sur Mallarmé*. Yerba Buena Center, San Francisco, CA.

Massachusetts Youth Wind Ensemble in Hindemith's *Symphony in B-Flat* and Holst's *First Suite*. Jordan Hall, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA.

*A Tribute to Earle Brown*. Orchestra of the S.E.M. Ensemble performs *From Here*, *Special Events*, *Event: Synergy II*, *Tracking Pierrot*, and *Modules I and III*, plus Boulez's *Improvisation sur Mallarmé* and Varèse's *Intégrales*. Alice Tully Hall, New York, NY. "[T]he rich, curtainlike chords of the *Modules* remain impressive, and the idea in *From Here* of chorus and orchestra as separate entities is remarkable. Best of all, Mr. Brown is still at work. He was [Petr] Kotik's confederate in his double-conductor pieces, and alone led his *Tracking Pierrot*, a sextet for the ensemble of Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* plus percussion, bristling with surprising contrasts. There was also a recent example of his creative activity in *Special Events* for cello . . . and piano . . . the two instruments speaking spasmodic messages to each other" [5/29/00].

May 23

Ensemble Intercontemporain in Berio's *Tempi concertati*, Dusapin's *Granum Sinapis*, and Kyburz's *The Voynich Cipher Manuscript*. Cité de la Musique, Paris, France.

Melanie Almiron performs Prokofiev's *Piano Sonata No. 6*. Williams Hall, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA.

Composers Concordance presents Hardish's *Sonorities I and VI*, Rhoads's *Highwire*, Luening's *Duo for Flute and Viola*, Kraft's *Cinque Fantasia*, Schwartz's *Tapestry*, Jong Suh Lee's *Odyssey*, and Foss's *Central Park Reel*. Loewe Auditorium, New York University, New York, NY.

Prometheus Chamber Orchestra in Copland's *Clarinet Concerto* and Sibelius's *Symphony No. 4*. Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY.

May 24

San Francisco Symphony, conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas, in Scelsi's *Konx-om-pax*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

California EAR Unit presents *Bongo Lesson!* Los Angeles County Art Museum, Los Angeles, CA.

Conservatory Camerata presents Kodály's *Mattra Pictures* and Schickele's *After Spring Sunset*. Jordan Hall, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA.

May 25

Michael Tilson Thomas conducts the San Francisco Symphony in Scelsi's *Konx-Om-Pax*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA. Repeated May 27.

Maria Benotti presents the world premiere of Serkebayev's *Fantasy for Violin and Piano*, plus Prokofiev's *Violin Sonata No. 1* and Stravinsky's *Histoire du Soldat*. Williams Hall, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA.

ASCAP Concert Music Awards, hosted by Peter Schickele. Concert Music 2000 Honorees: Lauren Flanigan, John Duffy, Ned Rorem, and Morton Subotnick. Paul Hall, The Juilliard School, New York, NY.

Martha Graham Dance Company pulls out of two major festivals and suspends operations because of financial problems. New York, NY.

May 26

West Bay Opera presents Kurt Weill's *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*. Lucie Stern Theatre, Palo Alto, CA. Through June 4.

Elena Kat's-Chernin's *Zoom and Zip* performed by the Women's Philharmonic. Herbst Theater, San Francisco, CA.

May 28

The Mountain Play presents *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. Mt. Tamalpais Theater, CA. Through June 18.

May 29

79th birthday of Iannis Xenakis.

May 31

Inoue Chamber Ensemble in Baksa's *Sonata for Accordion* and Stravinsky's "Danse Russe" from *Petrushka*. Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY.

# Comment

It's time for the little game we call "Name That Product." I will present you with a hunk of real advertising copy; you tell me what product is being sold. I have left blanks where the product itself is mentioned, so as not to spoil the rollicking amusement.

"If you're intrigued by the idea of climbing in the Himalayas, redefining your life with new technologies, or training for a marathon, this ... is for you."

The all-new Sports Palm Pilot? Nope: read on.

"It's for you if you're tired of being told where to eat, how much you should earn, and how you can look like everyone else. You're not like everyone else. Neither are ..."

Oh, such deconstruction. Who precisely is telling whom where to eat? . . .

Time for a hint: The product being promoted by the glossy brochure is produced by *American Mavericks*. The Mavericks are "mold-breakers, iconoclasts, pioneers." They "speak in a language of their own: funny, angry, raw, mystical, shocking, confident -- a language for a changing world, fundamental, honest and overwhelming." . . .

The brochure is from the San Francisco Symphony. . . .

