



# 21ST CENTURY MUSIC

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# Towards a David Rakowski Biography

PHILLIP GEORGE

David Rakowski (b. St. Albans, VT) played trombone in high school and community bands and keyboards in the rock band Silver Finger.

He studied at New England Conservatory, Princeton, and Tanglewood, with Robert Ceely, John Heiss, Milton Babbitt, Paul Lansky, Peter Westergaard, and Luciano Berio.

After a year teaching at Stanford, Rakowski taught at Columbia University for six years, before his lengthy and current tenure at Brandeis University.

His music and prose writing are renowned for their wit.

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## Works

A Fanfare, for Two Dozen Trombones, Whose Length Was Determined by the Amount of Space Remaining in my Brown Notebook (1978, 1-1/2') 24 trb. (for the New England Conservatory Trombone Ensemble)

Duo (1979-81, 8' 30") for violin and piano. C.F. Peters, Edition 67262. (for Ken Sugita)

A Refusal to Mourn... (1979, 9') for baritone, fl, cl/bcl, vla, vc, hpschd, pno, offstage horn. (Poem: Dylan Thomas) (for Robert Hancock)

Elegy (1980, 82, 84, 5') for string quartet.

Elegy (1982, 84, 5') for string orchestra. (for the Cathedral Concert Orchestra)

Concerto (1982-83, 27') for violin and chamber orchestra. C.F. Peters, Edition 67454, rental. (BMI Student Composer Awards, 1983, 84; semifinalist, Friedheim Awards, 1991). Final movement is an arrangement of Duo for violin and piano.

Slange (1984-87, 14') for cl, bcl, hn, pno, vln, vla, vc, bass. C.F. Peters, Edition 67099. (for Parnassus)

Overderive (1985, 4') 4 tpt, 2ASax, 2TSax, BSax, 4 trb, Gt, Bass, Pno, Drums. (for the Brandeis Jazz Ensemble)

Imaginary Dances (1986-88, 16') for fl/afl, cl/bcl, ob/EH, vln, vla, vc, pno, perc. C.F. Peters, Edition 67382. (for Speculum Musicae)

## Piano Études

BOOK I: (Peters Edition 67928a)

E-Machines (#1; 1988, 2' 30"), also available alone, Edition 67234. Repeated note étude (for Martin Butler).

BAM! (#2; 1991, 3'; étude on swirls of notes) (for Karen Harvey).

Nocturnal (#3; 1992, 4'; étude on slow repeated notes), also available, hand-copied, bound in same edition with BAM!, Edition 67588 (for Lyn Reyna). Trillage (#4; 1993, 4' 30"), currently available by itself, Edition 67591. Trill étude. (for Alan Feinberg).

Figure Eight (#5; 1994, 3'), octave étude.

Mano à mano (#6; 1995, 3' 45"), étude on alternating hands (for Lisa Moore).

Les arbres embués (#7; 1995, 6'), étude on thick sonorities and embedded lines (for Martin Butler).

Close Enough for Jazz (#8; 1995, 3'), ostinato étude (for Sandra Sprecher).

Pollici e mignoli, or The Virus That Ate New York (#9; 1995, 3' 30"), étude for thumbs and pinkies.

Corrente (#10; 1996, 2' 30"), étude on left-hand running notes.

BOOK II: (Peters Edition 67928b)

Touch Typing (#11; 1996, 2' 40"), étude for index fingers only.

Northpaw (#12; 1996, 2' 40"), right-hand étude (for Lyn Reyna and Barbara Barclay).

Plucking A (#13; 1997, 1' 40"), inside-the-piano étude (for Marilyn Nonken).

Plucking A (#13a; 1997, 2002, 3'), inside-the-piano étude for Steinway "D" pianos. (for Amy Dissanayake).

Martler (#14; 1997, 2' 30"), hand crossing étude.

The Third, Man (#15; 1997, 2' 30"), étude on thirds.

