

# 21ST CENTURY MUSIC

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# Chaos and Control: An Interview with Michael Gordon

ANDREW SHAPIRO

Michael Gordon, with David Lang and Julia Wolfe, founded *The Bang on a Can Marathon* and *The Bang on a Can All-Stars*. Recently the group established a record label as well, Cantaloupe Music.

I met with Michael Gordon on February 12, 2001, in New York.

SHAPIRO: What's Cantaloupe Music about and do you feel that Cantaloupe is an example of an outgrowth of the niche that Bang on a Can created?

GORDON: Well, my goal isn't to make a lot of money. If it were, I wouldn't be doing this. I wouldn't be writing the type of music that I write. My goal is to have some control of my life. I think when I got out of school in 1982, the way you had a career was you kissed people's butts.

SHAPIRO: This is any music career or the academic/quasi-academic music?

GORDON: The quasi-academic world. I was getting concerts of my stuff. The way that you got a performance in the venues that were established had nothing really to do with anything other than the connections that you had to the older people who ran those things. I was very inspired by not only the music of Philip Glass and Steve Reich, but also by the way that they took control of their lives. They played their own music and had their own groups and went out and performed. They bucked the establishment. They went past all of the performing organizations and all of the ensembles that existed, and went straight to people who would listen to their music. They got people interested. That is, in a sense, what downtown music is in a nutshell. It's not really a style but it's more like, "I'm going to go in front of a bunch of people and play the music and they're going to like it" as opposed to, "I'm going to go in front of a lot of people and tell them why they should like this music and whether they like it or not they're going to respect me." That's what I think uptown music is, in a sense. It's not a question of one music is good or one music is bad. I have a love and respect for all kinds of music but in a sense, the beautiful thing was that they controlled their lives. So when you ask, what's Bang on a Can or what's Cantaloupe Music about, why are we starting a record label, it's not because we want to make money or that we're going to be putting out music that's commercial. It's because we want to decide exactly what's on our records. We want to put out exactly the music that we want to put out the same way that we want to play exactly what we want to play and we don't want someone else to be dictating that to us. That's all.

SHAPIRO: But certainly you're counting on the fact that Bang on a Can's quasi-pop status (as opposed to another record label that just puts out supposed avant-garde string trios or something like that) will help you move some records right? For instance, Arnold Dreyblatt's song "Escalators" (off of *Renegade Heaven*, the debut Cantaloupe Records release) is a song that sounds like pop. Sting comes to mind. And then it veers off into areas that are decidedly non-pop. Anyway, you know as you're starting this project that Bang on a Can has already cut out a niche for itself. For a certain scene and group of people and mentality, you're the capitol of that particular world. So, you know that you're going to sell some records...

GORDON: I hope we sell records. That would be nice. I'm very hopeful. But I think that the entire record industry isn't doing very well. Especially classical music. It's taken a dive in the last 10 years because people already own all the classical music -- they're not going to buy it again. In a sense that's good news for composers and performers who are playing new music because that's the only new thing that there is. In other words, if you walk into the pop department, the artists have come out with new music. Every new record has new music on it. But if you go into the classical department, most of the records that come out are just of the same music. So if you're writing new stuff, that's a good thing for sales. Someone is going to walk in and say, "Oh, I haven't heard this, I wonder what this is." I think that the thing that you have to remember is that if you're interested in new music there's nothing as exciting as the first time you hear new music by a certain composer. Composers, especially radical composers like Glass and Reich, have gone through a period where people listen to their music and say, "What the hell is that? It's terrible. I can't stand it!" And I'm old enough to remember when people said that about those guys. It was so radical that people couldn't listen to it. Then there comes a point where their music has existed in the world for a period of time and younger people grow up and they hear it and all of a sudden it becomes part of the language that exists. It's no longer radical. Think about Van Gogh. People looked at his paintings and thought, "This guy is crazy. This stuff is awful. It's ugly." Now it's ubiquitous. People put it on their bathroom walls.

SHAPIRO: It's been said that the rigors of minimalism relaxed at around the time of Glass's *Einstein on the Beach* and Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians*. It was then (1975 or so) that minimalism influenced popular music to an enormous degree. The popular music idiom appropriated minimalism and then sent it back in a way that influenced the original sources(s) to relax into a smoother and more popular aesthetic. I wonder what your thoughts are on that issue.

GORDON: I think that that's possible. You're talking about Glass and Reich but there are still minimalists who are as die-hard as they were in the 1960's. I don't think that La Monte Young's music has shifted as radically as Glass's or Reich's. There are other people that were part of that movement. As far as Philip and Steve in particular, I have no idea. We can sit around and theorize if you want. Being a composer myself, I know that at a certain point I think you could just wake up one day and say, "Well, ya know, I've been playing my keyboard with three saxophone players for the past 15 years and some guy in Germany wants me to write a piece for orchestra and ya know, I've never done that and I'm curious to see what that would be like." I could definitely see Glass having that feeling. I think that when opportunities open up for composers who are, in a sense, outcast composers you say, "Well, I wonder what that would be like. No one has ever asked me to write anything for orchestra before and I'd like to try it out." I think it's as simple as that. You have to remember that these people were the villains of the classical music world. They weren't using classical instruments; everything that they were doing was upsetting the establishment. They were drawing audiences; they were touring throughout Europe; they were making records; people liked their music, and so on. The payback here in America was that no one would work with them. Orchestras didn't work with them. Conventional music groups didn't work with them --

SHAPIRO: -- Opera companies wouldn't commission them.

GORDON: And then one day someone calls you up and says, "We want you to do something."

SHAPIRO: You just take it.

GORDON: I couldn't possibly know what actually occurred. Certainly their music had an impact on the world. It crossed over into popular music. I think it had a big impact on the development of ambient music and even now younger pop groups and DJs are still freshly being influenced by those two guys. But I think for them if I had to make any guess I would say that the world of opportunity started opening up and they took it.

SHAPIRO: You say that there are people around that are still doing straight minimalism. Do you think that the minimalists from the 1960's are taking the place of the old guard hard-core serial people, the people that so many loathe and think of as being everything that is wrong with academia as it pertains to the composition of music in the year 2000? The minimal people are just staying put with their language and have no intention of moving on. Will straight minimal composition be analogous to straight 12-tone music, 20-30 years from now? Or is there a problem with that analogy because there was and still is a popular accessibility inherent in minimalism that 12-tone music never had?

GORDON: I hate to put it in such negative terms. I think people should do what they want. If you want to write 12-tone music I feel that that's fine. I don't really have a problem with that. I feel that the problem isn't on the basis of individual to individual. The problem is societal, it's the same in any science or art. When a prevailing aesthetic or theory comes in then there's a certain complacency that settles in; this is just what it is. People forget how radical the impulse is. I think especially the classical music world has a big problem with this because Beethoven was a radical composer. He was as radical as Steve Reich. He expanded the orchestra to contain instruments that were never used. He wrote these huge bombastic works-- he was the bad boy of classical music. He had an audience and people came to see him. But he was certainly an avant-garde composer and now look what's happened. Of course, not only with Beethoven. Most of the great classical composers broke ground and were avant-garde.

SHAPIRO: What do you think of as being the most recently written classical music out there?

GORDON: For me, a while back I heard something by Elvis as being classic. Then the Beatles, then Disco, now it's 80's pop. Things become classical very quickly because they become imbedded in our subconscious very quickly. What used to take 200 years as a pillar of something now will take barely any time at all. Classic rock is now from the 70's and now even the 80's.

SHAPIRO: Classic rock now definitely includes something like early Madonna or something like Michael Jackson's "Thriller."

GORDON: Some people who are buying records say, "Yeah I know what that sounds like and I won't buy more because I know it; I don't want to hear it again." On the other hand, there are still about five times as many who say, "Oh, I'll buy it because I've never heard it before and I'll hear it for the first time." I think that the idea that certain music is classic or classical -- "I want to hear this Beethoven symphony again or I want to turn on the radio and listen to this Rolling Stones song again, it makes me feel really happy" -- is really nostalgia. It's like having a blanket and a bottle, or something like that.

SHAPIRO: A bottle of what?

GORDON: Milk, not a bottle of whiskey. It's like being a baby again. It's very comforting. It's, give me what I know. When I was a kid I liked Captain Beefheart, Zappa, and progressive rock like Emerson, Lake & Palmer and King Crimson. I've always felt that that's music that I relate to and it's the stuff that I've been inspired by. Last year I went into Tower Records with some guys 22 years old. I said, "Guys, pick out stuff that's cool and experimental."

SHAPIRO: What did they get you? Mostly electronica stuff?

GORDON: Mostly electronica. I got this group called Pansonic. It was just an hour of feedback. It was great; I loved it. I'm very interested in that stuff. I have a nostalgic felling for the music I heard when I was a kid.

SHAPIRO: Well, with that in mind, do you ever take one of these songs that you're nostalgic about in your head and use it in a piece of your own? Not necessarily the beats and a literal transcription though.

GORDON: Well that's a sensibility. Obviously I have to write the music that interests me. I have to write stuff that pleases me. It's my market. My work is me.

SHAPIRO: Could get excited about skewing a pop tune?

GORDON: I've never really done anything like that. I think that the sensibility of the music that you write seeps into you. What is an aesthetic? Why do you like the music that you like? It's a very mysterious thing. What are you trying to get out of it? For me, I don't really feel totally fulfilled listening to popular music. I get it very quickly. I'm willing fully to totally accept the music that I'm nostalgic about which is from the late 60's because I was a kid then and I was totally in it. But I can't live in that music anymore today.

SHAPIRO: Were you into the Grateful Dead?

GORDON: Sure, I was never a Deadhead but I had a bunch of their records.

SHAPIRO: Here's Kyle Gann's *Village Voice* review of the *Bang on a Can Marathon* from a couple of months ago. It's not very nice. Gann states that it would be nice if they would try not to make it look like "the Michael Gordon, Julia Wolfe, and David Lang show again." Additionally, he goes on to say that, for instance, Pamela Z did her operatic thing again and that the All-Stars weren't able to learn new music so they performed Tan Dun's *Concerto for Six* again, and everything is again and again and again.

GORDON: Kyle came to the first marathon in 1987 but he didn't come to the one last year. There's no question that Kyle is the most astute writer on contemporary music in America. He's been hard on us sometimes --

SHAPIRO: Is this your honest feeling or are you just saying this for the interview?

GORDON: I honestly think he's the most astute writer about contemporary music in America. I don't think that there's any question about that. But, basically I don't read reviews. I've gotten into this habit because when you're on the road, you're always gone before the review comes out unless you have a friend or a relative who will send it to you. Then, if someone clips it and sends it to you, half the time it's a bad review anyway. You think, "Why is this person sending it to me?" I figure if there's a review that is incredibly fantastic and worth reading than someone will call you up and tell you about it or mail it to you. The thing is -- how smart are these guys that are writing these things? Unless you're someone who is really interested in new music -- not modernist music (Boulez, Carter, etc., or even Glass or Reich) but what's new right now-- if that's not your orientation, then you're invested in a certain sense of keeping... Look, if you're a classical music critic, which is 90% of the reviews that I've read of my stuff, nobody is going to compare me to Stravinsky. There is no one as great as Stravinsky or Shostakovich. There's no one as great as Debussy. Understandably so, it's impossible. There's a thought out there that there will never be composers as great as there were before. So, how can you compete with a critic who loves Bach or Stravinsky? It doesn't work. I've read some reviews that say, "This guy can't compare to Benjamin Britten." Well, of course not.

SHAPIRO: So then why is it that your music is compared with Beethoven's but someone like Whitney Houston would never ever be compared with a composer like Alban Berg?

GORDON: I think it's about consumerability. If you get it immediately than it's a different state of being than something where "I don't get it right away, it's going to take a while to figure it out. I don't understand it." The world is set up in a certain way. If I were setting it up myself maybe I'd set it up in a different way! There are a lot of factors -- artificial boundaries that are made due to societal factors that differentiate class or educational backgrounds. I'm not so sure why.

SHAPIRO: But imagine that on a poster! I read an article recently called "Strike the Band: Pop Music Without Musicians" by Tony Schulman [The New York Times, Sunday February 11, 2001].

GORDON: I read that.

SHAPIRO: One thing that the article discussed was how bands like the Stones and Beatles are decidedly modernist as far as pop music is concerned right now. Electronica is decidedly post-modernist -- it's about taking whatever you want that's out there (via sampling) and creating a music based upon your own sensibilities of what's around you at that particular time.

GORDON: I felt that the writer of the article was being very nostalgic. There was the thought there about making music where no one is playing and that the people that are making it have no musical training. But that's nothing new. The second that recordings were invented, music making became something else. Glenn Gould started splicing things together. There are no classical recordings that are made without splices. Sometimes hundreds of splices. Making records and playing live are two different things. This guy is saying, "Oh, I just figured it out that making a record is not the same thing as playing live." Well, surprise, surprise: making a record is not playing live. Well, that's been 40 years already.

SHAPIRO: If this were a pop review, I guess we'd be talking gossip.

GORDON: Well, I'll pass on that. Basically pop music is entertainment on a very large scale. You're talking about millions and millions of people. You really have to have your act together. Someone like Madonna really has her act together. If you notice, it's completely unlike classical music in that in pop, very rarely do people have careers that last for very long. The people from the 60s or 70s...some people have a couple of hit songs or some have a few hit records and are really big over a period of five years but then 10 years later no one knows who they are. So, someone like Madonna who is able to keep it up for 20 years is pretty impressive. She's a smart woman. There are people in the classical music world, even composers, that are concerned with fashion and appearances and things like that.

SHAPIRO: Kronos Quartet for instance. The pictures on their album covers --

GORDON: -- but that's a different thing. They're differentiating themselves from the image of a string quartet which is four people wearing tuxedos. What they wear has to do with trying to represent what they're trying to do with the music that they play. As far as pop music and fashion is concerned I really don't understand it. Fashion isn't my thing. It's pretty obvious. I think that as a serious artist what is really important are the thoughts that you have and the work that you do. For the long term you have the opportunity to let people in on the idea that the work you're doing is important or has some significance. The scientist that invents the cure for AIDS, no one is going to care what that person wears. No one is going to care what that person looks like, what their skin color is like, whether they're greasy or have bad breath or anything. That person invented the cure for AIDS. The way I like to think about it is basically like, "I'm a nerd and basically everyone I know is a nerd." What's a classical musician? Someone who has stayed inside and played their violin for eight hours a day while everyone else was out there having a good time. That's basically what musicians are. I practice this instrument over and over again. Sometimes if I play somewhere and get up on stage -- the people in the audience are way cooler than I am. They're hipper; they're dressed more fashionably. They're young.

SHAPIRO: What did you think of the crowd at Tonic for Arnold Dreyblatt's show last month?

GORDON: I thought it was interesting that a lot of the people there had no idea what the music was. It was a cool place to go and people knew that they could go there and hear something weird. It was like, "I'm going to dress up and look really great and do something weird because that's the cool thing to do right now." I'm not against anything. It's fine with me.

SHAPIRO: Are you writing songs these days? Your two pieces at the *Bang on a Can Marathon* were definitely songs as opposed to pieces.

GORDON: I just did a project with Julia and David called *Lost Objects*. It's basically 11 songs.

SHAPIRO: Did you write them all together?

GORDON: No, I wrote four of them. We just got back from Germany where we did the recording. The piece is for a sort of strange conglomerate that includes an early music group called Concerto Koln. They play mostly Baroque and Classical music on period instruments. Basically, this piece is like an oratorio.

SHAPIRO: Were you conducting the group? Was there a producer coaching the musicians?

GORDON: There was a producer and a conductor. There were 60 musicians all together.

SHAPIRO: Where do you get the money to do that?

GORDON: A festival in Germany commissioned the piece and it's going to premiere in May. The recording is sponsored by Teldec. Classical music is Europe's art form. American music is Blues, Jazz and Rock n Roll. Classical music is still Europe. They still believe in it over there. So, every town has an orchestra. If you live in a town and there's another town 20 miles away then they'll have their own orchestra and theater company and performance space because that's what they do there. There's still a lot of interest in music and there is a lot of interest in new music and experimental music. We're there a lot performing. Most of the music that I write is for European groups because that's where they're interested in my work.