It is a worthy effort, trying to expand the Symphony's repertoire, trying to increase the musical vocabulary of its audience. It is instructive to look at the composers selected, however: Charles Ives (born 1874), Duke Ellington (born 1900), George Antheil (born 1900) and John Cage (born 1914).

So these folks were shaking the very foundations of musical composition during the Coolidge administration. They were the bad boys of symphonic music at a time when Everest was unconquered by anyone . . .

Jon Carroll  
San Francisco Chronicle, 3/31/00

BMG Classics, once a powerhouse of the classical music recording industry, is being gutted in a major reorganization of the recording labels owned by the German entertainment giant Bertelsmann. In its heyday a decade ago, BMG Classics--better known in America under its imprints RCA Victor Red Seal and RCA Victor--released several hundred recordings a yea. . . . It also sat upon one of the greatest troves of recorded sound ever assembled, a historic archive that included the recordings of Toscanini, Rubenstein, Heifitz, and Van Cliburn. But in recent years it began releasing fewer and fewer recordings and relying more heavily on its archives. With the reorganization, the former giant will be a shadow of itself and even longtime stalwart artists, such as Galway and percussionist Evelyn Glennie, will apparently lose their contracts, according to those close to the company.

The downsizing of BMG Classics is yet one more indication that the market for classical music has changed radically over the past two decades. A glut of classical recordings that developed in the late 1980s and early 1990s led to a leaner and more market-oriented approach by the major labels. And those labels that remain in the classical music business today are increasingly focused on their most profitable projects, and no longer willing to subsidize a large stable of artists such as BMG once did.

Industry observers say that as many as 120 employees, including staff at RCA and the New Age / jazz label Windham Hill, could lose their jobs in the reorganization. BMG Classics will cease to exist as an independent label within the larger BMG corporation, and its few remaining artists and corporate staff will be folded into the American-run RCA label, which focuses on popular music. According to one insider, the label could be working with only a handful of classical musicians, with major decisions being made by the company's popular music executives.

That leaves the fate of classical music projects in question. Sources within BMG say that recording projects have already been canceled, including one by Glennie . . . .

"We simply don't know yet," says David Kuehn, vice president of marketing for classical music at RCA Red Seal. Kuehn wouldn't confirm details of the reorganization, but sources say he has been struggling to preserve major projects, including the label's critically successful relationship with conductor Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony. . . .

A successful classical music recording may sell as few as 12,000 copies, making profits precarious for almost all projects. (By comparison, the recent album by teen heartthrobs 'N Sync sold 1.1 million in a single day.)

"This is not an industry for people looking to make lots of money," said an agent associated with one of the BMG artists. "If you're not in it for artistic reasons, you shouldn't be in it at all."

That sentiment was echoed by an anonymous BMG employee who fears that the financial expectations created by successful projects on RCA's popular labels, such as Arista, are unrealistic in the classical music world.

"This isn't a business that they're familiar with. They come in and look at the numbers and see that they're really low, and they're not going to make big profits." . . .

The demise of BMG Classics marks what may be the final chapter in the long and impressive history of the RCA company. . . . After a slow period in the 1970s, the label was reinvigorated in 1986 when it was purchased by BMG. That, plus the boom in new recording sparked by the arrival of the compact disc format, made BMG Classics one of the most prolific labels in the classical music industry.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, BMG was home to dozens of artists, including the National Symphony Orchestra's music director, Leonard Slatkin, who recorded five Grammy-Award winning discs for the label. In recent years, BMG cut back, focusing its energy on a smaller roster that released a smaller number of recordings. . . .

Major commitments were allowed to lapse, including Slatkin's 10-year association, which ended early last year.

Other labels, including Sony Classical, set the industry compass toward more crossover albums and nonclassical fare. Major artists, who once considered a major record contract as a lifetime commitment, began to work from disc to disc, or not at all.

Kuehn pointed to his label's November release of the 92-disc Rubenstein edition--an omnibus collection of the famed pianist's entire recorded works--as a recent high point for the label. It was an ironic valedictory: The last great project of the once great label was devoted to an artist who spent his lifetime with RCA; and although Kuehn won't reveal sales figures, it was rumored to have sold only about 200 copies worldwide.

With the reorganization of BMG Classics, the burden of carrying on the recording of classical music is yet more solidly on the shoulders of smaller independent labels, such as Hyperion, Harmonia Mundi, and other small European houses.

Although it is likely that the San Francisco Symphony will continue to appear on RCA Red Seal, the reorganization of BMG Classics makes it yet more clear that the fate of American orchestras on recordings is left to the orchestras themselves, which have little choice but to produce their own recordings . . . .

