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Glass on the Brink

MARK ALBURGER

I had a great interest in science, and Einstein in particular. And I did chess. I was superficially kind of a smart kid, in a way [Philip Glass in Doerschuk, 67].

Philip Glass was born on January 31, 1937, in Baltimore, Maryland. His grandparents were Russian Orthodox Jewish immigrants, his uncle played vaudeville, and his father was a second cousin to Al Jolson. Glass's earliest memory of classical music, at age four or five, was of the Schubert E-flat Piano Trio.

Glass began violin at age six and flute at eight, studying the latter with Briton Johnson at Peabody Conservatory from 1947 to 1952. He worked in his father's record store, General Radio, intermittently from the age of twelve, and began familiarizing himself with the repertory.

My father . . . had a certain liking for certain kinds of modern music. Bartók and Shostakovich. I don't know why. He wasn't really a musically educated person. He used to run a music store though and he would bring home the records he couldn't sell, which turned out to be very good music [Philip Glass in Stefanac].

Glass learned to play piano by listening to his older brother and sister taking their lessons and imitating them. He took harmony and composition with Louis Cheslock, and produced a twelve-tone string trio at fifteen. Other works reflected the influence of Ives and serialism. His work habits, however, were and are entirely Stravinskian.

In my student days I knew a lot of composers, many of them more talented than myself. But I learned one thing most of them did not: good work habits. When I was still a teenager, I forced myself to write music during a set period every morning, and I also forced myself to stop at one in the afternoon. I refused to take down musical ideas at other hours, even when they came to me. You might say I trained the Muse to come calling at my hours, not hers. And it worked. For years now, I have gotten my ideas in the mornings and never in the afternoons [Glass, *Music* xv].

Glass enrolled at the University of Chicago at a prodigious fifteen -- playing the piano, wrestling as a featherweight, and graduating in 1956 at nineteen with a double major in philosophy and mathematics. Given his later role in music, neither major is a surprise. He put serialism behind him at this time.

The failure of modernism in music is clear. Modern music had become truly decadent, stagnant, uncommunicative by the 1960s and 70s. Composers were writing for each other and the public didn't seem to care. People want to like new music, but how can they, when it's so ugly and intimidating, emotionally and intellectually? [Coe, 70]

The young conservative, or radical -- depending on the viewpoint -- entered Juilliard in 1957. There he composed in the populist spirit of Copland and early Elliot Carter, whom he particularly sought to emulate. Classmates included Peter Schickele, of later P.D.Q. Bach fame, and Arthur Murphy, who would subsequently play in both Steve Reich and Musicians, and The Philip Glass Ensemble.

Glass met classmate, drummer, and future fellow minimalist Reich in 1958. The parallels are uncanny. Two precocious Jews who majored in philosophy and found their way to Juilliard. It is no wonder they became fast friends.

And adversaries.

In the 1950s, when I was a music student, I dutifully studied the standards of the opera repertory, and I made regular visits to the old Metropolitan Opera House on Broadway at 39th Street where, for fifty cents, one could use a score desk near the top of the house. You could hear the operas perfectly from up there, but you could see them only by stretching forward and peering straight down, a posture not only uncomfortable but positively life-threatening. From this extreme perspective I heard -- and, in a fashion, "saw" -- any number of the old war-horses as well as the extremely modern (or what seemed modern in those days) *Wozzeck* [Glass, *Music* 3].

Glass earned the Bachelor of Arts in Composition from Juilliard in 1959, and continued immediately on for his Master's. He found himself going less to the opera and more to the clubs and lofts.

I suppose I had been a good student at Juilliard, though there were certainly more obviously gifted people around than myself. I had two very good teachers there -- Vincent Persichetti and William Bergsma [who also taught Steve Reich during those same years] -- both accomplished and well-known composers. My five years there had been highly productive. I had written a great deal of music (over seventy works), all of which had been performed. . . .a number of these had been published by Elkan-Vogel (now part of Theodore Presser) [and Novello] [Glass, *Music* 14]

During his Juilliard years, Glass often took in John Coltrane sessions at the Village Vanguard.

When everyone else in the band took a break, sometimes he would just stay there on the stage, playing repetitive scales over and over, and when they came back he'd still be there playing [Glass, *Music* 14].

In May 19 or 20, 1961, Glass attended a performance at Yoko Ono's loft at 112 Chambers Street, one of the series of concerts organized by Young from December 1960 to January 1962.

Glass heard Young's *Composition 1960 #10* ("Draw a straight line and follow it") and *Compositions 1961*.

[Young] wasn't playing music, he was just drawing a line. I thought it was amazing that anybody would do it. That was very avant-garde to me at the age of twenty-three. I was shocked by it and I remembered it [Glass in Strickland, 203-204].

Glass received a diploma and the Master of Arts in Composition from Juilliard in 1961. Reich also left the school at this time, degreeless, to pursue a Master's at Mills with Milhaud. Glass had metaphorically been there, done that -- having studied with the French neoclassicist the year before in Aspen.

I wrote a Violin Concerto that summer -- I spent only one summer with [Milhaud] -- and played it through on the piano. I remember him looking at the last movement of it for a while, and then with his finger he traced a line in the woodwind section and said, "You missed this line." He just traced a melody with his finger; that's something a composer would do. That he could hear and see things like that was very impressive.

You learn different things from composers; mainly, you learn tricks [Glass in Gagne, 210].

