

21ST CENTURY MUSIC

AUGUST 2000

INFORMATION FOR SUBSCRIBERS

21ST-CENTURY MUSIC is published monthly by 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC, P.O. Box 2842, San Anselmo, CA 94960.

Subscription rates in the U.S. are \$84.00 (print) and \$42.00 (e-mail) per year; subscribers to the print version elsewhere should add \$36.00 for postage. Single copies of the current volume and back issues are \$8.00 (print) and \$4.00 (e-mail). Large back orders must be ordered by volume and be pre-paid. Please allow one month for receipt of first issue. Domestic claims for non-receipt of issues should be made within 90 days of the month of publication, overseas claims within 180 days. Thereafter, the regular back issue rate will be charged for replacement. Overseas delivery is not guaranteed. Send orders to 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC, P.O. Box 2842, San Anselmo, CA 94960. e-mail: mus21stc@aol.com.

Typeset in Times New Roman. Copyright 2000 by 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC. This journal is printed on recycled paper. Copyright notice: Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use is granted by 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC.

INFORMATION FOR CONTRIBUTORS

21ST-CENTURY MUSIC invites pertinent contributions in analysis, composition, criticism, interdisciplinary studies, musicology, and performance practice; and welcomes reviews of books, concerts, music, recordings, and videos. The journal also seeks items of interest for its calendar, chronicle, comment, communications, opportunities, publications, recordings, and videos sections. Typescripts should be double-spaced on 8 1/2 x 11 -inch paper, with ample margins. Authors with access to IBM compatible word-processing systems are encouraged to submit a floppy disk, or e-mail, in addition to hard copy.

Prospective contributors should consult "The Chicago Manual of Style," 13th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) and "Words and Music," rev. ed. (Valley Forge, PA: European American Music Corporation, 1982), in addition to back issues of this journal. Typescripts should be sent to 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC, P.O. Box 2842, San Anselmo, CA 94960. e-mail: mus21stc@aol.com. Materials for review may be sent to the same address.

INFORMATION FOR ADVERTISERS

Send all inquiries to 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC, P.O. Box 2842, San Anselmo, CA 94960. e-mail: mus21stc@aol.com.

21ST CENTURY MUSIC

August 2000

Volume 7, Number 8

RICHARD KOSTELANETZ	The Reddeath of P.D.Q. Bach	1
PAYTON MACDONALD	Yet Another Interview with Augusta Read Thomas	4
ANTON ROVNER	An Interview with Mark Belodubrovsky	8
TOM MOORE	An Interview with Serio Roberto de Oliveira	12
CONCERT REVIEWS	Ojai 2000	18
	TED BLAIR	
	Simplicius Far From Simple	20
	MARK ALBURGER	
	Bravo Maestro Thomas!	20
	BRUCE CHRISTIAN BENNETT	
	The Fourth of Faith	21
	JANOS GERE BEN	
	Talking Music at Davies Hall	21
	PAMELA Z	
	Colorful Cartoon "Rake"	22
	MARK ALBURGER	
	The Old Becomes New At San Francisco Symphony	23
	MARK ALBURGER	

	Antheil's "Terrifyingly Great Fun" JANOS GERE BEN	23
	Bravo MTT! CRAIG MATSUMOTO	24
	Underground Riot JANOS GERE BEN	25
	Music for 18 Mavericks PHILIPPE TAPON	25
	Water! Water! MARK PETERSEN	26
	Bravo Berkeley Symphony! MATT J. INGLES	26
	Adams Shakes It PHILIPPE TAPON	26
	Hudicek, Cowell, and Crumb GARRISON HULL	27
	The Random and Purposeful MARK ALBURGER	27
	Medium Bang, Big Effect MARK ALBURGER	28
RECORD REVIEWS	Once Upon a Piano Equischwartz Manifesto of Spiral Catacombs Small Wonders Sound Connections	29 29 29 30 30
CALENDAR	For August 2000	32
CHRONICLE	Of June 2000	33
COMMUNICATION		38
OPPORTUNITIES		39
WRITERS		39

ILLUSTRATIONS

i, 1 Peter Schickele; 9, 11 Russian maps; 15, 17 Brazilian maps
 20 Simplicius! (City College of San Francisco; 21 Charles Ives - Symphony No. 4 (excerpt - Associated)
 22 Sirens; 24, 25 Steve Reich - Phase Patterns (excerpts - Universal)
 27 Henry Cowell - The Banshee (excerpt - Quincke); 28-31 Sonic Circuits (Innova); 32 William Burroughs
 37 Money; 38-40 Villa Lobos - Twice Five Pieces (excerpt - Mercury)

The Redeath of P.D.Q. Bach

RICHARD KOSTELANETZ

Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different [T. S. Eliot, on Thomas Massinger].

There is nothing wrong with stealing, as long as you know who you're stealing from [Peter Schickele, quoting Ralph Vaughn Williams].

Several summers ago buzzed in my ear the rumor that P.D.Q. Bach might die again, that his dates in the history books would read not only (1807-1742?), as it now stands, but (1965-1991). The rumor continued that his terminal concert would be 1 April 1991, which is P.D.Q.'s birthday. "It's all false," his creator-alter ego Peter Schickele told me. P.D.Q. was simply going to follow the late Glenn Gould's example and retire from live concertizing, sort of. One afternoon last fall, seated in a windowless midtown Manhattan office, the ebullient Schickele explained that after a thousand or so live concerts all over North America (never abroad) he would like to fill touring time with other activities, done not only under his own name but as P.D.Q. His plans include a regular radio program with "Peter Schickele" as an inspired commentator, more "P.D.Q.B." discs from Telarc, and more composing as "P.S.," especially for movies, for the theater, and for children. As P.S., he has even produced a pilot of a television program for children. Unlike Gould who vowed to give up live concertizing forever and kept his promise, Schickele speaks of "a hibernation, a going underground, an indefinite sabbatical, without any commitment to going back."

Myself I don't believe it. I knew Gould, who despised live performing; he hated appearing in public; he refused to shake hands; he preferred to communicate with friends by telephone. Peter Schickele is not like that at all. The theatrical stage has always been his most natural habitat; the live audience, an easy friend. "I'm not afraid of kissing people on the cheek," he told me. As long as people want to see P.D.Q. Bach, and they do, he will feel tempted to return; and being a far more agreeable person than Gould ever was, I'll wager thaler to groschen that Schickele will tour P. D. Q. Bach again.

It has been a really extraordinary creation, this P.D.Q. Bach: a fictional composer of pseudo-classical music that could be quite funny. It is true that the humor depended upon such marvelously comic titles as *Concerto for Horn and Hardart* and *Iphigenia in Brooklyn* back in 1965, the "Safe" *Sextette* more recently. It also depended upon invented instruments or unusual combinations that made unusual sounds. The hardart, for instance, was a collection of dime-store noisemakers each tuned to a different pitch. The sextette depends, as he told me, "upon the forgotten members of the orchestra: piccolo, English horn, bass clarinet, contrabassoon, harp, and celeste." Its title comes "from the fact that it was discovered in a safe." Notwithstanding the titles and the instrumentation, the music itself could be witty in its shifts between high art and pop, between fast and slow, between classical and contemporary. Indeed, there is no doubt that much of the greatest comic classical music in all history is attributed to P. D. Q. Bach.

Born in 1935 in Ames, Iowa, Schickele grew up in Fargo, North Dakota, the son of an agricultural economist (himself the son of the noted Alsatian expressionist poet Rene Schickele, 1883-1940). Peter and his younger brother David built a basement theater, produced radio comedies, taped their musical performances, and shot films (with David eventually becoming a professional filmmaker). Peter also played the bassoon in the local semi-pro symphony and appeared in local theater productions. He discovered the records of Spike Jones, the comedic bandleader, whom he considers to this day the principal influence on P.D.Q.'s musical art. It was back there in Fargo, which is culturally about as far from eastern Germany as you can get in the western world, that the moniker "P.D.Q. Bach" was born, his initials referring to an obsolete euphemism for "pretty damn quick."

After he left Fargo, Schickele's theatrical career got sidetracked. He went to Swarthmore--then as now, as arduous a college as America allows. He studied composing as often as possible, even spending a summer at Aspen with Roy Harris. Graduating as the only music major in the 1957 class (just two years behind Michael Dukakis), he came to Juilliard, which was then considered to offer the best professional training for the budding composer. Among his Juilliard classmates were Philip Glass and Steve Reich, two young men who have since become well-known composers.

Schickele is best remembered as the most adept student in the class--the one who would finish the assignments with the quickest dispatch. "If we were asked to write a symphonic movement in the manner of Stravinsky," Glass once told me, "Peter could do it over a weekend. He could write synthetic Copland, synthetic Mozart, synthetic Bach. He had no fear of the terrors of composition." For his final year, Schickele was invited to teach an advanced class, and to this day Glass attests that his best course at Juilliard was "Peter's, in ear training."

As Schickele recalls, it was in the Juilliard cafeteria that the young composers discussed all the hilarious accidents they had seen in classical concerts. Why not do a concert full of them, he thought. The first opportunity came in the spring of 1959, when he was invited to fill half a concert program on short notice. To the fore came his legendary facility. The conductor for this ruse was Jorge Meister, who later conducted the orchestra on P.D.Q. Bach's first records and who, as the music director of the Pasadena Symphony, will conduct the terminal concert on April first. (Loyalty to his colleagues remains a Schickele virtue.) In the early 1960's, young Schickele pursued a compositional career, spending a year in Los Angeles and teaching at both of his alma maters. In 1962 he married the poet Susan Sindall; their family now includes two adult children.

The turning point was a single self-sponsored concert at Carnegie Hall in the spring of 1965. As Howard Klein wrote in the New York Times at the time, "The risibility of the audience threatened to become a problem." This led to Vanguard Records releasing an album drawn mostly from tapes of that performance. Perhaps the most extraordinary thing about this record is certain jokes that, classic as they were, have survived to this day. The basic conceit is that the disheveled Schickele, purportedly a "Professor" at the equally fictitious "University of Southern North Dakota at Hoople," had discovered P.D.Q., "the last but not least of J. S. Bach's 21 children."

As the record jacket explained, "Fifteen years ago musicologists completely ignored P.D.Q. whose existence had only been deduced from police records, tavern I.O.U.'s and the like. But in 1953, while visiting the lovely Lechendochschloss in Bavaria, Professor Schickele discovered -- quite by chance, in all fairness, a piece of manuscript being used as a strainer in the caretaker's percolator. This turned out to be the "*Sanka*" Cantata, the first autographed manuscript by P.D.Q. Bach ever found." In this double framing, the "Professor" is thick in ways that the real Mr. Peter Schickele is not (just as the stage "Jack Benny" was stingy in ways that the real Mr. Jack Benny was not). To put it differently, P.D.Q. is a dummy "discovered" by another dummy--literally a dummy-within-a-dummy--and one reason why the show is so rich in humor is that you laugh at them both.

Even on the record, the jokes are both common and sophisticated. On one hand Schickele introduced such instruments as "the left-hand sewer flute" that had various spigots attached. On the other hand, he gave his pieces unlikely numbers that echo the BWV catalog numbers for Papa Bach: *Sinfonia Concertata*, S. 98.6 or *The Seasonings*, S. 1/2 tsp." The movements were given names that make more sense if you begin with musical knowledge: "Sehr Unruhig mit Schmalz, Andante sensa moto, Presto mit schleppend." As the musicologist Robert White said, "He's spoofing things that most people don't know, and yet he makes them feel like insiders."

The concerts have been a rich delight. The one I saw last year at New York's Carnegie Hall, just after Christmas, opened with a bureaucratic-looking man identifying himself as an official of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, here to give Schickele the Grammy that, since he was performing on the road at ceremony-time, he couldn't receive in person. Schickele came running down the aisle, in one of his characteristically flamboyant entrances, showing no sign of the polio that put a brace on his leg in the late fifties. This all seemed perfunctory, if not innocuous, until the second number, "Classical Rap," in which Schickele introduces himself as "Grandmaster Flab with the Hoople Funkharmonic." As his doggerel rap started, Schickele coughed, revealing his mouthing to a prerecorded tape. Out of the wings stormed the Grammysman, confiscating the statue and before all eyes shredding the accompanying scroll. As few of us spectators saw in advance this allusion to Milli Vanilli, we laughed as well at ourselves by having taken the awards ceremony seriously.

There were clever word gags. He thanked "my booking agent, who gives me pretty good odds." The Alamo, he explained, was named by a Frenchman, meaning "in the style of one of the Three Stooges." One Beethoven symphony was written expressly for Alphonse the clergyman; it is called "Paster Al." He praised an historic Viennese restaurant, "Frauengutessen, or Mom's Good Eats." Young P.D.Q., he explained, played with little musical toys called "toy-lettes." His practice at such instruments was thus "toylette training." There was repartee directly with the audience. Schickele's responses to applause for his entrance was "same to you" and "likewise I'm sure." To audience hissing after a campy joke, he replied, "Truth is impervious to hissing." As the audience was clamoring for a second encore, he came to the front of the stage and asked whether "Jeff Ehrhart [air-heart?]," was in the house. Getting no answer, he approached the nearest handsome female musician and escorted her off the stage, in a kind of choreographic encore.

The highlight of the evening was his "Oedipus Tex," a dramatic oratorio nearly one-half hour long, featuring not only the "Greater Hoople Area Off-Season Philharmonic" (GHAOSP, which, he acknowledged, suspiciously resembled the "New York Pick-Up Ensemble" that accompanied him the year before) but "The Okay Chorale," which persistently stamped their chairs and feet every time they got up or sat down. Here the climax was a musical joke, with the chorus singing "The eyes of Texas are upon you" to an aberrant arrangement of the tune, "I've Been Working on the Railroad." Schickele himself played the role of Tex, brother of Rex, in a voice that could be generously characterized as "cracked." Though this work in particular included some beautiful arrangements for a large ensemble, the trouble with the entire program was that it duplicated item for item his 1990 CD, in sum reminding me, for one, that the CD was not half as hilarious as his live show (though it becomes perhaps three-quarters as hilarious after witnessing the live show). It is not for nothing that Schickele told me that, even in hibernation, these post-Christmas New York concerts will continue.

It is hard for us to imagine how much attention Schickele devotes to each of his visibly breezy performances. At his first Puerto Rican show in 1989, aware of the possibility of language difficulties, he asked a member of the orchestra to translate for him phrase upon phrase. However, whereas the professor said, "There are four movements to this piece," the translator was instructed to say, in Spanish equivalents, "There are four things I don't like about him," the last of which was that "he stinks." To Schickele, the importance of this comic tour-de-force involved more than humor. "It shows that I recognize English isn't their principal language. It relaxed the audience a bit." These Puerto Ricans also knew he cared enough about them to prepare a major gag he had not done before.