SHAPIRO: How did you become friends with Pamela Z? I met her at Cell Space in San Francisco. Do you know of that place?

GORDON: I've heard of it. She sent us a tape. We get a few hundred tapes every year. We listen to all of them without knowing who sent them to us. To tell you the truth, if you know the person who sent you the tape you can't really listen to it objectively. You want to like it. We sit around for about 3 days and listen to all of them. A lot of the stuff we find and use comes from the tapes. We do listen to them. Most people that send them in probably think that we don't and just throw the tapes out. It's interesting. I always find it very fascinating to listen to the stuff. From all over the spectrum. All kinds of things.

SHAPIRO: What instrument did you play growing up?

GORDON: Piano.

SHAPIRO: Have you performed solo piano pieces in concert halls? Your stuff, you go out and play it?

GORDON: Never solo. I don't have any piano music. Piano really isn't my thing as a composer. About ten years ago I stopped writing for myself.

SHAPIRO: But isn't Michael Gordon Band a group and music for you?

GORDON: It is for me but I really get excited when I am able to write for other instruments. I can write stuff that can get played. If I'm writing for myself I have to write only the stuff that I can play. Otherwise it's really embarrassing.

SHAPIRO: Your songs performed at the marathon had a singer but didn't sing lyrics. Only "oo." Would you ever write songs with lyrics? You use drum set and guitar. With lyrics you'd really be getting so close to pop!

GORDON: I love drums and I love beats. Again, it's very natural to want to use these things. When something new comes along a composer says, "I want it." That's the history of the orchestra. It had flutes and bassoon. Then they added oboes and horns and then trombones and trumpets, percussion and then tubas and then saxophone. Why not? Now we've got electric guitars and have had samplers and synthesizers for 20 years. I want to use them. It's nothing different from before. It's just that people think that those are pop instruments. They're not. They're just tools to be creative with.

SHAPIRO: I read an article in the Times that mentioned you as an example of computer-based composition. I'm in your studio. I don't see any pencils or manuscript paper... do you only use the computer? Do you ever jot things down on paper?

GORDON: Never. Basically never. I write in a notation program.

SHAPIRO: I was under the impression that you used a sequencer. Are you orchestrating these things as you write them?

GORDON: Yes, in a sense. Notation programs can trigger sounds just like a sequencer. I have Sample Cell, a card that goes into the computer. I have a palette of sounds that I can use as I go along. I'm notation orientated -- I feel that I need to be able to see the details of everything. I've worked with sequencers before and I can't get used to how they look because to me it's not exact enough. I want to see everything.

SHAPIRO: When you're writing these things do you put in notations besides notes? Or does that stuff (e.g. dynamics, phrasing) get worked out during rehearsal?

GORDON: Usually I put very few dynamics in my music because I feel like there's a common agreement about what the music is about between the musicians playing it. In baroque or classical music there are very few dynamic markings because there was a common aesthetic. Everyone understood the music. I'm working with ensembles and groups that I feel understand the music and so I feel that I don't have to fill up the score with lots of signs. In rehearsal we can work things out if we need to.

SHAPIRO: How would a conversation with the guy who's running the sound board play into this?

GORDON: Well, that's a different sort of control of course. I've controlled dynamics and processed sounds from the board. But the board and what the performers are actually doing are two different things. You can't really control the meaning that comes from dynamics from the board. You can control and shape the volume of the sound but you need to have that aspect of it coming from the performers themselves. I think that being able to work at the board is part of living now. You've got to know what it is, how it works and what you can do to the sound. But, that's not where the music making happens -- the music making happens with the performer. The soundboard is amplification. Sound processing lets you do all sorts of things but obviously the sound is originating from the performers.

SHAPIRO: But in the spirit of that Times article that we were discussing earlier, couldn't you say that what you just said really isn't the case? In a sense, one of the main ideas of that article was that now, music is more about what people do to the sound when it comes out of an instrument than it is more about the actual sound itself. For instance the use of compression, E.Q., and other dynamic manipulation methods.

GORDON: Every possible equation comes into play. But, I think that for a live performance of someone playing an actual instrument, there is no possible way to create at the board, with any kind of equipment... well, I shouldn't even say that. I shouldn't put any kind of limit on anything actually.



SHAPIRO: Have you every been approached by anyone who said, "I've heard your piece "Weather" and I think that it would work really well in my commercial for Ford trucks" or, "I work for a huge multi-national corporation and we're going to have a huge conference in which we're going to show a 17-minute video about our corporation. We think that part of "Weather" would be great for it." Would you license the material or would you simply turn that offer down?

GORDON: It's never happened. I don't think that people just come and knock on your door and say, we want to use your music for a commercial or for a corporate national anthem. Your representatives have to go to them. It's work that you have to seek. No one knocks on Philip Glass's door and says, "We want to use your music for a Pepsi commercial." He's got someone that goes and knocks on their door. It's not the business that I'm in. I don't want to make a blanket statement here but I'm against the ever-growing power that smaller and smaller groups of corporations are acquiring. I'm against the multi-national globalization that's happening. But I don't want to tell you I'd do this or that because I think it would be dishonest. I'm not in that position. It's not the kind of work I seek but, if someone knocked on my door to approach me about something like that, I can't make a blanket statement that I'd refuse it or take it. It would depend upon what it was exactly.

SHAPIRO: What about for a film?

GORDON: Well, that's a totally different situation. Films are great and I'd certainly like to collaborate with a filmmaker.

SHAPIRO: How did you end up in New York? Was it after finishing up at Yale?

GORDON: No, I came here from Miami. I lived in New York while I was in school at Yale. It's hard when you come here. But the great thing is that you can't sit still, since there's a lot of great places in New York to see art. Every single night people are just trying to do their work and realize their vision. I like that, because New York is pumping with creativity and pumping with people who want to make art and have really sacrificed other kinds of life. They're dedicated to doing this weird thing that they do. So, I like it. I like New York.

SHAPIRO: You said that you're from Florida but I remember reading something about you living in --

GORDON: -- I lived in Nicaragua until I was eight. Then my family moved to Miami Beach. My parents are Eastern European Jews. So I grew up in a place where all these Eastern European Jews lived who left Europe for the obvious reasons. Before and after the war, a lot of them ended up in Central and South America. I grew up in a kind of refugee European community living there.

SHAPIRO: Is it possible for you to explain a bit about how do you think that has affected you?

GORDON: Well, we didn't have TV there. When I was eight and my family moved to Miami, all of a sudden there was television. I grew up in a world where I didn't have that stuff in my brain. So I suppose that did affect me in some way. And then I have the experience of coming to the United States and being an immigrant. I spoke Spanish and English. You grow up in a certain society, and then you move to a completely different society. So there's change, and it does affect you.

SHAPIRO: I read in the press kit for Cantaloupe music that Bang on a Can's *Music for Airports* record was mentioned on MTV.

GORDON: They did a thing about that record on the MTV news or something like that.

SHAPIRO: That production was how I learned about Bang on a Can. I saw a live performance by the Bang on a Can All-Stars in Prospect Park. I think that this project you did speaks to the issue of recording-studio-to-live-performance that we were discussing earlier. That must have been a great education for you to figure out how to represent certain sounds.

GORDON: Well, it was fun. We transcribed it off the record.

SHAPIRO: How did you decide which person arranged which movement?

GORDON: Well, David Lang, Julia Wolfe, and Evan Ziporyn have a different sensibility and it worked out. In the end, Brian Eno was very happy about it. We met Eno; he came a couple of times when the All-Stars played the piece in a couple of airports. The first time was at a London airport. We flew in, played, and left.

SHAPIRO: You didn't leave the airport? You just flew in played and flew right out?

GORDON: Yes.

SHAPIRO: That's cool.

GORDON: Anyway, we sent the piece to Eno when it was done. He wrote us a really long -- I think it was a three-page -- letter. He was actually really moved by it because I think he felt that we had transformed his piece. He said in the letter that our version of the piece made his look like the demo. So, I took that as quite a compliment. The idea behind our project was that we felt *Music for Airports* was a great piece of music. It's a piece of music that was made by a pop musician in the pop world. It's the experimental pop world or whatever. In terms of a piece of music, I don't really see that you can make those lines. You remember I was talking before about the boundaries that society makes? Well, here's an example of a piece of music that was categorized in one world and all we wanted to say was that we could change its characterization. We can make it work for live instruments and play it live in a concert. This is now concert music. Great concert music. Not classical or pop or "new" music. It's just great music. So that was, in a sense, what we were trying to do: break down the perception that it's this or that.

# Remembering Donald Aird

## I

### BROOKE AIRD

Donald Aird, a distinguished composer and conductor who played a major role in San Francisco Bay Area new music, died Tuesday morning, August 7, of a heart attack in the Dulles Airport, in Maryland, on route from Maine to his home in Kensington. Aird was 77.

Aird was born in his grandfather's hospital in Provo, Utah on May 24, 1924. He grew up in Redondo Beach and then San Francisco, CA, where he attended Lowell High School. In World War II, he served in Italy where the United States government awarded him an organ scholarship to the Cherubini Conservatory of Music in Florence in 1945. Upon his return to the USA, Aird attended the University of California at Berkeley, studying composition with Roger Sessions. He received bachelor's and master's degrees in music from San Francisco State University, and later worked toward a doctorate in composition at the University of Southern California, studying with Ingolf Dahl and Halsey Stevens.

While still a student at Cal he joined the Berkeley Chamber Singers as a baritone, soon taking over directorship which he retained off and on for the next 46 years. Under his leadership, the Berkeley Chamber Singers presented West Coast premieres of several major choral works that are standard today, including Aaron Copland's *In the Beginning* and the first two movements of Stravinsky's *Mass*.

From 1961-64 Aird was Director of Choral Arts at the University of Minnesota, and prepared large choral works for performance by Robert Shaw and the Minneapolis Symphony. Preferring the more temperate climate of California, he returned to teach ear training and harmony at S.F. State University and UC Berkeley, where he also directed the Glee Club and Treble Clef choral groups.

Subsequently he served as choir director and organist at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Orinda, St. Mark's Episcopal in Berkeley, and All Soul's Parish in Berkeley, leading those church choirs to high musical accomplishments in works such as Bach's *St. Matthew* and *St. John Passions* and the *Mass in B Minor*. Professional musicians enjoyed playing for him with no compensation because of the meticulousness and joy that characterized his performances. His inspired teaching and generosity of spirit nurtured both amateur and professional musicians. For the past 20 years he devoted himself principally to the composition of works for orchestra, chamber ensemble, voice and chorus. Music critic Robert Commanday said of him, "A natural melodic inspiration, clear harmonic design and formal structure characterized his music, its expressive values reflecting his fine sensibilities. The always ready and inventive humor and geniality that reached out to his wide circle of friends was also manifested in his music. And, as he never followed trends, his music remained distinctively his." Reviewer Marshall Bialosky said of Aird's *Night Voyages*, "This is one of the best American choral pieces in the entire history of that genre."

Aird was a leading figure in the Bay Area new-music group Earplay, on whose board he served, and was active in the Bay Area Chapter of the Composers' Forum.

Those who performed his works included sopranos Judith Nelson and Anna Carol Dudley, tenor Jeffrey Thomas, Earplay, the Hilliard Ensemble, the Royal College of Music, the London Bach Society, and the San Jose Symphony, among others. His music was published by Fallen Leaf Press.

A devoted husband of 47 years and proud father and grandfather, Donald Aird is survived by his wife, Carol, of Kensington; son, Brooke, professional violinist, of El Cerrito; daughter, Samela, professional singer, of Los Angeles; and two granddaughters, Andrea and Deanna.

A memorial service and gathering to celebrate his life was held on Saturday, September 15, 2001, at 3 p.m. at All Souls Parish, 2220 Cedar Street, Berkeley, California 510-848-1755. Contributions may be made to EARPLAY, P.O. Box 192125, San Francisco, CA 94119-2125.

## II

### ELLIOTT SCHWARTZ

My wife and I first saw Don Aird in the fall of 1971 -- 30 years ago, in fact -- on a crowded London underground train. Out of the blue, this perfect stranger with an American accent asked me if I was a cellist. I replied that I was a composer, to which *he* replied that he was also a composer. It turns out that we were both planning to stay in England for a number of months. That brief encounter on the train led to a dinner, and a concert date, and then another and another -- it was the beginning of a long and very close friendship. After both of our families had returned to the states, we continued to see each other -- occasionally at our base in Maine, but much more often in California. We discovered, early on in our friendship, that Don and Carol shared with us a passion not only for music but for cuisine, and we happily spent the next thirty years together at some wonderful restaurants on both coasts.

We last saw Don on August 7, the final day of his life. He and Carol had been visiting us in Maine, and this was the day they were to return home. We woke them up at 5am, help them load their luggage in Deedee's car, and drove them to the airport in time for their 6:30 flight. If it's any consolation, I can honestly say that Don and Carol had a wonderful week with us. We heard music, and -- of course-- argued about it. We had a few intense tutorial sessions using the Sibelius software manual, with Don --as always-- being the patient, wise instructor. In addition, Don and Carol saw some very dear friends who lived in New England.

I was bowled over --and still am -- at Don's great musical gifts: his ear, his sight reading at the keyboard, his choral conducting, and his elegant compositions. "Night Voyages" is, for me, his masterpiece -- one of the best choral works I've ever heard. But Donald the man, the human being, was even more memorable than Donald the artist. His irrepressible humor, his warmth, his generosity, his terrible jokes, and his cheerful irreverence towards every kind of sacred cow -- all of these were very special, and impossible to forget. He will be greatly missed.

# Concert Reviews

## Schuller Scheventieth

DAVID CLEARY

Gunther Schuller Concert, in honor of his 75th birthday. January 29, Jordan Hall, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA.

The New England Conservatory held a 75th-birthday bash in honor of its distinguished ex-president, Gunther Schuller. It proved to be a fine event that spotlighted this composer's astonishingly versatile output—a smorgasbord of classical, third-stream, and ragtime selections.

The mainstream entities proved brief but memorable. *A Little Brass Music* (1963, written as a 70th-birthday present to Stefan Wolpe), while containing a Webern-like conciseness and clarity of gesture, also exhibits a forthright drive and hale aggression unusual in a work of such tiny dimensions. Scored for brass quintet minus second trumpet, the piece unfolds in a quirky, yet satisfying manner. Rob Meyers, Danielle Lemieux, Nicholas Strebendt, and David Liquori gave a polished rendition far beyond what one might expect from student players. The "Adagio" movement from *String Quartet no. 3* (1986) is unusual in Schuller's canon, consisting of an almost aria-like tune with a by-and-large simple, if dissonant, homophonic accompaniment. It's a lovely piece subtly hued with shadings of Bartók's "night music" style slow movements. The Borromeo Quartet was top-notch here, featuring a marvelously blended ensemble sound and deliciously sculpted phrasing that perfectly suited this music.

*Variants on a Theme of Thelonius Monk* (1960) and *Headin' Out, Movin' In* (1994) are stellar examples of this composer's melding of jazz and classical idioms. Both are scored for sizable jazz ensembles peppered with "legit" instruments like violins and French horns and stitch together written-out passages and jazz solo break sections. The harmonic language is dissonant but approachable, and scoring (especially in the later work) is imaginatively colorful. Formal delineation, while loose, shows good attention to sectional balance. They proved most enjoyable listens. George Garzone (tenor sax), Allan Chase (alto sax), and Josh Sinton (bass clarinet/flute/alto sax) were the excellent soloists, while Carl Atkins conducted with flexibility and intelligence.

*Sandpoint Rag* pointedly represents Schuller's interest in ragtime. With its triadic harmonies and stock stride-piano figuration, this could be mistaken for a style study by the inattentive listener. But sly references to passages from Brahms and periodic employment of unusual chord progressions give the work an unusual depth that wings it beyond the pedestrian. Pianist Veronica Jochum played it with an ideal combination of astuteness and whimsy.

In addition, third-stream performer Ran Blake gave a fascinatingly eclectic keyboard improvisation entitled *Gunther Noir* that nicely melded a tone row employed in some of Schuller's music with the movie themes from *Vertigo* and *Laura*.