Glass followed Juilliard with a Ford Foundation Composer-in-Residency in the Pittsburgh public schools from 1961 to 1963, where he was commissioned to write works published through the Contemporary Music Project. Among these were marches for school bands, a six-minute *Convention Overture* for community orchestra, a ten-minute *String Quartet* (1963) ("moderately difficult" for high schoolers, with a hint of repetition). Of note is the disparity in Glass's recollection of his the number and place of composition of early works when compared to previous comments.

I wrote maybe twenty pieces for that project, and about fifty others when I was at Juilliard. So there are some seventy to eighty pieces that I wrote between 1957 and 1965. I don't think that any of those pieces interest me at all at this point [Glass in Gagne, 210],

Among these "uninteresting" pieces: *Fantasy and Serenade* for solo flute, *Divertimento for Flute, Clarinet, and Bassoon*, *Diversions for Two Flutes and Bass Trombone*, *Brass Sextet*, string quartets, two *Ariosos* for string orchestra, *Essay for Orchestra*, and a capella choral settings on texts by Sandburg and Whitman.

More interesting to Glass at this time was his increasing familiarity with the writings of John Cage.

[Cage] has been a great teacher . . . his influence has been immense to me. . . . He created a different idea of aesthetics, really different [Philip Glass in Suzuki, 83].

Silence was a very formative book for me. I got a hold of it I think in 1962. . . . It was a kind of . . . a declaration of independence that affected everyone. I don't know anyone that was unaffected by it, even the ones that may not like his music. . . .

[He] was an active performing musician of a radically new work, and committed to that and not to teaching or any other kind of support system. . . . So there's a kind of lifestyle involved.

But, apart from that, the very thing John did was he kind of gave everyone permission to do what they want in a way. To throw over the European or traditional models, and to begin in a very empty kind of space. . .

He has always been the youngest of the avant-garde. He still remains that way. My music doesn't sound like him at all. I think he has many children in the arts and he may not always recognize them, but they can recognize him [Philip Glass in Furlong, side 2].

I admired [Cage's] ability to stand on his own feet. . . . You know there is this maverick tradition in America that's very strong. It's in Ives, Ruggles, Cage, Partch, Moondog, all of these weird guys. That's my tradition [Philip Glass in Rockwell, 119].

It was Vincent Persichetti . . . who got me involved with publishing In fact, in my last two years at Juilliard, as I was writing pieces for him, some of them would go right to the publisher. That was very flattering for someone of 23 or 24, and he meant it in a good way. Little did I know that those pieces would be, if not embarrassing, certainly non-representative. If I could get those pieces back from the publisher, I would. The best thing for me to say is that those were written by somebody else. I don't think it's worth anybody's time to bother with them [Philip Glass in Gagne, 210].

Brass Sextet, scored for two trumpets, two French horns, trombone, and tuba, was published by Novello in 1966. The work shows the influence of neoclassicism and popular music in tonal cadential progressions, careful voice-leading, major/minor alternations, and juxtapositions of unusually related chords. The Sextet is just adventuresome enough to be interesting -- radical only in its refusal to bend to the strong winds of post-serialism and aleatory. The cadential harmony of the first movement and the insistent drive of the third hint at things to come. Several rhythmic figures carry over into Glass's later work, such as the pattern of dotted quarter / dotted quarter / quarter, and the succession of four eighth notes with the last tied over in syncopation to the following beat.

During the period that I studied with her, I didn't show her any of my music; I wasn't interested in her comments on my music at that point. When I first went to study with her, I showed her a number of those earlier pieces that I did; I went there with a pile of music, and she went through fifteen or twenty pieces, examining them quickly but thoroughly, which was her way. She pointed to one measure and said, "This was written by a composer." That was the only nice thing that she said to me -- for the whole time!

I don't think that I could be writing the music that I'm writing now if I hadn't studied with her -- I'm sure of that. I didn't have the competence or confidence in my technique when I came to her that I had when I left. I just know that the music that I'm writing now couldn't have been written without the years that I spent with her [Philip Glass in Gagne, 210].

A Fulbright scholarship enabled Glass to study with Nadia Boulanger at Fontainebleau from 1963-1965. Boulanger's insistence on a solid grounding in fundamentals ironically dovetails with the insistent repetition of Glass's mature work. They both liked scales, arpeggios, and simple progressions. And she also, like our young Turk, had no use for the serialists.

The almost palpable distaste rubbed off. While former generations of American composers had found Paris alive with music, Glass found the city,

a quiet backwater . . . where nothing much was happening. . . . There was the Domaine Musicale run by Boulez . . . a wasteland, dominated by these maniacs, these creeps, who were trying to make everyone write this crazy creepy music.

I couldn't imagine writing that type of music so I had to find another way [Glass, *Music* 14].

While Glass's nausea *sartre* tempered over the years, at the time he must have felt there was no exit from this elliotland. Then he made a dramatic discovery.

Much more important than the Parisian "usual avant-garde gamut" was Glass's connection to contemporary theatre. As it turns out, he was a theatre composer before he was a theatre composer, and particularly drawn to Beckett, whose works he would incidentalize no less than five times in the course of his career: *Music for Play*, *The Lost Ones*, *Cascando*, *Mercier and Camier*, and *Endgame*. None is well known. To the public, all of these are "Lost Ones." For Genet, Glass would return to *The Screens* in 1992 with a multicultural vengeance.