Schickele made many records for Vanguard, which then repackaged selections into two-volume sets with titles like *The Worst of P.D.Q. Bach*. Many of these remain in print. When Vanguard was sold away to people no longer interested in producing new PDQB records, Schickele signed on with Telarc, opening with the CD that, wonder of wonders, scored his first Grammy for Best Comedy Recording. *1712 Overture and Other Musical Assaults* has all the earmarks, beginning with the fictitious professor introducing six pieces and then taking credit as "conductor, narrator, pianist, devious instrumentalist, and intellectual guide." He wrote the booklet notes which, as always in his discs, can be as funny as his music. A sort of counter-Renaissance man, Schickele must also be the disc's producer, as no one else is assigned that credit. Also appearing are "The Greater Hoople Area Off-Season Philharmonic" and "Walter Bruno, conductor." Since the last name is unknown to me, there might be an allusion to the historic Bruno Walter.

The best single work is the title piece, which becomes an ironic extension of the Tchaikovsky classic. Discovering that the "weird Russian hymn at the beginning of *1812* resembles 'Yankee Doodle'," he went with it; another Tchaikovsky section leads into "Pop Goes the Weasel." *1712* is also the first P.D.Q.B. piece for a full symphonic orchestra. "Up to now," he explained, "they've all been discovered in such a way that they can be performed by a forty-person orchestra." Such ironic extrapolations of other than baroque music represent a distinct new development of P.D.Q.'s art. Two other similar pieces on the same disc are *The Bach Portrait* that takes off from Aaron Copland's *Lincoln Portrait* and *Einstein on the Fritz* which parodies, rather savagely some think, his Juilliard buddy Philip Glass's *Einstein on the Beach*.

Otherwise, Schickele is full of plans. "I hope someday there will be a P.D.Q. Bach movie, 'The Life and Times of P.D.Q. Bach,' that, like Kenneth Clark's 'Civilization' series, will have quick transitions through history." Short of that he'd like to do a PDQB television special, which, surprisingly, has never happened before. I for one would like to have videotapes/discs of those PDQB pieces that, as he puts it, "are so inherently visual you have got to see them." Fellow Schickele fans tell me of the *Canine Cantata -- Wachet Arf*, subtitled *Sleeping Dogs Awake* (alluding to J.S.B.'s *Wachet Auf*, or *Sleepers Awake*), in which he emerges dressed as an English sheep dog. As even those that have been recorded sometimes are better when you can see as well as hear, P.D.Q.B. may become the

first classic composer to have a videography as substantial as his discography.

"I'm sure there will be some further P.D.Q. Bach discoveries too. I just discovered a cello piece, a P.D.Q. Bach for unaccompanied cello that a cellist commissioned for a recital," he concluded, quite proud of himself. "P.D.Q. Bach is the only dead composer who can be commissioned." I think Schickele's miscellaneous writings should be collected into a book, filled as they are with marvelous reinterpretations of music and music history -- a rare critical wit that curiously most resembles, among other writing musicians, Glenn Gould's. Indeed, it could be said that no other pseudo-baroque composer ever wrote so well about the circumstances behind his (or her) music. *The Definitive Biography of P.D.Q. Bach* (1976) remains one of my favorite Schickele productions-- indeed, a pseudo-historic comic fiction every bit as rich as his best music. Drawing upon his Swarthmore training in proper English prose, Schickele writes all his own sentences, eschewing joke writers for the exactly same reason that he eschews ghost composers -- no one else, alive or dead, can do it as well.

Schickele's unique professional problem has been that his alter ego has always been far more successful in worldly terms than himself. His Charlie McCarthy has stolen Edgar Bergen's show, in part because PDQB draws upon his talents for musical mimicry, fluency, and comedy (whereas music under his own name tends to be just fluent). This pains him, because he'd like for his two identities to be at least equal. His fear, as he told me, is that, "Some music historian, two hundred years in the future, will think Peter Schickele the alter ego of P.D.Q. Bach. To me, they've always been both there. People often want me to choose, and I don't want to choose. They are both important to me. Here I find myself giving up touring, and I have new ideas for P.D.Q. Bach. I sometimes put into my sketchbook ideas that I'm not sure will end up appearing in a Peter Schickele or a P.D.Q. Bach piece." My feeling is that Schickele has hardly made any art out of the tension he feels between pursuing two artistic identities. I'm awaiting a composition credited to "P.D.Q. Bach-Peter Schickele," further to confuse that future music historian, as well as Peter Schickele's *Requiem for P.D.Q. Bach* that, like all appropriate cultural obituaries, quotes from the deceased's work within the living composer's frame.

As a fecund composer with a disregard for esthetic hierarchy, Schickele wants to write more for theater and for movies. "They always want you to start tomorrow, but up to now I've been booked up so far in advance that I couldn't do that." He wants to compose more for children and speaks with pride of *A Zoo Called Earth*, written in the early 1970s, with a taped narration spoken by a purported alien. "It has also been done with nice puppets. There is almost no kind of music I don't want to write, in terms of theater, puppet shows, or movies, or whatever it is." Rest assured, dear world, P.D.Q.B. will rise, or rerise, again.

Yet Another Interview with Augusta Read Thomas

PAYTON MACDONALD

Augusta Read Thomas (born 1964 in New York) is a professor on the composition faculty at the Eastman School of Music, and was recently Composer-in-Residence with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (through May 2000). She studied at Northwestern University, Yale University, and the Royal Academy of Music. Thomas's works have been performed with many of the great orchestras, wind ensembles, and chamber groups in the world and under the leadership of such distinguished conductors as Daniel Barenboim, Mstislav Rostropovich, Pierre Boulez, Seiji Ozawa, Gerard Schwarz, and many others.

This interview took place in her studio at the Eastman School on a warm day in the spring of 2000. Like her music, Augusta Read Thomas's conversation sparkles with intelligence, wit, and sincerity. Many of her lively gestures resisted capture in print, but left a lasting impression as the mark of someone truly dedicated to music—passionate, committed, and fully engaged.

MACDONALD: Many people might be interested in knowing about your earliest musical impressions and memories. Why don't we start with that.

THOMAS: It is hard for me to remember when I was not working with music. When I was really little I remember lying under my mother's piano and she would play and I would listen to all the vibrations come at me. I also remember putting my fingers where the pedals were and just feeling the music and being really attracted to the piano and loving music. I didn't have a formal understanding of music, but I loved it. I remember playing the piano and I remember that my father loved Bach. He'd make us sit and listen to Bach almost every night. I remember thinking: "Oh no, now we have to listen to Bach again..."

MACDONALD: That changed!

THOMAS: Then that changed. Suddenly one day I thought: "Bach's music is pretty cool stuff, I think I like this." But that was much later, that was when I was about nine. I come from a large family. There are ten kids in the family, so we always had music in the house because they all played instruments. It was the sixties, so I could hear the Beatles in one room and something else in another room. It was kind of a big, huge, chaotic musical household.

MACDONALD: Were your parents professional musicians?

THOMAS: No, neither of them, but they loved music.

MACDONALD: Can you pinpoint a time when you realized that music was not just a passion, but also perhaps a professional course?

THOMAS: I could never have imagined my life without music. I remember in second or third grade that I was really involved with music. I was taking piano lessons and singing in the chorus and playing in a little band in school. And I remember my teacher wrote in a report card that "...Augusta should really consider a career in music, she has an inkling toward it." And this one teacher every year said that I should really think about concentrating on music, and that I should go to this summer program, and do this all-state event. So it was really this one teacher who made me aware that there was a music profession and that I could be a professional. It wouldn't really occur to a kid, but when you have someone encouraging you it helps. I also remember in high school when I was applying to college and I had to tick on the boxes to determine my future career. I remember sitting there wondering whether I should tick the music box or the religion box. I was very interested in religious studies and I still am. I remember actually sitting there wondering whether I should tick the music box or the religion box. And then I realized they were the same.

MACDONALD: That's interesting. I recently had a conversation with my father. During the course of our conversation he remarked that he wished he had given me a more religious upbringing. My response was that composing and performing new music in our culture necessitates a kind of religious existence. Are you sympathetic with that response?

THOMAS: That totally resonates with me, I know exactly what you're saying. But...I don't know if I would go so far as to include all of culture. While we do live in a culture that is not necessarily sympathetic to classical musical arts, and certainly not classical musical arts for acoustic instruments...I mean, we're talking about the tiniest little speck of the music profession...but we're living in a culture that doesn't appreciate that. Our culture is completely commercial, it's bombarding us with trivial things, and here we are trying to put two notes together in the right way. How one fits religion into that is complicated, though, because I think people are involved with a lot of different types of religion, from extremely personal to extremely public. I would say that I'm a very spiritual person, and religion for me involves a sense of ritual and dedication and daily commitment to truth. But writing music every day, trying to create something, because I do write music every day, is very much a ritual experience. Confronting one's own art is like being in a religious space, and it becomes like a ritual.

MACDONALD: To change the subject a bit, I'm wondering if you can talk a bit about working with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra the last few years. Perhaps you could comment on working with Mr. Boulez and Mr. Barenboim.

THOMAS: Yes. That has been one of the best things that ever happened in my life. When the Chicago Symphony called me up to ask if I would like to be their Composer-in-Residence I said “yes” on the spot! It was an instant feeling, it felt so right, and it has felt right the whole time. I think one of the reasons it feels right is that sometimes a job fits for you. Let’s say you have strengths X, Y, and Z and they need someone to do X, Y, and Z and it’s a perfect fit. The way it has worked out is that I’ve been able to be totally true to myself, be totally who I am, say what I think, and write what I hear in my ears and soul. The experience has been so enriching and I’ve made a lot of friends there. What happened is that I wrote a piece for them, called *Words of the Sea*, for a large orchestra, which Mr. Boulez premiered in 1995. It was a very positive experience in a lot of ways. A couple of months after that they called me up on the phone and that is when they asked me to be the Composer-in-Residence. The interesting thing about the Composer-in-Residence program, for me in particular, is that I can really get along well with the staff, the administration, artistic committees, the board, and all that, but I also feel comfortable in the musician’s coffee lounge. I can talk with the players about music, go out for a drink, or have dinner with them after a concert. The musicians know I stand for something and I’ll fight for it. We’ve built a great relationship. Working with Mr. Boulez has been great. Working with him on *Words of the Sea* was terrifying, though, because my respect for him is profound. The first time we did that piece I was 31 years old. It felt really nerve-wracking at first, and yet he was so gracious, supportive, and down to earth that after the first ten minutes I felt totally comfortable. That is a very generous and gentlemanly thing for a man of his stature to do. It was great, and right away he commissioned another piece. That was also a beautiful experience, equally gratifying. He was very generous about everything. Working with Mr. Barenboim and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra has been superb. Both experiences have been great. I can’t think of two people I admire more. Working with Mr. Barenboim has been really meaningful to me because I recognize my music in his gestures. I feel this immediate rightness. For example, recently in his green room I was singing my piece to him. It felt very natural, a different kind of raw, musical, and passionate immediacy than I’ve experienced with many other conductors. He’s incredibly bright and he can get right to the core.

MACDONALD: Along with orchestral works and choral pieces, you’ve also written several concertos recently. I’m curious as to how a given player’s unique sound and approach toward music affects your compositional process when writing for that person. For example, I’m wondering what you were thinking when you wrote the trombone concerto for Christian Lindberg.

THOMAS: Well, the piece for Christian Lindberg was actually a cello concerto called *Vigil* that I wrote in 1989 which was recorded on CD. Christian was trying to make a recording of American trombone concertos and he just needed one more piece, and he asked me if I would write a piece. I said I couldn’t do it right away, but I really thought my cello concerto might make a good version for trombone. I told him I’d make a version if he liked.

It had to be refigured, and I changed the orchestration, but essentially it’s the same body of music. The only thing that was directly an inspiration about Christian Lindberg, because at the time I didn’t know him that well, was that in most cases I wouldn’t have written so many high notes. There’s a lot of high stuff in *Meditation*, but for him I know he’s got them, and he’s got them right there, so I didn’t have to put things down the octave. When I wrote *Chanson*, the cello concerto for Slava, I was really writing a song, a *chanson*, and I was actually imagining his bow arm. The piece is very impassioned and “on the string,” with subtle colors and long lines—forty or fifty bars long, really long, not just eight bar phrases. Somehow that reminds me of him, this incredibly passionate man. But it’s kind of the same with *Ritual Incantations* for David Finkel because for the most part I like that side of the cello, the impassioned, long-line, broad sound. I try to avoid the glissandos and pizzicatos that have become clichés. None of that interests me, unless it’s perfectly, compositionally right, but it’s hard to pull off. So the nature of the musical ideas is closely tied to a certain side of the cello, but also for the two players. Both cellists are incredibly accurate, with a beautiful vibrato and a huge sound. I’m trying to think of any other concertos I’ve done. I just did a piano concerto, with Daniel Barenboim, and also a violin concerto and a flute concerto. So I’ve done quite a few concertos and I think the player you’re writing for really does matter, especially if you know he or she will be committed to the project.

MACDONALD: This discussion of your repertoire reminds of me of a question I’ve been wanting to ask you for some time: Many composers of your generation and even a generation before you have embraced technology as the primary outlet for their musical ideas. You have not. Is there a reason why?

THOMAS: That’s true, I have not written any electronic music or any computer-generated sound. Everything I’ve ever written was one hundred percent acoustic. I love music made by computer or electronics, but for me the acoustic palette is so vast, and infinite, and colossal—a labyrinth of possibilities. I feel that if I just work with acoustic sound, really carefully over the next sixty years I might really learn something about it and maybe write a good piece. If I were also to add into it all that technology can do and all that computer-generated sounds can do it would be too much for me. I can do enough already with just what I have. But I love that other people do it, and there are a ton of people doing different things which are superb. A couple of other things occur to me. Number one, as a composer I am a product of all that I hear, whether it’s jazz, or street music, or an electronic work, so in a way I’m learning from having all these sounds around me. In fact, there are many things in my orchestral music that are very electronic sounding, like a shimmering behind the scenes, or a sudden metallic spark. It is clear from hearing my works that I know computer-generated music. In fact, I love it when my students bring me their computer projects. That I choose to write for acoustic instruments is just a preference, I guess. Also, I really like the human aspect of music. I’ve learned so much from the players I’ve worked with.

In all the pieces I've done I've gone to every player and asked: "What's wrong with your part? Did you like it? What do you suggest? Would that be better pizzicato? Do you suggest a mute somewhere?" I sort of accost these players for their parts, and I think they're amazed that I would even come to them.

MACDONALD: That reminds me of a story I heard recently about Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn. Apparently, following the first reading of a piece, they would talk with every player in the orchestra and get feedback about the part, and if a player didn't enjoy playing a part for some reason, Ellington and Strayhorn would actually change it!

