

A satellite image of a large hurricane, likely Hurricane Wilma, over the Gulf of Mexico. The hurricane has a well-defined eye and a dense, swirling cloud structure. The surrounding ocean is dark blue, and the landmasses of North and Central America are visible in shades of green and brown.

# 21ST CENTURY MUSIC

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NOVEMBER 2005

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21ST-CENTURY MUSIC is published monthly by 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC, P.O. Box 2842, San Anselmo, CA 94960. ISSN 1534-3219.

Subscription rates in the U.S. are \$84.00 per year; subscribers elsewhere should add \$36.00 for postage. Single copies of the current volume and back issues are \$10.00. Large back orders must be ordered by volume and be pre-paid. Please allow one month for receipt of first issue. Domestic claims for non-receipt of issues should be made within 90 days of the month of publication, overseas claims within 180 days. Thereafter, the regular back issue rate will be charged for replacement. Overseas delivery is not guaranteed. Send orders to 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC, P.O. Box 2842, San Anselmo, CA 94960. email: mus21stc@aol.com.

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

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November 2005

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# Wynton Marsalis

PHILLIP GEORGE

Wynton [Learson] Marsalis (b. October 18, 1961) Marsalis was born to Dolores (née Ferdinand) and Ellis Marsalis, Jr., a New Orleans-based music teacher and pianist. He is the second of six sons: Branford (1960), Wynton (1961), Ellis III (1964), Delfeayo (1965), Mboya Kinyatta (1971), and Jason (1977). Branford, Delfeayo, and Jason are also jazz musicians. Ellis is a poet, photographer and network engineer based in Baltimore. Mboya was born with autism.

At an early age Marsalis demonstrated an aptitude and interest for music. Al Hirt gave a six-year-old Marsalis his first trumpet, and age eight he performed traditional New Orleans music in the Fairview Baptist Church band led by banjoist, Danny Barker. By 14, he was invited to perform with the New Orleans Philharmonic. During his high school years attending Benjamin Franklin High School, Marsalis was a member of the New Orleans Symphony Brass Quintet, New Orleans Community Concert Band, under the direction of Peter Dombourian, New Orleans Youth Orchestra, New Orleans Symphony, and on weekends performed in a jazz band as well as a local funk band, the Creators.

He moved to New York City to attend the Juilliard School of Music in 1978. Two years later in 1980, he joined the Jazz Messengers to study under drummer and bandleader, Art Blakey, during which time Marsalis gleaned from Blakey how to lead a band and how to how perform with intensity and consistency. In 1981, Marsalis toured with the Herbie Hancock quartet throughout the USA and Japan, as well as performing at the Newport Jazz Festival with Herbie. During his career Marsalis has played with artists including Sarah Vaughan, Dizzy Gillespie, Harry Edison, Clark Terry, and Sonny Rollins.

Not all, however, were willing collaborators. Miles Davis hedged his praise of Marsalis by strongly suggesting that he was unoriginal and too competitive, saying "Wynton thinks playing music is about blowing people up on stage." In 1986, in Vancouver, an uninvited Marsalis tried to join an angered Davis on stage. Davis said "Wynton can't play the kind of shit we were playing", and twice told the rival trumpeter to leave the stage saying "Get the fuck off."

Marsalis assembled his own band and performed over 120 concerts every year for ten consecutive seasons. Through an extensive series of performances, lectures, and music workshops, he helped generate interest in an art form that had lost much of its artistic substance. As Marsalis focused attention on older jazz musicians, many record companies had re-issued out-of-print recordings from their catalogues. Many students of Marsalis's workshops, and collaborators have included James Carter; Christian McBride; Roy Hargrove; Harry Connick, Jr.; Nicholas Payton; Eric Reed; and Eric Lewis.

He has been commissioned to compose for Dance companies including Garth Fagan Dance, Peter Martins at the New York City Ballet, Twyla Tharp for the American Ballet Theatre, and also for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre.

Marsalis provided the score for the 1990 film *Tune in Tomorrow*, in which he also makes a cameo appearance as a New Orleans trumpeter with his band.

He collaborated with The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center in 1995 to compose the string quartet, *At The Octoroon Balls*, Marsalis's first string quartet, performed by the Orion Quartet.

In 1997, his epic oratorio on slavery, *Blood on the Fields*, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in music.

Nevertheless, that year also brought out the publication of *Blue: The Murder of Jazz*, in which Eric Nisenson argued that Marsalis's focus on a narrow portion of jazz's past was stifling the music's growth and preventing any further innovation.