What has always stirred me is theater that challenges one's ideas of society, one's notions of order. . . . Jean-Louis Barrault's Théâtre Odéon in Paris regularly presented new works by Beckett and Genet, and I particularly remember a stunning production of Genet's *The Screens*, directed by Roger Blin. Also, I saw the unforgettable Madeleine Renaud playing the Woman in what may have been one of the very first productions of Beckett's *Happy Days* [Glass, *Music* 4]

Working as an extra in films led Glass to a project of transcribing Indian music into Western notation with Ravi Shankar and Alla Rakha for Conrad Rook's "archetypical sixties acid-head hippie" film *Chappaqua*, which featured beat luminaries Allen Ginsberg, Peter Orlovsky, and William Burroughs.

There also would be a little conducting to do, plus translating English into French when necessary. I got the job, though at the time I knew scarcely a note of non-Western music . . .

There we were with the musicians sitting around waiting for me to notate the music to be recorded. This was never done in advance, no matter how much I pleaded with Ravi to meet ahead of time so I could prepare the instrumental parts before the musicians arrived. He was quite happy to meet early but he never used the time for writing. Instead, there was tea, discussion about music tuning his sitar and the tambura . . . Finally, when the musicians had arrived, Ravi would begin. He would sing the music to me, and I would write it down, part by part [Glass, *Music* 17].

Shankar recalls,

From the very first moment I saw such interest from him . . . and he started asking me questions about ragas and talas and started writing down the whole score, and for the seven days he asked me so many questions. And seeing how interested he was I told him everything I could in that short time [Ravi Shankar in Perlich].

These sessions with Shankar and Rakha led to Glass's personal discovery of "additive," as opposed to "divisive," rhythms.

No matter how I tried to notate the music, they kept shaking their heads. Out of sheer desperation, I just eliminated the bar lines altogether -- which, of course, revealed the fact that Indians don't divide music, the way Western theory says it must be done. Instead, they add to it. That was the closest I'll ever get to a moment when the creative light suddenly kicks on [Philip Glass in Walsh, 72].

Delighted, I exclaimed to Alla Rakha: "All the notes are equal!" He rewarded me with an ear-to-ear smile.

I saw then what any first-year student in a world music course (which did not exist in 1966) would have learned [Glass, *Music* 18].

[Indian musicians] form rhythmic structures out of an additive process. We divide, they add. Then there's a cyclical process, where you have something that lasts maybe thirty-five beats and then begins the cycle again. Then you join cycles of different beats, like wheels inside wheels, everything going at the same time and always changing [Philip Glass in Dura].

Good creativity, bad ethnomusicology -- which Glass grew to recognize in later years. But misinterpretations are often a path to new ideas.

Ravi didn't tell me anything. I just saw how his music worked and I saw that rhythmic structure was the basis of that music, or at least the way I perceived it which is only part of the way that music is organized [Philip Glass in Suzuki, 246].

During these years of study, Glass traveled to North Africa on several occasions, following the unknown lead of Terry Riley.

It was easy to hitchhike down from Paris [to listen to] all the strings playing in unison in three octaves in African orchestras [Philip Glass in Annalyn Swan, *Time* (1978), in Strickland, 208].

Non-Western culture. The Theatre. Non-Western Theatre. It was a natural transition. Perhaps North Africa and Genet kept scrambling about until the 90s take on *The Screens* was produced with Foday Musa Suso. Perhaps.

Meanwhile on the Western civilization front, Glass served as the resident composer the expatriate avant-garde troupe which would later be christened Mabou Mines. Perhaps overdoing his commitment to drama, he married performer / co-director JoAnne Akalaitis. Their relationship over the next several decades was always artistically profitable, if not maritable.

I began working with the Mabou Mines in Paris, with a seminal group of people: Lee Breuer, Ruth Maleczech, David Warilow, and JoAnne Akalaitis. My early work grew out of my association with the theatre; very static and repetitive pieces that I did for Beckett plays [Glass in Gagne, 215].

The Lost Ones...

[*Music for Ensemble and Two Speakers*] is transitional piece. . . . I don't have that score anymore either. Jack [Kripl] played in that piece. It was a five-movement piece. Two of the movements were based on this idea of a repetitive, polymetric, simple, tonal music. Three of the other movements weren't at all like that. So that's purely a transitional piece. If we could ever find that music, you could see it actually happening in one score, going from one style to another.

The other style was very dodecaphonic almost random. It doesn't sound like my music now. In a way, that piece was a turning point. I could have gone one way or I could have gone the other. The next piece I wrote was the theatre piece [*Music for "Play"*] and I definitely took that direction [Philip Glass in Suzuki, 525].

Music for Ensemble and Two Speakers, a.k.a. *Music for Woodwind Quartet and Two Actresses*, featured a soufflé recipe intoned by JoAnne Akalaitis and Ruth Maleczech, foreshadowing the quixotic Einstein on the Beach texts. The verbal component was an add-on rather than integral, as in *Einstein*. Also dating from this time is the similarly confusingly alternately named *Music for a Small Ensemble* or *Piece for Chamber Orchestra*. Neither manuscript is possessed by the composer. The published *Music for "Play"* is no less problematic.