## Songs and Rituals of New England

DAVID CLEARY

*Songs and Rituals*. New England Conservatory Contemporary Ensemble. February 13, Jordan Hall, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA.

The New England Conservatory Contemporary Ensemble's recent program contained pieces with intriguing ties beyond the obvious "Songs and Rituals" connection. Two entries set poetry by Shakespeare, two others were the precocious products of now distinguished international names, and the rest showed influence of a major name in pre-1945 music history.

The output of Anton Webern loomed large (or, should one say, small) over three selections. All either use serial techniques or at least sound as if they do. Luigi Dallapiccola's *Goethe-Lieder* (1953), for soprano and three clarinets, paid the most overt homage here. This work's seven little movements are shot through with canons and other learned devices and employ angular melodic writing. But despite all this (as well as the fact that they set German texts), there's a certain lightness of being here that mutes the severity of these jewel box delights. Igor Stravinsky's *Fanfare for Two Trumpets* (1964) is over before we know it, pithy yet effective, attention-getting yet delightful. To say more risks babbling on longer than this tiny piece lasts. *A Little Brass Music* (1963), by Gunther Schuller, mixes stock Expressionist muted material with more outgoing gestures. Its structure is both tight and unusual -- a compelling work to experience.

Schuller's *Quartet for Double Basses* (1947), on the other hand, shows its then 22-year-old composer heavily steeped in Schoenberg and Stravinsky's early ballets. The first two movements revel in *Le Sacre* style chords, chugging ostinati, octatonic fragments, and syncopated figures. Demonstrative Second-Viennese-School-style angst pervades the slow finale, leavened with walking bass figures that hint of jazz. Plucky and audacious, it's still great fun to hear after so many years. *Masks* (1969) by Oliver Knussen shows precocious knowledge of spatial placement, theatrical elements, and disjunct, yet idiomatic instrumental writing. Its solo flutist wanders onstage while playing, walks in choreographed manner to various stage placements (meanwhile pointing the flute in various directions vis-à-vis the audience), and exits still performing. The accompanying percussionist stays off stage the whole time while jingling wind chimes at various intervals. It's a solid listen indeed, a most sophisticated outing for a 17-year-old composer.

*Three Songs from William Shakespeare* (1953) is a deservedly well-respected classic of Stravinsky's late serial period: dry, spare, and graceful, yet possessing depth and personality. Written only four years later, Malcolm Peyton's *Four Songs from Shakespeare* (1957) for mezzo-soprano and five players shows some kinship to its predecessor. Like the Stravinsky, it begins with a setting of the poem "Music to Hear" and very occasionally contains similar material (such as the bell-like figures in "Blow, blow, thou Winter Wind" that echo those of "Full fathom five"). But this is no style study; Peyton's work, while dissonant sounding, is not serial, and the manner of speech here is much more expressive and outgoing, containing a substantial character all its own -- excellent to experience.

Performances by the numerous student ensemble members were uniformly splendid -- without question, these talented folks are ready for prime time. To briefly illustrate the group's depth, six different clarinet players appeared this evening, with no drop off in quality whatever. Director John Heiss conducted the Peyton with an ideal blend of precision and passion. This was an excellent concert, greatly enjoyed.

## Conservatory Not Conservative

### DAVID CLEARY

New England Conservatory Wind Ensemble. February 15, Jordan Hall, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA.

This event featured British composers from three generations. Of the trio, the eldest provided the most impressive listen, while the rest proved more problematic.

Gustav Holst's *Hammersmith* (1930) is by now pretty much a classic of the wind ensemble repertoire. The "Prelude and Scherzo" given this evening shows this composer experimenting successfully with bitonal idioms. This is no Milhaud style "wrong note" essay—Holst manages to avoid grinding pitch clashes here, making the technique go down as smoothly as fine Canadian whiskey. And formal delineation is strong as well, with a convincing arch structure effectively employed. This is a most enjoyable entry.

*Mosaic* (1962-63, originally the opening movement of the *Concerto for Orchestra*) by Michael Tippett, is one of those pieces that ends up being intriguing in theory but not so successful in practice. Taking its title very much to heart, the work is built from frozen fragments that are consistently allied with a particular small group of instruments and have seemingly little in common with each other. These fragments are initially stated separately one after the other, then piled on top of each other in various combinations. Tippett makes some effort to impose a vague overall dramatic shape to this splintered composition, but it ultimately doesn't come across especially well; no clear overall image is seen in this mosaic. And the work simply stops rather than ending convincingly.

Despite being based on music from Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*, Jonathan Dove's wind octet *Figures in the Garden* (1992) doesn't bear much sonic resemblance to the classical master (the quoted material used in fact winds up being well concealed most of the time). Instead, the piece seems intent on mating a 1930's English tweed-jacket pastoral aesthetic with Stravinsky's chorales and ostinati (this latter sometimes extending into process music aesthetics). For the most part, it comes across as flossy, gentle, and a bit less than memorable.

Performances were for the most part very good. Charles Peltz conducted smartly, imparting clean rigor to the ensemble playing yet insisting that the musicians shape larger phrases with careful grace. Moods from the expressive to the forceful were expertly drawn from his young charges.

## Latitude of Longitude

### DAVID CLEARY

Longitude. February 27, Pickman Hall, Longy School of Music, Cambridge, MA.

In his pre-concert remarks, Longitude's director Eric Sawyer gave this event the subtitle "Hidden Treasures"—in other words, the works presented were unknown, yet worthy entities. Your reviewer agreed that the first and last pieces performed this evening showed much merit indeed and deserved wider circulation.

Aaron Jay Kernis's *Valentines* (1999-2000), a song cycle for soprano and piano, is, despite its moniker, no fluffy trifle. Rather, this bittersweet, complex, substantial composition is highly dramatic, exhibiting significant depth of expression. Containing strong, well-sculpted, often intricate piano writing and a challenging, yet idiomatic vocal line, its harmonic language is mostly dissonant, though the last song expertly interweaves more triadic passages into the mix. It's a splendid listen. Longy faculty Karyl Ryczek's voice was sturdy and nicely controlled, projecting well in all ranges; her diction was serviceable and her stage deportment effective. Faculty member Wayman Chin traversed the formidable challenges of the piano part with conspicuous success. His highly demonstrative performing style excellently suited this work's forthright nature. Prominently featuring such characteristics as heterophonic writing, pitch bending, and a predominantly tonal sound world, Kui Dong's Pierrot quintet *The Blue Melody* (1993) clearly shows Chinese folk music roots. Among this excellent piece's many attributes can be counted its widely varied textures, clear yet non-traditional formal use, and orchestration that proves both tasteful and multi-hued. And even the busiest passages show a crystalline nattiness that proves highly appealing.

The other two selections had their positive aspects but pleased somewhat less. *Suite* (1998) for flute, clarinet, and violin by Francine Trester is a five-movement divertimento that possesses a certain tail-wagging charm. Its wistful "Pavane" (containing notable echoes of Ravel) and soulful "Entr'acte" prove most successful. The other movements seem a bit too tightly bound to traditional models for comfort, though the central "Rag Time" spoofs this tendency, starting off as an acutely self-conscious style study before creeping into polytonal parody. Jeffrey Goldberg's *Poema para Angelica* ("*Aqui te amo*") (1990) for mezzo-soprano and piano proves a real puzzler. It begins with square triadic writing that borders on the saccharine (and reiterates such material with some frequency), but just when one is about to give up on the piece, it twists down more dissonantly interesting alleyways. Despite this (and Goldberg's able Spanish text setting), it comes across as inconsistent and inelegant.

The ensemble's talented student performers played the Goldberg, Trester, and Dong works well. Sawyer's conducting in the last of these proved very effective. And thanks also go to Sawyer and his group for unearthing an especially pleasurable pair of treats in the Dong and Kernis works.

## Short Civic Review

### DAVID CLEARY

The Civic Symphony Orchestra of Boston. March 4, Jordan Hall, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA.

On March 4, the Civic Symphony Orchestra of Boston presented Thomas Oboe Lee's *Symphony no. 4* ("*War and Peace*"), a work that is a symphony in the sense that Shostakovich's 13th and 14th essays in the genre are. In other words, it's an orchestral song collection that exhibits the gravity of this now nearly 300-year-old format. With its ripe instrumentation (suggestive at times of film scores) and thickly stacked triadic constructs (though often laced with polytonal passages), the piece can be construed as a textbook example of neotonicity. But Lee's work is not cloying or sentimental, as sometimes happens with such entities. The feel of its three movements, as one might guess of a composition purveying an anti-war message, is respectively grimly bittersweet, bleakly obsessed, and wearily resigned. It unfolds slowly yet purposefully and features attractive, well-gauged vocal writing. Briefly put, it's a substantial, satisfying listen. Peggy Horstmann Hodes's voice type was a bit too lyric and intimate to ideally suit the soprano part, but she sang out as strongly as she was able; her diction was good and stage presence exemplary. Max Hobart led a sturdy, committed performance.

## Shakespeare in Music

### DAVID CLEARY

Shakespeare in Music: The British View. March 14, Jordan Hall, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA.

This concert was presented as part of the New England Conservatory's four-day *Shakespeare in Music* festival. Appropriately enough, it featured pieces by 20th-century composers hailing from the same homeland as the immortal British bard.

A clutch of incidental music selections, given by members of the Conservatory Wind Ensemble, comprised the first half. The most memorable of these entities drew impetus from the play *Hamlet*. Oliver Knussen's *Ophelia Dances, Book One* (1975), while an unmistakable example of cosmopolitan European music of the era (featuring twisting contrapuntal lines, dissonant harmonies, and occasional pointillism), nevertheless still dances. It's a piece with lilt, character, energy, and expressiveness, much enjoyed. Also clangorous in sound (though in a grittier, almost Ivesian way) was *Ophelia's Lament* (2000) by Marc-Anthony Turnage. Slow in tempo and often contemplative, even anguished in feel, it proved an able listen. The remaining three selections, Richard Rodney Bennett's *Masque* (1977), William Mathias's *Final Dance* (1967), and Guy Woolfendon's *Blow, Blow* (1978) -- the first inspired by *Timon of Athens*, the last two by *As You Like It* -- were not only tonal, but evoked a certain Late Renaissance archaism through use of ancient dance rhythms, steady patterned drumbeat accompaniments, modal/folklike inflections, or other means. Only Bennett's work managed the trick of combining this sound world with a certain film music sheen. All were brief and evocative. Charles Peltz conducted excellently, shining especially in the Knussen, whose complex changing meters were sparkingly delineated.

The concert concluded with two theatrical excerpts satisfyingly presented in bare bones staging by the NEC Opera Studio (Patricia Maria Weinmann and Lynn Torgove, directors). A selection from Benjamin Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1959-60) in which fairy queen Titania falls in love with asinine Bottom, was charming and clever. The score here is a surprisingly dissonant one to come from this tonalist icon, though a traditional *bel canto* feel lurks not far beneath the surface and occasionally breaks out in earnest. *Sir John in Love* (1924-28) by Ralph Vaughan Williams catches its composer in a folk song influenced place, leavened with some polytonality and other discords. But structurally, the Finale given this evening shows a strongly traditional slant not fundamentally different from that found in Mozart. Performances were excellent, with the group's student cast sporting good voices and dramatic instincts.

In short, this was a very enjoyable affair, one worthy of association with the great playwright.

## Fromm Here for Martino

### DAVID CLEARY

Fromm Players at Harvard, Part II, performing music by Donald Martino in celebration of his 70th birthday. March 16, John Knowles Paine Concert Hall, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

[Part I may be found in the May 2001 issue of 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC]

Part two of Harvard's 70th-birthday tribute to Donald Martino was a most enjoyable affair, given over to this composer's latter-day concert music for piano as well as a taste of his youthful flirtations with commercially-oriented writing.

Of all these selections, *Impromptu for Roger* (1979 -- written to celebrate Roger Sessions's 80th birthday) was the only piece that might be thought to have any sense of abstruseness, due perhaps to the work's stated purpose to functionally visit each of the piano's 88 keys only once. But the human touch is clearly evident here: the overall duration is brief and a short, swaying ostinato centerpiece digs an elbow into the ribs of the somewhat drier framing sections. It's fractured yet playful, with tongue firmly planted in cheek. This holds true even more obviously for the *Suite in Old Form* (1982). Here, one encounters a series of sly, knowing winks at the dance movements that comprise this aged format. Liberally peppered with Baroque-inspired figuration and flourishes, the piece predominantly employs triadic (if very chromatic) pitch constructs. But this is no groveling pastiche, as cockeyed phrase lengths, harmonic and textural surprises, and serially derived pitch controls firmly brand the work as a product of its time. As a listening experience, it's excellent, sophisticated fun.

*Fantasies and Impromptus* (1980) and *Twelve Preludes* (1991) are significant additions to the piano repertoire, first-rate to hear. Both combine the rigors of dodecaphony with an exquisitely developed sense of line and personality. They are very much character piece collections, presenting a cornucopia of moods ranging from atmospheric to forceful, light hearted to agitated, and everything in between. But these are in no way rewritten versions of each other. Phrase types in the *Fantasies* tend to be somewhat more expansive (paradoxically centered within a more variegated inter-movement framework), while those of the *Preludes* are a bit more compact and spare (again paradoxically within a more homogeneous sectional way of thinking).

The harmonic languages, while dissonantly serial in both cases, show subtle differences in sound. And both collections, while utilizing larger overall frameworks to yoke together individual units, differ as to the structure used: binary for the *Preludes*, tripartite for the *Fantasies*.

Selections from the *24 Tin Pan Alley Tunes* (1956-57) present Martino's earnest dabbling in vernacular idioms (under the moniker "Jimmie Vincent") before he landed a stable teaching post. They show kinship to both film score music and jazz inflected 1940's pop standards such as Mercer and Shertzinger's "Tangerine." Attractive, friendly entities, their biggest sin was that of bad timing, having been produced during the heyday of rockabilly, doo-wop, Chuck Berry, and Little Richard.

One of the tin-pan alley items was presented in pre-recorded fashion, ably played by jazz great Bill Evans. Pianist Randall Hodgkinson performed the rest of the music wonderfully well, balancing cleanliness, expression, thoughtfulness, and vigor. His sense of melodic line, voice differentiation, and drama—essential to these selections—was spot-on. And bravos go to Martino, one of a few recent composers whose piano music shows sufficient variety and depth to stand up well under a full concert's worth of scrutiny.

## Just Right

### DAVID CLEARY

Just in Time Composers and Players. April 6, Pollen Church, Lexington, MA.

The dairy item half-and-half combines equal parts milk and cream. Friday's Just in Time concert showed a comparable split in content, numbering three each of mixed duos and solo piano entities

The most ambitious of the latter was *Blue Solomon: A Song of Songs* by Marc W. Rossi. Developed from a series of jazzy sounding improvisations, it contains both the strengths and weaknesses inherent to this approach to music making. Its tripartite format teems with energetic abandon and shows an engaging directness of speech. On the minus side, these movements also prove rather shapeless and overly lengthy. Pianist Jeffrey Jacob gave the night's finest performance, displaying rock solid technique and a full sound quality loaded with character. Played in its solo piano version, Pamela J. Marshall's *Suite* strongly exhibits its origins as a harpsichord piece. The writing is often dry and subdued by piano standards: full-throated textures are uncommon, the sustain pedal is rarely used, and neo-Scarlattian clusters sometimes appear. But the work's reticent nature is not altogether inappropriate, reinforcing its composer's cultivated conception of the old form. It was also the only non-triadic work to be heard. Karen Sauer's pianism paid careful mind to the work's primness without seeming stifled. *Master Lyell and His Cat*, by Stephen James, takes its cue both in subject matter and sound world from Claude Debussy's *Children's Corner Suite*. These are unpretentious character miniatures that put forth a sweet sense of humor -- charming, if not laden with any deep messages. The composer presented it well, sporting a strong, focused tone and able stage presence.