Philip Kennicott  
The Washington Post, 4/19/00

# Communication

Dear Editor,

I enjoyed the Paul Drescher interview [May 2000]. It was very enlightening.

Erling Wold  
El Cerrito, CA

Dear Editor,

Keep up the incredibly valuable work you do for contemporary music here and around the world.

James Meredith  
SONOS HANDBELL ENSEMBLE  
Oakland, CA

Editor,

Very nice e-mail version of version of 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC!!! Excellent -- this'll drive down your costs.

Byrwec Ellison  
Los Angeles, CA

Editor,

It's downright criminal that no major funder has yet come forward to help you with your publishing. You're by far the most vital and useful source of 'how it is now' with composers, that any editor has brought to fruition.

Take care,

Harry Hewitt  
PENN SOUNDS  
Philadelphia, PA

Dear Editor,

Thank you for 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC, which I love.

Best regards,

Lisa Scola Prosek  
Cazadero, CA

Dear Editor,

Thank you very much for the review.

I think that maybe when you write "Here's Rosenberg:" on page 20 and proceed to quote an extensive passage, you mean, "Rosenblum"? Those notes are definitely not in reference to my music.

Another thing, the barelyauditable@email.com address has been destroyed for reasons unknown. If it is possible to run a correction (though you did write the correct address the first time), it would be of great help. The new address is barelyauditableec@email.com

Thank you again. I appreciate your dedication to the music.

Scott Rosenberg  
Chicago, IL

Dear Editor,

21ST-CENTURY MUSIC is one of my favorite journals -- I read it religiously! Keep up the great work.

Sincerely,

Payton Elsworth MacDonald  
Rochester, NY

# Opportunities

## Conducting

Eastman School of Music -- Professor of Conducting and Ensembles - The Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester celebrates the career and retirement of Donald Hunsberger after 35 years as Conductor and Director of the Eastman Wind Ensemble at the conclusion of the Spring Term 2002. A search for the tenure-track faculty position in the Conducting and Ensembles Department begins in May 2000. The Eastman School seeks an artist musician-conductor of the highest caliber with a broad range of experience in wind ensemble, orchestra, chamber music, new music, and instrumental conducting. Primary responsibilities will include directing the wind ensemble program and continuing the development of its repertoire. Teaching and advising all levels of conducting, research and writing. Conducting responsibilities include the Eastman Wind Ensemble, Wind Orchestra and other conducting assignments as deemed appropriate by the Conducting and Ensembles Department and the Director of the Eastman School. Deadline for application is August 1, 2000. Please send a letter of application and three current reference names with contact information and a Curriculum Vitae to: Eastman School of Music, John Marcellus, Chair, Conducting and Ensembles Search, 26 Gibbs Street, Rochester, NY 14604.

## Music History

Earlham College -- Ethnomusicology/Musicology Replacement Needed. Due to a late resignation, Earlham College is seeking to fill a full-time position to teach Intro to World Music, Methods in Ethnomusicology, History of Western Music (1800-present), and upper-class elective courses in Ethnic music topics. Candidates able to fill all or some of this position are encouraged to apply. Start Date: August, 2000. Application deadline: Until filled. Send letter of application, vita, and current placement file to: Earlham College, Trudi Weyermann, Music Department Convenor, Drawer #31, Richmond, IN 47374-4095. URL: <http://www.earlham.edu> Additional materials may be requested later. Earlham, a Quaker liberal arts college, is an EOE continuing to build a vigorous academic community reflecting gender and racial diversity of society at large. Applications from African Americans, other minorities, and Quakers especially encouraged.

University of Richmond -- The Department of Music at the University of Richmond seeks a musicologist committed to excellence in undergraduate-level teaching with record of, or potential for, significant scholarly contributions. Primary duties are to develop and teach music history courses in a liberal arts, undergraduate curriculum, in which interdisciplinary approaches are encouraged. Assistant Professor, tenure-track position beginning August, 2001. Completed doctorate required. Application deadline: 9/1/00 or until filled. Send letter of application outlining experience, teaching and research interests, a curriculum vitae, and have three letters of recommendation directed to: University of Richmond, Fred Cohen, Chair, Department of Music, Booker Hall, Richmond, VA 23173. URL: <http://music.richmond.edu> The University of Richmond is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity employer.