I can't remember if I met Ravi before I wrote *Play* or after I wrote *Play*. It seems to me it must have been at the same time, because he was the person who taught me about rhythmic structure. I don't believe I could have had such a rigorous approach to it until I had met him. I think it was during that period. . . .

The piece I was writing was just about the same time. I can't place it more accurately than that. I would say it was the spring of '65. Before that, there was nothing in my music that was like that. In fact I had practically stopped writing. Along about February or March I met Ravi, this play came up, and the next thing I knew I was writing that music and I just started completely new again [Glass in Suzuki, 525].

It is curious that *Music for "Play"*, not only Glass's first Beckettian effort, but a landmark of style, cannot be better placed in time with regard to Shankar and the other 1965 works. It is scored for two soprano saxophones,

a result of asking Jack Kripl, who later played for years in the Philip Glass Ensemble, what instrument he had on hand ("I've got a soprano saxophone," he said. "Great!, I said.") [Strickland, 205].

Play was the thing for "a group that would become known in a few years as" Mabou Mines (one wonders how the marquee read), directed by Lee Breuer, who had worked with Riley and Reich at the San Francisco Tape Music Center (one wonders, Watergateianly, how much he knew, and when he knew it). The minimalist conscience for a royal presentation.

JoAnne Akalaitis, Ruth Maleczek, and David Warrilow were the actors, Lee Breuer [who had worked at the San Francisco Tape Music Center] directed, and I wrote the music, a series of five or six short pieces separated by equal lengths of silence.

The music for *Play* . . . was simply two superimposed patterns of two notes each. Working with Jack Kripl on soprano saxophone, we recorded a piece that lasted the one-hour length of the play, forming a mosaic background to the whole. In terms of the music alone, it was the first of the highly reductive and repetitive pieces that occupied me for years afterward, and it set the direction which eventually led to the ensemble music just three years in the future [Glass, 35-36].

Jack only played two notes on one part and [I played] two notes on another part. Then you made a change, then [there] was a different selection of notes. So at any one moment, you're only hearing four pitches. . . . There were something like seven or eight modules, and each module played for about twenty seconds and I believe there was a ten second silence [Philip Glass in Suzuki, 547].

The score included 10 20-second phrases based on repeated musical figures for two instruments, each phrase separated by 20 seconds of silence [Coe].

In 1992 [Glass] described the work as "a conceptual piece based on a very reductive, repetitive pattern" but could remember neither the notes nor pattern. When [Edward Strickland] tried singing a pattern, Glass obligingly allowed, "It might be those notes!" [Strickland, 205].

As theatre music, *Play* had an equally crucial effect on my thinking. I found, during my many viewings, that I experienced the work differently on almost every occasion. Specifically, I noticed that the emotional quickening (or epiphany) of the work seemed to occur in a different place in each performance. . . .

A simpler way to say it is that Beckett's *Play* doesn't exist separately from its relationship to the viewer, who is included as part of the play's content. This is the mechanism we mean when we say the audience "completes" the work [Glass, *Music*, 35-36].

. . . these early pieces -- the music for Beckett's *Play* and a few chamber works -- aroused an intense resistance on the part of the musicians around me. I was beginning to work in a reductive, repetitive style that made most of the musicians who encountered it very angry. They wanted nothing to do with it.

And no wonder. Here, with *Play*, for instance, was a piece of music based on two lines, each played by soprano saxophone, having only two notes so that each line represented an alternating, pulsing interval. When combined, these two intervals (they were written in two different repeating rhythms) formed a shifting pattern of sounds that stayed within the four pitches of the two intervals. The result was a very static piece that was still full of rhythmic variety.

. . . I realized . . . that if my new music was to be played, I would have to play it myself [Glass, *Music* 18-19].

I would show [the music] to people and they would say, "you can't do this," or they would laugh, or whatever. . . . There was actually a lot of just out and out rejection. I was actually very surprised at first [Glass, *Glassworks*].

. . . I was unprepared for that. It seemed to me that the music was so simple, so transparent, what was there to be angry about? Of course, that was precisely what there was to be angry about. I had, perhaps without intending it -- although that's really hard to know -- challenged so many precepts of the modernist tradition at that point. In fact, you could have almost defined my music in terms of polarities: If Stockhausen jumped all over the place, my music stayed in a very limited range; if his music changed pitches with every note, my music stayed the same; if he never repeated anything, I repeated all the time. I didn't go about inventing a language in those terms, but looking back on it, it looked as if I was dealing with polarities. In fact, I wasn't thinking about that at all. I was just trying to write some music, and it came out that way -- for a variety of reasons, partially having to do with my discontent with contemporary music at the time.

For me, what sets the music apart is the fact that it's non-narrative; and because it is non-narrative, we don't hear it within the usual time frame of most musical experiences. As I look at most other music, I see that it takes ordinary time, day-to-day time -- what I call colloquial time -- as a model for its own musical time. . . .

When music doesn't deal with subjects and treatments, as in my music, which is often a process where the musical material and its evolution becomes part and parcel of the structure of the music, then you don't have the psychological access to the music that I described earlier [Philip Glass in Gagne, 213-214].

The music is placed outside the usual time-scale substituting a non-narrative and extended time-sense, in its place. . . . When it becomes apparent that nothing "happens" in the usual sense, but that, instead, a gradual accretion of musical material can and does serve as the basis of the listener's attention, then he can perhaps discover another mode of listening -- one in which neither memory nor anticipation (the usual psychological devices of programmatic music whether Baroque, Classical, Romantic, or Modernistic) have a place in sustaining the texture, quality, or reality of the musical experience [Philip Glass in Mertens, 79].