Ice Boogie (#16; 1998, 2'), étude on octave leaps (for Steven Weigt).

Keine kaskadenjagd mehr (#17; 1998, 2' 15") étude on falling thirds and fourths.

Pitching from the Stretch (#18; 1998, 2'), étude on tenths.

Secondary Dominance (#19; 1998, 2' 30"), étude on seconds.

Fourth of Habit (#20; 1998, 2'), étude on fourths. (for Geoffrey Bursleson).

BOOK III: (Peters Edition 67928c)

Twelve-Step Program (#21; 1999, 3'), on chromatic scales and wedges (for Marilyn Nonken).

Schnozzage (#22; 1999, 2' 10"), étude with melody played by the nose.

You Dirty Rag (#23; 1999, 2' 40"), for melody in the left thumb.

Horned In (#24; 1999, 2'), on horn fifths (for David Horne).

Fists of Fury (#25; 1999, 3' 30"), étude using fists (for Marilyn Nonken).

Once Bitten (#26; 2000, 2' 30"), on mordents.

Halftone (#27; 2000, 2' 00"), black vs. white keys.

You've Got Scale (#28; 2000, 3' 30"), on scales and arpeggios (for Teresa McCollough).

Roll Your Own (#29; 2000, 3' 00"), on rolled chords (for Jason Eckardt).

A Gliss Is Just a Gliss (#30; 2000, 1' 40"), on glissandi.

BOOK IV: (Peters Edition 67928d)

Usurpation (#31; 2000, 2-1/2') on a slow trill (also appears in Perspectives of New Music Boykan Festschrift). (for Martin Boykan at 70).

Boogie Ninths (#32; 2000, 2-1/2') on ninths.

Sliding Scales (#33, 2001, 3') gonzo étude on scales (for Marilyn Nonken).

Chorale Fantasy (#34, 2001, 2-1/2') slow étude on an embedded melody.

Luceole (#35, 2001, 2' 20") étude on ascending seconds and thirds (for Amy Dissanayake).

Purple (#36, 2001, 2-1/2") étude on a chord (for Amy Dissanayake).

Taking the Fifths (#37, 2002, 3') étude on perfect fifths.

Silent But Deadly (#38, 2002, 2-1/2') pianissimo étude (to Shehan Dissanayake).

Sixth Appeal (#39, 2002, 3') étude on sixths.

Strident (#40, 2002, 3-1/2') stride piano étude (for Amy Dissanayake).

BOOK V: (Peters Edition 67928e) commissioned by the Fromm Music Foundation

Bop It (#41, 2002, 3') bop étude (for Geoffrey Bursleson).

Madam I'm Adam (#42, 2002, 2') little palindrome étude.

Wiggle Room (#43, 2002, 2-1/2') étude on fast notes moving in parallel.

Triaddled (#44, 2002, 2-1/2') étude on triads.

Pink Tab (#45, 2002, 3-1/2') accelerando-ritenuto étude.

Durchrauscht die luft (#46, 2002, 2-1/2') étude on sevenths.

Fra diabolis (#47, 2002, 2-1/2') étude on tritones.

What Half Diminishes One (Half-Diminishes All) (#48, 2002, 2') chorale-étude on half-diminished seventh chords. (to Eric Chafe, on an idea stolen from Martler and encouraged by Rick M.).

Saltimmano (#49, 2002, 3') finger-pedaling étude.

No Stranger to Our Planet (#50, 2002, 2-1/2') étude on register shifts.

BOOK VI: (Peters Edition 67928f)

Zipper Tango (#51, 2003, 3') tango-étude on grace notes (for Amy Dissanayake).

Moody's Blues (#52, 2003, 3') rock and roll étude on repeated chords (to Rick Moody).

Cell Division (#53, 2003, 2-1/2') treble étude on arpeggios.

Pedal to the Metal (#54, 2003, 3') pedaling étude (to Rick Moody).