THOMAS: For me that's key, absolutely key. The people that are playing the music are playing it all day long and they are profoundly knowledgeable. They may not be composers -- composers are a different breed of people, but they can help a lot. I find that dialogue crucial, and beautiful, extremely informative, and alive. I like to work with live players. I don't want to say never, but I don't think I'm going to go out and buy all the latest technology and set up a studio in my house. I can get my toaster and my microwave to work, but I'm not a technical person. Half of the things in my car I don't know how to work. I just don't have the curiosity for it; but if you give me two live players, any time of night or day, and say: "Go," I'll start composing something, in a split second, with no hesitation.

MACDONALD: As I understand, you were a trumpet major for all of your undergraduate studies.

THOMAS: For three years, I kind of overlapped in that third year.

MACDONALD: Are you doing any playing or conducting now?

THOMAS: No.

MACDONALD: Do you miss it? Has that affected your compositional work at all?

THOMAS: I definitely miss performing, there's no doubt about that. I wish I had your hands and could play the drums. I wish I had somebody's voice so I could sing the *Lieder*. That immediacy is so important. But on the other hand, two things occur to me. One, when I write my music I'm always singing it and dancing it and tapping it and trying to feel it. It's very much alive for me. I think the one thing you can always say about my music is that the listener knows that I heard it. It might get very complicated or it might get very simple, but it's clear that I heard it. A lot of composers write music that sounds like they've never even heard it. It's just a bunch of notes being pushed around and it's messy. But whether you like my music or not, it's clear that I heard it, and that's a reflection of the fact that I am singing it, and dancing it, and conducting it. So there *is* an immediacy with my composing. Secondly, I'm a relatively prolific composer. So if someone offers to perform an old piece I usually ask them if I can write them a new one. I do that because I like the

immediacy of it. I don't want to sit on my catalogue of older pieces, and sit on my laurels. I would much rather write another piece. So in that sense I think there is kind of an immediacy still. Everyone's different, but I've definitely got my sleeves rolled up and I'm in the mode for writing, I'm in the groove. Some composers never really get in that groove. They're here, and the music is over there. They write some music and then go to their other life, composing is not their entire life. It's very separate, and the music sounds that way, it's not bursting out of them.

MACDONALD: Your music certainly seems like it's bursting out of you. In fact, I'm amazed at how much you're able to write while still holding down a full-time teaching job and participating in the various administrative tasks that result from your work at Eastman and with the CSO. Your life must be a whirlwind of work.

THOMAS: ...I've been on a roll. I love music, that is my whole life. I basically get up and work all day until about one in the morning, and then collapse and then get up early and do it all over again. ...It's been a little bit *too* busy. Basically I haven't been sleeping much. I pretty much sleep about four hours a night, which is not good, I have to change. This has been going on for about three years and I'm a complete insomniac. But I think all people who are really devoted to something are obsessed. I can't think of people that I really admire that are really good at something that weren't obsessed about it. Whatever it is, a car mechanic, a nuclear scientist, anything. All the musicians I admire I can imagine that they were completely impassioned people. In a way music wants that, it requires that and it is so gratifying, it gives back so much. You work and work and work, but then you realize that it gives back so much. What I'm trying to say is that I think a lot of people are insomniacs, people who are dedicated to what they doing.

MACDONALD: Going back to some discussion about your repertoire, I know that you've written a ballet and a chamber opera. Are you planning to do more multi-media work?

THOMAS: I'd like to. I'd really like to work more with dancers. Maybe it's because I dance my music all the time.

MACDONALD: So that immediacy aspect comes into play again.

THOMAS: Yes, so I feel how it might feel. Often I ask my students to dance their music out, right here, which is always very interesting.

MACDONALD: Are they reluctant to do that?

THOMAS: Some are, but some students will dance and sing their music. But my music doesn't have a pounding and unchanging beat. The tyranny of the incessant beat is not something that interests me. My music is highly rhythmic in a lot of ways, but it's always punchy and athletic and shifting. It's not just boom, boom, boom. I might have a lot of five against two or three against two over a long rubato.

It's hard to dance to that and dancers aren't always attracted to that. But I would like to do more with dance, and I'd like to do another opera. I like to do pieces with collaborators, because I learn so much from their expertise.

MACDONALD: Is there anyone working now that you've dreamed of working with?

THOMAS: Oh boy...I'd love to work with James Taylor because he was my idol when I was growing up. Or maybe Simon and Garfunkel. Just something out of the ordinary. That would interest me. I would do something completely unexpected for them, though. I would also like to work more with Chanticleer, the 12-voice men's chorus. I've already done five commissions for them, but I want to do a sixth and a seventh and an eighth. I'd like to do something with them in an opera, with dancers. I like the high male countertenor voice. I also want to write a work for Esa Pekka Salonen and the Los Angeles Philharmonic as well as a work for my hometown orchestra, the New York Philharmonic. I like to notate all my music, but the energy and the risk in jazz is very close to what I try to get in my music, and therefore I'd like to work with a really rocking big band. I would write something for them, fully notated, but then revise it because I would learn so much from them.

MACDONALD: Are you familiar with many of the composers that are working today that are doing more experimental work in jazz and with big bands?

THOMAS: No, but I would love to know what they're doing.

MACDONALD: I'll loan you some CD's. There are many people out there, like Anthony Braxton, Tom Pierson, Maria Schneider, Dave Rivello, and others, that are doing some fantastic work. Do you consciously try to incorporate jazz into your orchestra pieces the way other composers have done?

THOMAS: My piece *Orbital Beacons* really goes for it! You might hate it, but it commits big time. Some jazz-oriented orchestral pieces seem a bit pandering to me. I have a lot of CDs of Ella Fitzgerald with big band and I really like it when it gets out on the edge of the sound, really rocking. That's what interests me, and the harmonies, the harmonic possibilities. But I do think a lot of my orchestral music is very jazzy, especially in the brass writing. I like the hits, or stacking the hits up. It's so clear to me where the reference is coming from. It is somewhat coming out of Stravinsky, but it's much more coming out of jazz. When you put it on an orchestral concert stage it suddenly sounds "classical," because of the venue, but if people are really listening to the syntax of the sound it's clear the reference is jazz.

MACDONALD: That's interesting. I've heard you comment many times in previous conversations how important the *sound* is. It seems to me that there are many composers working today who consider the visual aspect of their presentation to be equally important to the sound of their music. How do you feel about that aspect of contemporary music?

THOMAS: We do live in a culture where spectacle is everything. There are TV's everywhere: in elevators, and bus stations, and airports, every twenty feet there's a TV. And there's a barrage of advertising. Clearly we're in this phase across three thousand plus years of Western culture where we're highly visually oriented. It's very hard for people to sit for forty-five minutes and listen to a brand new symphony of Augusta Read Thomas, in a stiff chair, in clothes they're not completely comfortable in, at 8:30 at night, after they've worked all day, and after they've paid fifty dollars to hear this thing. It's not the easiest context for me to try to share my soul. But I have nothing against visualizations. For example, in my piece *Song of Sorrow* I went and bought purple silk shirts for all the singers because I wanted them to be uniform. They were a team. What I won't do is think: "O.K., these poor people have paid fifty dollars to hear this Thomas piece at eight-thirty at night so I think I'll have purple strobe lights, show a video, and have the orchestra all wear pink..." For me, that's totally irrelevant. Maybe I'm too much of a purist or optimist, but I believe the audience will get something from it. I don't want to put make-up on my music. I'd rather just be a pure human being. It feels too much like I have put strobe lights on to sell something, but it would feel that way if I had lipstick on right now. It's just not my way. The thing is that I listen to music all day long. You can put a CD in and I'm right there and I can stay there for three hours. I have this attention span that I've cultivated over 25 years, and you have the same attention span. We're in the very small minority, but I still don't think we should pander to the majority with quick fixes. There are too many composers making gimmicks to their music anyway. I prefer gimmickless art.

MACDONALD: Related to this is the fact that you do a lot of public speaking, often in conjunction with the premier of a new work. You're very good at communicating verbally with an audience. Is this a skill you've consciously developed or has it always come naturally to you?

THOMAS: I haven't cultivated those skills at all. If someone asks me what I think about the current political election, or media scandal, I'll say a couple sentences. But if you ask me to say something about a Beethoven string quartet you'll get paragraphs, automatically. It interests me. It's just natural, it's what I like to think about and talk about. I may be wrong, but I'll have an opinion. It just bubbles up enthusiastically, I can't even shut myself up. It's really just generous enthusiasm to share what I love. That's all it is. I don't speak brilliantly, but I speak honestly. It's coming straight from my heart. Therefore, I think people are attracted to that. If I saw a nuclear physicist telling me "I made this, and I did this, and I solved this!..." I would want to hear more, and I don't know anything about nuclear science; but if someone's being academic: "Blah, blah, blah..." I'm not interested because I don't feel like it's coming from them. I wish I knew more about more things. I've also said to audiences: "I really don't know." I just tell them that, and I think people appreciate that.

An Interview with Mark Belodubrovsky

ANTON ROVNER

Mark Belodubrovsky, a native of Bryansk, Russia, is a composer, violinist, and the artistic director of the annual *Nicolai Roslavetz and Nahum Gabo Festival for Contemporary Art*, which is dedicated to reviving and promoting the legacy of neglected early 20th century Russian avant-garde composers and visual artists, whose legacy was suppressed by the Soviet regime and is only now starting to be revived. One of the most important figures in this category is the Russian composer Nicolai Roslavetz (1880-1944), whose music is based on his own discovered "new system of organization of sounds," akin to Scriabin's late music and an early pre-cursor of Schoenberg's serialism. Bryansk is a small city, six hours southwest of Moscow, presently close to the borders of Ukraine and Belarus, a picturesque town, combining urban and rural features. This city, a highly unlikely place for appreciation of contemporary music or art, has become a major center for both, due to the effort of one person: Mark Belodubrovsky, a wonderful musician and an enthusiastic champion for contemporary music and art.

I spoke with Mark Belodubrovsky in his home, a one-story wooden house, on March 19, 2000, the last day of the eight days of the *Nicolas Roslavetz and Nahum Gabo Festival*.

ROVNER: Tell us about yourself, about your life and about how you started your musical activities.

BELODUBROVSKY: I was born in Bryansk, where I have lived the greater part of my life. I started my musical studies by studying violin with my mother, Alexandra Vassilievna Belodubrovskaya. Then I studied in Leningrad in a special music school affiliated with the Leningrad Conservatory, where I studied violin with Veniamin Iosefovich Scher and composition with Sergei Yakovlevich Wolfensohn. After I finished school, I studied at the Leningrad Conservatory, continuing my violin studies with Scher and also studying composition with Orest Alexandrovich Yevlakhov, who around that time was also the teacher of such famous composers as Boris Tischenko and, earlier, Sergei Slonimsky and Andrei Petrov. I graduated from the Conservatory in 1965 from the violin class and in 1966 from the composition class. I returned to Bryansk in 1965, and since then I have worked as a soloist in the Bryansk Philharmonia and as professor at the Bryansk Music College, where I have taught violin, chamber music, music theory and composition, recently also taking charge of the college chamber orchestra. I have been a member of the Composers' Union since 1972. In 1978 I became the founder and artistic director of the artistic club Apodion and in 1986 I became the founder and artistic director of the Nicolai Roslavetz Music Festival. I have performed in tours in Moscow, Leningrad (subsequently, St. Petersburg), Finland (in 1994) and in Germany.

I have had articles on music published in such magazines as *Sovetskaya Muzyka*, *Muzykal'naya Zhizn'* (*Musical Life*), and in the American journal *Leonardo*.

ROVNER: Could you describe your own music, your personal musical style, and how your style is manifested in some of your compositions?

BELODUBROVSKY: Among my musical compositions, the genres of chamber, choral and vocal music predominate. I have written songs and choruses set to the texts of Russian poets Feodor Tutchev, Velemir Khlebnikov, Alexander Pushkin, Olga Sedakova, Daniil Andreyev, Victoria Andreyeva. My chamber music includes two sonatas for violin and piano, and my solo violin pieces -- *Four Transformations*, *Four Poems of J.Einchendorf*, and *Prelude and Toccata*. Because I studied at the Leningrad Conservatory, many of the features of the Leningrad or St. Petersburg contemporary music tradition have become prominent in my musical style. My music is to a great degree based on traditional musical language, combined with a moderate amount of newer and more innovative techniques, without getting into more radical avant-garde trends. Additionally, my music shows a strong balance between the structural, formal elements and the emotional, romantic elements. There is also a certain influence present of various composers from the early 20th century. My music frequently incorporates the effect of reading poetry or singing done by the performer simultaneously while playing. Among techniques I have often utilized, I should mention the serial organization of folkloric elements, as well as the notion of "thorough transformation." Just as in the related paintings of artist Mikhail Shemyakin, here an entire musical composition (or an ethnographical element) is taken and virtually transformed and restructured. In my *Four Transformations* for solo violin, I have taken as a source the music of Grieg, Webern, Dufay, and Russian folk music from the Bryansk region. My other work for solo violin, *Four Poems of J.Eichendorf*, incorporates the technique of sound-imitation. I was interested in this musical device as far back as my years at the Conservatory, when I was entirely fascinated by Jannequin's composition *Bird Songs*. In my piece, the imitation is more an example of pure fascination with the beauty of sound-color, a joy of being able to create sonorities that are similar to nature. Lastly, my music also frequently includes arrangements and developments of folk music, including that from the Bryansk region, obtained during my trips and expeditions into villages. In my *Second Sonata for Violin and Piano*, subtitled *Quasi una Sonata*, serial techniques are used in the development of a well-known author's melody, upon which the entire four-movement composition is built.

ROVNER: What other activities did the festival engage in other than present concerts? When did the festival include the name of Nahum Gabo, the noteworthy architect and sculptor, and when did you start bringing in exhibitions of visual art as part of the festival?

BELODUBROVSKY: I have already mentioned that we have occasionally included poetry readings as well as short theatrical productions, most notably, of works by the famous Russian Futurist poet Velemir Khlebnikov, including his quasi-abstract plays *Zangezi* and *Mrs. Lenine*. For several years we have also conducted musicological conferences, devoted to the legacy of Nicolai Roslavetz, to the other forgotten Russian avant-garde composers from the early 20th century and to early 20th-century Russian musical and artistic culture in general. A wide assortment of musicologists from different cities have attended the conference and contributed presentations to it. These presentations were subsequently published as *Roslavetz and His Time* of which three volumes have appeared. In 1999 we published a book entitled *Russian Avant-garde and the Bryansk Region*, which features many theoretical articles on the festival's namesakes and their contemporaries. In addition the book contains summaries of the activities of our festival and even printed scores of music by Roslavetz and of pieces of a number of living composers, dedicated to his memory. Since 1992 I have collaborated closely with St. Petersburg pianist Sergei Oskolkov, who regularly comes to Bryansk to perform at the Nicolai Roslavetz and Nahum Gabo Festival, performing as a solo pianist, a composer and, together with me, in a violin-piano duo. This year, during the festival, we have performed together half of a concert, consisting of three *Second Sonatas for Violin and Piano*, i.e. by Roslavetz, Oskolkov, and me.