Like the James, Erika Foins's *Diamonds and Squares* for violin and marimba is light, flossy fare—in this instance heavily inspired by folk and dance idioms spiced with hints of minimalism. Structurally, it proves unusual, yet intriguing. Violinist Mark Latham and marimba player Gary Wallen at times struggled with ensemble coordination, but for the most part played it capably. Neoclassicism of the Barber/Copland stripe leavened with a bit of Faure proved the basis for Latham's violin/piano duo *Hommages I*. While clearly delineating an arch-style format, the sections are extremely block-like. And melodic writing here seems a bit on the square side. Pianist James performed well, though Latham's intonation suffered on occasion. John Sarkissian's *Songs on Armenian Texts* utilize an unabashedly post-Wagnerian tonality and gestural world. This is emotive, highly charged stuff, bursting to the door jams with ripe world-weariness. Mezzo soprano Victoria Avetisyan was splendid, singing with a huge, vibrant middle and high range and substantial chest tones. Her pitch sense was spot-on and her diction superb. The composer accompanied smartly at the piano, providing support without swamping the vocalist.

While perhaps not vitally nourishing (like a sturdy piece of bread), this event did have its positive aspects (like the aforementioned coffee lightener). Received with thanks.

## Australian Organ Music

### DAVID CLEARY

A Recital of Contemporary Australian Organ Music. May 2, Appleton Chapel, Memorial Church, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

Harvard undergraduate Carson P. Cooman already boasts a sizable track record of professional level organ recitals, and he did not disappoint on May 2; his technical command was exemplary and his use of stops was both tasteful and thoroughly imaginative.

Given over to music of Australian composers, his choice of program contained numerous nuggets of enjoyment. *Organ* (2001), by Barry Conyngham, packs a startling array of textures and sounds into its moderate duration -- but these disparate elements hang together surprisingly well, tied securely to an able feel for unfolding and a loose, yet satisfying structural sense. In *A Sydney Sojourn* (2001) Eric Gross Conyngham's love of local variety and care in large-scale construction. Uniquely, it also possesses a friendly, robust sense of humor -- not the sort of feel one often encounters in pipe organ music. Nigel Butterley's *Fanfare for a Ceremony* (1961) and Elliott Gyger's "Offertory" from *Wedding Music* (1995), while brief in duration and single-minded in mood, carve noteworthy niches in opposite ends of the emotional spectrum; the former is angular and robust, the latter quietly contemplative. Both prove to be loaded with personality. In his tripartite *Etudes Espace* (1986), Andrew Schultz accomplishes the neat trick of combining aspects of the first movement's assertive gestural world and the second movement's charming rustic tune into a chorale style finale of much power.

Robert Allworth's two-movement entity *In Memoriam Oscar Wilde* (2000) manages to be suitably anguished and rueful without descending into histrionic malaise; it too finds much textural variety for the player to explore.

While the aforementioned fare traversed more clangorous idioms, Cooman included two predominantly tonal compositions as well. *Meditations of Mary* (1978), by Dulcie Holland, finds some personal space in the Stravinsky neoclassic technique of adding relatively dissonant enhancements to older triadic literature, in this case interweaving subtly discordant embellishments into a *Voluntary* by 16th century British composer Robert Redford. It proves to be an acceptable listen. Ann Carr-Boyd's programmatic piece *The Bells of Sydney Harbor* (1979) pleases somewhat less. The work's sense of shape often proves aimless and its qualities of depiction are at times rather too Richard-Strauss-literal. But otherwise, most of this evening's selections proved highly listenable.

And bravos are in order for Cooman, who performs like a seasoned veteran.

## Short Arte Review

### DAVID CLEARY

Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra of Boston. May 20, Sanders Theatre, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

The Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra of Boston gave the premiere of James Russell Smith's single-movement piece *Savishna's Dance* on May 20, 2001. This is a splendid, festive curtain raiser, a work brimming with vigor and style. It echoes some of Stravinsky's more energetic entries for the dance in its use of driving rhythms and polytonal harmonies, but given its Russian-derived programmatic basis, this proves to be an appropriate influence. Structurally, the composition is intuitive but sound, possessing a felicitous feel for unfolding. The ensemble's presentation, expertly conducted by Isaiah Jackson, was a snappy and exciting one.

## Imaginary Review

### DAVID CLEARY

Boston Musica Viva presents *Imaginary Landscapes*. April 20, Edward Pickman Auditorium, Longy School of Music, Cambridge, MA.

Five intriguing works appeared at the Boston Musica Viva presentation. *Three Songs* (1930-1932) by Ruth Crawford Seeger is yet another terrific piece from this unique American original, a sophisticated, well crafted setting of poetry by Carl Sandburg. Scored for voice, oboe, piano, and percussion, its evocative employment of dissonant harmonies and layered rhythmic planes was surely most unusual at its time of composition, preceded in the U.S. by only a scant handful of her colleagues, Charles Ives most prominently. Originally premiered by this ensemble a number of years ago, Donald Harris' *For the Night to Wear* (1978) for voice and septet remains a solidly effective outing. Cast in a dramatic, smoothly executed East Coast style of much personality, its bipartite construction neatly reflects that of Hortense Flexner's verse. This schizophrenic musical format is delineated in part through the scoring used; at the work's structural divide, one of the viola players as well as the alto flutist and alto clarinetist take up their soprano counterparts, shifting the ensemble sound from dusky to lucid.

The Pierrot-plus-percussion entry *i* (2001) by Shi-Hui Chen, interlaces occasional Oriental-sounding tonal passages within its generally dissonant ethos and contains a good bit of exposed solo writing. Its form is expressed cleverly, organizing its quasi-rondo blueprint within a larger overall expanding wedge-like shape. And the piece's gestures contain an appealing level of aggressive energy.

Unless told otherwise, one might never guess that Steven Mackey's *Indigenous Instruments* (1989) is orchestrated for Pierrot ensemble; the composer here attempts to evoke the scoring (as well as the melodic and harmonic idioms) of the vernacular music of an imaginary people. This is accomplished in part by use of string and flute retunings as well as conspicuous microtonal employment. Robust, raw, quirky, and vibrant, it often suggests a parallel universe version of Bartók's oeuvre. It also proves a bit too long, shapeless, and slow to unfold, a criticism that also applies to the otherwise highly distinctive piece *Invisible Rivers* (1987), by Henry Brant. This spatially arranged mixed ensemble selection, one in which each instrument plays independently after being given various coordinated starting and stopping points, proves to be a powerful protest against ecological ills. Satiric, brooding, angry, and intense, it bites like a ravenous shark. The ensemble, led by Richard Pittman, sounded splendid, as did mezzo-soprano Janice Meyerson; the latter's voice featured strong high tones, fully substantial low- and mid-registers, and good enunciation.

## Singing About The Tunnel Of Love

### RYDER W. MILLER

Goat Hall Productions presents Mark Alburger's *Henry Miller in Brooklyn* (words by Mel Clay), directed by Harriet March Page, with Tisha C. Page, Rick Richetta, and Elaine Foley Romanelli. May 4, Potrero Hill Neighborhood House Theater, San Francisco, CA. Through May 20.

*Henry Miller in Brooklyn*, Mark Alburger's opera to words of Mel Clay, recounts an angst-filled chapter in Henry Miller's life when he was a struggling unpublished author and his wife, his famous muse June, invited her female lover to live with them.

The opera follows Miller (played by Rick Richetta) struggling to find himself as a writer and suffering from bouts of depression. At the time, June (Tisha C. Page) waitressed and worked in Broadway dance palaces. But June became enamored of Jeanne (Elaine Foley Romanelli), a mysterious painter. Both Henry and Jeanne are attracted to June.

But things at the apartment are not always pleasant. Henry is jealous; he drinks, he rages, he attempts suicide. June announces her role as Henry's muse, complains about work, and openly conducts an affair with Jeanne. Henry and Jeanne fight, but they share an enthusiasm for Rimbaud. The music allows you to feel their angst, joy, hope and rebellion. June and Jeanne will later flee to Paris.

This early period was a tunnel that Miller would pass through. Opera rather than jazz, song with the emotion behind the words, was a successful way of expressing the trio's interest in breaking free from the conformity of marriage and Miller's problems with narrative. The musical choices also remind one of the importance of music in Henry's life. Though he doesn't dwell on the subject, Miller brilliantly asserts the importance of music to him in *Black Spring* and *Tropic of Capricorn*. In the latter, Miller writes:

My whole aim in life is to get near to God, that is, to get nearer to myself. That's why it doesn't matter to me what road I take. But music is very important. Music is a tonic for the pineal gland. Music isn't Bach or Beethoven; music is the can opener of the soul. It makes you terribly quiet inside, makes you aware that there's a roof to your being [305].

To be is music, which is a profanation of silence in the interest of silence, and therefore beyond good and evil. Music is the manifestation of action without activity. It is the pure act of creation swimming on its own bosom. Music neither goads nor defends, neither seeks nor explains. Music is the noiseless sound made by the swimming in the ocean of consciousness. It is a reward which can only be given by oneself. It is the gift of the god which one is because he has ceased thinking about God. It is an auger of the god which every one will become in due time, when all that is will *be* beyond imagination [332-3].

The music sounded as it always sounded -light, peppery, enchanting. I was alone and there were millions of people around me. It came over me, as I stood there, that I wasn't thinking of her anymore; I was thinking of this book which I am writing, and the book had become more important to me than her, than all that had happened to us [333].

In *Black Spring*, Miller recounts an experience at the opera:

In this house I dreamed about becoming a musician.

Sitting before the house in which I was born I feel absolutely unique. I belong to an orchestra for which no Parsifal symphonies have ever been written. Everything is in the wrong key, *Parsifal* included. About *Parsifal*, now-it's just a minor incident, but it has the right ring. It's got to do with America, my love of music, my grotesque loneliness. . . .

Was standing one night in the gallery of the Metropolitan Opera House. The house was sold out and I was standing about three rows back from the rail. Could see only a tiny fragment of the stage and even to do that had to strain my neck. But I could hear the music, Wagner's *Parsifal*, with which I was already slightly familiar through the phonograph records. Parts of the opera are dull, duller than anything ever written. But there are other parts which are sublime and during the sublime parts because I was being squeezed like a sardine, an embarrassing thing happened to me-I got an erection. The woman I was pressing against must also have been inspired by the sublime music of the Holy Grail. We were in heat, the two of us, and pressed together like a couple of sardines. During the intermission the woman left her place to pace up and down the corridor. I stayed where I was, wondering if she would return to the same place. When the music started up again she returned. She returned to her spot with such exactitude that if we had been married it could not have been more perfect. All through the last act we were joined in heavenly bliss. It was beautiful and sublime, nearer to Boccaccio than to Dante, but sublime and beautiful just the same.

Sitting in the snow before the place of my birth I remember this incident vividly. Why, I don't know, except that it connects with the grotesque and the void, with the heartbreaking loneliness, the snow, the lack of color, the absence of music [224-225].

On May 11, Goat Hall Productions succeeded in its mission of presenting fine musical theater in a less formal setting than the concert hall, opera house, or big Broadway-style venue. Henry (Rick Richetta) and June (Tisha C. Page) were warm and fleshy, while Jeanne (Elaine Foley Romanelli) was cold and queer.

Richetta's singing was heartfelt, and his sincerity rang through the performance. When you looked at and heard Page (sung voluptuously and confidently) it was easy to find the answer to the question posed in "June's Song" ("What do men see in me?").

Some of the selections include Henry's "Suicide Song," Jeanne's love ballad to "Arthur Rimbaud" (a tango, "At the Club" which describes June's sleazy job at the dancehall, and "Paris," where the three fantasize about the freedoms of Europe.

Henry Miller's subsequent successes beyond Brooklyn and the opera, remind us that there is sometimes something worthwhile beyond the tunnel of love.

## Dinosaur Pioneers and Premieres

### DAVID CLEARY

Dinosaur Annex Ensemble presents *Pioneers and Premieres III*. May 6, First and Second Church, Boston, MA.

The Dinosaur Annex Ensemble concert, on May 6 at Boston's First and Second Church, put the spotlight on its resident pianist, Donald Berman. His program proved eclectic and for the most part enjoyable. The two finest pieces heard here, both for solo piano, are separated in date of composition by more than half a century. *Usurpations: Five Bagatelles* (1997), by Martin Boykan, is a set of evocative, eloquent, nicely crafted miniatures, splendid to hear. The set's emotional sincerity shines brightly through its post-Schoenbergian serial language. Hunter Johnson's *Piano Sonata* (1936) is a top-notch listen as well; in the sense that Copland's *Third Symphony* can be considered the "Great American Symphony" of the 1930s and '40s, this piece lays serious claim to the title of the "Great American Piano Sonata" from that same era. Dissonant, yet thoroughly stateside sounding (in part because of faint blues touches), it obliquely invokes elements of Copland's dissonant oeuvre and Roy Harris' work while managing to sound like no one else. A substantial, vigorous, well-constructed entry with a fine ear for piano sonority, it strongly merits a place in any pianist's repertoire.



*Bell Birds* (1998), by Dana Brayton, is a surprising work to come from this composer, exhibiting a distinctly non-Western feel throughout despite a comparatively fully textured central section. While a bit loose formally, it contains attractively multihued writing for its cello/piano/percussion threesome, basing its winsome gestures on birdcalls.

Scored for piano and digital delay, Mark Wingate's *Sombras* (1995) is fizzy, delightful fun, a work that draws its material from bouncy, clipped Latin American idioms. The computer-based echo effects here serve to subtly enhance, not obfuscate, what the piano plays. Judith Weir's *Piano Trio* (1998), a composition whose tonal sound world owes something to Messiaen, Stravinsky, and the Americana school, pleased less than the other selections. Sad to say, its square, single-minded rhythms and sentimental ethos did not endear, its structural simplicity and wan unfolding did not impress, and its abrupt endings did not convince. The rest of the program consisted of tiny, low-key solo piano bonbons: Walter Helfer's Gershwin-like *Nocturne* (1927), two of George Rochberg's Roger-Sessions-influenced *Bagatelles* (1952), Kamran Ince's surprisingly Ravel-oriented *My Friend Mozart* (1987), and Scott Wheeler's encore "Epithalamium" from *Artist Proofs*. With this recital, Berman solidified his claim as one of Boston's premier pianists, new music or not; his playing featured scrupulously clean finger work, excellent delineation of line, a tone quality able to whisper or command without conveying an ounce of sonic paucity or ugliness, and the ability to interact sensitively in a chamber music circumstance. Violinist Cyrus Stevens, cellist Andrew Mark, and percussionist James Russell Smith provided solid support.

## Da Capo

### JOHN DE CLEF PINEIRO

Da Capo Chamber Players in *Retrospectives and Discovered Treasures: Gala 30th Anniversary Concert*. Bruce Adolphe's *Machaut Is My Beginning* (1989), Shulamit Ran's *Mirage* (1990), Giya Kancheli's *Night Prayers* from *Life Without Christmas* (1992), Alla Borzova's *Mother Said* (1997), and Joan Tower's *Big Sky* (2000), and *Petroushskates* (1980), with Joan Tower and Paul Sperry. June 5, Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY.

Perhaps in no other context would the adjective "happy" be more appropriate for a 30th birthday than for the Da Capo Chamber Players' third decennial gala celebration on June 5. Indeed, the longevity of small ensembles, particularly those promoting new music, is not often measured in decades. So this was a very special musical event, not only as a milestone, but also for the sheer excellence of the evening's program.

First to be heard was the gracious and charming, short *Machaut Is My Beginning* (1989), by Bruce Adolphe. The work had its genesis in a suggestion from Da Capo "to take a look at Machaut's clever and catchy little canon *Ma fin est mon commencement* with the idea of somehow arranging it" for the ensemble. Given this, it is no wonder that Adolphe's exquisite elaboration (which is certainly much more than an arrangement) is neomedieval in sound. This is a delicate, lovely-textured work that inhabits, for the most part, terrain above middle C with a playfulness and vibrancy that quite naturally exemplified the celebratory nature of the evening.