Memories conflict above as to the very nature of the play of *Play* -- again puzzling. In any case, memory and anticipation, as in all music, remain in Glass's personal style, with patterns constantly relating back to what has been heard, and forward to future possibilities. Interesting ideas, nevertheless.

This music is not characterized by argument and development. It has disposed of traditional concepts that were closely linked to real time, to clock-time. Music is not a literal interpretation of life and the experience of time is different. It does not deal with events in a clear directional structure. In fact there is not structure at all. . . . Music no longer has a mediative function, referring to something outside itself, but it rather embodies itself without any mediation. . . . Music must be listened to as a pure sound-event, an act without any dramatic structure [Philip Glass in Mertens, 79].

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Concert Reviews

Kronos Quartet Riley Reich

MARK ALBURGER

West Coast premiere of Reich's *Triple Quartet*, San Francisco premiere of Golijov's *The Dreams and Prayers of Isaac the Blind*, U.S. premiere of Riley's *Requiem for Adam*, and the world premiere of Kalhor's *Gallop of a Thousand Horses*, performed by the Kronos Quartet, clarinetist David Krakauer, and kamancheh player Kayhan Kalhor. Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Theater, San Francisco, CA. September 24, 1999, Repeated September 25.

Count on the Kronos Quartet to assemble a world-class concert of new music, and count they did through the tricky gyrations of Steve Reich's new *Triple Quartet*, which along the lines of his earlier *Counterpoint* pieces, is scored for live and taped performers. As in *Different Trains*, these pre-recorded performers are the Kronos players themselves, and again as in the earlier work, the level of dissonance is ramped up for striking results.

Also striking and poignant were Terry Riley's *Requiem for Adam*, a large three-movement work that was far beyond the bounds of strict minimalism, and Kayhan Kalhor's *Gallop of a Thousand Horses*, with the composer on kamancheh and Ziya Tabassian on tombak. Rounding out the program was Osvaldo Golijov's *The Dreams and Prayers of Isaac the Blind*, with David Krakauer, which continues to please at any hearing.

Society Notes

MARK ALBURGER

Forty-Second College Music Society Annual Meeting. Bun-Ching Lam's *After Spring*, Tower's *Stepping Stones*, Tailleferre's *Jeux de plein*, H. Smith's *Mirrors: Rondo Variations I and II*, Leisner's *Dances in the Madhouse*, D. Moore's *Into All Crevices of My World*, and Thow's *To Invoke the Clouds*. October 14, 1999, Hyatt Regency, Denver, CO. Conference through October 17.

Forty-Second College Music Society Annual Meeting. *The Music of Henry Cowell and George Crumb*, Poulenc's "Portraits -- *Les Soirées de Nazelles*," and *The Piano Music of Carlos Chavez* (Max Lifchitz). October 15, 1999, Hyatt Regency, Denver, CO.

Forty-Second College Music Society Annual Meeting. *The Wild West in Music*, *The CMS Robert Trotter Lecture by Bruno Nettle*, *The Operas of William Grant Still*, Reynold Weidenaar's *Magic Music from the Telharmonium*, and *Festival of Balinese Music and Dance*. October 16, 1999, Hyatt Regency, Denver, CO.

Wild West and Wild Music were a good match at the Forty-Second College Music Society Annual Meeting. held at the Hyatt Regency in Denver, from October 14-17, 1999. And like this intriguing city in a gorgeous setting, there was plenty of evolving refinement as well.

Among the standouts were John Thow's *To Invoke the Clouds*, with baroque flutist Karen Haid; Reza Vali's *Folk Songs (Set No. 11B)*, from the Lamont Graduate String Quartet; and presentations on the music of Henry Cowell and George Crumb, given respectively by John Wickelgren (String-Piano Music), Jeffrey Jacob (*Gnomic Variations*), and Anne Z. Turner and Richard Hihn (*Apparition*). David Stock was the organizing force behind a very satisfying concert on October 14.

Other notable presentations included those from renowned ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettle, and intriguing lectures on the operas of William Grant Still and the Telharmonium, the latter by Reynold Weidenaar. The crowning event was a Festival of Balinese Music and Dance presented by the Lamont School of Music. The sounds continue to ring in the ears.

Kronos Dracula

BRIANA TAYLOR

Kronos Quartet performs Philip Glass's *Dracula*. October 29, 1999, Zellerbach Hall, Berkeley, CA.

Philip Glass's score to the classic *Dracula* film goes along the lines of his bait-and-switch *La Belle et La Bete* -- keep the movie but jettison the music. But unlike his operas such as *Belle*, the composer's string quartet seem to rarely break new ground.

This one takes many of the Glassian standard operating procedures through their paces yet again. Arpeggios, intervallic oscillations, repeated note pulsations, scales -- if you haven't heard them before, they may be a revelation, but hearers hoping for something new, they would do well to listen elsewhere. Or to simply go back to other Glass essays, such as *The Thin Blue Line*, which is evoked on several occasions.

The Kronos Quartet gave the music its due, however, and the performances were first-rate.