ROVNER: In addition to the Nicolai Roslavetz and Nahum Gabo festival, where else do you perform as a violinist? Do you have concerts or recitals in other cities or countries?

BELODUBROVSKY: In Moscow I had two notable concerts, dedicated to the music of Nicolai Roslavetz in March 1989, when we came with a group of musicians from Bryansk and performed a number of his works, among which were his *Third* and *Fifth String Quartets*, the *First Sonata for Violin and Piano*, the *Fifth Piano Sonata* and several of the *24 Preludes for Violin and Piano*. I frequently travel to St. Petersburg, where I perform in various contemporary music festivals. One of my most significant performances took place there in 1994, when I performed as a soloist with the Finland Symphony Orchestra, playing a *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra* of Vyacheslav Nagovitsyn in the Large Hall of the Philharmonia as part of the festival *From the Avant-garde to the Present Days*. The whole concert was later repeated in Finland in the city Lahti as part of the *Aid to St. Petersburg Festival*. I have also performed in Germany several times during the last few years, both as a soloist and as an orchestra member. Occasionally I also perform in Moscow. My *Composition for Two Pianos* was part of the *Moscow Autumn Festival* in 1991. Together with my colleagues from Bryansk, I performed another landmark concert during one of the first *Alternativa Festivals*, in October 1989, when we have played the *String Trio* by the Russian émigré composer Jefim Golysheff (which was one of the earliest piece which carried harbingers of serialism and even total serialism, i.e. serial rhythm and dynamic order) and Roslavetz's *Third String Quartet*. I have performed in the festival *Sergei Oskolkov and his Friends* in a suburb of St. Petersburg (Oranienbaum, which is the birthplace of Stravinsky).

ROVNER: Could you tell us in greater detail about your concert activities in Bryansk?

BELODUBROVSKY: When I returned to Bryansk in 1965 after many years of studying in Leningrad, I had an idealistic wish of raising the level of culture of the region, starting with the classics -- Bartók, Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Webern, Prokofiev, and Shostakovich. With this aim in view, I started to convince teachers and students of the Music College in Bryansk to learn new compositions by contemporary composers and perform them in concerts, which I myself had started to organize. From the very beginning of my stay in Bryansk, I started to organize concerts devoted to 20th century music, each one based on a particular theme. These concerts were held in two venues -- the Journalists' Club and the Art Museum; they took place regularly on Thursdays or Fridays. The performances at the Journalists' Club were usually joined with poetry and prose readings, while those at the Art Museum were usually connected with exhibitions of paintings and sculptures. I always tried to give these concerts a sense of thematic unity. In 1978 on the basis of these evenings, I was able to establish the artistic club Apodion, the name of which is derived from the connection of the abbreviated names of Apollo and Dionysus, in the style of the typical Soviet abbreviations from the 1920's. This name emphasized the extreme variety of the forms and styles of art which were presented. Apodion featured once-a-month concerts, which, as a rule, were divided into two parts. The first was devoted to serious, academic art, while the second was devoted to popular and vernacular forms and genres. In addition to music, the club offered exhibitions of paintings, graphics and art photography, poetry readings, staging of theatrical plays, as well as performances by a variety of artists, actors and musicians, both professionals and amateurs. At the Apodion we tried not to miss anything. Along with performances of serious, classical music -- which included the contemporary -- there were plenty of performances of folk music. Singers and players performed rare bits, some of which even contained quartertone temperaments. There were also performances of rarely heard masterpieces of classical music, such as, for instance, a four-hand piano arrangement of Beethoven's *Grosse Fugue*, made by the composer himself, or Mikhail Glinka's very seldomly performed *String Quartet*. In general, the Apodion club had a very definite slant towards rare and seldomly presented art works. It was at the club that for the first time in Bryansk the music of Nicolai Roslavetz was performed and reproductions of art works by Nahum Gabo were presented. One important feature of the club was that it did not limit itself to traditional forms of presenting the various art works. For instance, in one concert one of Roslavetz's string quartets was performed. The musicians took the first few pages of music and played them all together; then they divided the music up and each musician performed his respective part on his instrument, after which they added each successive part, one on top of the other. Not only did listeners understand the music better, but they started to comprehend how compound musical textures are achieved in ensemble music. In 1985 the Apodion club was forcefully closed down by the Soviet authorities, who accused it of "spreading bourgeois art, religion, and Zionism." In 1986, wishing to continue my concert activities notwithstanding all the obstacles, I started to organize the Nicolai Roslavetz Music Festival.

ROVNER: The composer Nicolai Roslavetz was a well-known as a pioneer in Russian modernist music of the early 20th century. He was a precursor of Schoenberg's serialism and an inventor of his own "new system of organization of sounds," based on the "synthetic chord," which presents (in vertical form, as serialism, essentially does in horizontal form) a unifying element of construction on which an entire musical composition is based and which could be transposed and even altered, to insure variation of harmony within a musical composition. His name, well-known in the 1910's and 1920's, had all but disappeared from the scene in the 1930's due to the suppression of his music by the Soviet authorities. Only during the last couple of decades has his work been occasionally performed in Russia and in West. Milton Babbitt has stated that his music was available in the United States in the 1930's, after which a long hiatus followed. George Perle told me that, back in 1959, he accidentally found a score of Roslavetz's *Third String Quartet* (written in the early 1920's and published around that time as a joint venture of Gosmuzizdat in Moscow and Universal Edition in Vienna) in a sale bin of a music store. Perle was amazed that at that time in Russia such advanced type of music was written. He placed one small composition of Roslavetz as a musical example in the first chapter of his famous book *Serial Composition and Atonality*. Lately, Roslavetz's music has become much more well-known, and his piano, chamber, and the few orchestral compositions have been released on CD's. Most of his scores are, by now, published by the Schott Edition in Germany, thanks to the efforts of Russian musicologist Marina Lobanova and composer Vladimir Tarnopolski. In Russia, it is well known that composer Edison Denisov did a great job in promoting Roslavetz's music. Could you tell us how you founded the Nicolai Roslavetz Music Festival?

BELODUBROVSKY: In 1986, in the place of the closed down Apodion club, the Nicolai Roslavetz Festival emerged.. Roslavetz was born in the village of Dushatin in the Bryansk region in 1880 and studied violin and composition at the Moscow Conservatory, graduating rather late, in 1913. That same year, 1913, witnessed the appearance of that entirely new personal musical style for Roslavetz. Though based on new types of chordal constructions, Roslavetz's music to a great degree retains a late-romantic musical texture and emotional moods and is aesthetically very closely connected to the innovative trends in Russian literature and art of that time. While being closely affiliated with Symbolist and Futurist literary and artistic circles in the 1910's, Roslavetz became a supporter of the Bolshevik regime after it came to power, and among his musical compositions of the 1920's there exist a number of political compositions, for the most part songs in a more popular, mass style, based on revolutionary texts. In the 1920's Roslavetz was an active member of the newly formed Association of Contemporary Music, which was very much oriented towards Western and modernist music trends, which also included such composers as Alexander Mosolov, Leonid Polovinkin, and Dmitri Shostakovich. In the late 1920's and early 1930's upon pressure of the Soviet authorities, Roslavetz renounced his innovative harmonic style and returned to a more traditional, tonal style of music; despite this, his music was entirely taken off the concert scene and forbidden.

Roslavetz himself died in Moscow in 1944 in total poverty and oblivion, having written during the last few years of his life a number of noteworthy works, very Romantic in style, employing a traditional, tonal language, but containing a very profound, philosophical mood. Among these are the *Fifth String Quartet*, the *Sixth Violin and Piano Sonata* and the *24 Preludes for Violin and Piano*. The name of Roslavetz was familiar to me from my youth, since he was offered to us as an example of a "bad" composer, who "went astray" and wrote "formalist" and "bourgeois" music. One day, opening up the big *Soviet Encyclopaedia*, I looked up his name and made the discovery that he was born in the Bryansk region -- in the village of Dushatin. This gave me the idea that it would be worthwhile to have a look at the legacy of my countryman, as well as to open up his music for his native region, since otherwise I would not be allowed to promote the music of a "formalist." I decided to play the patriotic card, imposed on us during the Soviet times, and stated that it would be very "patriotic" to bring back a native composer of the Bryansk region from oblivion. Next, I started to search for all the people connected with the Association of Contemporary Music of the 1920's, and with Roslavetz's legacy in general, and my quest brought me to composer Edison Denisov, who was well known for his active promotion of the legacy of this composer. Denisov introduced me to all the people who were connected with Roslavetz and his music, first and foremost, his only student, Pyotr Vasilievich Teplov. Doing some research on Roslavetz's music in the Lenin Library, I became familiar with the composer's autobiography and of the few publications of his articles in the famous Soviet journals from the 1920's devoted to new music, *Contemporary Music* and *Towards the New Shores*, as well as the scores of Roslavetz's music. In this manner, I began to gather material for my concerts in Bryansk, first at the Apodion club and then for the Roslavetz Festival. In order to bypass the Soviet censorship, in our concerts we performed both his serious, modernistic works, written in the "new system of sound organization," as well as some of his political songs and marches from the 1920's and 1930's. In order to promote his name further, as well as to give our festival some additional support, in 1986 I wrote an article about Roslavetz for the newspaper *The Bryansk Worker*, which was the first publication about Roslavetz in the Soviet press since the 1920's. There I was compelled to present him as a Communist and a person loyal to the Soviet regime (which, essentially he was, during a

particular phase of his life), which was the only way that could allow us to study and promote his legacy further. As part of our musical program, I organized trips to his native village Dushatin for the musicians and we gave performances of his music there. In a little while, the festival expanded its function by starting to promote a whole group of similarly forgotten and forbidden composers of the Russian avant-garde movement of the 1910's and 1920's, including Arthur Lourie, Alexander Mosolov, Sergei Protopopoff, and Vladimir Deshevov. Some of these composers remained in the Soviet Union and became musical incognitos, while a few of them emigrated to the West. For a long time this legacy was hidden away in special storage departments of libraries and was virtually inaccessible to the general public. One of the first scholars, who started to promote this music, was the German musicologist Detlev Gojowy, who has done a lot of research of this music since the 1960's and has written a book about it, titled *Neue Sowjetische Musik*, published by Laaber Edition in Germany in 1972. When I started the Roslavetz Festival, I obtained a lot of this music from the central libraries and archives in Moscow and Leningrad. Gradually the festival began to acquire many of the features of the Apodion club, since it likewise began to offer a synthesis of various forms of art, and to incorporate cinema, theater, dance and poetry. This festival, similarly to the Apodion club, of which it was in all essence a direct continuation, was one of the very few venues for promotion of contemporary music during the last Soviet years. In time, the festival broadened out its stylistic boundaries and became even more similar to Apodion, since we started to invite living contemporary composers and poets. While back in the days of Apodion we organized a concert of the music of Moscow composer Victor Ekimovsky, attended by the composer, and an evening of poetry of Moscow poet Olga Sedakova, read by the poet, the Roslavetz Festival hosted such musicians from Moscow as the extravagant pianist and composer Ivan Sokolov, the Moscow Ensemble of Contemporary Music, directed by composer Yuri Kasparov and the Percussion Ensemble of Mark Pekarsky. One important feature of the festival was that I tried to incorporate into it performers of all ages, so in each festival there were concerts where the performers were, respectively, school-children, students of the Bryansk Music College, students of conservatories, professors of the college and independent soloists.

An Interview with Sergio Roberto de Oliveira

TOM MOORE

Composer Sergio Roberto de Oliveira is a native of Rio de Janeiro, where he was born on Oct. 24, 1970. He lives in Tijuca, a middle-class neighborhood of the Zona Norte (North Zone), with his wife and daughter, and is presently completing a second master's degree at the University of Rio (UniRio), located in the Zona Sul (South Zone) in the shadow of the world-famous Sugarloaf Mountain. He has won prizes for both his work in popular music and classical music, and performs with two ensembles: *Preludio XXI*, a composer's collaborative, and *Tasto*, a piano duo with composer Marcio Conrad. His duo for baroque flutes, *Circus Brasilis*, had its U.S. premiere in December 1999 at Princeton University. Other works include a suite for string orchestra, a piano concerto, a sinfonietta, a fantasia for solo flute, a duo for flutes, and recently a second duo for baroque flutes, entitled *Faces*. We talked in Rio in early April of this year.

MOORE: Where were you were born? Tell us about growing up in Rio, and your musical experiences as a child.

OLIVEIRA: I was born in Rio. My childhood was in Tijuca -- that's a neighborhood which is very traditional. We lived in apartments, not houses -- I am an apartment kid. My experience of music as a child comes from my parents, of course. They just listened to popular music -- I didn't have any contact with classical music at this time. My father, Paulo Roberto de Oliveira was a friend of lots of musicians. My godfather, Sergio Bittencourt, was a musician and composer -- a popular composer. He is the son of one of the best chorões [sing. chorão, pl. chorões -- musicians who play choro, the vernacular instrumental music of Rio, São Paulo, and other cities, dating from the late 19th century and still developing], Jacob do Bandolim. My father was in contact with Jacob and other chorões and instrumentalists - always in popular music. My first teacher, Claudionor Cruz was a chorão too. At the end of my life he was my partner in choro.

MOORE: What did he play?

OLIVEIRA: He played guitar. He could play all the string instruments in choro -- cavaquinho, bandolim, but his instrument was the acoustic guitar.

MOORE: Six or seven string?

OLIVEIRA: Six, but he could play the seven-string version, too. In the old days, he had one of the most famous regionais bands, the Regional Claudionor Cruz, which worked in radio.

MOORE: Where did he live?

OLIVEIRA: In the north zone, very far from here.

MOORE: Did you study with him privately?

OLIVEIRA: At his home. He had an informal school.

MOORE: What did he teach?

OLIVEIRA: Theory.

MOORE: What were his methods? He was a guitarist and you are a pianist.

OLIVEIRA: He said he would give me lessons on piano, but that first I had to know theory very well. We never got to the piano. I had to stop, because it was very far, and I couldn't go there by myself.

MOORE: How old were you at this point?

OLIVEIRA: 12. I had never thought about being a musician until I was twelve. I had no contact with instruments -- my father is not a musician, and there are no musicians in my family, except for my godfather, who died when I was nine. When I was twelve, two months after my birthday, it was Christmas, my mother said to me "What do you want to have as a gift?" and I said "I think I want a piano." My first serious study of the piano was when I was 16, at the Escola de Musica Villa-Lobos, in downtown. I could study theory, harmony, piano there, and composition as well. They had a composition workshop with Tato Taborda. He is a contemporary, avant-garde Brazilian composer.

MOORE: What were the differences between his approach to composition and that of Claudionor?

OLIVEIRA: Claudionor was always talking about what was in the books, and Tato Taborda was talking about the sound, how you can do it no matter what the books say. I took harmony with Maria Aparecia Ferreira. I studied with her both at the Escola and privately, at her home. I felt like I was very old, so I had to catch up.