University of Sydney -- Lecturer/Senior Lecturer in Musicology, Sydney Conservatorium of Music, Reference No. B23/000571. The Musicology Unit seeks to appoint a publishing scholar in the area of Western Historical Musicology to contribute to specialist musicology and other programs. For a copy of the selection criteria and conditions of service contact Cathy Jones (61-2) 9351 1204 or e-mail: [cjones@greenway.usyd.edu.au](mailto:cjones@greenway.usyd.edu.au) or visit [http://infodesk.conmusic.usyd.edu.au/public/lect\\_musicology.html](http://infodesk.conmusic.usyd.edu.au/public/lect_musicology.html) For further information contact Richard Toop, Reader in Musicology (61-2) 9230 3755 or e-mail: [rtoop@mail.usyd.edu.au](mailto:rtoop@mail.usyd.edu.au). Application deadline: 8/7/00.

## Vocal Music

Weber State University -- Assistant Professor of Music - Weber State University invites applications for a tenure-track Vocal Music position (soprano/alto) in the music area of the Department of Performing Arts. Responsibilities: teach applied voice, vocal pedagogy and diction; classroom teaching in other music area subjects according to the candidate's strengths; and fulfill committee assignments. Successful candidate will be an active performer who is visible and active in professional associations. Minimum Requirements: earned doctorate in Vocal Performance and/or Pedagogy; successful college/university teaching experience with evidence of superior teaching ability. Preferred Qualifications: pedagogy skills, excellent written and oral communication skills. A background in Opera and/or Choral Music is an advantage but not required. Position begins July 1, 2000, with classes beginning August 30, 2000. Full teaching load consists of 12 hours per semester. Salary commensurate with rank and experience. Send inquiries, nominations, and applications (which should include a letter indicating the applicant's interest in and qualifications for the position, resume, names and phone numbers of three references, and a transcript indicating the highest degree obtained) to: Weber State University, Music Search Committee, c/o Human Resource Department, 1016 University Circle, Ogden, UT 84408-1016. Phone: (801) 626-6991.

# Recordings

*Bach 2000*. Teldec. "Never mind when I would listen to it; where would I put it? Think of the expanse [and expense]: 153 compact discs released in 12 volumes, 71 CD's of the sacred cantatas alone, 35 more for organ and other keyboard pieces. Volume 7 has motets, songs and 371 chorales. . . . Bach 2000 . . . competes with Genesis: a creation-making seven days of listening and no seventh day of rest. No time out for naps or bathroom breaks either. . . . [A]llow for almost two yards of music. Eleven hundred ninety-nine dollars and ninety-seven cents, please. A less caloric package, minus the cantatas (described by one representative of the company as Bach Light), will cost you \$849.97" [Bernard Holland, The New York Times, 2/15/00].

Earle Brown. *Times Five. Octet 1 for Eight Loudspeakers. December 1952. Novara. Music for Violin, Cell, and Piano. Music for Cello and Piano. Nine Rare Bits for One or Two Harpsichords*. David Tudor, Matthew Raimondi, David Soyer, Michael Daugherty. CRI. "Earle Brown is known as part of 'The New York School' that also included Cage and Feldman. This new American Masters collection focuses on his seminal works from the 1950s and 1960s. This is bold, abstract music that utilizes such modern techniques as graphic and proportional scoring. In addition to works from CRI LPs, there are several new releases including a set of performances by the young composer Michael Daugherty, a former student of Brown. Other stand-out performances are by the late pianist David Tudor and violinist Matthew Raimondi" [Internet release].

Marco Eneidi and the American Jungle Orchestra, with Glenn Spearman, Jackson Krall, Wadada Leo Smith, Bertram Turetzky, Bruce Ackley, Ashley Adams, Chris Cox, George Cremaschi, Danielle Degruittela, Tara Flandreau, Hal Forman, Matthew Goodheart, Philip Greenleif, Tom Heasley, Ron Heglin, Garth Powell, Jon Raskin, Damon Smith, Oluyemi Thomas, and Alex Weiss. Marco Eneidi, 4141 Masterson St., Oakland, CA 94619.

Carson Kievman. *The Temporary & Tentative Extended Piano*. David Arden. CRI.

Edwin London. *Day of Desolation. Brass Quintet. Psalm of These Days II, Psalm of These Days III. Dream Thing on Biblical Episodes*. University of Connecticut Concert Choir, Extended Vocal Techniques Ensemble, and University of Illinois Contemporary Chamber Players. CRI. "Edwin London (b. 1929) has been a reigning force in the contemporary music scene in Cleveland, Ohio for several decades. Though he has earned distinction as a teacher (at Cleveland State) and as a conductor and administrator (he founded the Cleveland Chamber Symphony in 1980), his greatest accomplishments are as a composer. This American Masters collection focuses on London's innovative choral works of the 70s and 80s. Similar to portions of Bernstein's *Mass*, these works draw on extended vocal techniques" (whispers, shouts, chance procedures and the like) and electronics to explore religious themes in a modern world. Rounding out the collection is the stately *Brass Quintet* which was recorded by the principals of the Cleveland Orchestra in 1981" [Internet release].