A Year with NACUSA

PHILLIP GEORGE

NACUSA Concert. Ilana Cotton's *Playthings*, Brian Holmes's *Six Lullabies*, John Beeman's *Crystal Nocturne*, Sondra Clark's *Mastiffo's Aria*, Mark Alburger's *Andante cantabile* from *Symphony No. 1* ("It Wasn't Classical..."), Paul M. Stouffer's *Phizzog*, Owen J. Lee's *Credo*, Bruce Hamill's *The Long Goodbye*, and Nancy Bloomer Deussen's *Rondo*. October 30, 1999, Art Center, Palo Alto, CA.

NACUSA Concert. *Composers Can Play, Too*. Jo Anne Carey's *La Soledad*, Carolyn Hawley's *The Chase*, John Beeman's *Dear Composer*, Ilana Cotton's *Improvisation*, Sondra Clark's *More Odd Meters*, Mark Alburger's *Quadruple Concerto ("Metal")*, and Nancy Bloomer Deussen's *The World Is a Butterfly's Wing*. March 4, 2000, Art Center, Palo Alto, CA.

NACUSA Concert. Michael Kimbell's *Woodwind Quintet*, Nancy Bloomer Deussen's *One of Nature's Majesties*, Carolyn Hawley's *Sheep Trio*, Brian Holmes's *Pu-Gesänge*, Ilana Cotton's *The Light of Darkness*, Daniel Simpson's *Toad Pizza*, and Mark Alburger's *Adagio: Allegro molto e vivace ("Casino")*. June 10, 2000, Art Center, Palo Alto, CA.

Taking in a year's worth of National Association of Composers, San Francisco, one certainly notes commonalities of personalities. So let's take a look at featured artists over the course of concerts presented on October 30, 1999, and May 4 and June 10, 2000 at the Palo Alto Art Center.

Mark Alburger cropped up on all three concerts, twice with chamber music excerpts from his *Symphony No. 1* and once with a *Quadruple Concerto ("Metal")*, in all manifesting his characteristic troping behavior on pre-existent music, by Ludwig van Beethoven and Igor Stravinsky in these cases, to diverting effect. Also exhibiting a remarkable consistency of musical thought was Nancy Bloomer Deussen in *Rondo*, *The World Is a Butterfly's Wing*, and *One of Nature's Majesties* -- the middle selection's gentle beauty setting up an interesting cognitive dissonance with poet Allen Cohen's visions.

John Beeman came to the fore in the two earlier concerts in strikingly different lights. His *Crystal Nocturne* was every delicacy that the words would suggest. By contrast, *Dear Composer* was an irreverent, witty take on the foibles of creative advancement, a three-part contrapuntal vocal (think the autistic discourses of Philip Glass's *Einstein on the Beach* or Harry Partch's sardonic *Barstow*) backed by quirky swing.

Another composer with surprises was Michael Kimbell, whose atonal *Woodwind Quartet* was decidedly different than his previous tonal offerings. Also surprising was Ilana Cotton, who takes a modal, improvisational aesthetic to a variety of arenas, as manifested in her *Playthings*, *Improvisation*, and *The Light of Darkness*.

Other voices were striking as well, including Brian Holmes's witty neoclassicism in *Six Lullabies and Pu-Gesänge*, and Sondra Clark's similarly sparkly *Mastiffo's Aria* and *More Odd Meters*. Humor and excellence were also evident in Carolyn Hawley's quirky *Sheep Trio* and *The Chase*.

The year's sound spectacular was rounded out by Jo Anne Carey (*La Soledad*), Paul M. Stouffer (*Phizzog*), Bruce Hamill (*The Long Goodbye*), Daniel Simpson (*Toad Pizza*), and Owen Lee, the latter's *Credo* a beautiful exercise in balance and proportion.

Two ACF Salons

PHILLIP GEORGE

American Composers Forum Salon. with Laurie Amat, Matthew Burtner, Jim McManus, Katie Wreede, and Richard Burg. November 6, 1999, Berkeley, CA.

American Composers Forum Salon. Mark Alburger's *Sidewalks of New York: Henry Miller in Brooklyn* (libretto by Mel Clay), Nicole Sumner's *Out of the Blue* and *The Rock's Lullaby* (to texts of Anca Hariton), and Peter Bellinger's *Blessings and Meditations* (texts by Marcia Falk). December 5, 1999, Noe Valley Ministry, San Francisco, CA.

As with the National Association of Composers concerts above, there were certain commonalities in the two American Composers Forum concerts of November 6 and December 5, 1999. There was that Mark Alburger again. But even more so was that splendid singer Laurie Amat, who was featured in her own amazing improvisations on November 6 in Berkeley and in Alburger's *Sidewalks of New York: Henry Miller in Brooklyn* (words by Mel Clay) on December 5 in San Francisco.

Amat was joined on December 5 by solid work from an all-star instrumentalist-composer line up of flutist Diana Tucker, clarinetist Andrew Shapiro, and pianist Erling Wold. They made the music shine.

The ruminating Jim McManus and crystal-clear Katie Wreede were heard in fine chamber music on November 6, along with expert contributions from Matthew Burtner and Richard Burg. December 5 also was graced by the artistry of Nicole Sumner (*Out of the Blue* and *The Rock's Lullaby*), supplemented by Peter Bellinger's lovely *Blessings and Meditations*. All works on the second concert were grant-winners from the ACF's composer-writer project.