A second commission by Lincoln Center in 1998 allowed Marsalis to produce a creative response to Igor Stravinsky's *Histoire du Soldat* with a companion piece, *A Fiddler's Tale*, which premiered on April 23 of that year at Hill Auditorium, Ann Arbor, Michigan. A version without narration is paired with *At the Octoroon Balls* on a release available at the composer's website.

Marsalis compositions and playing is represented on a quartet of Sony Classical releases, *At the Octoroon Balls: String Quartet No. 1*, *A Fiddler's Tale*, *Reel Time*, and *Sweet Release and Ghost Story: Two More Ballets* by Wynton Marsalis. All are volumes of an eight-CD series, entitled *Swinging Into The 21st*, a set of albums released in 1999-2000, featuring original compositions and standard repertory, including works of Jelly Roll Morton, Igor Stravinsky, and Thelonious Monk. *Reeltime* is Marsalis's score for John Singleton's film *Rosewood*. This original music, featuring vocals by Cassandra Wilson and Shirley Caesar, was never used in the film.

Marsalis's has been criticized as a minor trumpeter who promulgates controversial and pedantic opinions on jazz. *Down Beat* magazine's website reports that Marsalis is viewed by many as a savior of pure jazz from "pop fusion and noise," while others have regarded his music and notions regarding jazz as "regressive."

Pierre Sprey, president of jazz record company Mapleshade Records, said in 2001 that "When Marsalis was nineteen, he was a fine jazz trumpeter ... But he was getting his tail beat off every night in Art Blakey's band. I don't think he could keep up. And finally he retreated to safe waters. He's a good classical trumpeter and thus he sees jazz as being a classical Music. He has no clue what's going on now."

Marsalis has also been criticized for his role in the Ken Burns documentary *Jazz* (2001), which promoted a classicist view of jazz similar to his own. The documentary focused primarily on Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong among others, while failing to mention jazz artists that Marsalis has disparaged.

The documentary also angered many with subjective statements, often from Marsalis, about the comparative complexity, popularity, and general worth of the music of a wide variety of artists.

As artistic director and co-producer of the project, Marsalis was an object of many of the criticisms of the series, which was also highly acclaimed. Critic David Adler has suggested his production role was a conflict of interest with his high onscreen profile: "Wynton's coronation in the film is not merely biased. It is not just aesthetically grating. It is unethical, given his integral role in the making of the very film that is praising him to the heavens."

Marsalis emerged as a New Orleans booster in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, this past August, by making public speeches and television ads to increase public awareness of the importance of rebuilding New Orleans, and also to encourage tourism of Louisiana.



# Chronicle

September 7

Richard Strauss's *Capriccio*. New York, NY. "Richard Strauss called *Capriccio*, his final opera, a 'conversation piece for music,' an unconventional but apt description. It's a dialectical opera about an aesthetic question: What comes first in opera, the music or the words? Do words determine music, or does music flesh out and give breadth to words? Strauss's conceit for dramatizing the question was to concoct a story of aristocratic courtship in 18th-century France. Flamand, a composer, and Olivier, a poet, vie for the affections of Madeleine, a young, widowed countess. The whole opera takes place in the drawing room of her chateau outside Paris. And nothing much happens but a lot of talk about the hierarchy of poetry and music. "*Capriccio*" has long been considered an insiders-only opera, musically refined and intellectually intriguing but dramatically static. So you can understand why the director Stephen Lawless decided to open up and energize this seldom-seen work in the production he has created for the New York City Opera, which was unveiled on Wednesday night at the New York State Theater to inaugurate the company's 62nd season. Mr. Lawless has moved the action, such as it is, from the countess's drawing room to a small but elegant theater and updated the setting to roughly the period when Strauss composed it (The Munich premiere was in 1942). Zapping the tale to modern times creates some havoc, naturally. The story is meant to be set at the time when Gluck's bold reforms of opera were the talk of Paris. And moving the action to a theater makes sense only if you accept that the countess's chateau was a grand affair with its own mini-opera house, which it could have been, of course. There she has brought together Flamand and Olivier, as well as a blustery and pragmatic theater director, La Roche, some singers, dancers and guests, who are all planning a birthday party for their hostess. In effect, they are checking out the space they will be working in. Fans of the opera are likely to miss the drawing-room setting of the original. Strauss surely meant Flamand and Olivier to come across as earnest dilettantes. Only dilettantes have time to sit around a salon arguing endlessly about unanswerable aesthetic questions. Yet there are appealing aspects to the concept. Ashley Martin-Davis, the set and costume designer, has rendered a theater that has not seen much activity for a while. At first the audience seats and chandeliers are draped with black cloths. Competing platforms in different sections of the stage offer work spaces for Flamand with his harpsichord and Olivier with his writing desk. The main problem, though, is that in milking the opera for humor, Mr. Lawless goes too far. Strauss pokes musically clever fun at Italian opera, French ballet and mythological tragedy by having some performers appear at the salon to give the countess and her guests a hint of what they have in store for the party. But here the Italian tenor (Barry Banks) is a Caruso caricature with a cashmere coat slung over his shoulders; the Italian soprano (Lisa Saffer in an ungratifying role) is a crude gum-chewing diva; and there is a whole zany roster of exotic dancers and preening tragediennes. The scene, meant to be smart and amusing, becomes a laugh riot.