In striking contrast was Shulamit Ran's *Mirage* (1990), her fourth work commissioned by Da Capo and composed in celebration of Da Capo's 20th anniversary. Ran notes that she chose to include all five Da Capo players and to assign "the principal 'tune' this time to an amplified alto flute. . . . Throughout I aimed for a free-flowing, yet intense, at times incantational style of delivery. . . . Harmonically and melodically the work reminds me, I think, of modes associated with Middle Eastern music." The symbolic suggestiveness of the soundscape depicted in the music seemed more profound than this. If mirages are phenomena of the desert, then the sultry lines of the alto flute, cast against a relatively motionless accompaniment by the other instruments, set the stage in the early part of this work to evoke a mood of elemental life in the midst of desolation. The tension and drama at the core of this work suggest an archetypal struggle, an urgent gesture of resistance, a fervent effort to survive the very passing of time and breath. There is a vital chronology depicted in this work, capturing a life-and-death or life-against-death progression. In essence what we are hearing is a narration, the urgent telling of an experience that demands one's complete attention.

Whether intended or not, the contrasts between the first two works found their culmination in Giya Kancheli's *Night Prayers*, the fourth part of a four-part cycle of independent chamber pieces entitled *Life Without Christmas* (1992) that was composed for the Kronos Quartet.

Before playing the piece, cellist Emelianoff read from a translated interview with Kancheli, in which the composer articulates a standard for composers and listeners alike that might serve as a rule for engagement when an audience hears a new work: "For me, it doesn't matter how my music will be received; it matters how it will be listened to, and to what degree silence will be present in the hall.

Silence can be of many kinds. There's formal silence, there's intellectual silence, and there's silence that's accompanied by some kind of 'letting go,' some kind of attention, expectation. I strive toward this last kind of silence. And when a performance is over, the rest doesn't matter – whether people like or don't like it, what the critics write. What's most important is the attention with which people listen."

What was heard was a series of sharply contrasting episodes, beginning with the energetic, yet flowing, progression of thick chords that soon turned into calm diaphanous textures that again thickened, then yielded yet again. From this ebb and flow of opposing textures emerge intermittent statements in the viola's lower register that are soon contrasted by harmonics in the second violin. Through this dialogue of contrasts, one can sense a spiritual disturbance or disquiet with which the sensitive listener can readily identify. A shifting, pulsating mystical light gradually appears that soothes as it bathes the landscape with a calm that is interrupted, yet again, with another contrasting intensity that returns to the energy with which the piece began, but only to conclude unexpectedly with a recorded soprano intoning sustained pitches of seeming lament as if the cyclic, and perhaps futile, to and fro of contrasts that have gone before were a metaphor for the human condition, and, therefore, were worthy of a restrained lamentation.

The seemingly ubiquitous and prolific Alla Borzova gave a triumphal performance, conducting her enthrallingly delightful *Mother Said* (1997), which was commissioned and performed by tenor Paul Sperry. The work matches a delicious accompaniment of musical irony to a text of wit and whimsy from a volume of Hal Sirowitz's liked-named poetry. Paul Sperry's pointed and comedic theatrics made it abundantly clear that this is, unquestionably, one of the most successful marriages of music and text in this genre. And for her part, Borzova demonstrated a masterful use of illustrative instrumental color and a deft editorial ear for the apt musical quotation. For this reviewer, this was first-rate parodistic pastiche with class.

Again, in the spirit of contrasts that seemed to dominate the evening's program, Joan Tower's elegantly beautiful *Big Sky* (2000), with the composer at the piano, presented a more contemplative offering. The program notes state that "the setting is a spacious mountain range with lots of big panoramic skies above. A wild horse is there sometimes grazing, sometimes running free, and at other times hiding from the big loud thunderstorms that occasionally interrupt his peaceful surroundings." But, while informed by programmatic imagery, this very fine masterwork of interaction and interconnection for violin, cello and piano was essentially absolute and nondescriptive in its sound, and yet captivating . . . as a big sky. As a contemporary piano trio, it just does not get any better than this.

Almost as if in the spirit of an encore and certainly as a nostalgic remembrance of Joan Tower's 15 years of performance as one of Da Capo founders, was Tower's popular and, by now, classic *Petroushkates* (1980) that, earlier this season, was given an outstanding performance by the contemporary chamber ensemble, Eighth Blackbird, at the Miller Theater of Columbia University. The performance this evening by Da Capo was no less exciting. Lisa Moore's command and enthusiasm for the work, whose piano part is a prominent and often motoric driving force, was most palpable. All in all, this evening of celebration was a memorable and fitting tribute to the artistry and staying power of one of contemporary music's best-known champions. Long Live Da Capo!

## SummeR ContempoRaRy PeRfoRmance

### DAVID CLEARY

*Summer Institute for Contemporary Piano Performance.* June 18, Williams Recital Hall, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA. Through June 22, Brown Hall.

Unique challenges occasionally crop up during concerts and festivals presented during the months without "r's." This year's *Summer Institute for Contemporary Piano Performance* series found its venues warm and muggy because of a recent heat wave. But fortunately, these five evenings featured some really hot and steamy pianism the weather could not begin to match, making this an enjoyable group of concerts to attend.

June 18 was given over to the music of György Ligeti. This composer's stunningly virtuosic *Etudes pour piano* may well be the finest collection to bear this title since those of Debussy. All are character pieces, every one preoccupied with spinning out a single idea to its fullest extent while boasting nary a single boring moment. These focused, riveting entities each delineate a unique, memorable sound world. Performing Book One from memory, Yukiko Takagi attacked the keyboard with earnest intensity, eye-popping technique, excellent attention to voicing, and a steely tone. Stephen Drury's playing of Book Two, featuring spotless finger dexterity, fluidly unforced sound, and careful attention to shape and pace, showed a real sense of mature mastery.

The two performers closed the program in splendid fashion by ably joining forces to give Ligeti's *Three Pieces for Two Pianos* -- a triumvirate that, if anything, proves even more obsessive in nature, suggesting kinship to American minimalism at various points.

European 1950's style pointillism dominated the next evening. In this recital's kingdom, the music of Karlheinz Stockhausen reigned supreme; his *Piano Pieces I-V* and *VII* display a sense of directional shape and truly musical feel despite their highly abstruse language. Of the others, the best was Friedrich Goldmann's *Four Piano Pieces*, which uses this disjunct approach to construct an attractive, nicely focused set of character movements. *Tropismen*, by Hans Otte, adds myriad sympathetically ringing pitches to the basic formula; the piece sports much contrast but lacks a clear formal sense. Nicolaus Richter de Vroe had the right idea in constructing his piece *Gabbro* in a postminimalist style using an obsessive, clipped two-note figure, tossing this gesture among different registers with numerous reharmonizations and spicing it with single-note punctuations -- but unfortunately the result proved both amorphous and too long (one can only guess how imaginatively Ligeti might handle such a task). Pianist Steffen Schleirmacher's playing ranged from an outsized, thunderous roar to a hushed whisper, demonstrating strong technique and a splendid feel for phrasing this highly disjointed music; a listen with score in hand to Stockhausen's first four *Klavierstuecke* left this reviewer wishing for a little more fidelity to the printed page of these admittedly ultra-fastidiously scribed entities. Schleirmacher's own work *piano&pianos* is a minimalist-leaning toccata backed by mostly piano-based prerecorded sounds that is also noteworthy for asking the performer to depart the stage "*Farewell*" *Symphony* fashion, leaving the audio speakers to have the last word. It's an attractive listen.

By contrast, Shannon Wettstein's choices on June 20 contained works of a post-Impressionist bent. The most interesting of these, Chinary Ung's *Seven Mirrors*, contains lithe Debussy-like colorist passages while not neglecting more forceful writing -- very ear-catching to experience. *Quelquefois, à l'ombre de la nuit...au lointain...* by Brian Cherney traffics in thicker, hazier sonorities suggestive of Messiaen. Neither it nor Mark Applebaum's *Discipline 5: from Saturn to Alabama: Travels in Outer Space*, a piece loaded with mercurial shifts of multihued music ranging from the atmospheric to the jittery, displayed a particularly strong sense of long-range architecture, though. The winner of "best in show" for structure on this concert went to *Avoidance Tactics #1 for Piano and Percussion* by Curtis K. Hughes. Its sense of form is clearly delineated, highly unusual, and extremely effective -- first contrasting brief sections of dense and sparse textures, then choosing a less extreme example of each to expand on in detail. This is intense, in-your-face stuff that seizes the lapels with glee. Pianist Sara Bob and percussionist Aaron Trant gave it a fire-breathing presentation. And Wettstein's playing of the rest was splendid, featuring a hearty, yet unforced tone, scrupulously accurate finger work, and an excellent sense of line and drama.

The festival's composer-in-residence this year was Paul Elwood, and the June 21 concert featured a few of his solo piano works. *Vigils* is a real find, a meditative, ethereal composition that makes the most of its somewhat limited palette of chords. This lovely sounding piece, containing a harmonic language that is tonal though not functional in nature, suggests an intriguing cross between Debussy and Feldman. It also unfolds cogently and convincingly. Drury's performance was a masterpiece of tasteful understatement. *Four Etudes* (No. 1, 3, 6, and 9) from *Shadow Red with Sun* continued in a similar vein, at times containing more forceful music that in places recalls Stravinsky's *Le Sacre*. Their lack of flashy writing -- surprising in selections designated as "etudes" -- stems from the intention that they be used by high-school level students. Regardless, these pleasing entries coaxed effectively restrained presentations from pianists Takagi and Wettstein.

11 players joined forces at program's end to realize the graphically-notated score to Cornelius Cardew's *Treatise*. It proved good, clean 1960s-type conceptual fun for a decent bit of its duration (no one played a standard note when an extended technique would do) before finally succumbing to shapelessness and excessive length.

The final concert continued June 19's fascination with Stockhausen's music. Because of its uniquely fractured spatial layout and aleatoric execution procedure, *Klavierstück XI* is perhaps this composer's most distinctive work in the series. Pianist John Mark Harris gave it twice, and in so doing showed how different this piece can sound from one performance to the next -- his first version being brash and angular, the second thoughtful and restrained. Both realizations were highly convincing, allowing its performer to effectively showcase a wide range of tone colors and flexibility of execution. Moving to a Roland electronic keyboard, Harris presented Aldo Clementi's *Sigla*, which proved to be maddening. The piece, constructed entirely from an incessantly repeated phrase (exuding a cloudy sense of tonality unusual in music of this type) that slows by nearly imperceptible increments, proves to be a crashing bore. Its only distinction is to show just how special the accomplishments by the best composers of minimalist music, such as Reich, Glass, and Adams, really are. Harris's rendition was a model of controlled technique and touch. Two small ensemble works by Stockhausen served as bookends for these solo keyboard entries. The trio *Refrain* proved the more engaging of these, an enjoyable assemblage of brief events surrounding the occasional larger flurry of activity, spiced with vocal effects such as tongue clicks and *Sprechstimme*. *Nasenflugeltanz*, for synthesizer, drum kit, and sampled sounds, came off as eccentric, satiric, and a bit scattered, asking the percussionist to not only play, but also sing, shout, and raise his arms up in theatrical fashion; samples here drew from many sources, including Jimi Hendrix, the Beatles, and Stockhausen himself. Ensemble Sirius (Michael Fowler, piano and Stuart Gerber, percussion, later joined by Catherine Woodard on celesta) put the music across in fiery, well-controlled fashion.

## Runaway Sonos

### CHERYL KELLER

Sonos Handbell Ensemble. July 1, First Unitarian Church, San Francisco, CA.

Sonos Handbell Ensemble reached new musical and technical heights at their latest concert on July 1 at First Unitarian Church in San Francisco. Joined by noted mezzo-soprano Frederica von Stade, oboist Roger Weismeyer, Peruvian flutist Nayo Ulloa -- the concert *Runaway Child*, based on the life and travels of Isaac Albeniz, featured works by Spanish and Latin American composers, and a new song cycle written by Libby Larsen.

The *Sonata No. 84 in D* by Soler immediately established Sonos' technical skill, with crisply articulated ornamentation, and dynamic nuances. However, it was the three song cycles by Braun, Ginastera and de Falla, deftly arranged by conductor James Meredith to include oboe and flute, which were the high points of the concert. Von Stade, who seemed particularly at home with these songs, sang with emotional conviction, using all the colors of her warm mezzo-soprano to bring each piece into vivid relief.

The haunting modal melodies of Braun's *Four Sephardic Romances* were enhanced by Weismeyer and Ulloa's expressive playing, especially the lullaby, "Nani, Nani", but Ginastera's *Cinco Canciones Populares* showed the combined forces to best advantage. Based on Argentinean folk music, each song had its own character, aptly delineated by von Stade, from the lovely vocalism of "Triste" and "Arro" to the raucous rhythmic explosion of "Gato." The flair and precision demanded by these pieces was ably matched by the handbell ensemble, whose rhythmic clarity was often awe-inspiring.

The handbells alone played pieces by Lecuona, Albeniz, Moszkowski, and Turina. Of these, Lecuona's *Malaguena*, with exquisite arpeggios executed in a languid manner and fiery rapid passagework, displayed the formidable ensemble at its best. Albeniz was represented by three *Cantos de Espana*, the most beautiful being "Preludio." "Cordoba," the famous Moorish city known for its blending of Moslem, Christian and Gypsy cultures, was depicted by the gentler sonority of hand chimes. The set closed with "Seguidilla," a serenade using every handbell technique known to man, or at least Sonos, to marvelous effect.

The finale was a new song cycle by Libby Larsen, *Hell's Belles*. The first movement, "There was a little girl," a collection of quotations by American women interspersed with a familiar nursery rhyme, brought to mind headstrong little girls growing into forceful women. "Footlight Wisdom" warned young women of the pitfalls of becoming an actress, while "When I am an old woman" is the familiar poem about wearing purple and doing what you please. The final song "The Magic City Golden Transit" described the station wagon of an artist, decorated with millions of Barbie doll shoes and twinkling Christmas lights. Von Stade told these stories with her usual excellent diction and vocal colors to match each of the different characters. Larsen's use of melodic motifs as a unifying device for her songs was always apparent throughout the cycle and she made best use of the handbell accompaniment in the final song, when we could hear the rhythm of the car rolling along, and the slightly wacky character of the artist herself. However, compared to the wonderful colors of Meredith's arrangements, these pieces, although enjoyable, were a somewhat thin showing for the handbells.

The concert included an encore of Falla's *Ritual Fire Dance*, once again displaying Sonos' marvelous dynamic control, finely honed technique, and flair for this repertoire. All afternoon the audience was impressed with the technical precision and musicality of the ensemble, and excellent arrangements of the works by Meredith, who exploited every possible color and percussive sound from the bells.

## Gerald Finzi Centennial

### MARK PETERSEN

The Esoterics celebrate the centennial of Gerald Finzi's birth by presenting the composer's entire a cappella repertoire. Soloists from the group also perform Finzi's song cycle *Before and After Summer*, accompanied by pianist Kevin Johnson. July 13, Pilgrim Congregational Church, Seattle, WA. Repeated July 14 and 15.

The Esoterics call themselves "a cappella addicts." An addiction is defined as "a compulsive physiological need for a habit-forming substance." With many addictions, even a brief exposure to the substance can result in altered states of body and mind, as well as a life-long dependency. A brief Friday the 13th examination of the group's condition yielded strong evidence that the Esoterics' self-diagnosis is correct.

I have also come to the conclusion that, under the right conditions, this "a cappella addiction" is highly contagious and could soon reach epidemic proportions. Let's see how well the Esoterics' dependency fits the textbook definition...

Example 1. Compulsive behavior. The recent examination revealed very few symptoms that could be considered compulsive. One exception would be the compulsion to present more programs each season than originally scheduled. Each year the group presents a series of concerts based on a conceptual idea or theme. Last year they presented *The Elements*. Their 2001 series is entitled *Celestis*; with music which commemorates the sun, moon, and stars. But each calendar year also seems to yield a number of "compulsive" performances such as the Finzi centennial in July. Previous centenarians have included Francis Poulenc, Randall Thompson, Carlos Chávez, and Lagos Bárdos in 1999, and Aaron Copland in 2000. Each centennial celebration presents not only the choral repertoire of the composer; but also subtle insights into the life, thoughts and motivations of each artist. The listener comes away from the performance as if s/he had just made a new acquaintance, rather than listened to a concert. At the Finzi celebration, excerpts from the composer's journal and correspondence with his wife Joy provided an introspective glimpse into the philosophical and physiological battles with which Finzi struggled during his short life.