All in the Same Boat

BRIANA TAYLOR

Judith Blankman and Marilyn Hudson's *Reclaiming the Ground Note: Echoes from Broken Vessels* and Mark Alburger's *Blue Boat*. November 11, 1999, Crucible Steel Gallery, San Francisco, CA.

Sometimes art is therapy, and that certainly was the case with Marilyn Hudson's *Reclaiming the Ground Note: Echoes from Broken Vessels*, experienced on November 11, 1999, at the Crucible Steel Gallery in San Francisco.

"Experienced" was the word, as this was a visual as well as sonic thrill. Composer Hudson teamed up with artist Judith Blankman in creating, in a rather free Harry Partchian tradition, an assemblage of musical boats, first seen at the Marin Civic Center (San Rafael) several months previously.

These boat hulls became nothing less than giant resonators: large instrument bodies strung with thick piano wires -- theoroboats, if you will....

Reliable pitch was out of the question as the old dingies were full of give-and-take, but that hardly mattered, since the improvisational music created was more about rhythm and texture than discrete frequencies.

A large chart-score on the wall provided improvisers and audience alike with the sonic plan. The gallery was packed with new-art and new-music aficionados, and the energy was palpable -- putting to shame many more standard venues. The extra-musical subtext was also striking. Suffice it to say that the creators are experienced in many ways.

The program opened with Mark Alburger's audience-participation *Blue Boat*, where the audience was divided into four groups of contrapuntal shouters, augmented by the music of the boat people. A good time was had by all.

Stanford Symphony Glass

MARK ALBURGER

Stanford Symphony Orchestra in the West Coast premiere of Glass's *Songs of Milarepa*. November 19, 1999, Stanford University, CA.

Despite the "minimalist" label, no one can accuse Philip Glass of not thinking big. From his massive *Music in Twelve Parts* and *Einstein on the Beach*, to the relatedly ambitious *Symphony No. 5*, this is one composer who is not afraid of a big palette and a big picture.

So it is with the *Songs of Milarepa* (1997), which seems like a warm-up to the latter above in its scoring for large orchestra and solo baritone delivering spiritual texts. Glass is far from a typical orchestrator, and his large ensemble sounds are almost always intriguing, if for no other reason than we don't expect orchestras to do what he asks them to do. There is almost always a freshness and personality in the sound that makes a lasting effect.

Conductor Karla Lemmon carried out the proceedings with the Stanford Symphony with aplomb, and also turned in a fine performance of Dmitri Shostakovich's *Violin Concerto No. 1*, with Charlene Chen in the solo spot. It was a fine night at Dinkelspiel Auditorium.

Davis, Drescher, Jeanrenaud, Riley

MARK ALBURGER

Paul Drescher Ensemble Electro-Acoustic Band in the world premieres of Drescher's *Unequal Distemperment: A Concerto for Cello and Electro-Acoustic Band*, Davis's *Blue Funk into Darkness for Cello and Ensemble*, and Riley's *Banana Humberto 2000: Concerto for Piano and Electro-Acoustic Band*, plus the third movement of Drescher's *Elapsed Time, Duo for Violin and Piano*. February 10, 2001, Dinkelspiel Auditorium, Stanford University, CA.

The unique sound of the Paul Drescher Ensemble Electro-Acoustic Band lingers in the mind. This funky assemblage of all-star players (bassoonist Paul Hanson, guitarist Drescher, keyboardist Marja Mutru, percussionists Joel Davel and Gene Reffkin, and violinist Karen Bentley) turn everything to sonic gold, and when supplemented with the likes of cellist Joan Jeanrenaud and composer-pianist Terry Riley, the results were memorable indeed on February 10, 2001, in Dinkelspiel Auditorium at Stanford University.

Drescher's own cranky *Unequal Distemperament*, found Jeanrenaud and the Band in top form, and Anthony Davis's *Blue Funk into Darkness* kept the interest high as well. The signature four-movement work was Riley's *Banana Humberto 2000*, the name being a playful mumbling of Piano Concerto. Supplemented by the energetic Tracy Silverman on violin, Riley and the Band took off into uncharted improvisational and notated territory that astounded.