Still, Mr. Lawless has drawn some nuanced portrayals from an appealing cast. The soprano Pamela Armstrong makes a bright-voiced, lovely and admirable countess. The ardent tenor Ryan MacPherson is a dashing and impetuous Flamand. Mel Ulrich brings his hardy baritone voice, imposing presence and intensity to the role of Olivier. The bass Eric Halfvarson nearly steals the show as La Roche. Of course we are meant to chuckle at the theater director's diatribes as he extols the superiority of Italian comic opera, which gives the public real people - pepper peddlers and soap makers - instead of absurd Turks and Greeks and mythical beings in pretentious tragedies. But he is filled with a common sense that the poet and the composer should listen to. Making strong company debuts were the baritone George Mosley as the count, Madeleine's brother, and the mezzo-soprano Claire Powell as Clairon, the wily actress the count is smitten by. The conductor George Manahan caught the ebbs and flows of this fitful and elusive score, which hews closely to every turn of phrase in the libretto (by Clemens Krauss and Strauss). The glory of the opera is the lyrically sublime final scene for the countess, who, in trying to decide between her suitors and to answer the aesthetic questions they have posed, confronts the painful yet human arbitrariness of all choices. Here Strauss gives his hand away, though. Music wins, hands down. Ms. Armstrong sang this famous monologue with sensitivity, despite the melodramatic final image Mr. Lawless devises. Instead of pondering the questions alone in her salon, wistfully singing the song Flamand has composed to Olivier's sonnet while strumming her harp, she takes the stage of her theater like a diva, bathed in floods of golden light, singing and playing the love ode while the entire stage platform moves forward. And on Wednesday the stage moved creakily, which certainly undermined the intended effect" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 9/9/05].

September 8

Mari Kimura and Yoshihiro Kanno's *Project RITE* (Reinventing Tradition and Environment). Chelsea Art Center, New York, NY. "Mari Kimura had planned to follow the traditional career trajectory for violinists -- performances of standard repertory and some new music -- when a chance conversation made her reconsider. Her interlocutor, on hearing that she was a violinist, asked Ms. Kimura whether she composed, and when the answer was no, he asked her why not. For Ms. Kimura, it was a good question, so she started writing music, including works for violin and computer. And she began collaborating with like-minded performer-composers. [In h]er latest endeavor . . . she is joined by performers who play ancient Asian instruments and also compose and use computers. She is presenting two installments . . . and the first . . . explored the interaction among the violin, the koto . . . , the shakuhachi . . . , the sho . . . , and a handful of Apple laptops. Bruce Gremo opened the program with *New Old Song 2*, a solo work for shakuhachi and computer in which the boundaries between the flute and the electronics were blurred at first.

The shakuhachi can produce some surprisingly textured and eerie sounds, even without electronic support. Mr. Gremo's computer line used these timbres (and plenty of atmospheric reverberation) as starting points and ran with them, exaggerating the textures until they sounded like electronic feedback, and using electronic delays to create a spacey polyphony. Tamami Tono, a sho player and composer, followed similar lines in *Arc for the Breath of Life*, for sho, computer and Ms. Kimura's violin. Miya Masaoka did, too, in *Something Comes Then Sails Away*, for koto - which Ms. Masaoka sometimes played with a bow - computer and sho. In both, ancient timbres were explored and extended, on their own and through their interaction with the computer. And both, like Mr. Gremo's work, had a meandering, New Age quality. Ms. Kimura's *Pluck-Ring*, for violin, computer, and TibetBot -- an electronic device that, among other things, rings temple bells -- had a slightly tougher edge, as well as the benefit of computer graphics, a stream of constantly shifting geometric shapes that she produced with Liubomir Borissov. The most imaginative work on the program was Mr. Kanno's *City of Wind*, a haunting, melancholy work that brought together all the musicians as well as Mr. Kanno on keyboards. In it, Mr. Kanno probed a variety of wind sounds, ranging from those that drive the shakuhachi and the sho to a desolate, distant, hollow howl produced by the computer. Ms. Kimura and company closed the concert with a vigorous, concise improvisation that she said was called *Dessert* [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 9/10/05].