Otto Luening. *Songs of Otto Luening*. Soprano Judith Betina and pianist James Goldsworthy. CRI. "Otto Luening (1900-1996) was a grand old man of American Twentieth Century music. A pioneer of electronic music, a distinguished teacher at Columbia University, and the very the model of musical citizen, he was also co-founder of CRI. His music is widely recorded on the label but until now his distinctive writing for solo voice was not on disc. Now, in honor of Luening's Centennial year, CRI presents this new recording of songs that spanned Luening's entire life. Many of these gems practically tell the story of his life, for there are German lieder (Luening studied in Zurich with Busoni!), there are Joyce settings (as young men, Luening and Joyce were in a theatre troupe together), and there are numerous straight-ahead settings of American poets (including a large Dickinson set). CRI's disc includes complete song texts and liner notes by composer Jack Beeson" [Internet release].

Barton McLean. *Forgotten Shadows*. Barton McLean, keyboards, party horns, sirens, flexatone; Priscilla McLean, music boxes, slide whistle, siren, party horns, clapper, woodblock, flexatone, Happy Apple. CRI. "Barton McLean's new Emergency Music disc consists of three electro-acoustic works which remember and celebrate the rituals and ceremonies that bring people together. . . . *Happy Days* mixes various classic party-tunes performed on music boxes!" [Internet release].

# 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 is currently at work on his Symphony No. 5.

DAVID BÜNDLER is the pen name of Byrwec 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.

MARK FRANCIS is Instructor of Music at the Louisiana School for Math, Science, and the Arts. He holds a D.M.A. in composition from the University of Kentucky. He has received four ASCAP Standard Awards and his compositions and arrangements are published by Connors Publications, Flute Club America, Mysterium Publications, and Little Piper Publications. He performs in flute and guitar duo with Denette McDermott and with the chamber ensemble, Pipes and Strums. He is Vice-President of the Southeastern Composers League and a frequent contributor to the *New Journal of Music* and 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC.

JANOS GEREKEN is the Arts Editor of the Post Newspaper Group.

HARRY HEWITT's writing appears courtesy of PENN SOUNDS, which he edits and publishes.

LAURIE HUDICEK began her musical education at the age of five. In 1988 she began studying at the Peabody Preparatory School where she was a student of Frances Cheng-Koors. She completed the school's certificate program in 1991. In 1995, Hudicek graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in music from St. Mary's College of Maryland where she studied with Brian Ganz and focused on twentieth-century repertoire with Eliza Garth. In 1998, she received her Master's of Music degree in Piano Performance from the University of

Maryland while studying with Bradford Gowen. Hudicek has won awards from several institutions including the Maryland State Music Teacher's Association (1989, 1990), and the Arts Alliance of St. Mary's College (1994). She was a prizewinner in the Crane Festival of New Music National Solo Performers Competition in April 1995, and participated in the first Annual Institute for Contemporary Music Performance Summer Master Session in Buffalo, NY in the same year. Hudicek continues to study with Gowen while in the Doctoral program at the University of Maryland, where she has a teaching assistantship. She focuses on the performance of contemporary piano music and has performed several masterpieces of this century including volumes I and II of George Crumb's *Makrokosmos* for solo piano and volume IV for piano four-hands. Hudicek had been on the piano faculty of St. Mary's College of Maryland (1995-96) and is currently on the piano faculty of the Levine School of Music in Washington, D. C.

DEBORAH KRAVETZ is Staff Reviewer for Penn Sounds and writes about contemporary art, artists and galleries for ArtMatters; she was Managing Director for the Philadelphia Festival Chorus.

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](http://www.msu.edu/user/gualtie3).

JAMES L. PAULK is a New York correspondent for *The New Music Connoisseur* and 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC.

MIKE SILVERTON is Editor of *La Folia*, LaFolia.com., sponsored by Madrigal Audio Labs, Inc. He is also a contributor to *The Absolute Sound*, former contributor to *Fanfare*, and producer of poetry readings and broadcasts for the Kaymar Gallery, the New School for Social Research, NYC, WNYC, and Pacifica Radio. His poetry has been published in Harper's, literary magazines, and short-verse anthologies edited by William Cole. A book of his poems, *Battery Park*, 1966, was published by Russell Edson's Thing Press.



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