Example 2. Physiological need. Finzi composed feverishly in the five years between his initial diagnosis of Hodgkin's disease and his death. In a similar vein, The Esoterics zealously delve into their choral performances—it seems they have an intrinsic (or addictive) physiological need to sing. Each of the choral works: *Three short elegies* (1926), *Thou didst delight my eyes* (1951), *Seven part-songs* (1931-37), *White-flowering days* (1953), and *All this night* (1951) were presented with resolute intensity, stunning dynamic variation, and empathetic sentience toward text and music.

Example 3. Altered states of mind and body. It's difficult, if not impossible, to come away from an Esoterics performance "unaltered." Even though Finzi's music is somewhat obscure, he definitely had that "Englishness" which pervades the music of many composers from the United Kingdom. His settings of texts by Thomas Hardy, William Drummond, Robert Bridges, Edmund Blunden, and William Austin instantly transport the listener to a summer landscape, the sounds of war, the angst of one near death, the songs of lovers (accepted and rejected), and the glories of the sunrise. Especially notable in the "transporter" category was the performance of *Before and After Summer*, a ten-movement song cycle for voice and piano. A different soloist was selected for each movement -- all were magnificently accompanied by the picturesque, yet perspicuous pianism of Jeff Johnson.

Example 4. Life-long dependency to a habit-forming substance. The Esoterics are now in their ninth season -- a reasonably long life for a group that specializes in contemporary music. They continue to collect accolades; including a 2001 ASCAP Award for Adventurous Programming. They continue to delight their audiences with treasures from the literature --- the celebrated works, the unexplored, and especially the brand new. The group's energy is infectious -- be on guard -- the next performance you attend could make you an "a cappella addict" as well.

## Naive Music

### MICHAEL MCDONAGH

*Fresh Voices Festival II*. Mark Alburger's *The Little Prince*, John Partridge's *The Soldiers Who Wanted To Kill Death*, and Nancy Bloomer Deussen's *The World Is A Butterfly's Wing*. July 20, Goat Hall, San Francisco, CA. Through July 22.

Every encounter with music should be a discovery, and we expect music festivals to provide them in spades. But that, I'm afraid, is in the best of all possible worlds. In the real world things are a bit different, and finding one or two strong works on a program of any music festival usually has to suffice. Goat Hall Productions' *Fresh Voices Festival II* presented two shows this year of works by Bay Area composers and librettists, and Program A, given July 20-22, had three works by three composers.

Mark Alburger's *The Little Prince* was an adaptation of the story of the same name by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. This composer usually takes a repertory piece as the model for his operatic works, and the principal one here was Schoenberg's 1912 breakthrough *Pierrot Lunaire* (op. 21) as well as his *Six Little Piano Pieces*, op. 19 (1911), and the *Five Pieces for Orchestra*, op. 16 (1909). Alburger's opera has 28 songs and an instrumental epilogue structured around the 21 items in the Viennese master's *Pierrot*. He "postmodernizes" Schoenberg by removing the Expressionist's sharps and flats, so that the resulting music seems as pure and "simple" as Mozart, and this was an ideal sound world for a fairy tale for adults like *The Little Prince*. Alburger's piece used a cast of eight who played over 15 principal roles as well as numerous subsidiary ones -- Shades, Echoes, Grown-Ups, Flowers. Tenor David Saslav performed that of the explorer-aviator Saint-Exupéry, and soprano Heather Lukens Gavin that of the Little Prince. Dressed in an 18th-century soldier's uniform, she sang sweetly and looked innocent. Saslav complemented her in tone and gesture in their five songs together. The other standout in the cast was soprano Deirdre Lobo who gave astute and funny impersonations of her two parts -- the Flower and the Serpent. Harriet March Page's direction was appropriately straightforward, and the three musicians -- pianist Melissa Smith, flutist Bruce Salvisberg, and violinist Joanna Pinckney -- under the spirited direction of the composer -- projected the work with enthusiasm, if not always accuracy. Still, *The Little Prince* is a charming and effective piece which might benefit from the inclusion of very short interludes (or tastefully chosen repeats) within its already written numbers to give it some more breathing room. This is obviously a very different kind of piece than Alburger's opera *Henry Miller in Brooklyn*, but the latter's alternation of action and repose projected its virtues with greater clarity and force than did *The Little Prince*.

John Partridge's opera *The Soldiers Who Wanted To Kill Death* had neither clarity nor force as it struggled manfully to make a universal statement on the human condition. But the composer, at least in this piece, seemed to lack a real stage instinct, and hiring a writer might have made his dramatic argument more vivid and compelling. As it was, it started nowhere and went nowhere. Tenor Aurelio Viscarra (Private Fallon), baritone Douglas Mandell (Sgt. Thompson), and bass Beckett Swede (Pvt. Dritz) did as much as they could with what they were given. The composer-led instrumental ensemble -- Smith and Pinckney again, joined by cellist Annie Yeh and percussionist Stuart Quan had far more interesting sounds.

Nancy Bloomer Deussen's song cycle *The World Is A Butterfly's Wing* fared better. The composer's setting of 5 poems by Allen Cohen of San Francisco Oracle fame was graciously written, with clear, unobtrusive piano lines supporting the voice. And though none of the texts were especially profound, their politically correct sentiments, which Deussen shares, were projected with sincerity and ease by Saslav, who sang affectingly, and Smith, who played with her usual discernment and grace. Violist Daria D'Andrea's playing was poised and deeply expressive, too.

## Whose Baby Is This?

### MICHAEL MCDONAGH

Marin Alsop conducts The Cabrillo Festival Orchestra in Philip Glass's *The Photographer*. August 5, Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium, Santa Cruz, CA.

Marin Alsop conducts The Cabrillo Festival Orchestra in Rouse's *Rapture*; MacMillan's *Symphony No. 2*; and Rautavaara's *Symphony No. 7 ("Angel of Light")*. August 12, Mission San Juan Bautista, San Juan Bautista, CA.

Lou Harrison and several of his friends founded the Cabrillo Music Festival in 1961 at a coffeehouse in Aptos, on California's central coast. But it really became a going concern two years later when composer and music director Gerhard Samuel, who served in that capacity from 1963-1968, conducted its first concert at its new home, Cabrillo College. His work, and that of succeeding music directors Carlos Chavez (1967-1973), and Dennis Russell Davies (1974-1990) put this new music festival on the map: they presented compositions of internationally celebrated composers like Henze, who became a composer-in-residence for its two-week run, which is always in August. Cabrillo gained prestige and its programming was always intelligent and varied. That was certainly the case when I last visited it in 1987 and heard orchestral works by William Schuman, Henry Brant, Charles Shere, Philip Glass, and others, as well as a piano recital by Ursula Oppens, of Brahms, Stravinsky and Nancarrow (older masters get in too).

Davies's focus was on both chamber and orchestral pieces, but his successor, Marin Alsop, who's been music director since 1992 -- John Adams served in 1991 -- concentrates almost exclusively on works for orchestra. It's a viable approach, though an undoubtedly expensive one, too.

That certainly had to be the case with its first offering, a fully staged production of Glass's infrequently revived *The Photographer*, which got a full house (Harrison's 1952 opera *Rapunzel* was given August 4). Conceived by Dutch director/designer Rob Malasch, and written in 1982, it was commissioned by the Holland Festival and produced that year at Amsterdam's Carre Theater. The U.S. premiere, directed by JoAnne Akalaitis, opened Brooklyn Academy of Music's 1983 *Next Wave Festival*, and toured several American cities. *The Photographer* is a curious work. It dates from a time when classic minimalism was over, but performance art was still a happening thing. Glass's description of it as "a music/theater piece" is telling, and "music slash theater," instead of "music hyphen theater" seems to indicate that its parts are intended not to be equal, but opposed. Act I is a play, Act II a concert, and Act III a dance. This split construction stretches the conventions of theatrical form, and gives the work its schizoid character.

Sure, things progress, and the pictures taken by its title character, Eadweard Muybridge (1830-1904) do indeed "develop" in Act II, but does the work cohere, and transcend its contradictory parts? Or was it ever intended to? Far from being a 20 year-old relic, *The Photographer* appears, upon reflection, to be about the split act of perception -- how seeing and hearing are separate and opposed.

This is clear in Act I where a team of stage actors re-enact events in Muybridge's life -- his discovery of his wife Flora's affair, his fatal shooting of her lover, his trial and subsequent acquittal -- but director Michael Scarola places the viewer at a deliberate distance from them. We get a juicy Victorian melodrama with that juice removed, and it's intentionally fractured. Lines, situations and characters are skewed. And Leland Stanford (Fred Ochs), Jack Kellogg (prosecuting attorney), Nathan Michael Place (Larkyns), Michael Needham (Muybridge), and Sara Kraft (Flora), have oblique relations to each other and to the wide, and non-proscenium, stage space (they all wore head mikes to project above the orchestra, and fill the high-ceilinged house). Brecht's intention was to alienate or distance the audience from the play (Brecht was a seminal influence on Glass and others of his generation) so that it could learn essential truths about the nature of society. But the intention of this production seemed entirely aesthetic -- it wants to strike a pose, and does. The stage pictures composed by scenic/lighting designer Matthew Antaky had a beautiful, yet utterly detached look which mirrored Glass's delicate scoring for chamber orchestra and voices: here 40 players and nine voices (seven female and two male), as opposed to the six voices, all women, on the original recording. Glass's use of alternating major and minor harmonies, especially in the opening "A Gentleman's Honor" (lyrics assembled by David Byrne), create ambivalence and subtle tension.

The original production had three "incidental pieces" in Act I, but Scarola's version boasted an additional 15 minutes of music which the composer wrote for a recent production by director Birgitta Trommler for a dance theater production performed at Darmstadt's Staatstheater. Glass let Alsop and Scarola put this additional material anywhere they wanted to, and one new number, which appeared after the words "his (Muybridge's) day had passed," was enormously affecting.

The Act II concert, with its violin solo played by Alsop, may be the emotional heart of *The Photographer*. And its repeating figures for the player, with their increasingly chromatic downward turns, seem to echo Muybridge's obsession -- he shot over 20,000 photos of animal and human locomotion -- and maybe his anguish over his murder of Larkyns. The stage action, at any rate, showed him "shooting" 3 nearly nude models, sexily impersonated by dancers Deanna Ross, James Brenneman III and Joseph Pikalek, who also showed up in Act III, a 20 minute dance choreographed by Maria Basile in which all the characters from Act I return. This wasn't a general dance per se, but a choreographed movement in which actors and dancers interacted as Muybridge's images came and went on a screen above the stage, and the music, serene, poised, and full of drive, grew in rhythmic, harmonic and textural complexity. A particularly stunning moment came at the very end, when Muybridge, borne on the shoulders of several characters, outstretched his arms, to a photograph of the sun, as if in worship, and embrace. This seemed to echo the apotheosis of Apollo at the end of the Stravinsky/Balanchine ballet. This resemblance is even more striking because Glass's score, though not the white on white strings-only of *Apollo*, is similarly muted and repressed.

Cabrillo's production was a provocative and engaging evening in the theater. *The Photographer* is an elliptical and difficult piece which seems to continue the aesthetic, if not the look, of groups like The Living Theater. Alsop's orchestra conveyed its magic with precision, and heart. And the chorus, in period costumes, and everyone else, gave it their all.

The three composers on the Mission San Juan Bautista program on Cabrillo's closing night -- it was also done there that afternoon -- didn't have to contend with the questions raised by a collaborative art form like the theater. All they had to do was show up, and two of them did -- the American Christopher Rouse and the Scot James MacMillan (the no show was the Finn Einojuhani Rautavaara), and have their pieces played. Yet any musical work, whether programmatic or not, almost always has extra-musical content which the listener brings to it. And so "absolute music" is never really absolute. Rouse, whose *Rapture* (2000) received its West Coast premiere, spoke amusingly and somewhat defensively (he, after all, is a serious modernist guy) about its "upbeat" tone.

But what this listener actually heard was a slight, fairly accomplished piece of about 13 minutes duration. The felicities here were an arabesque for oboe beautifully played by principal Alexander Miller, a fugato violin figure which contrasts with lyric writing in the mid-lower strings, and a slam-bang blues-inflected end which sounded a bit like Janacek's *Sinfonietta* (including crashing timpani), or John Williams on a bad day (sometimes a triad is just a triad).

James MacMillan, in the U.S. premiere of his 23-minute *Symphony No. 2* (1999) proved why he has a following. The composer, in his opening remarks, said it was inspired by Scots poets and writers who used the melancholy nature of winter as a metaphor for spiritual desolation, and it's definitely an honest, sincere, and deeply felt work. The first movement is transparently scored, almost bare, with an intentionally wandering quality, the second has chilling martial fanfares in the brass evoking Scotland's troubled history -- think Maria Stuart -- while the third, with its partial quotes of *Tristan's* prelude -- *the* motif of course -- is a study in wonderfully varied, and mostly quiet, textures. Rautavaara, who's become a big name in recent years, was represented by his 34 minute *Symphony No. 7* ("*Angel of Light*") (1994), which observes the 4-movement format codified by the classic masters, though the order of movements broke with that tradition. The impressive opening "Tranquillo" was followed by a vigorous "Molto allegro," which segues without a break -- "attaca" anyone? -- into a rapturous, and meditative "Come un Sogno" -- a slowly building, long-lined violin solo, with modal hymn-like cadences, played with accuracy and great feeling by concertmaster Yumi Hwang-Williams. The concluding "Pesante - cantabile" brought the piece full circle. With everyone -- from "the Nazarene" Pärt to Reich jumping on the New Age bandwagon, this definitely felt like the real thing. The audience responded as if they'd received a gift, and, I daresay, they had.

Alsop got superlative sound, and wonderfully committed and responsive playing from her band. She also seemed genuinely modest and thankful, which is never a bad thing, especially with conductors.

## Correspondents

BROOKE AIRD is a San Francisco violinist and writer.

MARK ALBURGER is Editor-Publisher of 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC and an ASCAP composer of four symphonies and nine operas. His opera *The Wind God* is scheduled for performance this month in San Francisco.

DAVID CLEARY's music has been played throughout the U.S. and abroad, including performances at Tanglewood and by Alea II and Dinosaur Annex. His music appears on the Centaur and Vienna Modern Masters labels, and his bio may be found in many *Who's Who* books.

JOHN DE CLEF PINEIRO, a graduate of Yale Law School, is a public sector transactional attorney by profession and an orchestral composer by avocation. He is an active member of the New York Chapter of the American Composers Forum, and is a frequent editorial contributor to *The New Music Connoisseur*, a quarterly publication devoted to the contemporary music scene.

PATTI DEUTER is Associate Editor of 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC.

JEFF DUNN is a freelance critic with a B.A. in music and a Ph.D. in Education. He now serves on the board of directors for New Music Forum and is a Bay Area correspondent for 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC.

CHERYL KELLER is a singer specializing in contemporary music who lives in Berkeley and teaches at Holy Names College.

MICHAEL MCDONAGH is a San Francisco-based poet and writer on the arts who has done two poem/picture books with artist Gary Bukovnik, *Before I Forget* (1991) and *Once* (1997), the former being in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, The Berkeley Art Museum, and the New York Public Library.

RYDER W. MILLER is a Bay Area writer on music and theatre.

HARRIET MARCH PAGE is Artistic Director for Goat Hall Productions, Assistant Editor of 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC, and a dramatic soprano.

MARK PETERSEN is a composer, pianist, singer, music director, and Seattle Correspondent for 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC. He has degrees in music from Weber State College (B.A.) and North Texas State University (M.M.).

Composer and writer ELLIOTT SCHWARTZ (b. January 19, 1936, Brooklyn, NY) studied at Columbia University (A.B. 1957, M.A. 1958, Ed.D. 1962) under Otto Luening and Jack Beeson, and also privately with Paul Creston. During the summers of 1961 to 1966 he worked with Edgar Varèse, Henry Brant, Chou Wen-chung, and Stefan Wolpe at the Bennington (VT) Composers Conference. In addition to producing a large body of compositions, he has also written a number of books, including *The Symphonies of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, (Amherst, 1965), *Electronic Music: A Listener's Guide* (New York, 1967), and *Music: Ways of Listening* (New York, 1982).