Opera for All, including a performance by Rufus Wainwright and an excerpt from Giacomo Puccini's *Turandot*. New York City Opera, New York, NY. A second program of the latter's *Madama Butterfly* is presented the following evening.

## September 9

counter/induction. New York, NY. "It's easy to poke fun at the popular image of contemporary chamber music ensembles as scrappy collectives of composers and performers who give concerts in downtown lofts before audiences of 50 people, most of whom have been conscripted to attend by friends in the ensemble. In truth, that image is often borne out at these events. So what? As the brilliantly performed program . . . by counter)induction, the New York-based contemporary music collective, proved, hearing new and recent works in such settings can be the most bracing of musical experiences. The core members of this collective are two composers, Kyle Bartlett and Douglas Boyce, and five impressive instrumentalists: Benjamin Fingland (clarinet), Asmira Woodward-Page (violin), Jessica Meyer (viola), Sumire Kudo (cello) and Blair McMillen (piano). The concert took place at the Tenri Cultural Institute on West 13th Street in a wonderfully intimate art gallery with vibrant paintings from an exhibition of Japanese artists filling the walls. The place was packed, meaning that roughly 65 people attended. I've seldom been among such intensely focused listeners. How could you not have been drawn in when the music was so provocative, the setting so inviting and the performances so compelling? The opening work, Eric Moe's *And Life Like Froth Doth Throb*, snapped the audience to attention.

In this short, perpetual-motion tour de force for viola and cello, the two players trade off relentless eighth-note ostinatos. Fragments of themes try to take off but get pulled into the frenetic rush. Mr. Boyce's *102nd and Amsterdam*, for violin, viola and cello, which received its premiere, begins with a long episode of intensely soft squiggles, glissandos and shimmers. Once in a while a moaning rumination for the cello or an aborted melody for the violin break through and bring the diffuse harmonies into focus, though some fitful middle sections also threaten the uneasy calm. Eli Marshal's *Opus Prime* for piano, violin and cello sounded like some crazed, metrically fractured rondo by a latter-day Ravel. Alexandre Lunsqui's *After Frottage*, though intriguing, tested one's patience. Scored for wailing clarinet and bustling cello, the music seemed like the harmonically unhinged and extended transitional section of a longer chamber work. The program included one piece by an older-generation composer, Karel Husa's 1982 *Sonata a Tre*, for clarinet, piano and violin. This riveting trio shifts between atmospherics, startling solo cadenzas, episodes of fidgety almost Neo-Classical counterpoint and spasms of wildness. The performers nailed the challenging score, especially the formidable young Mr. McMillen at the piano. All five performers also proved masterly in the final work, Georges Aperghis's daunting *Mouvement Pour Quintette*, ecstatic music that could be called Messiaenic. With admission by donation and complimentary wine and pretzels in the lobby afterward, this concert offered New Yorkers with a sense of musical adventure and limited budgets a great way to spend a weekend evening" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 9/12/05].

Giacomo Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*. New York City Opera, New York, NY. "[T]he company presented straight opera - Puccini's "*Madama Butterfly*," in one of its best productions - and bedded it in introductions from Paul Kellogg (City Opera's general and artistic director), the actress Cynthia Nixon and a very good documentary film that gave a behind-the-scenes look, from singers, stagehands, the production team, etc., about what it's like to put this thing on. For all of you who are new to opera, here's another part of your introduction: the review, which many people see as the part where the critic takes something they liked and tears it apart. For me, as someone who loves opera, the point is actually to encourage everyone to think more critically about what they did and didn't like and challenge the things that didn't work, rather than simply praising it for being lovely and letting people continue to believe that if they don't like classical music, the fault lies with them rather than a possibly indifferent performance. But I don't think City Opera's performance Friday night was indifferent. There was a lot to like here, even beyond the music, starting with Mark Lamos's simple, beautiful production. The orchestra, under Ari Pelto, had its moments, though there were quite a few muddy patches, and the supporting cast - Robert Mack as Goro, Kathryn Friest as Suzuki, Jake Gardner as an urbane Sharpless - was strong. The weakness lay with the two leads, who were visually attractive but lacked the vocal goods to do more than simply act as place-holders, going through the motions of the *Butterfly* tradition. . . . This doesn't mean, though, that you were wrong if you liked it.