MOORE: Growing up in the U.S. I didn't know anyone who was studying theory and composition as a teenager. Is it common in Rio for teenagers to be studying theory and composition if they are interested in music?

OLIVEIRA: Nowadays, yes. There was a movement in the 80's towards instrumental music, what they call Brazilian jazz, and this is a good bridge between popular music and classical music -- to think about music, not just do it, like popular musicians do. Studying composition is not so common.

MOORE: But theory is.

OLIVEIRA: People want to know how music works. My interest in composition so early is because I started to study piano at sixteen. My mind was working better than my fingers. When I had a piece, I asked myself "how could someone write this?" It was more interesting than playing it well. On an unconscious level, it was trying to play better, as well. I was always studying with composers. My piano teacher, Leopoldo Tousa, was a graduate in composition as well. It was natural for me. My first composition class was with Maria Aparecida. One day she said "I want you to compose a piano piece."

MOORE: How old were you?

OLIVEIRA: I don't know - about 20. After all these people I could study with Cesar Guerra-Peixe, who was my first important teacher.

MOORE: When was this?

OLIVEIRA: 1990.

MOORE: You were twenty when you were studying with Guerra-Peixe. Were you in undergraduate school at this point?

OLIVEIRA: No. The course at the Escola Villa-Lobos was free, that is, not arranged in a fixed program of study. In 1993 I went to undergraduate school at UniRio. I had gone to university in 1987 to study philosophy, but just for three months. I love philosophy, but all the other students went to the library after class to study philosophy and I went home to study piano, and I realized "there is something wrong here!"

MOORE: Where did you study philosophy?

OLIVEIRA: At UFRJ. I think it was a smart way to continue to study music, because my mother was very worried about my future. I said "I want to be a musician." She thought that I had to study lots of things in order to have a job. The course in philosophy was very easy. But I convinced her that I wouldn't make very much money with a degree in philosophy, and, if I wasn't going to make lots of money, I might as well be a musician!

MOORE: What did she think when you dropped out?

OLIVEIRA: She was a little worried, but my parents were very supportive. But it was a convincing argument -- I could actually make more money as a musician than writing books on philosophy -- things are very hard in Brazil. So she insisted that I go to college in music. But I waited until 1993 because I felt I was not ready. If you don't have your own ideas, it's very difficult. You have to know yourself as a musician. In 1995 I became a composer -- until then I was just writing exercises.

MOORE: Tell us a little about Guerra-Peixe.

OLIVEIRA: He was around 80. It was as if I was in front of the music. When he talked about orchestration, I could hear the orchestra, hear his experience and talent. He was like an icon. My studies with him impressed me a lot. Sometimes he slept in class, but he was music personified. At that time he was the most important living Brazilian composer.

MOORE: I learned recently that he started out playing choro in Petropolis, and then in movie theatre orchestras, so he also came from a background of popular music.

OLIVEIRA: He did a lot of research in this music.

MOORE: In teaching composition did he draw on both popular and erudite music?

OLIVEIRA: Just on erudite music.

MOORE: What composers did you look at?

OLIVEIRA: We were always looking at the technique of music, composing melodies, acoustic harmony. We studied Schuman in orchestration, but not composers. He taught classical composition -- no relation to popular music. He was a great composer of film music, and one of the best arrangers of his time.

MOORE: Who did he write arrangements for?

OLIVEIRA: He was an arranger for the festivals of popular music here -- Milton Nascimento -- all those guys had their music arranged by him. He worked in radio, with many arrangements for singers of the 40's and 50's. I don't know if this is documented, because here in Brazil people are not so careful about the history. Radames Gnattali and he were the most important arrangers at the time. Gnattali was also working with popular and classical music. This is something common in Brazil, because popular music here is so strong, it's normal to have people on both sides. In my case, it's a little different. When I listen to these guys I have the impression that they take popular music simply as a raw material, and when I compose I try to do it like a popular musician. When I work with melodies and form I try to think about both popular and classical music. I don't hear this in their music.

MOORE: You studied with Guerra-Peixe...

OLIVEIRA: From 1990 to 1992.

MOORE: Do you still see the other students from that class?

OLIVEIRA: One of them is a composer in my group, Preludio XXI, Nader Nassaro. He was already studying with Guerra-Peixe when I started. He was much older than me.

MOORE: Where did you go to university in 1993?

OLIVEIRA: UniRio. I finished in 1998.

MOORE: Were you older than the other students?

OLIVEIRA: No There was one that was my age, and one younger. Every semester three students are admitted in composition. Most people that study composition in undergraduate school are about my age -- 23, 24, or older.

MOORE: Do they need that time to be able to pass the entrance examination?

OLIVEIRA: Not only that. People need to be more mature to study composition. People can study an instrument very early, but in composition that's not true. Almost everybody was older than 25.

MOORE: Can you tell us a little more about what you were up to before you went to UniRio?

OLIVEIRA: I was working with ballet. There was a working agreement between the Escola and the Escola de Ballet Maria Olenewa, near the Sala Cecília Meirelles in Lapa. As soon as I could play anything at the piano I began to write songs, so I just adapted songs to the ballet.

MOORE: For whom did you write the songs? Were these popular songs? Lead sheets with chords?

OLIVEIRA: At this time I was competing in song contests, and won two. The first was the Festival de Musica de São Jose do Vale do Rio Preto, a city near Petropolis. I always spent the July vacation there with my family. I saw the announcement and knew that I had to go back, see my friends and try it. This was about 1990. In 1992 there was another contest, this time in Rio de Janeiro, promoted by the state of Rio de Janeiro, called Festival de Zona Oeste. This time I won both first and second prize.

MOORE: What do you submit to these contests?

OLIVEIRA: A tape, and if you are selected you have to perform.

MOORE: Who was on the tape?

OLIVEIRA: A singer, Adriana Romano, a friend from high school. She's a great singer, and she's very good at winning festivals. At this time we had a show, just piano and voice playing popular songs, at little cultural spots ("espacos culturais"). You get the cover charge, and we had tapes that we sold. But it wasn't important to make money. I was also composing for theater at the time. I worked with Antonio Abujamra, who is a very important director. This was just a staged reading but it was very good to work with him. I worked also in children's theatre.

MOORE: Where were the theatres?

OLIVEIRA: With Abujamra it was a play by Saramago at the Teatro Dulcina, near Rua Senador Dantas.

MOORE: And the children's theatre?

OLIVEIRA: At the Teatro Noel Rosa in Vila Isabel. The same play later went to the Teatro Cândido Mendes in Ipanema, and also traveled through Brazil, with my music on tape. I also composed for another children's theater which works with schools. Recently I worked with the Teatro do Sesi downtown. This time was very productive for me in popular music.

MOORE: What genre of music was this?

OLIVEIRA: What is called MPB -- bossa nova, sambas, samba-canção. I also played with jazz groups -- quintets, quartets. I can't say I am a jazz player, but it was an important experience to get the language of jazz. Everyone here that plays bossa nova plays jazz too.

MOORE: Rock and rap are very popular with younger people, but people in their 20's are still writing MPB?

OLIVEIRA: Most people in their 20's are composing and playing rock and roll, because there was an important movement in the eighties which they called B-Rock.

MOORE: What is the audience like for MPB these days? When you played in these cultural spaces who was listening to your music?

OLIVEIRA: People older than 30, 40. I remember that my friends in school were usually playing in rock bands. Adriana also sang in a rock band. We don't have prejudice. I played in a progressive rock band. I can't say I am a rock musician, but it was very interesting.

MOORE: Are you still writing MPB?

OLIVEIRA: No. It sounds crazy, but the opportunities in classical music are better than in popular music. In classical music if you study, if you have talent, if you write well, people want to play your music. In popular music, there is lots of money involved, so it is very hard.

MOORE: You have to be very popular to be successful in popular music, whereas you can be less popular and be successful in classical music.

OLIVEIRA: Here we have what we call a "panela" ["cooking pot"]. It 's all the same people.

MOORE: So it's hard to write songs for the successful singers.

OLIVEIRA: You have to know somebody. I don't come from a musical family -- I don't have lots of musician friends. My father's musician friends are older.

MOORE: So it's easier to get into the "panela" for classical music.

OLIVEIRA: I won an important contest in classical music, but I don't think it would be possible to win the Globo Festival.

MOORE: But if you did you'd be set for life. Tell us about UniRio.

OLIVEIRA: It was a great experience. I could learn different things. There were people who were serious about their work. For me the fact that it was not a freely structured course, but that I was required to study all these things was important... It was also important that it was a school where it was traditional to have popular musicians. Every time you go there, in the garden there is someone playing choro or samba. It's a nice change of pace. I could be in class talking about Mahler, and then walk out and people are playing Pixinguinha. This is the difference between UniRio and the Escola de Musica Villa-Lobos. At the Escola people were studying in class; at the university people are talking about music in all the spaces. At UniRio I studied with David Korenchender, my professor of composition, orchestration and counterpoint. It was also very important to study harmony with Leonardo Sa, who is a good composer also. It was very important to study with Laura Ronai. I was deciding whether to go to UniRio or UFRJ. I looked at the two curriculums, and the people teaching at each place, and I decided to go to UniRio, but there was something in the curriculum at UFRJ that I thought was very interesting. You had to study one string instrument and one wind instrument, which was not required at UniRio. But I thought "I can do this," and I decided to study flute, my favorite wind instrument, with Laura Ronai. I learned more than just flute, because she is a wonderful musician. The most important thing I learned with her is the approach to the music -- how to think about music. As a composer, the way I saw the music was changed.

MOORE: In what way?

OLIVEIRA: First of all, the performer's way is different from that of the composer. You see the music differently from the way we do. It impressed me greatly -- to see what level of artistry you can achieve in the moment, how much you can extract from the score, how your vision can completely change the music. I came to respect performers much more than I had before, and even to incorporate some of this approach when I am composing. What can I do with these ideas, before the instrumentalist begins? It was very important to learn flute, to learn how to write for flute, to experience playing the flute, and to try to make this not just a limiting factor, but something that is part of the music.

MOORE: Good music has phrases that are based on the amount of breath you can take in.

OLIVEIRA: When I composed my fantasia for solo flute for Laura, the thing that was the most impressive when she played was the way she breathed. It was so musical, it was a musical element, not just something you have to do to continue playing, not just a pause, but more expressive. I learned that this was important when I compose, to realize that it is not just silence.

MOORE: Because how people breathe affects how the next phrase will be shaped.

OLIVEIRA: Yes. You can hear the breath. It is music as well, it is part of the music. You cannot ignore it. A little like Cage's ideas!....

MOORE: Who else did you study with at UniRio?

OLIVEIRA: These were the most important professors for me. David makes you write music -- you really have to compose a lot. He gives you three classes, and then tells you to compose a concerto, and of course in his class he works with your difficulties in composing the concerto. The first semester we studied theme and variations, and I was just writing exercises, and in the second semester I had to write a suite for string orchestra. He is a very difficult teacher -- very demanding of his students. This suite was my first piece. This was in 1995, and in 1996 there was a national contest in Rio de Janeiro supported by RioArte, for pieces for string orchestra, and so I entered my suite, and won second prize. There were two categories, one for solo instrument and strings, and one just for strings, and the other category was won by David. And third prize in my category was won by another student of David. My first flute piece was composed for the festival Panorama da Musica Brasileira Contemporanea.

MOORE: The fantasia?

OLIVEIRA: No, the duo for flutes, which was my first piece to be performed. I said "I will enter my string orchestra piece" for the Panorama, and when I went to enter, they said "You have to provide the orchestra." So I realized I would not be able to enter the string orchestra piece. I went home and in four days I composed the duo for flutes. It worked out well, because if my string orchestra piece had been played in the Panorama it would not have been eligible for the RioArte contest.

MOORE: Who performed the duo?

OLIVEIRA: Alexandre Bittencourt and Claudio Frydman, both of whom are students of Laura Ronai. I dedicated the piece to Laura, because she taught me to play flute.

MOORE: Where did the Panorama take place?

OLIVEIRA: At UFRJ. This concert was in the Sala de Congregaçao.

MOORE: What other pieces have you composed?

OLIVEIRA: Here in Brazil it is very difficult to have pieces performed, and almost impossible to write for big groups. I have a *Sinfonietta* from 1997 which I like a lot, but it has not been played yet. It's tonal, I wrote it using jazz harmonies. My piano concerto was my final project for the degree at UniRio. It is dedicated to Tom Jobim, who is the composer that influenced me the most. I come from a family that just listened to popular music, and although I now listen to classical music a lot, I listen to popular music, too. The way Tom Jobim worked with popular music is great, the way he wrote for orchestra...I used some of his melodies in the concerto. It also has not been performed. I used popular percussion in the piece, including berimbau. David always made you write your markings in Italian, so I found the Italian word for berimbau. David said, "What's this?" I said, "It's Italian. You don't know this instrument? It's a berimbau." David said "You have to write this one in Portuguese." I also used congas. I have other pieces, but it's hard to write pieces that will never be played. So now I am working a lot with flute, because I have flutists who are asking me to compose. I also am working on a guitar piece that will be performed on June 15 at the Salão Dourado of UFRJ by Nicolo de Sousa Barros. We had a group of composers that asked Nicolo to give us a workshop on composing for guitar. He asked me to write a piece for him. It's called *Suite imaginaria*. Each movement has dance names, but the movements are not exactly those dances. The first dance is "Baião" -- it has elements of the baião, but it's not a baião. The choro is not really a choro -- I put rests where you should have notes, and notes where you should have rests. This is why it's called "imaginary." You think it's one of those dances, but it's not really. I have been working with baroque flutes over the last year. This is interesting, because it is a completely different instrument. My view of the baroque flute is that it's a "pifano metido a besta" [i.e. a "conceited" pifano, the wooden folk flute played in the northeast of Brazil]. I am always trying to make a link between popular music and classical music, so when I write for baroque flutes, I am trying to create an atmosphere of music from the northeast. I want to talk about Preludio XXI. We are seven young composers, and although it's easier to be in the classical "panela," there is a panela there too. We don't get the lucrative commissions, and it's hard to have performance space. We have the Bienal, and the Panorama -- two open festivals, where you can have your music played, but it's not much. So we decided to get together and present our own concerts. We had an interview with Radio MEC (note: the station of the Ministry of Education and Culture, the only classical station in Rio). They would not have interviewed me, since I am not so well-known, but a group has a stronger presence. Since they interviewed me with Preludio XXI, they will now interview me by myself. Our group does not have an esthetic in common. This is good, because our concerts are very eclectic -- each composer has his own style. The composers are Marcio Conrad, J. Orlando Alves, Daniel Quaranta (who is from Argentina, but also studied at UniRio), Heber Schünemann, Luiz Eduardo Castelões, Neder Nassaro, and myself. Now I have the opportunity to have my pieces played, and this opportunity leads to other opportunities. On our first concert, I invited Laura Ronai to play, and wrote the fantasia for flute.