ANDREW SHAPIRO holds a degree in music composition from the Oberlin Conservatory. Shapiro lives in New York where he composes for a variety of different areas including dance pieces, film scores, the concert hall, and club bookings with his group, ShapiroEnsemble.

# Record Reviews

## The Big Picture

### MARK ALBURGER

John Luther Adams. *The Far Country [Dream in White on White. Night Peace. The Far Country of Sleep]*. Apollo Quartet and the Cabrillo Festival Orchestra, conducted by Joann Falletta; Atlanta Singers, conducted by Kevin Culver. New Albion Records. 1993.

John Luther Adams. *Earth and the Great Weather: A Sonic Geography of the Arctic*. New World Records. 1994

John Luther Adams. *Clouds of Forgetting. Clouds of Unknowing*. The Apollo Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Joann Falletta. New World Records. 1997.

Geography determines destiny. So it's no surprise that John Luther Adams thinks big, as big as his adopted homeland Alaska. In a series of three albums from New Albion and New World, we hear the sweep of his musical thought, across a half-decade and hundreds of miles.

*The Far Country* (New Albion, 1993) shows the mellow West-Coast side of the north, in a calm *Dream in White on White* (1992). The sustained strings could almost be some Prosaked-out Ligeti, but the harp contributions and the general quiescent Pythagorean diatonicism bespeak a post-minimalism that -- true to Adams's big-picture orientation -- has been characterized as maximalism or totalism. In an interior section, there's even a folkish string quality reminiscent of early American hymnody and Ingram Marshall. *Night Piece* (1977) is at times more ominous and ritualistic, featuring percussion and voices, which the composer notes "is based entirely on a single melodic line, which is heard only once, sung by the solo soprano at the end of the piece." The biggest work, at once calm and threatening, is *The Far Country of Sleep*, for a full orchestra of sustained strings and winds, punctuated by drum pulses. A lonely trumpet even calls to mind Ives and Mahler. Performances throughout -- by the Apollo Quartet, the Atlanta Singers, and the Cabrillo Festival Orchestra -- are excellent.

*Earth and the Great Weather* is even more ambitious, and both less and more "of the people." Some of the sensuality and drumming sensibility of *The Far Country* remain here, but augmented by the text-sound art of Inupiaq and Gwich'in speakers. Additionally the percussion quartet writing is far more prominent, even regimentally violent, than anything heard earlier and is exceedingly evocative -- thunderous and ornithological.

*Clouds of Forgetting, Unknowing* is the most and least programmatic. In the minimalist tradition, it is about musical process, and maintains Adams's characteristic big-picture sweep as a series of imposing environments. Characterized as a contemporary Well-Tempered Clavier for chamber orchestra (perhaps even better The Art of Interval), Adams gradually and methodically explores the accumulation of an ascending chromatic scale over the course of more than an hour. A list of subsections captures the concept.

minor seconds, rising  
Clouds of mixed Seconds  
Major Seconds, rising  
Clouds of Seconds and thirds  
diminished bells

Clouds of mixed Thirds  
Forgotten Triads  
Lost Chorales  
Clouds of Perfect Fourths  
Turbulent Changes  
Clouds of Perfect Fifths  
Chorales return  
Triads, remembered  
Clouds of mixed Sixths  
...and bells, again...  
Clouds of Sixths and sevenths  
minor sevenths, rising  
clouds of mixed Sevenths  
Major Sevenths, rising

Much of this is reverent, spiritual, sustained. But when it howls it really does so in the monstrous mechanized rhythms of "Turbulent Changes." But perhaps even in the fear there remains the reverent, spiritual, and sustained.

When the music finally hits the octave at the very end, there's an incredible sensation of resolution. Few endings in any style have made such an extraordinary effect.

## Not Quite Dead Yet

### MARK ALBURGER

Amherst Saxophone Quartet. *Lament on the Death of Music* [Leila Lustig. *Lament on the Death of Music*. Chan Ka Nin. *Saxophone Quartet*. Anita D. Perry. *Quartet for Saxophones*. Andrew Stiller. *Chamber Symphony for Saxophone Quartet*]. Amherst Saxophone Quartet. Innova.

Like Mark Twain, the news of music's death has been greatly exaggerated. This deploration, *Lament on the Death of Music* (Innova) from the Amherst Saxophone Quartet, is a winning collection of selections from the whimsical side of serious music.

Leila Lustig begins the festivities happily and lustily with the title composition, a clever pastiche featuring excerpts from such formerly radical "death-of-music" pieces such as Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, Debussy's *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*, Wagner's *Prelude to "Tristan und Isolde"*, Chopin's *Prelude in E-Minor*, Mozart's *Symphony No. 41 ("Jupiter")*, and Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5*. Not sure how it all fits together, but it's amusing, and soprano Christine Shadeberg and the Quartet make a winning combination.

The memorable tunes of the Lustig are nicely complemented by the memorable modulations of Andrew Stiller's *Chamber Symphony for Saxophone Quartet*. The most radical device comes in the traditional first-movement sonata-allegro, where Stiller has the second theme not modulate to the dominant, but instead to a tonality 1/4 tone above the tonic, and takes this step gradually by having each of the four instruments take the modulation sequentially rather than together, resulting in strikingly humorous clashes. The music ends beyond the pale, with the last words of an ill-fated broadcaster on Mt. St. Helens on an ill-fated day.

Good spirits abound in the interior selections, the *Saxophone Quartet* of Chan Ka Nim and equally-colorfully named *Quartet for Saxophones* by Anita D. Perry. The former finds a bouncy eastern contemporaneity and the latter charms in its high spirits and excellence.

## Gold Dust

### MARK ALBURGER

Robert Ashley. *Your Money My Life Goodbye*. Jacqueline Humbert, Thomas Buckner, Sam Ashley, Robert Ashley, Joan La Barbara. Lovely Music.

Robert Ashley. *Dust*. Sam Ashley, Thomas Buckner, Tom Hamilton, Jacqueline Humbert, Joan La Barbara, "Blue" Gene Tyranny, and Robert Ashley. Lovely Music.

Like John Cage, Robert Ashley has always pushed the envelope of "What is music?" Sound-poet and collaborator par excellence, Ashley's gesamtkunstwerk in two recent Lovely Music releases -- *Your Money My Life Goodbye* and *Dust* -- involves his highly imaginative texts and musical structures, allied with talented and spirited voices (Sam Ashley, Thomas Buckner, Jacqueline Humbert, Joan La Barbara, in addition to his own) and instrumentalists (keyboardist "Blue" Gene Tyranny [in *Dust* only] and sound engineer Tom Hamilton).

Ashley notes that *Your Money*

is one of forty-nine vocal-ensemble pieces of various lengths (from 10 to 90 minutes or more) that can be used in many kinds of combinations to make an opera for stage, for radio or for television. Any of the combinations go under the title of the "opera," *The Immortality Songs*. When any of the pieces are performed separately, as in *Your Money My Life Goodbye* for Bayerischer Rundfunk, they take their individual titles. I have finished seven of the compositions. It looks like a lifetime of work. Hence the title.

This story of a "renowned international swindler" is grounded in an "electronic orchestra" developed by Ashley and Hamilton that features wah-wah pulsations on C/Eb, a cadential Eb-Fb-Eb-Ab, and returning sustained high C's. This texture later modulates around to such regions as G-Ab-G-C, D-Eb-D-G, and E-F-E-A (the high C always present), and is augmented by a driving anthemic drum-kit. Throughout, the surreal, tonally-inflected recitations of the voices make their telling effects.

If *Your Money* has high-society connections, *Dust* is *An Urban Downhome Street Companion* that details the stories of five down-and-outs, not least of which, Ashley himself as a kind of sardonic cross between W.C. Fields and Garrison Keillor. Jacqueline Humbert and Sam Ashley become some sort of aspiritualist soul-speakers, backed by chorus. Joan La Barbara takes a comic x-rated turn as a wide-eyed raconteuse, terribly politically incorrect, while Thomas Buckner becomes a mellifluous homeboy in post-jive.

For those who enjoy, as the album-rock stations made into a cliché, "more music less talk" -- the second of two discs features particularly... well, lovely... singing from the assembled vocal forces, backed by a mysterious and humorous neo-pop electronic orchestra from Ashley, Hamilton, and Tyranny (including those old standbys I-VI-IV-V and bVI-bVII-I). It's a keeper, worthy of many repeated listenings.

## On Virtuosity

### MARK ALBURGER

Robert Avalon. *Piano Concerto. Flute and Harp Concerto*. Foundation for Modern Music Orchestra, with Robert Avalon, conducted by Larry Rechleff. Centaur Records.

There are virtuoso composers and virtuoso performers. Robert Avalon is both, in his recent release on Centaur records where he serves as pianist in his own *Piano Concerto*, with the Foundation for Modern Music Orchestra, conducted by Larry Rechleff.

Like John Luther Adams, Avalon writes big geographical music (in this case, Texas-style), in an opulent four-movement piano concerto touched by various musics including, as the composer notes, "baroque, impressionist, twentieth-century Russian," with a fair dollop of Beethovenian 19th-century romanticism and even hints of 20th-century New Viennese. While the concerto's second movement is particularly striking and robust, the entire work is filled with nuance and variety.

The *Flute and Harp Concerto* is a similarly ambitious affair, despite its scoring for string orchestra and its single-movement structure with a duration (20:08) less than that of the *Piano Concerto*'s first movement (20:26) Flutist Megan Meisenbach, harpist Mary Golden, and The Foundation for Modern Music Orchestra (a collection of Houston Symphony players), sound terrific and the recording quality is first-rate.

## 90% Post Consumer Review

### DAVID CLEARY

Ellen Band. *90% Post Consumer Sound*. XI Records. XI 124.

Chirping canaries. Creaking leather jackets. Squealing playground swings. Clanging railroad crossing gate signals. Boiling, hissing, rattling steam radiators. In the XI CD *90% Post Consumer Sound*, Boston-based sound artist Ellen Band constructs remarkable musical edifices from these seemingly mundane items (*Swinging Sings* [1992] is the only item that utilizes traditional musical instruments, and even here the violin and RAAD violin playing mimic and enhance the basis sound of squeaking kiddy swings). By relying so heavily on such building blocks, she accomplishes two fascinating things. First, she forces us to focus attention on the commonplace, to listen to things we usually take for granted; in that sense, these works show affinity to pieces like John Cage's *4'33"*, which asks its audience to contemplate the concert hall sounds we ordinarily tune out.



But Band does not stop there. In limiting her source materials so severely, she convincingly demonstrates that even the simplest sounds contain a surprisingly large amount of complexity and range, more than we normally give them credit for.

*Railroad Gamelan* (1992) features the widest variety of sonic building blocks. Here, railroad crossing gate alarms of differing pitches and speeds are overlaid in phase manner a la Steve Reich. Band then adds in other elements that define this basic idea further. One also hears cars whizzing by, a sound which gradually becomes more frequent and noticeable as the piece progresses; these eventually give way to blaring train whistles (also tuned to different pitches), and finally the frenzied whoosh of passing trains—which serve as a capstone intensifier of the earlier automobile sounds. This sweeping, Ravel's-*Bolero*-type formal shape is encountered in most of the other selections on this release, though in the two newest works (*Radiatore* [1998] and *Minimally Tough* [1997]), Band refines this basic shape with numerous secondary climax points and laid-back plateaus. The excerpt from *Closet Bird* (1976) is unique in this regard, suggesting a rudimentary theme and variations construct. It's the presence of such larger organizational ways of thinking which transform these intriguing aural events into convincing works of art. And while unfolding of material is generally slow, the effect proves hypnotic, not seat-squirming.

Sound quality on this CD is first-rate. Special mention should be made here of *Minimally Tough*, a work meant to be heard on headphones only; Band's sonic spatial placement in relation to the listener shows marvelous imagination. This reviewer was only left wishing for a standard composer bio in the CD booklet. In summation, this wonderful release is a definite must-hear.

## Calendar

October 1

Left Coast Ensemble in Imbrie's *Piano Quartet*, plus music of Carlos Sanchez Gutierrez, Pamela Z, and Beth Custer. Green Room, Veterans Building, San Francisco, CA.

October 4

Paul Drescher Ensemble Electro-Acoustic Band in *A Deep Dark Spoonful of New Music (And a Whole Lotta Pianos)*. Premiere of Martin Bresnick's *Fantasia (On a Theme of Willie Dixon)* with pianist Lisa Moore, the world premiere of Lois V Vierk's *Deep-water Waves*, the San Francisco premiere of Terry Riley's four movement piano concerto *Banana Humberto 2000* with Riley as soloist, and Paul Drescher's *Concerto for Violin & Electro-Acoustic Band* with violinist Tracy Silverman. ODC Theater, San Francisco, CA. Through October 6.

Michael Tilson Thomas conducts the San Francisco Symphony in Knussen's *Choral*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA. Through October 6.

Ligeti's *Poème Symphonique*, Reich's *Pendulum Music*, and Nancarrow's *Etudes for Player Piano*. Knoll Ballroom, Stanford University, CA.

October 5

American Composers Forum presents New Music Works Ensemble. Old First Church, San Francisco, CA.

October 6

Temple University Symphony in Scott Watson's *Concerto for Trumpet and Orchestra*. Academy of Music, Philadelphia, PA.

October 9

Composers, Inc. presents music of Aquilanti, Greenberg, Mobberley, Sheinfeld, and McClwry. Green Room, Veterans Building, San Francisco, CA.

October 10

Michael Tilson Thomas conducts the San Francisco Symphony in Schoenberg's *Theme and Variations* and Krenek's *Die Nachtigall*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA. Through October 13.

October 15

*Berkeley New Music Project*. University of California, Berkeley, CA.

October 18

Stanislaw Skrowaczewski and the S.F. Symphony in his *Music in the Night*. Davies Hall, San Francisco, CA. Through October 20.

October 21

San Francisco Symphony musicians in Shostakovich's *String Quartet No. 8*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

October 22

Pauline Oliveros, Philip Gelb, and Dana Reason. Stanford University, CA.

October 23

80th-birthday tribute to Karel Husa. Merkin Hall, New York, NY.

October 24

San Francisco Symphony in Blacher's *Variations on a Theme of Paganini*, Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, and Sibelius's *Symphony No. 2*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

October 26

New Music Ensemble in music of Yarnell, Copland (*Music for the Theater*), and Takemitsu. San Francisco Conservatory, San Francisco, CA.

# Chronicle

August 3

Death of Jeanne Loriod (b. 7/13/28, Houilles, France), of a stroke, at age 73. Juan-les-Pins, France. "[H]er artistry playing the ondes martenot . . . made her the instrument's most celebrated performer. . . . The instrument, also known as ondes musicales, French for musical waves, was first demonstrated in France on April 20, 1928, by its inventor, Maurice Martenot. . . . She followed her sister Yvonne to the piano class of Lazare Levy at the Paris Conservatory, where she soon became fascinated by the new instrument. . . . She was in the middle of a futuristic electronic music movement that never went remotely as far as its pioneers dreamed. Beginning with the 200-ton telharmonium, and on through at least a dozen instruments with strange-sounding names and even stranger sounds, proponents of the new music delighted in making previously unimaginable noises. For example, the theremin, an electronic instrument conjured up by a Russian scientist, Leon Theremin, in 1920, can make a sound that has been likened to a violin being played while submerged in deep water. Other electronic instruments include the traultonium, the sfaerofon, the gnome and the orgatron. Not surprisingly, the new instruments found their most welcome home in movie soundtracks, including those for *King Kong*, *The Lost Weekend*, and *Spellbound*. Rock groups also liked the eerie sounds. The Beach Boys used a theremin in *Good Vibrations*. . . . The [ondes martenot] is played with a keyboard and by manipulating a ribbon with a ring for the player's right index finger. But like the theremin, the ondes martenot achieved its widest exposure not in avant-garde music, but on the screen. Maurice Jarre, a friend of Miss Loriod, played the instrument for *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Mad Max*. One early composer who took an immediate liking to the ondes martenot was Olivier Messiaen, who married Jeanne's sister Yvonne; she became a renowned pianist. Particularly in his 10-movement symphony, *Turangalila*, Messiaen used the ondes martinot to create shimmering, swooping musical effects. Virtually everywhere *Turangalila* was performed, Jeanne Loriod was to be found, her sister often playing the virtuoso piano part. Miss Loriod recorded her part in the symphony at least six times and performed it live with conductors like Pierre Boulez, Seiji Ozawa, André Previn, and Zubin Mehta. In addition to Yvonne, Miss Loriod is survived by another sister, Jacqueline. Miss Loriod also took ample advantage of two other masterworks that Messiaen wrote for the instrument. *Trois Petites Liturgies de la Présence Divine* (1943-44) mixes its qualities with women's voices, piano, strings and percussion. *Saint Francois d'Assise* (1975-83) features the ondes in three of the eight tableaux in a work lasting nearly four hours. Other composers who wrote for the instrument included Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, Edgard Varèse, Charles Koechlin, Florent Schmitt, and Jacques Ibert. Jeanne Loriod performed in more than 500 works, 14 of them concertos. She added to the repertoire herself by creating 85 works for a sextet of ondes she formed in 1974, initially to revive Messiaen's first ondes piece, *La Fete des Belles Eaux* of 1937. She . . . wrote a three-volume book that became the standard text for the instrument: *Technique de l'Onde Electronique Type Martenot*" (Leduc, 1987). Hugh Davies, a performer and musicologist specializing in electronic instruments, estimated that more than 1,000 works had been composed for the ondes. . . . [She said] 'Since 1928 we have 15 concertos and over 300 works of chamber music' . . . Shortly before her death, she had planned to perform with the British pop group Radiohead" [Douglas Martin, *The New York Times*, 8/19/01].