What it means is that if you liked it, there are more nice things in store for you" [Anne Midgette, *The New York Times*, 9/12/05].

#### September 12

Jupiter Symphony Chamber Players in Bela Bartok's Piano Quintet. Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, New York, NY. "[Adam] Nieman presided over a steamy account of Bartok's youthful Piano Quintet, a work in which Bartok's own voice can be heard just starting to peek through but that otherwise shows the influences of Liszt, Brahms and Strauss. . . . [The performance was electrifying]" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 9/14/05].

#### September 11

Argento New Music Project in French Connections. Merkin Hall, New York, NY. "[T]he program began with a man seducing a double bass. Jacob Druckman's *Valentine* has dated somewhat since it was written in 1970. It deals with aspects of performance beyond simply making notes, casting the relationship between a performer and his instrument - starting cold, warming up, getting into the thick of the music - in purely sexual terms. In showing all the ways you can approach the issue of drawing sound from a resonating body, it also makes some sounds that are interesting to hear: shudders and percussive thwacks and wonderful thick, chewy clicking sounds emanating simultaneously from the performer's tongue and the instrument's strings. It was a nice little set piece, and Kevin Weng-Yew Mayner performed it fabulously, without a trace of self-consciousness. If it wasn't quite indicative, the piece did give a sense of the flavor of the . . . concert . . . . That is, it was an entertaining piece by a composer with intellectual chops; and beyond mere musical concept, it traded in emotion, expressivity and, yes, enjoyment. None of the other four pieces on the program were as openly antic. The French Connections . . . indicated that two members of the group have worked in France: Michel Galante at Ircam, Michael Klingbeil with the composer Tristan Murail. Mr. Galante's *Leaves of Absence II*, a parabolic arc of music for octet, and Mr. Klingbeil's episodic, slightly ponderous *Monoliths and Interludes* for solo piano, beautifully played by Augustus Arnone, had their world premieres on this program. The other French element was a French composer, Philippe Hurel, whose nice pieces were a highlight of the evening. *Loops*, for solo flute (played by Erin Lesser), began with a flourish and gradually wrought changes on the gesture, note by note, in a way that was melodically engaging, not merely mechanical. And *4 Variations* was a virtuosic anticoncerto for percussion and ensemble in which vibraphone was gradually submerged in a bright tapestry of sound. Matt Ward was the fine soloist, and Mr. Galante conducted the end of what proved to be a cheerful evening" [Anne Midgette, *The New York Times*, 9/13/05].

#### September 15

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center Gala. New York, NY "These exploratory artists [cellist David Finckel and pianist Wu Han], who happen to be married to each other, have thought outside the box and undertaken projects as recording producers, educators and administrators. oncertgoers will have to wait until next season, though, to see what kinds of programs they have in mind, since their appointment came after the current season was planned. Still, Mr. Finckel and Ms. Han gave a hint of their thinking with [their] gala, which they did devise. If a program focusing on Eastern European music from Dvorak to Bartok was not particularly daring, the choice of works showed creativity and the performances were top-notch. Another musically eminent couple, the pianist Emanuel Ax and Yoko Nozaki . . . [performed] Bartok's 1937 *Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion*, joined by the dynamic percussionists Don S. Liuzzi and Ayano Kataoka. For 30 minutes all that mattered was this riveting performance of a stunning 20th-century masterpiece. By scoring the work as he did, Bartok forces the piano to stop pretending otherwise and embrace its identity as a member of the percussion family. This is not to imply that the piano writing is unduly steely and that the music lacks lush harmony, fetching colors and lyricism. Indeed, the yearning second theme of the first movement, which slinks up and down the keyboards in astringent chords of stacked-up fourths, is achingly melodic. After intermission Ms. Wu gave a lively spoken introduction to a group of salon pieces for viola and piano by the Romanian-born composer Georges Boulanger (1893-1958). Though these Gypsy fiddler tunes were not much more than high-class novelties, Paul Neubauer and Ms. Han milked them for every bit of schmalz" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 9/17/05].