This piece opened a lot of doors. She invited me to write a piece for you (*Circus Brasilis*, for two baroque flutes) and she played the fantasia when she visited Princeton.

MOORE: In the U.S. a group of this kind would be incorporated as a non-profit corporation. Does this happen in Brazil?

OLIVEIRA: It's not possible to get money from the government. You can from private companies, but it's not easy. To get back to Princeton, my pieces have been played twice at Princeton University, and the second piece was recorded. I was able to present my work there during a visit in February of this year.

MOORE: Is it usual for Brazilian composers to study outside of Brazil?

OLIVEIRA: Here in Brazil we don't have enough information, even in the universities. It is difficult to buy records here. With the internet it is easier, but it is still expensive. We go to other countries so that we can have access to more information and better conditions in which to work.

MOORE: Where do they go?

OLIVEIRA: United States, France, and Germany. I would also like to talk about my group Tasto. I started my musical studies at the piano, and I am sure I am not a concert pianist, but I have this relationship with the instrument. Together with Marcio Conrad, we decided to have a group where we could play the piano from the composer's point of view. Not to show our virtuosity, but our ideas.

MOORE: When you started piano, you said you had more ideas than technique, and you still have more ideas than technique.

OLIVEIRA: This is the place where I can show this (laughs). It's very interesting work, because we have the space to experiment. For example, we have a piece where we put marbles in the piano. If I write a piece with marbles in the piano, I can't know if anyone wants to play it. In Tasto we can see the possibility of using marbles, playing with mallets. The work is very interesting, because it is open. We work with 12-tone music, experimental music, and many other compositional techniques. It's good to have the connection between composer and performer, but it's also good to have your piece played exactly the way you want.

MOORE: Could you say a little more about the compositional techniques you use?

OLIVEIRA: The interval is the point of my music -- I am always thinking about intervals -- how to put the intervals. I can think of this when I construct a series. I know that there are composers who are more concerned about how the piece works on paper than about how it sounds -- I am not against this -- but in my music I have to sing. I can sing something completely crazy, but I have to sing it. There has to be an expression, a logic, that I can sing.

MOORE: Expressing "brasilidade" [the quality of being Brazilian] has been very important in classical music in Brazil since 1920. I don't hear that as a concern in the music of your teacher, Korenchandler, but it seems very evident in your music, in a subtle way, sometimes more obvious, sometimes less obvious. Your Brazilianity comes from your popular music.

OLIVEIRA: It is something that we are concerned with. The nationalists began working with folk music. It's like Mario de Andrade said -- if you want to make bad music, make Brazilian music. If you want to make OK music, make Brazilian music. If you want to make good music, make Brazilian music. I don't know if we have a clear idea of what Brazilian music is. People worked on bringing folk music into

classical music. I want to work more with the popular music of the city. Although I use northeastern music a lot, it's not from folk groups. My way to compose is something that is Brazilian -- not just the patterns, the clichés, but the way I think of music, the way I am always trying to be melodic. We don't know yet what Brazilian music is. I prefer to take Tom Jobim, not like all these composers using folk patterns. I prefer to work from my experience in urban music, and MPB. I am very concerned to be Brazilian. I am spontaneously Brazilian, but I am always thinking about this in a world of globalization. If you are not worried about this, you may make a music with no personality. I am very proud of being Brazilian, and I want to show this in my music. This is not important for the music, but for the nation. Singing the national hymn here is not something common -- I don't even know if I know all the words. We had our problems with the military dictatorship in the sixties, but we have to affirm that we are Brazilians. We have to construct a nation that is more proud of itself. People think very individually. I don't think my music will be heard by one percent of Brazilians, but it is my work. My work is the space I have where I can express this idea -- that we have to construct a nation that is proud of itself.

Concert Reviews

The Ojai Music Festival

TED BLAIR

The Ojai Music Festival, May 31, Ojai, CA. Festival through June 4.

South of San Francisco and north of Los Angeles, in a beautiful valley, is the small town of Ojai, 20 miles from the Pacific Ocean. In addition to the valley's natural beauty and its proximity to Santa Barbara, Ventura, Los Angeles, Los Padres National Forest, and Lake Casitas -- this Garden of Eden is host to one of the finest music festivals in the U.S. For 54 years, during the first weekend of June (currently with eight concerts), the Ojai Music Festival has consistently lived up to its original credo as founded by John Bauer in 1947: the music must be eclectic and interesting. Since its inception, the list of music directors reads like a music history text -- from Aaron Copland, Igor Stravinsky, Pierre Boulez, Michael Tilson Thomas, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Kent Nagano, to the present, Simon Rattle, crowned conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. Besides music, there is an active involvement of Ojai Artists with exhibits on the Festival's grounds, and an educational program aimed at students from elementary through high school.

Emphasis is on superior performances of interesting or unusual music, much of the fare chosen from compositions composed in the last decade. Festival Directors include Laurence Morton, from 1954 until his death in 1987, followed by Ara Guzelimian, and presently, Ernest Fleischmann, retired Executive Director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, whose Ojai title is Artistic Director. The Executive Director is Jacqueline Saunders. The main performing unit is the excellent Los Angeles Philharmonic which is in residence for the weekend and whose members readily cavort with the townspeople and the audience members. Through this superior orchestra and its players, any composer who is chosen to be the composer-in-residence for the weekend can be assured of a superior reading of her/his music. This year's choices were British composers Thomas Adès and Mark-Anthony Turnage. The other performers, who were all superior in their own way, included members of the Los Angeles Master Chorale (mezzo sopranos Marietta Simpson, Rinat Shaham, and Cynthia Clarey; soprano Heidi Grant Murphy; tenor John Aler, baritone François Le Roux; and bass Julian Rodescu), pianists Gloria Cheng and Vicki Ray, cellist Ben Hong, the Flux String Quartet, drummer Peter Erskine, guitarist Mike Miller, saxophonist Martin Robertson, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic's New Music Group. For the second year, the Festival added Sundowner programs on Wednesday and Thursday with local groups performing.

Open-air performances are held in Libbey Bowl, adjacent to the picturesque downtown section of Ojai. Weather is warm to hot during the daylight hours, but at night, the temperature

ranges from warm to cold -- typical semi-desert weather. Audiences are informal in their manners and dress, folksy in their friendliness and joviality, but once the music begins, the audiences are attentive, insightful, respectful, and enthusiastic. Many a composition and performance draws bravos and accolades of all kinds, from screaming and hollering to polite applause. Like all stimulating musical events, this enthusiasm is contagious.

The composers-in-residence Thomas Adès and Mark-Anthony Turnage shared the opening concert, although the pivotal composition was Adès's already famous *Asyla* (1997), which has received excellent reviews in its performances worldwide. Adès talent is beyond question. *Asyla* (the plural of asylum meaning a place of refuge) displays his unique vision of orchestration, his intricate technique for dealing with that vision, and his concise melodic motives which writhe with permutations. The composition uses an enlarged orchestra with six horns and six percussionists, tintinnabulations at their best (cowbells), tuba, imaginative use of woodwinds and brass, a prepared piano, and an upright piano tuned a quarter-tone flat (Adès is an excellent pianist and conductor) -- all exhibiting the conciseness of a Beethoven. His imagination seems infinite. In *These Premises Are Alarmed* (1996), heard on June 4, he brazenly requires dangerous virtuosity from the orchestra encapsulated with fun and humor in a four-minute work. Much of this music is referential of earlier times.

Adès had two other compositions performed, both on Gloria Cheng's piano concert on June 3: *Still Sorrowing* (1992) and *Darkness Visible* (1992), the first distinguished by dampening the central register of the piano. This dampening differentiated pitches, accompaniment, and timbral color, since the prepared section sounded like a plucked instrument, while the rest of the composition concentrated upon the spatial atmospheres of the upper registers. *Darkness Visible* is a re-composition of John Dowland's song, "In Darkness Let Me Dwell" from the *Musical Banquet* of 1610. Adès's remarkable composition uses bits and scraps of the Dowland melody and the *Dies Irae* over accompanying tremolos and repetitions of notes in different registral combinations à la Messiaen.

Certain truths materialize over time, and one which has surfaced from listening to orchestral music composed in the last 15 years is that many current musical ideas have their origin in the orchestra itself: the brass, woodwinds, and the percussion sections. Though Turnage's *Kai* (1990) has its origins in jazz, the composition's percussive effects dominate the rhythm, harmony, and instrumentation. The cello is used as a solo instrument with a jazz ensemble of two saxophones, bass guitar, and drum kit within the orchestra. Motives are jazz-derived rhythmically in direction and shape. Ben Hong, the Assistant Principal of the orchestra, was the able soloist in this difficult work.

The other Turnage composition was the U. S. premiere of *Blood on the Floor* (1996), a long-winded (ca. 72 minutes) hodge-podge of remarkable ideas. There are nine programs

or movements -- each different in character and each a different story or symbol. Just as Britain has been exporting its drug-induced movie hallucinations such as *Trainspotting*, here is a musical composition which purports to do the same. The music's title and the first movement are from Francis Bacon's painting of the same name. Other movements' names are "Needles," "Cut Up," and "Crackdown" -- not your usual programmatic titles for music. The work, conducted by Simon Rattle on June 3, shook the town of Ojai in a jarring but wonderful performance. The jazz element (represented by Peter Erskine on drums, Mike Miller on guitar, and the expert Martin Robertson on saxophone), met the challenge as well as members of the New Music Group, who often had to double (e. g., the flutes played cowbells, anvils and hammers, and other woodwinds fluctuated between their regular instruments and bass counterparts). *Blood on the Floor* is an exciting composition but seriously needs editing since the slower sections which alternate with the more exciting sections replicate their musical ideas over and over, ad nauseum. The jazz is there as well as rock, but whether or not their assimilation is successful will be decided in the future. Sometimes, the music sounds layered where the jazz or rock is juxtaposed. There is no arbitrary structure and that may be part of the problem. Still, the basic elements are there with driving cross-rhythms, the perpetual two strong beats followed by two light beats, the pounding pulse, the timbrel colors, and the exciting dynamics. Even some melodies in the slower parts are appealing. The piece is just not consistent, for where some of the melodies succeed, others are whiney and embarrassing. The performance received an instantaneous standing ovation.

Equally jarring on the same June 3 program was *Deluge* composed by Naomi Sekiya, this year's winner of the *Music for Tomorrow* composition award. Sekiya, a doctoral candidate in composition at the University of Southern California, composed *Deluge* from January to March, 2000. Composed as a one-movement piano concerto, it has a meditative middle section flanked by two super fast outer movements, whose main characteristics are dangerous ostinati which fly all over the keyboard. Vicki Ray was the exciting pianist whose wondrous pyrotechnics on the keyboard pleased the audience. The piece is a wonderful opener, and from all accounts, Sekiya has already established a reputation for herself.

The June 2 and 4 orchestral performances included two French operas: Ravel's *L'enfant et les sortilèges* (1925) and Poulenc's *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* (1944), both charming audience-pleasers and perfect music to follow the serious British music. The June 4 evening performance also included the orchestral suite Benjamin Britten arranged from his opera *Peter Grimes* (1945), the *Four Sea Interludes and Passacaglia*. Ravel's *L'enfant* is a masterpiece of a child's fantasy where every familiar household object becomes scary -- the armchair, the Wedgwood teapot and china cup, fire, ashes, Princess, Arithmetic and his Digits, the cat, dragonflies, moths, bats, and squirrels -- all reek havoc in the child's imagination after he behaves badly, and only the magic word, Maman/Mother soothes the child after he has repented his bad behavior. The music is charming and clever, and Colette's libretto is superb.

Additions to the orchestra in this clever opera are the xylophone, celesta, wood block, and cheese grater. Besides jazz, the music incorporates burlesque, saraband, and ragtime, enough to evoke the necessary humor and fun inherent in the libretto. The Friday night performances were excellent, and mention must be made of Le Roux's wonderful "meows!"

As one might expect, Simon Rattle's performance of the Benjamin Britten was exciting and insightful. Poulenc's *Breasts* is a racy farce with racy music based upon the absurdist play by Guillaume Apollinaire written during World War 1. The opera is a comic opera in every sense with its beautiful melodies, orchestral parodies, and carefree spirit. In this work, which can roughly be described as "make babies, not war," the music sounds like music on the Parisian streets. A paradox: if one traces Poulenc's "familiar" tunes, they are not traceable, but are the work of a melodic genius. All five singers -- Heidi Grant Murphy, Marietta Simpson, John Aler, François Le Roux, and Julian Rodescu gave this concert-performance their best.

The daytime concerts were distinguished by Gloria Cheng's piano performances of Messiaen, Adès, Tristan Murail, Ravel, George Benjamin, Pierre Boulez, Judith Weir, and Jonathan Harvey. The most distinguished and exciting piece in this illustrious company was Pierre Boulez's *Incises* (1994) which is a composition Boulez continues to revise. This June 3 afternoon performance represented the latest revision. The work is also the basis of his recent *Sur Incises* for three pianos, three harps, and percussion. The music is harrowing in its unrestrained speed, incorporates all the registers of the piano, and proves a greater challenge than most pianists wish to meet. Much of the music on that afternoon concert dealt with spatial and spectral sounds, the Messiaen *Mode de valeurs et d'intensités* (1949-50) setting the standard. Because of the out-of-doors setting, much of the spatial and spectral colors were lost in some of the music by Adès, Murail, and Jonathan Harvey. The birdcall music of Messiaen's *Petites esquisses d'oiseaux* (1985) -- six short pieces based upon the birdcalls of the robin (there are three red robins), the blackbird, thrush, and skylark -- were often answered by the birds in the big oak trees over the proscenium, a delightful comment on the 7performance. Cheng's performances were excellent.

The young and excellent American string quartet, the Flux Quartet, succeeded with their repertoire partially, which included the tacky Benjamin Franklin scordatura string quartet in five movements, Ornette Coleman's bland *Poets and Writers* (1962, recently revised), and the improbable improvisatory *Solver's 3*. The heart of their program resided in two string quartets by Philip Cashian and Renaud Gagneux, with the *Collage Series No. 1* a close-runner-up: quartet music which uses pre-recorded sounds composed by the first-violinist, Tom Chiu. The Gagneux quartet (1986) uses microtones and improvisatory materials, but the Cashian quartet (1989) succeeded in its intricate sounds and sudden shifts which proved exciting, similar in concept and sound to a Ligeti quartet. There is no dispute about the Flux Quartet's performing abilities, but the repertoire needs more scrutiny if the quartet is to match some of the more established string quartets performing contemporary music.

Simplicius far from Simple

MARK ALBURGER

American premiere of Hartmann's *Simplicius Simplicissimus* (1934). June 2, City College, San Francisco, CA

Interest in World War II era composers has been on the rise, and Karl Amadeus Hartmann is one of many whose music has been revived in recent years. Known primarily as a symphonist (a recent Telarc CD of his *Symphony No. 1* and *No. 6*, with Leon Botstein conducting the London Philharmonic Orchestra may serve as a fine introduction), the composer completely withdrew from public life in Germany during the Nazi regime. However, much of his music in this period retains a political edge, not the least of which being his sole opera, *Simplicius Simplicissimus* (1934), which finally received its American premiere in concerts on Friday, June 2, and Saturday, June 3, at City College of San Francisco. While based on the Reformation turmoil of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), this is a work whose socialism and pacifism speaks strongly to both the composer's and our day. *Simplicius* is far from simple.