*Fresh Voices Festival II*. Mark Alburger's *Antigone*, Lisa Scola Prosek's *Miniature Portraits* (lyrics by Michael McDonagh), D.C. Meckler's "Toccatà di Luna" from *Apollo 14: A Space Opera*, and Anne Doherty's *Modulating Back to Tonic*, with Tisha C. Page, Harriet March Page, David Saslav, Melissa Smith, Micah Epps, Sharon Walters, Robert Benda, Miriam Lewis, Heather Lukens Gavin, Anne Doherty, and John Thorn. Goat Hall, San Francisco, CA. Through August 5. "[Alburger] based . . . the score on a variety of influences, most obviously Minimalist master Philip Glass. . . . [He] has a satisfying way of keeping the ball rolling, here avoiding the bumpiness endemic to the necessary brevity of the scenes in this . . . short . . . piece. . . . [Harriet March] Page proved one of the best of the evening's actors and voices . . . in the role of Ismene . . . . Soprano Tisha C. Page sang the title role and reached moments of edifying credibility . . . . Alburger provided many enviable settings for his singers, using staggered rhythms and vocal embellishments to good dramatic effect, and his instrumental chamber ensemble supplied accurate and exciting support. With further shaping and refinement, this opera will stand handsomely in Alburger's developing showcase of talent. . . . Diana Landau's wispy, luminescent soprano was well-paired with composer [Lisa Scola Prosek]'s piano work in [*Miniature Portraits*], at times hauntingly evocative of Maurice Ravel, and McDonagh's odes to love were affecting. . . . ["Toccatà di Luna"]'s repetition of tones is meant to evoke the computer crisis encountered by a pair of astronauts. . . . The best singer and comic actor in [*Modulating Back to Tonic* is] Heather Lukens Gavin as the somewhat faded but still cute and redolent moll Violet Rose. Gavin also delivers the best of several atonal numbers, contrasting nicely with her previous showtune" [Jeff Kaliss, *Commuter Times*, 8/9/01].

West Coast premiere[!] of Philip Glass's *The Photographer*. Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium, Santa Cruz, CA. Repeated August 5.

August 4

Higdon's *Fanfare Ritmico*, Adams's *Fearful Symmetries*, and Rouse's *Violin Concerto*. Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium, Santa Cruz, CA.

Seiji Ozawa conducts the Boston Symphony Orchestra in Strauss's *Salome*, in his final performance at Tanglewood. Lenox, MA.

August 5

Sarah Cahill performs Kyle Gann's *Time Does Not Exist*, Kui Dong's *Earth, Water, Wood, Metal, and Fire*, Ursula Mamlok's *2000 Notes*, Ingram Marshall's *Authentic Presence*, and Evan Ziporyn's *Pondok*. Old First Church, San Francisco, CA.

August 7

Death of harmonica player Larry Adler (b. 2/10/14, Baltimore, MD), at age 87. London Hospital, London, United Kingdom. "He . . . had lived in Britain since the early 1950's, when he was blacklisted for his political views and his career in America effectively ended. . . . He not only introduced the 'mouth organ,' as he called it, into the concert hall, but also persuaded important composers, among them Darius Milhaud, Ralph Vaughan Williams, William Walton, Malcolm Arnold and Joaquin Rodrigo, to create works specifically for him. On three occasions, he proved that the unadorned harmonica could provide an eloquent score for an entire motion picture.

Mr. Adler and his performing partner, the tap dancer Paul Draper, were denounced as Communist sympathizers in 1948. They sued for libel but were unable to win full vindication. Mr. Adler, a celebrated star who had been earning up to \$200,000 a year, suddenly could not find employment. He departed for Britain, where he remained a star of the first rank. He earned household-name status there as much for his lively and humorous public personality as for his musicianship. . . . 'I can't understand Marx,' he said in 1971. 'Communist literature, brochures and stuff didn't mean anything to me.' But he continued to insist that imagined or even real Communists should not be deprived of their ability to earn a living, since being a Communist was not against the law. . . . [His father was] Louis Adler, a peripatetic plumber ("Adler's Plumbing Shop on Wheels") . . . His parents were both born in Russia and were brought to the United States as infants. He was fascinated by music from an early age, and sang in the neighborhood synagogue. . . . He enrolled in the Peabody School of Music . . . for piano training, but stayed only a short time. Instead of playing a Grieg waltz, as the school had expected, he made a face and pounded out, 'Yes, We Have No Bananas.' He was expelled from Peabody, he said, for being 'incorrigible, untalented and entirely lacking in ear.' (In 1985 he returned to Peabody and received an honorary degree.) . . . The harmonica, he said, 'was just a means of getting the hell away from Baltimore.' In 1928, at age 14, he said, he left home with \$7 in his pocket and headed for New York. . . . He auditioned for Borrah Minevitch and His Harmonica Rascals, which was the biggest harmonica act in show business, but was rejected. Minevitch listened carefully, looked at young Adler, and said, 'Kid, you stink.' . . . For all his increasing success, Mr. Adler played by ear and from memory after listening to phonograph records; he couldn't even read music until he was in his late 20's and well into his career. He once said that he agreed to learn only at the behest of Milhaud, who explained that unless he learned to understand what all those little notes meant, he'd never be able to perform the music that was being written for him, music that he'd never be able to hear on a phonograph record or the radio. . . . During the war he . . . entertained the troops with Jack Benny and with Ingrid Bergman, with whom he had an affair. . . . In the mid-1960's, he wrote a book called *Jokes and How to Tell Them*. Despite his efforts to bring the harmonica to the concert stage, Mr. Adler said he thought the instrument would always be grounded in cowboy songs and blues. 'I can play it for the next hundred years and it won't change that,' he said in 1984. . . . 'Resist the pressure to conform. . . . Better be a lonely individualist than a contented conformist' [Richard Severo, *The New York Times*, 8/8/01]. "Adler played with . . . George Gershwin, Paul Whiteman, Jack Benny, Django Reinhardt and, late in life, with Sting. . . . Billie Holiday once told him, 'Man, you don't play that thing -- you sing it.' At heart, Mr. Adler remained the brash teenager who caused gasps in Britain by striding up to King George V to shake his hand, rather than bowing. When Mr. Adler played at the White House, President Harry Truman accompanied 'The Missouri Waltz.' When the music ended, Adler cracked: 'You're a hell of a better president than you are a pianist.' . . . [Larry Adler] Fan clubs sprouted all over [Britain], and the composer William Walton said; 'The only two young musical geniuses in the world are Yehudi Menuhin and Larry Adler.' In 1947 Mr. Adler's earlier activity in anti-fascist groups led to a summons from the House Committee on Un-American Activities. 'My agent called me and said, 'Unless you're willing to come back to the States, make a complete public, noncommunist affidavit, and then go before the Un-American Activities Committee and name names, it's not worthwhile your coming back,' Mr. Adler said in a 1995 interview with National Public Radio. So he stayed in Britain. Mr. Adler's score for the 1953 film *Genevieve* was nominated for an Oscar, though in someone else's name. He was not acknowledged as the true composer until 31 years later" [Associated Press, 8/11/01].

*Peninsula Suite*, by Nancy Bloomer Deussen, premiered by the Sinfonia Musica, conducted by Peter Willsher. Ottawa, Canada.

Death of Donald Aird (b. 5/24/24, Provo, UT), of a heart attack, at age 77. Dulles Airport, MD. "[He was] a distinguished composer and conductor who played a major role in San Francisco Bay Area music -- particularly in the new music" [Brooke Aird].

August 10

*Debussy and His World*. Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY. Through August 19.

August 11

Harrison's *Rapunzel* and Thomson's *The River*. Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium, Santa Cruz, CA. "*Rapunzel* . . . marked one of the composer's rare (and final) forays into serialism . . . He had studied composition with Arnold Schoenberg at the University of California at Los Angeles in the 1940s before moving to New York . . . Harrison wrote *Rapunzel* in 1952-53 . . . New York heard the premiere of the complete work in 1959. The Cabrillo Music Festival, then housed down the coast at Cabrillo College, brought the opera to Northern California in 1966. . . . [It is] cast in six short acts and [runs] 55 minutes" [San Francisco Chronicle]

Tanglewood Festival presents the Boston Symphony in Wuorinen's *Machaut Mon Chou*. Lenox, MA. "[The piece] creates a compact yet grand mosaic out of sequences from . . . Machaut's *Mass*, lasting just 11 minutes" [The New York Times].

August 12

Rouse's *Rapture*, MacMillan's *Symphony No. 2*, and Rautavaara's *Angel of Light*. Mission, San Juan Bautista, CA.

Messiaen's *Turangalila Symphony*. Aspen, CO.

August 14

Oliver Knussen conducts Tanglewood musicians in Wuorinen's *The Great Procession*, Turnage's *Silent Cities*, Thomas's *Orbital Beacons*, and Lindberg's *Gran Duo*. Lenox, MA.

August 16

Mark O'Connor and Steve Mackey in *A Tribute to Stephane Grappelli*. La Jolla, CA.

August 17

Death of Henry Onderdonk, while backpacking, at age 73. Sierra Nevada, CA. "He graduated from Princeton University and later taught composition and theory at the University of Michigan, where he earned a graduate degree. He came to the Bay Area in 1960 to begin what would become a 34-year career as composer and professor of music at San Francisco State University. . . . His works include *Sonata for Two Pianos*, *Music for Viola and Piano*, *A Moment of Decision*, and *Two Songs*, settings of poems by Emily Dickinson and Edna St. Vincent Millay" [Kelly St. John, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 8/30/01].

Christopher Rouse's *Concerto per Corde*. Aspen, CO.

August 19

Death of Morris Golde (4/4/20, New York, NY), at age 81. "[He] supported organizations like the Erick Hawkins Dance Foundation and *The New York Festival of Song*. . . . Among the close friends to whom he gave support at various times were the composer Ned Rorem (whose early romantic relationship with Mr. Golde is recounted in Mr. Rorem's 1994 memoir, *Knowing When to Stop*), the poet John Ashbery, the dancer Erick Hawkins, the composer Virgil Thomson and the poet Frank O'Hara. In 1966, O'Hara was staying at Mr. Morris's summer house on Fire Island, along with Thomson and another friend, J.J. Mitchell, when he was run over by a beach buggy and killed. Perpetually cheerful and energetic, Mr. Golde was a loyal supporter of arts schools, including Juilliard, the Harlem School of the Arts and the Greenwich House Music School . . . . Golde (pronounced Goldie) studied clarinet as a child, was a champion at music memory contests in his public school and became a self-described 'art song junkie'" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 8/22/01].

Górecki's *Symphony No. 3* and Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. Aspen, CO.

August 23

Locrian Chamber Players in Neal Kirkwood's *Five Variations Without a Theme* (performed by the composer), György Ligeti's *Sonata for Solo Viola*, Jo Kondo's *Three Songs of the Elderberry Tree* and *Short Summer Dance*, and David MacBride's *Timing*. Riverside Church, New York, NY. "The Locrian Chamber Players . . . has just one operating principle: to perform music written only within the last 10 years. . . . [The *Variations* are] steeped in the 12-tone idiom, though not in any strict way. . . . By choice, the ensemble does not provide program notes. . . . The first movement [of the Ligeti] starts with an earthy folkloric melody, rather like the tunes Bartók discovered . . . . The vivacious 'Loop' movement should be played 'with swing,' in the composer's words. But swing here means something jerky and dangerous, not jazzy. There is a brusque lament and a harmonically pungent final 'Chaconne chromatique.' . . . The Tokyo-born . . . Jo Kondo was associated with John Cage during the 1970's, and his *Three Songs of the Elderberry Tree* for violin (Katie Lansdale) and percussion (William Trigg) had a Cage-like quality, with its meandering, microtonal melodies against a delicate backdrop for bell sound and tapped drums. . . . *Short Summer Dance* for piano was far more inventive: restless, astringently atonal, yet wispy and gentle music . . . . *Timing*, for two percussionists, [was] introduced by its soft-spoken composer . . . . The work was inspired . . . by listening to his baby's heartbeat in utero (about 150 beats a minute) alongside his wife's (about half that). . . . MacBride adds a kitchen timer, ticking away . . . . The beguiling music alternates soft rumblings on the drums, played with bare hands and fingers, with pummeled outbursts produced by sticks, and a wondrously delicate myriad of sounds from tin plates, glass dishes and rattles. After the final flourish on the drums, the fine percussionists, Evan Hause and Mr. Trigg, held their arms frozen in place as everyone waited for the timer to run out. 'Clink' went the bell and the piece was over. You wanted to hear the work again. But don't count on the Locrian Chamber Players to reprogram it. *Timing* was composed in 1991, so it just sneaked in under the ensemble's 10-year-cutoff policy" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 8/27/01].

August 25

Death of singer Aaliyah [Haughton] (b. 1/16/79) New York, NY), in a plane crash during takeoff, at age 22. Abaco Island, The Bahamas. "Her mother, Diane, was a singer, and her uncle, Barry Hankerson, was an entertainment manager who was once married to Gladys Knight" [Associated Press, 8/27/01]. "She began singing as a child and performed with Gladys Knight when she was 11. . . . Aaliyah was 14 when she made her first album . . . . It sold a million copies . . . . Her third album, Aaliyah, was released in July and reached No. 2 on the Billboard 200 album chart" [Jon Pareles, *The New York Times*, 8/27/01].

August 26

Doug Carroll and The Left Coast Improv Group. Musicians Union Hall, San Francisco, CA.

Death of Alix Williamson (b. 4/6/16, New York, NY), at age 85. New York, NY. "[She was a] classical music publicist who helped promote and shape the career of legendary musicians from Lotte Lehmann to the Trapp Family Singers. . . . Williamson built brand names for many artists and organizations, from André Watts and Frederica von Stade at the start of their careers to Richard Tucker at the end of his. . . . It was she who suggested to the Baroness Maria von Trapp that she write a book about her family's experiences. The resulting book inspired the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *The Sound of Music*. She also acted as impresario for the Juilliard String Quartet and the Waverly Consort in their Alice Tully Hall series" [Anne Midgette, *The New York Times*, 8/31/01].

August 29

Mark Adamo's *Little Women*. PBS. "Adamo's music is disappointing, lacking a clear sense of compositional voice. Scored for a cast of 11, an orchestra of 18 and an off-stage chorus, the music seems almost calculated not to rattle. . . . [It's rare that] Adamo allows his music to be strange. Over all, there is a forced quality to the modern touches, as if Mr. Adamo had wanted to make sure his opera would pass muster in contemporary music circles" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 8/29/01]. "Adamo's harmonic and melodic palettes are those of a dozen American predecessors, going back to the earlier efforts of Carlisle Floyd, Lee Hoiby and others" [Joshua Kosman, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 8/29/01].

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