#### September 16

True to New Orleans ritual, *Higher Ground* -- the benefit for Hurricane Katrina relief at the Rose Theater . . . - opened with a processional and wound up with a parade. Wynton Marsalis, the artistic director of Jazz at Lincoln Center, which presented the show, is from New Orleans and has always brought a justifiable hometown pride to his programs. He has also stocked the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra with musicians who learned New Orleans style at the source. The five-hour concert mixed affirmation, mourning and glints of anger at the devastation of the cradle of jazz (It was slightly compressed for broadcast on PBS and NPR, and is being repeated on many stations). The concert's most touching moment was a performance by the New Orleans trumpeter Irvin Mayfield. His father, he said, is still among the missing. He played *Just a Closer Walk with Thee*, the hymn that becomes both dirge and celebration at New Orleans funerals. From a hushed, sustained, almost tearful beginning, it turned more assertive and ornate, with growls and extended slides, determined to rise above sorrow. The actor Laurence Fishburne, a New Orleans resident, was the host. Between songs, he read historical and literary tributes to the city. He also said it had endured 'a plague of light-fingered politicians' and 'generations of malign neglect from Baton Rouge and Washington.'

Elvis Costello, who performed with the New Orleans songwriter Allen Toussaint, noted that some conservatives were already warning about the cost of rebuilding the city. 'An effort like this can never be too expensive,' he declared. The program interspersed New Orleans standards - Aaron Neville and Mr. Toussaint sharing Go to the Mardi Gras, Diana Krall singing a relaxed, sultry Basin Street Blues - with other songs transformed by the context. The pianist Herbie Hancock led a trio in his Eye of the Hurricane, a jagged, shifting tune he played with percussive intensity. Female singers reached for somber redemption. Cassandra Wilson, who is from Mississippi, sang a richly reverent Come Sunday, and Abbey Lincoln sang For All We Know in hovering, elegiac slow motion. Stephanie Jordan, the singer in a musical family from New Orleans, made Here's to Life sound wounded but determined. Norah Jones sang Randy Newman's I Think It's Going to Rain Today with melancholy modesty. Renée Fleming sang Amazing Grace with just a hint of operatic inflection. Bette Midler, however, made the odd choice of the cynical Is That All There Is? Mr. Marsalis led small and large groups, sketching a long New Orleans continuum from King Oliver's "Dipper Mouth Blues" to his own swinging big-band piece Back to Basics (with a whinnying plunger-muted solo) to modal jazz with members of his family. The pianist Marcus Roberts played his New Orleans Blues, riffing elegantly through styles from gospel to stride to rumba to modern jazz. Terence Blanchard, a trumpeter and film composer originally from New Orleans, led a composition steeped in melancholy dignity. The saxophonist Joe Lovano played Blackwell's Message, dedicated to a drummer from New Orleans. Paul Simon played his zydeco-based That Was Your Mother backed by the Louisiana accordionist Buckwheat Zydeco, while James Taylor offered his metaphysical Never Die Young. Others chose songs with social concerns. Jon Hendricks sang a bossa nova with a political accusation, Tell Me the Truth, and Mr. Costello reached for the anguish and fervor in Mr. Toussaint's song Freedom for the Stallion. Dianne Reeves poured her voice into the didactic The House I Live In. And the pianist and singer Peter Cincotti introduced a new song, Bring Back New Orleans. To begin and end the concert, Mr. Marsalis chose parade tunes that were modern takes on New Orleans tradition: Ain No, rooted in Mardi Gras chants, and Duke Ellington's Second Line. The finale turned into a handkerchief-waving parade through the aisles and back to the stage for a loose, raucous jam that continued after much of the audience had left - the kind of neighborhood party that's at the heart of New Orleans music. Now it's uncertain whether those neighborhoods will ever return" [Jon Pareles, 9/19/05].

#### September 21

New York Philharmonic raises \$3.1 million during their opening night gala. "Maazel turned to Richard Strauss, and suddenly the Philharmonic returned to the great orchestra it is. . . . Maazel conducted . . . with a welcome vigor, clarity and incandescent colorings. He allowed himself to schmaltz around with the waltzes in the "Rosenkavalier" Suite, and some bursts of brass turned raucous. Still, this, too, was vibrant and stylish Strauss playing.

The orchestra sounded like a million dollars. Make that \$3.1 million" [Anthony Tommasini, The New York Times, 9/23/05].