The story deals with a simpleton who, in his innocence, becomes an advocate for social change. Like Alban Berg's *Wozzeck*, the main character is surrounded by the tumult of life, depicted in an expressionist, post-romantic musical language. Also as in Berg, the orchestra bears the weight of the story, in this case right from the lengthy overture. Unfortunately, the orchestra's placement upstage, behind the action, resulted in a lack of immediacy, possibly due to poor acoustics. Librettists Herman Scherchen, Wolfgang Petzet, and the composer (after the 1668 work of Johannes Grimmelshausen) take their time setting up the story, and the spirited pantomiming by the student cast was a valiant attempt by director David Ostwald to keep the show moving. There are perhaps good reasons why the U.S. premiere of this work occurs only now -- more than 50 years after its first performance in 1949.

Nevertheless there is much to enjoy in this opera and production: not least of which, the fine singing from Nicole Lumetta as Simplicius and Michael Mendelsohn as the Hermit (reports are that Elaine Romanelli and Harvey Garn appeared to excellent effect in these roles on June 2). Lumetta and Mendelsohn's disparate takes on the Lord's Prayer are the highlight of Episode 2, while the Hermit's death in Episode 3 is accompanied by gorgeous plainchant material from the chorus.

Again as in Berg, the music is clearly, yet fluidly sectionalized into a variety of set pieces and genres. Unlike Berg however, Hartmann's palette includes a fair amount of Stravinskyisms, including martial wind and chorale music à "L'histoire du soldat" and a sinuous, spun-out take on the opening bassoon solo from *The Rite of Spring*. In the latter case, clearly Hartmann thought, as some others have, that Stravinsky could have stood to develop his famous opening theme (Hartmann returned yet again to this music in 1950 in his *Symphony No. 5*).

The performances are in English and take some liberty with Hartmann's dramatic conception (or lack thereof), including the *Oliver!*-like re-titling of the work for a contemporary audience as *Simplicius!* and a basic, economical costuming of blue jeans and white t-shirts. A pair of singers with the very musical names of John Adams and Richard Wagner turn in very musical supporting roles as Captain and Foot Soldier. Simplicius himself has a young pantomime doppelganger in Braden Wiegand-Shahani. Michael Shahani conducts a professional chamber orchestra which always allows the fine diction of the solo vocalists to shine without benefit of supertitles.

Bravo, Maestro Thomas!

BRUCE CHRISTIAN BENNETT

American Mavericks. Meet the Mavericks, with Michael Tilson Thomas. Babbitt's *Philomel*, Cage's *Credo in Us*, Feldman's *Piece for Four Pianos*, and Riley's *In C*. June 7 Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA. Festival through June 24.

Bravo, Maestro Tilson Thomas!

The opening night (June 7) of the San Francisco Symphony's *American Mavericks Festival* was a success! Michael Tilson Thomas played emcee to an evening of landmark works. His interest in and love of the music presented seemed quite genuine. He had a very comfortable rapport with the audience and musicians, giving Davies Symphony Hall a more casual atmosphere than usual.

Alan Feinberg and Julie Steinberg gave an eloquent reading of Charles Ives's *Allegro* for two pianos tuned a quartertone apart. The piece sounded like a hazy, distorted memory of much 19th-century piano music. Next, Thomas conducted John Cage's *Credo in Us* with Feinberg playing the piano part with clarity and conviction. The "radio" part consisted of previously selected period recordings, lending the performance a vintage quality. Thomas joined three other pianists (Feinberg, Grunberg, and Linville) for the performance of Feldman's hauntingly beautiful *Piece for Four Pianos*. The performance was not much louder than the air conditioning in the hall, but it was absolutely captivating. Just preceding intermission, Lauren Flanigan gave a stellar performance of *Philomel*. As confounding as Milton Babbitt's music may be to most, this performance really brought the piece to life! Gone were the criticisms against serialism and complexity; all one heard in Flanigan's performance was a compelling, expressive, fluid reading of this sad tale.

During the intermission, Thomas rehearsed members of the audience for Terry Riley's *In C*, performed in the second half. This turned out to be great fun! It was a little messy, but Thomas kept it all together quite nicely, walking about the hall encouraging members of the audience to play louder or softer, keep the pulse, and so on. The effect was enormous; *In C* was all around us, shifting in and out of focus and moving around the hall. The sheet music scrolled by on large projection screens that had been set up on either side of the stage (these were a bit of a distraction in the first half, projecting photos of the composers and the goings-on on stage) so that every one in the audience could play or sing along. People brought violins, clarinets, horns, guitars, banjos, kazoos, penny whistles, hand drums, voices, bells . . . It was better than a Sing-along-Messiah!

All in all, Tilson Thomas made a very strong case for the music and the audience responded enthusiastically. Given the restricted seating, it was a full house! After years of only being able to listen to recording of this music, it's a joy to hear it in the concert hall.

The Fourth of Faith

JANOS GEREBEN

American Mavericks. Maverick Icons, with Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony. Ruggles's *Sun-treader*, Ruth Crawford Seeger's *Andante for Strings*, Foss's *Time Cycle*, Meredith Monk's *ATLAS*, and Ives's *Symphony No. 4*. June 9, Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

It's hard to imagine a more gripping and involving Gesamtkunstwerk than June 9's San Francisco Symphony performance of Charles Ives's *Symphony No. 4*.

Under Michael Tilson Thomas' passionate and superb direction and the orchestra playing at its spectacular best, the breathtaking spiritual arch of the third movement had all that is simple and powerful in Bruckner. There is no more thrilling victory of good over evil in *Parsifal* than in the humble and glorious Ives finale.

Pianist Michael Linville and Vance George's Symphony Chorus were at one with Thomas and the orchestra in a performance that instantly burned into the memory, there to stay along with some of the most moving music ever heard in Davies Hall.

It's almost ironic that the Ives was the culmination of this edition of the *American Mavericks Festival* because, appearances notwithstanding, this work by now is in the very mainstream of music -- any place, any time (The rest of the excellent program was Ruggles's *Sun-treader*, Ruth Crawford Seeger's *Andante for Strings*, Lucas Foss's *Time Cycle* with soprano Lauren Flanigan, and, yes, the continued local-edition of the cult of Meredith Monk, with four extended pieces from *ATLAS* -- all of which were swept by the Ives).

With all the still-unusual assortment of instruments in addition to the full orchestra, harps and violins in the loge above the stage (representing the Star of Bethlehem or Haley's Comet, according to Thomas), a subterranean percussion section under the stage, the Ives symphony can very easily turn into a circus. Thomas avoided pitfalls with a simple but masterful arrangement. After speaking briefly about the nature of the work, he then had the chorus sing the four great hymns that provide the essence of the symphony, and opened the first movement's "question" without pause, immediately after the chorus's stunningly simple "Nearer, My God, to Thee." The audience was given a chance to hear the theme and its variations through that magnificent conclusion of acceptance and transfiguration.

Talking Music at Davies Hall

PAMELA Z

American Mavericks. Maverick Icons, with Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony. Ruggles's *Sun-treader*, Ruth Crawford Seeger's *Andante for Strings*, Foss's *Time Cycle*, Meredith Monk's *ATLAS*, and Ives's *Symphony No. 4*. June 9, Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

The June 9 before-and-after talks at Davies Symphony Hall were very good for contextualizing a program of Carl Ruggles, Ruth Crawford Seeger, Lukas Foss, Meredith Monk, and Charles Ives. Foss made some very welcome comments about his use of improvisation to "free his students from the tyranny of the printed page" and Meredith Monk talked about how her work is really about aural tradition and how she doesn't separate lyrical-ness from the process of developing vocal techniques. She spoke about how difficult it was at first for her to deal with people (members of San Francisco Symphony Chorus) who needed her music to be on paper in order to learn it, but how beautifully they got it once she sang with them and they got it in their bodies. Lou Harrison was also there for the after-concert question-and-answer, though his work was not programmed on this particular evening, and charmed everyone with his jovial responses to Michael Tilson Thomas (who moderated the panel with a Martin Short-like demeanor). Lou said that he thought this "Maverick" business was really just about being interested in what it is that you are exploring to the extent that you stay with it even when that means you have to be totally alone. He said "All my friends call me a very 'interested person'!" (Later, backstage, I asked Meredith why she didn't just refuse to send a score and force them to learn it by call and response in rehearsal. Her answer was the obvious one. The chorus never has enough time to learn the material. They only had a few rehearsals with her, so it was important that they got the music before hand).

The before concert talk, by Susan Key, was a bit more academic, but livened up when Lukas Foss came on to discuss his work with her. It also included a Theremin demonstration, and a fascinating little factoid about Ives writing for the Theremin (or something quite like it) before it was invented, and then having to wait for the technology to exist before the piece could be realized.

The performances themselves were wonderful and at times thrilling. The Ruggles *Sun-treader* featured the bright and bombastic brass section. The strings in Crawford Seeger's *Andante*, sounded like a swarm of hovering bees. Truly. Lauren Flanigan was again stunning with her performance of the Foss *Time Cycle*. Her stage presence is so much more musicianly than that of a lot of other classical soloists. She is completely present and her body completely involved even during the passages where she "lays out" while the orchestra plays those sparse and tasty little punctuated interludes. Monk's excerpts from *ATLAS* were beautiful, and both the members of her ensemble and the members of the Chorus were very physically connected and wove marvelous textures with repeating phrases, overtone singing, and physical gestures. The Ives *4* was big and multi-layered -- including the chorus and the small string and harp section in the loft, and the subterranean percussion ensemble beneath the stage.

It was a very full concert!

Colorful Cartoon "Rake"

MARK ALBURGER

San Francisco Opera presents Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*. June 10, War Memorial Opera House, San Francisco, CA. Through June 29. Reviewed June 20.

The Rake's Progress, Igor Stravinsky's sole full-length opera (and his longest work), is an opera about opera -- a caricature of a music drama, a cartoon of a musical. So it is only appropriate that the renowned artist David Hockney produced vibrant, colorful, cartoony set designs in 1975 for the Glyndebourne Festival Opera. These sets, purchased and adapted (under Hockney's supervision) by the San Francisco Opera, have been seen at War Memorial Opera House productions in 1982, 1988, and now most recently in a series of performances that began on June 10.

This new revival, conducted by Markus Stenz and staged by John Cox, is itself a wonderful reflection of Stravinsky's score and Hockney's sets. *Rake*, while hardly an exotic opulent score in the tradition of *Petrushka* or *The Rite of Spring*, is yet, in its studied neoclassic acerbity and wit, a colorful and sumptuous work. Stenz brought out the taut lines, the cartoonish brightness, the shimmering pomposity, the surreal distortions, and the genuinely tender, poignant, and beautiful moments.

Rake is far from realistic. It is a Faustian fable, a series of dramatic, yet flat panels, which Stravinsky, with librettists W.H. Auden and Chester Kallman, based on William Hogarth's 18th-century etchings on a young man gone bad. The singers in this production reflect such otherworldliness. Bass-baritone Bryn Terfel, as the demonic servant Nick Shadow, brings a light dastardliness to the multi-faceted role. There is less of the satanic ominousness that Samuel Ramey brought to the part in 1988, but more of a sense of play and surprise. Also surprising is the great countertenor Brian Asawa, only the second male in the history of the opera (a change approved by the composer in 1967 for a Sarah Caldwell Boston production), cast in the female role of Baba the Turk. Asawa plays Baba as a bona fide female -- complete with a false beard (the revelation of which was surprisingly understated), just as a woman would be presented -- and many in the audience were probably unaware of his true gender.

Rebecca Evans, as Anne Trulove, and Raymond Very, as Tom Rakewell, turn in performances of much gentle beauty. Dale Travis, Susan Nicely, and David Cangelosi are solid in supporting roles as the stolid Father Trulove, the over-the-top Mother Goose, and the comic Sellem. The three-and-a-half hour evening moves along at a fair clip and keeps the shiny tone of a Saturday morning TV marathon.

The Old Becomes New at San Francisco Symphony

MARK ALBURGER

George Antheil Centennial / American Mavericks. Bad Boy of Music: The World of George Antheil, with Michael Tilson Thomas and the Abel-Steinberg-Winant Trio. *Second Sonata for Violin with Accompaniment of Piano and Drums*, *A Jazz Symphony*, and *Ballet Mécanique*. June 11, Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

Over the years in which Michael Tilson Thomas has presided over the San Francisco Symphony, concerts and concert attitudes have just gotten better and better. The music and the performances are first rate, and the audience has grown to expect the best and to expect to be, in the spirit of Sergei Diaghilev, astounded.

Yet another example of the health of Bay Area music was provided by Thomas's program on June 11, entitled *The World of George Antheil*, which celebrated the 100th anniversary of the birth of this self-described "Bad Boy of Music" who was born on July 8, 1900, in Trenton, NJ. The highlight was the first San Francisco Symphony performance (and probably the West Coast premiere) of Antheil's notorious *Ballet mécanique* (a work known far more by name than by sound to music aficionados) in a version which is probably closer to the composer's original 1924 intentions than even he was able to achieve at the time

But unlike some early audiences, which fussed and rioted through performances, this enlightened San Francisco crowd anticipated and took on the assault of this music with delight and enthusiasm. The tone of the experience was somewhat along the lines of a well-mannered heavy metal concert, where listeners reveled at the massiveness and relentlessness of the sound.

And big it was, starting with no less than 16 digitally-controlled Yamaha Disklaviers playing four independent parts, an update of Antheil's intended 16 player pianos, which he never heard, since the technology of synchronized mechanical pianos was never perfected in his time (instead, Antheil had to make do with one player piano and a number of live pianists). Added to this are four bass drums, two (electric) pianos, three (four?) xylophones, a tam-tam, seven electric bells (the alarm types), a siren (two?), and three airplane propellers (the last unfortunately only in digital recordings rather than in their dangerous reality).

What does it sound like?

It sounds like Igor Stravinsky's *Les Noces* (*The Wedding*), without vocals, beefed up on steroids and uppers, but with the same relentless, mechanistic-yet-folkish, motoric, proto-minimalist drive. It's a happy/threatening brutality salted with the values of the Italian futurists (who envisioned a music of "squawkers," "screamers," "buzzers," and so on), including the siren sounds more familiar to contemporary ears from Erik Satie's *Parade* and a number of Edgar Varèse's works. Like Stravinsky and Varèse, there are powerful, percussive rhythms, and striking dissonances. The pianola clusters, however, are more akin to Henry Cowell, in their blatant simplicity and exuberant new-world spirit. And, anticipating John Cage, there are silences and alarums galore, as well as jazzy bits, chord cycles, and ostinati that would not sound out of place in a current pop tune or new-music ensemble. The bulk of the music is a headlong rush of driving rhythms and motivic invention for live and mechanical players which ultimately gives way in fits and starts to sputters of the purely mechanical, including a back and forth interplay of alarm bells and tremolo pianolas doing their best to approximate the former. An extraordinarily brief coda brings back the humans for a rousing conclusion.