Chronicle

March 1

First Viennese Vegetable Orchestra. Hamburg, Germany. "We have to be flexible," said Matthias Meinharter . . . who awkwardly lost the mouthpiece for his hollowed-out carrot during a . . . concert, and had to improvise by nibbling at the carrot even as he blew into it. . . . The orchestra, made up of nine black-clad avant-garde artists from Vienna, uses everything from tiny kidney beans to hefty pumpkins in its work -- beating, shaking, blowing, peeling, spitting, snapping, grating, poking, rubbing, and mushing them in startlingly ingenious ways. The sensitive microphones onstage pick up even the softest hint of vegetable noise, and somehow the result suggests that the musicians are more than just people publicly playing with their food. "They're very enthusiastic, talented and artistically minded," said Franz Hautzinger, a trumpet player and abstract composer in Vienna, whose compositions for the vegetable orchestra include *Five Improvisations for Mixed Vegetables*. Speaking of one of his favorite vegetable instruments, he added, "You can really write for the cucumber-o-phon -- it's an instrument with many, many possibilities. In Hamburg, the orchestra played in a bohemian-minded arts center and then served post-performance bowls of vegetable soup. The audience seemed to take the whole thing in stride, even when Mr. Meinharter grated carrots so zealously in one piece that the shavings sprayed across the front row (the orchestra also uses kitchen utensils, including knives and blenders). "I expected it to be just fun and games, but it's really interesting experimental music," said Hartwig Spitzer, a 64-year-old physicist. . . . As he spoke, members of the orchestra were dismantling their instruments -- which generally take about 90 minutes to construct -- and offering those still in good condition, as well as unused backups, for people to take home for dinner. "We are showing that you can make music not only with common instruments, and also that it's important to work in a multisensual way . . . said Barbara Kaiser, 30. "Do you need some leeks?" The orchestra's pieces include traditional Austrian tunes; versions of works by bands like Kraftwerk; and original compositions that evoke house music, technopop, electronic music, and genres that defy characterization. "It's become more about the music than the vegetables," Mr. Meinharter said. His colleague Nikolaus Gansterere said: "It's about the whole procedure of being and playing and destroying and eating and vanquishing your fears. Nothing lasts forever." . . . Kaiser, an animator, recalls cooking dinner one evening when she suddenly "thought about the fantasy of people sitting in a concert hall, playing on tomatoes. In fact, the finale of the Hamburg show was meant to be a piece performed entirely on tomatoes, but the theater asked that it be left out. "It was too dangerous for their beautiful new curtains," Ms. Kaiser said. It goes without saying that the quality of the music depends on the quality of the vegetables, which must be "really, really fresh," said Mr. Meinharter, who in his other life is an industrial designer and conceptual artist. . . .

Merchants at Vienna's big open-air vegetable market, the Naschmarkt, initially looked askance at the musicians testing out their potential instruments in odd ways, "but now we have some people who know us," Mr. Gansterere said. "They might say, "Wow, I have a very big pumpkin for you."" [Sarah Lyall, *The New York Times*, 3/6/03].

March 2

Death of Hank Ballard (b. John H. Kendricks, 1927, according to his birth records, or 1936, according to many reference works, Detroit, MI). "[He was] the singer and songwriter whose hit "The Twist" ushered in a nationwide dance craze in the 1960's. . . . In 1958 Mr. Ballard wrote and recorded "The Twist," but it was released on the "B" side of a record. A year later Chubby Checker sang his own version of "The Twist" on Dick Clark's Philadelphia television show. It soon topped the charts, eventually selling more than a million copies. The song started a dance craze that prompted the creation of other Twist songs, including "Twist and Shout" by the Isley Brothers.

Debra Barsha's "Radiant Baby," on the life of artist Keith Haring. Joseph Papp Public Theater, New York, NY.

American Composers Orchestra in music of Frank Zappa. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY.

March 5

West Coast premiere of Ned Rorem's 90-minute, 36-song "Evidence of Things Not Seen" (1977). Palace of Fine Arts Theatre, San Francisco, CA. "There is an undeniable grandeur about a composer assembling an encyclopedic overview of one musical genre, the way Bach did with the fugue and the way Ned Rorem has done with the art song. . . . Contributing . . . to the cycle's variety is its scoring for four vocalists, often in groups of two or more (just half of the selections are for a solo singer). Thus, in addition to more traditionally shaped songs, Rorem includes four-part chorales, dialogues . . . and even little dramatic scenes. . . . His predilection for medium-tempo, soft-edged lyricism . . . weighs on a listener after a while" [Joshua Kosman, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 3/7/03].

March 7

Musicians' strike, honored by actors and stagehands, closes down most Broadway shows. New York, NY.

March 8

NACUSA Composers Can Play, Too, including Nancy Bloomer Deussen's *Two Pieces*, Sondra Clark's *Three Scenes from New Orleans*, Mark Alburger's *Cats, Dogs, and Divas* (Harriet March Page), and music by Ila Dimov and Robert Arnold Hall. Arts Center, Palo Alto, CA.

March 9

A revival of Richard Rodgers's *Flower Drum Song* (words by Oscar Hammerstein) announces an early closure, citing in part the musician's strike of Broadway. New York, NY.

March 10

Induction of three British punk and new wave bands -- The Clash, the Police, and Elvis Costello and the Attractions -- along with the Australian hard rockers AC/DC and the pop-soul duo the Righteous Brothers into The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Waldorf Astoria, New York, NY. The Police gave their first public performance in 18 years, after the guitarist Andy Summers joked, "There's absolutely no ego in our band whatsoever," and Sting said that the band's drummer, Stewart Copeland, had complained that there wasn't enough drumming in the songs Sting had wanted to play: "Roxanne," "Message in a Bottle" and "Every Breath You Take." There was actually plenty of super drumming. The band's lean, springy rhythms were intact, in a performance that stretched and explored the old songs" [Jon Pareles, The New York Times, 3/12/03].

March 13

Ricky Ian Gordon's *My Life with Albertine* (after Proust). Playwrights Horizons, New York, NY.

March 20

New York premiere of John Adams's *El Nino*. Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York, NY.

Southwest Ensemble in *Schoenberg in L.A.*, including *String Quartet No. 4* and *Ode to Napoleon*. Great Hall, Cooper Union, New York, NY.

March 22

Ralph Vaughan Williams's *Riders to the Sea*, directed by Sylvia Amarino, with Harriet March Page. Holy Names College, Oakland, CA.

March 24

San Francisco Contemporary Music Players in Gerard Grisey's *Vortex Temporum*. Yerba Buena Center, San Francisco, CA.

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