#### September 24

New Juilliard Ensemble. Peter Jay Sharp Theater, New York, NY. "The two youngest composers, Kenji Bunch and John Psathas, both in their 30's, examined the intersection of classical and pop styles. Mr. Psathas's assertive Stream 3 (1996) a homage to Gunther Schuller's 'Third Stream' music, in which jazz and classical modernism mingle, is a concerto grosso of sorts, with a jazz trio as the concertino. Both the trio and the larger ensemble play overtly jazzy music, but when the trio was in the spotlight, it had a more freewheeling, improvisatory quality, while the full band's pages seemed more fully scripted, and more susceptible to formal touches. Mr. Bunch's Arachnophobia (1997) also drew on jazz influences, but was more cartoonish: alongside a gloss on the brass big band style, there was an episode in which Mr. Sachs played a jaw harp and the players in the ensemble rhythmically shouted what sounded like his first name. And in its finale, the score moved from jazz into sharper, more angular hip-hop rhythms. Two more scores reflected Mr. Sachs's fascination with composers from the former Soviet Union. Suren Zakarian's Island of Lamentation (2001) and Valentin Bibik's Symphony for 17 Instruments, Opus 119 (1997) were couched in a hazy language that suggested icy, bleak exteriors but also a surging, inner warmth. The Bibik, in particular, had a vibrant inner life, reflected in a Tchaikovskian pizzicato section at its center. Jack Beeson's Ophelia Sings (2000) held its own stylistic ground here. The way its vocal line veered from angularity to lithe lyricism suited the text (drawn from Hamlet and freely reconfigured), and Sasha Cooke, a mezzo-soprano, gave the work a beautifully nuanced performance. The soloists in Mr. Psathas's work also performed admirably. They were Michael Caterisano, the energetic drummer; Philip Fisher, pianist; and Tomoya Aomori, bassist" [Allan Kozinn, The New York Times, 9/27/05].

Richard Strauss's Ariadne auf Naxos. Metropolitan Opera, New York, NY. "The performance was vibrantly conducted by Kirill Petrenko" [Anthony Tommasini, The New York Times, 9/27/05].

#### September 25

Leon Botstein conducts the American Symphony Orchestra in Inventing America. Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY. "Symphony No. 1 by Roger Sessions and the lustrous Symphony No. 2 by Randall Thompson [were played], as well as a fitfully engaging shaggy-dog essay in Americana by Ernest Bloch, the Swiss-born naturalized American with whom Sessions and Thompson studied. Mr. Botstein presented the works, composed between 1926 and 1931, in an effort to define an American style. But they were written too late in the game, and made too tiny a splash, to justify the Ken Burns-like title, Inventing America."

In any case, their place in the development of a national style is not their principal attraction. The *Sessions First*, written in 1927, captures the composer in a virtually forgotten conservative phase of his career. Though he was friendly with Copland, he was more comfortable writing in a rigorous, craggy international style than in a self-consciously American one. But in 1927 Copland and *Sessions* were heading in opposite directions. Where Copland's works of the time had a modernist prickliness, the long, spacious lines of the *Sessions* symphony hint at the popular, folk-tinged style Copland would perfect more than a decade later. It anticipates Barber as well: the sumptuous string writing in the *Largo* edges toward the Barber *Adagio*, composed in 1936. Unlike *Sessions*, Thompson found his voice early, and held to it. His *Second Symphony* (1931) is unabashedly Romantic, with dramatic brass, woodwind and percussion flourishes, richly melodic string writing and an almost unceasing drive. Apart from a few choral works, this composer's music has largely vanished from the repertory, no doubt because it seemed eagerly ingratiating at a time when such geniality was abhorred in new-music circles. But perhaps it's worth a second look. Bloch's *America: An Epic Rhapsody* (1926) was composed for a Musical America competition, and the composer didn't take any chances: the three-movement work makes its way from Native American themes and British colonialism, through the Civil War, to bursts of jazz and clangorous urbanity. He won. The work includes a treacly hymn as its finale, which Mr. Botstein encouraged the audience to sing, as Bloch apparently intended. The American Symphony played all this gamely and sounded spectacular" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 9/25/05].

September 27

Young Concert Artists presents the Jupiter String Quartet. Zankel Hall, New York, NY. "The audience . . . at the season-opening performance, by the Jupiter String Quartet, seemed younger than Young Concert Artists audiences at the Y tended to be, and the hall looked nearly sold out. But Zankel's rental fees are considerably higher, and corners must be cut: when Susan Wadsworth, the organization's founder and director, spoke from the stage before the performance, she said she was saving \$3,000 by not using a microphone. [T]he group gave a vivid performance of Henri Dutilleux's *Ainsi la Nuit* (1976), a work that, like Britten's *Nocturnal* and Elliott Carter's *Night Fantasies*, evokes the fitful magic of the night. Its textures change constantly, from pizzicato figures to sliding lines, from airy timbres to glassy harmonics. The Jupiter players handled these demands comfortably enough to make the music sound more picturesque than difficult, technically or conceptually" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 9/29/05].