Through the mechanized section, Thomas continued theatrically to "conduct" the machines. His showmanship was also evident during his fine introductory talk in the Leonard Bernstein tradition, introducing the music with the aid of two large-screen projectors above each corner of the stage and recorded reminiscences by the composer. During the performance, close-up projections of the Disklavier hammers were shown until a technical problem froze the image -- just like at the ballpark!

The rest of the concert replicated Antheil's 1927 Carnegie Hall program, opening with the wonderful *Second Sonata for Violin with Accompaniment of Piano and Drums*, ably performed by the stars that are the Abel-Steinberg-Winant Trio. The original version of the happy-go-lucky *Jazz Symphony* shined in its dizzy scoring for two oboes, three clarinets/saxophones, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, percussion, solo piano, two additional pianos (one in alternation with xylophone), and strings. Pianist Michael Linville, trumpeter Mark Inouye, Thomas, and the orchestra hand matters elegantly in hand.

Antheil's "Terrifyingly Great Fun"

JANOS GEREBEN

George Antheil Centennial / American Mavericks. Bad Boy of Music: The World of George Antheil, with Michael Tilson Thomas and the Abel-Steinberg-Winant Trio. *Second Sonata for Violin with Accompaniment of Piano and Drums*, *A Jazz Symphony*, and *Ballet Mécanique*. June 11, Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

"Terrifyingly great fun" is the description from Michael Tilson Thomas, who gave his all on June 11 to an *American Mavericks* concert, *The World of George Antheil*. The late composer, whose 100th birthday falls on July 8, is somewhat of an asterisk in the history of 20th-century American music. After a definitive performance of the *Sonata No. 2*, the delightful *A Jazz Symphony*, and a kind of premiere of the original *Ballet mécanique*, that asterisk shines even brighter.

Ballet mécanique was at the heart of the event, with 16 computer-assisted player pianos, two grand pianos, xylophones, bass drums, a tam-tam, electric bells, a siren, and recorded airplane propellers. The footnote to the asterisk is that -- according to Paul D. Lehrman who is responsible for the reconstruction and programming -- this was among the first real premieres of the work. Obviously, in the 20's, there was no Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI) which makes a performance possible on the scale Antheil composed it; the Lehrman version was performed twice before, including a Carnegie Hall event a few months back but even that didn't have the full forces required. We did. How did it go?

Here are some possible summaries: 1. It felt so good when it stopped, 2. *Les Noces* on steroid, 3. Everyone should hear it once, few may want to repeat the experience, unless "1,240 measures of brutal rhythms" is your idea of a good time... or of music that matters.

Thanks to Thomas's brilliant salesmanship and superb direction (although he had to follow a "click track" over headphones) and the musicians' dedication, the reaction in Davies Hall was an ovation.

A Jazz Symphony is something else. It's impossible to hear it without grinning madly. From its genuinely crazy rhythms to what Thomas correctly called "deliciously mawkish" moments of popular music, this is a delightful, repeatable work... of the asterisk kind. No MIDI program can measure up to Michael Linville's heroic and brilliant piano solos -- the man was on fire. Mark Inouye played a mean trumpet.

Of course, the presence of Julie Steinberg on the program -- playing the Antheil *Sonata No. 2* for the second time during Thomas's five-year directorship in San Francisco -- assured gender equality in world-class pianism. David Abel was the awesome violinist, and the shoeless William Winant played the role Ezra Pound performed at the original performance of the piece: he turned pages for Steinberg and then hopped over (it's faster in socks) to the percussion for the powerful finale.

Bravo MTT!

CRAIG MATSUMOTO

George Antheil Centennial / American Mavericks. Bad Boy of Music: The World of George Antheil, with Michael Tilson Thomas and the Abel-Steinberg-Winant Trio. *Second Sonata for Violin with Accompaniment of Piano and Drums, A Jazz Symphony*, and *Ballet Mécanique*. June 11, Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

The second half of the Antheil program at Davies Symphony Hall on June 11 featured, the *Ballet mécanique*, which was most impressive. The three airplane propellers were sampled, and not all that loud, which was a bit of a disappointment. But all the other elements were there: 2 pianists, 3 xylophonists, 4 bass drummers, an air-raid siren (played by a live human), 7 electric bells (triggered by a homemade MIDI device) and the crowning touch: 16 brand-new Yamaha Disklaviers dominating the back of the stage.

Ballet mécanique is loads of fun: fast, percussive and LOUD. It's full of "modern" dissonance and abstract melody, but it's not that difficult to follow, as it contains some repeated passages that even my ears could pick up. Paul Lehrman, who put the whole piece into MIDI, was gracious enough to give a post-show talk, where he said this was the loudest and fastest performance to date: 115 bpm, versus 90 at Lowell, Mass., and 100 at Carnegie Hall.

Ballet mécanique was written in 1923-4, but it wasn't possible to perform until recently, due to its requirement for 16 synchronized player pianos. The pianos dominate much of the show, playing four groups of loud unison lines, none of them humanly playable. Even today, the technology isn't 100% there -- they showed us one of the pianos on the video screens, and wouldn't you know it, it was the one that failed halfway through. Yamaha guys were poring over its insides after the concert.

The human players get plenty to do in this piece, often turning out fast and oddly syncopated parts. Precision is a big part of this piece. The bass drums had a moment, for example, where for a couple of measures they dropped out of unison to produce a complicated, tightly knit rhythm. It was impressive.

Conductor Michael Tilson Thomas had headphones on, so he could hear the click track that was running the piece. He kept conducting even during the parts where no human was playing... which seemed a bit pretentious, but then again, just standing there would have lacked interest.

Late in the piece, Antheil starts experimenting with silences: long, vacant gaps that get terminated by a quick blast from the orchestra. It's not the change of pace that you'd expect -- the silences certainly are different, but the quick blasts keep the boisterous mood intact.

The piece is a bit of a crowd-pleaser -- not that you could hum along with it, but some could consider it noise for noise's sake, a spectacle to see how much sound these instruments can pump out. Still, it's massively complex, apparently riddled with annoying time-signature changes... and it is impressive to see the player pianos crank out their parts. *Ballet mécanique* is big fun. The crowd loved it, and MIDI man Lehrman was mobbed with questions afterward.

Underground Riot

JANOS GEREBEN

American Mavericks. American Underground, with Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony. Cage's *Dance Four Orchestras*, Cowell's *Piano Concerto*, Del Tredici's *Adventures Underground*, and Varèse's *Amériques*. June 16, Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

In the long history of riotous behavior at new-music concerts, June 16's San Francisco Symphony event was refreshing. The shouting was for the music, not against it.

Multiple curtain calls, standing ovations, shouting and whistling. What would make a thoroughly mixed (young, old, jeans, and gowns) audience of 1,500 carry on like this? Try a program of John Cage's *Dance Four Orchestras*, David Del Tredici's *Adventures Underground*, Henry Cowell's *Piano Concerto*, and Edgar Varèse's *Amériques*.

Citing and embodying Cage's "unquenchable sense of wonder," Michael Tilson Thomas in five short years has commanded orchestra and audience loyalty of extraordinary dimensions. His troops willingly follow him where no large groups of listeners have gone before: his *American Mavericks Festival* just keeps rolling on.

No sandwiching of an occasional morsel between comforting layers of the familiar, Thomas concerts boldly go forth to entire programs of the new and unusual. And then comes the miracle: somehow, against all odds, he makes the audience love it. Love is what's at work here, Thomas's genuine, powerful belief in the "mavericks," his Bernsteinesque presentations (without his teacher's ego), the securing of best talent, not usually associated with "this kind of thing" (Lauren Flanigan and Ursula Oppens in this concert), painstaking preparation, and brilliant performances. It all comes together and you have dear old, formerly often staid, Davies Hall go nuts over tone clusters.

The Cage piece is performed by four separate orchestras -- Apo Hsu, Alasdair Neale, and Peter Grunberg conducting the three performing off-stage -- Thomas cuing the orchestras with his left hand (showing numbers) and working the beat with his right. With proper preparation of the audience and a passionately excellent performance, the work by the man who "preferred sound to music" actually came through, holding the audience for 20 silent minutes, and releasing the first of the evening's "riots."

It's no good trying to describe Flanigan's performance in Del Tredici's work (originally written for Thomas when he was in Buffalo): words cannot do justice to her searing intensity, total involvement -- voice, body and soul -- in conveying the lament of indignation and terror... of a mouse. Not for a moment was it ridiculous (although often very, very funny) as Flanigan spoke and sang "The Mouse's Tale" ("tail," Alice thinks at first), her face and body twitching, becoming one with both Del Tredici's youthfully (1971) brash music and the woebegone mouse itself, through Lewis Carroll's text and Isaac Watts's poem. Again, it's impossible to explain how you can roll Salome and Electra into one and come up with a credible swim in the pool of tears, climaxing in the mouse's "that... that... that." But if you were there, you'd know.

Intensity and physicality were also present in Oppens seemingly climbing inside the piano, her elbows and arms working the keyboard furiously in the wonderful Cowell concerto. Even with movements such as "Polyharmony," "Tone Cluster," and "Counter Rhythm," this work came across as the most "conventional" of the evening. The orchestra performance here -- as, indeed, all evening long -- was phenomenal.

Amériques, performed during the subscription season just a few weeks ago, is now owned by the Thomas / San Francisco forces, securely, completely. The way they perform it, this is one of the most joyful noises unto the Lord of Dance.

Music for 18 Mavericks

PHILIPPE TAPON

American Mavericks. Steve Reich and Musicians. West Coast premiere of *Hindenburg* (Beryl Korot), and *Music for Eighteen Musicians*. June 17, Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA. Repeated June 18.

On June 17 at Davies Hall, Steve Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians* went off very well. I was less moved and impressed by *Hindenburg*, but it is incomplete. There was a discussion and question-and-answer session between collaborators Steve Reich (pronounced "Reish," he says) and Beryl Korot, and Michael Tilson Thomas; hardly anyone moved from their seats after the conclusion of the program. Once upon a time Reich was so avant-garde no one would touch his music, and the performance of *Four Organs* caused an uproar, and he has perhaps softened his position since. *Music for 18* is still a very fine piece. There remains a stark contrast between improvisers and Steve Reich and Musicians, who had no freedom whatever about what notes to play. Yet, the sacrifice of freedom gains that sustained, mesmerizing, rhythm...

Water! Water

MARK PETERSEN

The Esoterics present *Water*, a cappella choral works by Samuel Barber, Donald Skirvin, Manuel de Falla, Carlos Chávez, Jørgen Jersild, Jaakko Mäntyjärvi, Thea Musgrave, Garrett Fisher, Lajos Bárdos, Henryk Górecki, and Kam Morrill. June 17, Christ Episcopal Church, Tacoma, WA. Through June 24 Pilgrim Congregational Church, Seattle. Reviewed June 23, Pilgrim Congregational Church.

The Esoterics have always been innovative in their concert programming. Their 2000 Season is no exception -- it celebrates each of the four ancient elements (Earth, Water, Air and Fire) -- at the times of year most revered by the ancients: the vernal equinox, summer solstice, autumnal equinox and winter solstice.

Each concert subsumes a broad spectrum of music (written in the last 100 years), some familiar, some obscure, masterworks of choral literature, and a generous sampling of Northwest and world premieres. Also notable at the Seattle concerts has been the inclusion of a mini-exhibition of works by local visual and graphic artists D. Hake Brinkerhoff, Jennifer dela Cruz, Dionne Haroutunian, Norman Rueter, and Christine Schoener on each of the concert themes.

Although unified thematically, the *Water* compositions were pleasantly diverse in style, structure, and especially language. It's not often a chorus can effortlessly transition from English to Catalanian, Spanish, Danish, Latin, Old English, Hungarian, Polish and back to English in a single performance. Barber's lyricism ("To be sung on the water," 1968) was balanced by Chávez' angularity ("Tierra mojada," 1932). The perpetual motion of Thea Musgrave's "Song of the burn" (1954) complemented the simple structures of Górecki's folk-song cycle *Szeroka woda* (1979). The layered, Bolero-like harmonies of Bárdos's mystical *Jávai dal* (1957) afforded pleasing contrast to Jersild's *Natteregn* (1971); a delightful mini-fantasy which juxtaposes lively, rapidly-changing meters with sublime chorales.

Affirming a long-standing commitment to local composers, the program also included premieres of Garrett Fisher's *riverrun* (2000); Kam Morrill's rhapsodic arrangement of the folk-tune "The water's wide" (1999); and "Summer solstice: Wheel of dreams" (2000) by Esoterics's composer-in-residence, Donald Skirvin. "Wheel of Dreams" is the second of a cycle of pieces written for the 2000 elements concert series -- all settings of introspective Native-American texts.

The highlight of the performance had to be the group's compelling rendition of Jaakko Mäntyjärvi's memorial to those who perished in the 1994 sinking of the ferry Estonia in the Baltic Sea. From the opening whispers of souls in prayer ("Miserere Domini"), to the fortissi-issimo climax describing the victims' tragic demise; the Esoterics's performance of *Canticum calamitatis maritimæ* (1997) was a transcendental experience of the first-magnitude.

Bravo Berkeley Symphony!

MATT J. INGLES

Under Construction. Berkeley Symphony reads Thomas Day's *Objcey*. June 18, Berkeley, CA.

The Berkeley symphony's *Under Construction* reading session featured Thomas Day's piece *Objcey*, which is excellent. The work sounds like Ives, but with clearer orchestration, humor, and beauty. Yes, beauty. But, whereas Ives found beauty in "vernacular" folk tunes, Day sees and presents folk elements as foolish and bland. Instead, the younger composer very successfully transforms trivial elements into gnarly, dissonant, (beautiful) chords that moved one to tears.

We hope to hear the piece again someday with revisions, from an orchestra that has actually thoroughly rehearsed it.

Adams Shakes It

PHILIPPE TAPON

American Mavericks. New World Symphony: Adams to Zappa, with John Adams and the New World Symphony. Zappa's *Dupree's Paradise*, Adams's *Shaker Loops* and *Grand Pianola Music*, and Nancarrow's *Study No. 6*. June 21, Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

On June 21, John Adams conducted the San Francisco Symphony at Davies Symphony Hall in Frank Zappa's *Dupree's Paradise*, Conlon Nancarrow's *Study No. 6*, and two of his own pieces: *Shaker Loops* and *Grand Pianola Music*.

The Zappa was fun, brassy, smart. *Shaker Loops* was really fine, especially the nervous, buzzy bits; but the slow bits seemed a little ... slow.