September 29

Neeme Jarvi conducts the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra. New Brunswick, NJ. "Rachmaninoff's *Symphonic Dances*, the composer's last piece and not an easy one, received a warm and solid performance. This wasn't a concert that had you at the edge of your seat, but it was a substantial one that showed evidence of strong leadership: something the orchestra is only too happy to welcome" [Anne Midgette, *The New York Times*, 10/1/05].



## Recordings

Richard Rodney Bennett: *The Mines of Sulphur*. Vocal soloists and Glimmerglass Opera Orchestra, conducted by Stewart Robertson. Chandos. When the Glimmerglass Opera in Cooperstown, N.Y., suddenly found itself facing a hole in its schedule for the summer of 2004, Stewart Robertson, the music director, urged the company to present *The Mines of Sulphur* by the English composer Richard Rodney Bennett. Mr. Robertson had been championing this little-known work since attending its 1965 premiere in London. His advice proved sound. *The Mines of Sulphur*, a gothic murder mystery with a taut libretto by Beverley Cross, was the surprise hit of that Glimmerglass season. The work will be presented at the New York City Opera next month. Just in time, Chandos has released the work's first recording, made live at Glimmerglass and conducted by Mr. Robertson. It's an exciting addition to the discography of 20th-century opera. Set in 18th-century England, in a deteriorating manor, the opera tells of Boconnion, an army deserter seething with class resentment. Abetted by Tovey, a wily tramp, and Rosalind, a seductive Gypsy, he murders the sanctimonious landowner Braxton. As the ruthless conspirators celebrate their newfound wealth, some itinerant actors appear, seeking shelter. Boconnion houses them on the condition that they perform their newest work, *The Mines of Sulphur*. But he is horrified when the play echoes his murder of Braxton. Though just 28 when he composed this work, Sir Richard showed a sure grasp of dramatic pacing and an intuitive feeling for character. He confidently adapted the 12-tone idiom to his distinctive musical and dramatic aims, reining in a wayward Bergian language with ravishing moments of tonal mooring. The vocal writing shifts naturally between sputtered outbursts and ruminative lyricism. The excellent cast is headed by Brandon Jovanovich (Boconnion), Kristopher Irmiter (Braxton), Beth Clayton (Rosalind) and James Maddalena (Tovey). Mr. Robertson conducts a vividly colored and inexorable performance" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 9/18/05].

David Chesky. Violin Concerto. *The Girl From Guatemala*. Flute Concerto. Tom Chiu, violinist; Wonjung Kim, soprano; Jeffrey Khaner, flutist. Area 31, conducted by Anthony Aibel. Chesky. "David Chesky writes concert works influenced by jazz and Latin music, and works in Latin forms with undercurrents of North American and European classicism. He has the luxury of releasing his music through a family-run label that specializes in classical music and jazz, but don't write his discs off as vanity projects. The music on this new one is deftly orchestrated and full of original ideas, and Mr. Chesky has enlisted superb players, including Jeffrey Khaner, the principal flutist of the Philadelphia Orchestra, and Tom Chiu, a New York violinist who has become prominent in new-music circles. The three pieces here -- two virtuosic, lyrical concertos and a vocal work -- combine a gritty sophistication with a street-level energy and currents of exotic folkishness. All three include flamencolike clapping and stamping, an effect that could grow tiresome if it weren't used so inventively, both as a quirky alternative to conventional percussion and as a tightly intertwined line of rhythmic counterpoint. The Violin Concerto begins with a consonant, naïvely poplike chord progression, but the bouncy opening quickly shatters into a spiky, vigorous deconstruction. Mr. Chiu gives its slow movement the shape and intensity of a dramatic monologue, and he summons considerable energy for the finale, which weaves 12-tone themes into rhythms and textures drawn from the last movement of Bach's "Brandenburg" Concerto No. 3. The Flute Concerto heads in different directions, often taking on an accent of mid-20th-century French urbanity but sometimes borrowing Brazilian moves as well. Its lyricism suits Mr. Khaner's sound, but he seems equally at home in the music's rougher moments, including its explosively rhythmic finale. Mr. Chesky's vocal writing in *The Girl From Guatemala*, a setting of a poem by the Cuban writer and revolutionary José Martí, glides between Mozartean gracefulness and contemporary angularity. Wonjung Kim, the soprano, sounds comfortable at either extreme" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 9/18/05].