Eight Misbeahvin' (#55, 2003, 2-1/2') slow octave étude (for Amy Osborn).

Crazy Eights (#56, 2003, 3') fast octave/black-white key étude.

Chord Shark (#57, 2003, 2-1/2') slow étude on thick chords (for Corey Hamm).

Wound Tight (#58, 2003, 2-1/2') fast étude on all chords (for Corey Hamm).

Zeccatella (#59, 2003, 3') staccato-legato étude (for Amy Dissanayake).

Accents of Malice (#60, 2003, 3-1/2') accent étude.

Terra Firma (1988, 13') for Pierrot ensemble. (for Alea II)

Eleven Recital Pieces (1989, 1' each) for children aged 5 and 6, in duet with their instructor. (commissioned by Judith Bettina and James Goldsworthy for the Nueva Learning Center)

Six Bogan Poems (1989-90, 16') for soprano, string orchestra, harp and celesta C.F. Peters, Edition 67453, rental.

Three Songs on Poems of Louise Bogan (1989, 8') for soprano and piano. C.F. Peters, Edition 67381. (for Judith Bettina and James Goldsworthy)

Crackling Fire (1990, 4-1/2') for piano four hands. Commissioned by James Goldsworthy and Sara Doniach.

Musician (1990, 3') voice, violin and piano (for Judy, Jim and The New Arrival, text by Louise Bogan) C.F. Peters Edition 67453a.

Symphony #1 (1990-91, 29') for soprano and orchestra (2(picc)23(bcl)2 2220 2perc,pno, str). C.F. Peters, Edition 67543, rental. (for the Riverside Symphony)

Diverti (1991, 6') for Bb clarinet and piano. C.F. Peters, Edition 67542. (for Beth Wiemann)

O Rhode Island (1991, 1') voice and piano. (text by Tom Chandler)

Three Encores (1991, 8') for medium-to-high voice and piano. C.F. Peters Edition 67617 (for Judith Bettina). Vocal Ease, Vocal Angst, and Scatter.

Winged Contraption (1991, 9') for orchestra (22(Ehn)3(bcl)2 4220 2perc,pno,str). C.F. Peters Edition 67618, rental (to Marty Boykan at 60).

Cerberus (1991-92, 23') for clarinet and chamber orchestra. C.F. Peters, Edition 67515. (for Beth Wiemann, NEA Fellowship)

Hyperblue (1991-93, 13') for piano trio. C.F. Peters, Edition 67541. (commissioned by the Fromm Music Foundation for the Itzkoff-Shapiro-Rider trio)

Firecat (1993, 10') for flute and piano. C.F. Peters Edition 67589. (for Margaret Swinchoski)

Trio (1993, 8') for piano trio, for teenagers. (commissioned by Sara Doniach) (score lost)

No Holds Barred (1994-95, 30'), for cello and chamber orchestra. C.F. Peters, Edition 67682, rental. (for the Crosstown Ensemble)

Silently, A Wind Goes Over (1994, 13') for soprano and piano. C.F. Peters Edition 67616. (Poems: Joseph Duemer, April Bernard, Robert Louis Stevenson, Wallace Stevens) (for Susan Narucki)  
A Loose Gathering of Words (1993, 12') for soprano and mixed quintet (cl, bcl, vla, vc, bass). C.F. Peters Edition 67587. (Poems: Joseph Duemer, Louise Bogan, Wallace Stevens, Tom Chandler) (for the Composers Ensemble)

The Burning Woman, The Physics of Witches, and Last Dance (1995, 7') for mezzo-soprano., cl., and pno. C.F. Peters Edition 67647. (Poems: Joseph Duemer) (for Opus 90)

Mento (1995, 6') for Bb clarinet and piano. C.F. Peters Edition 67650. (for Beth Wiemann)

Nothing But the Wind (1995, 15') for soprano and orchestra (223(bcl)2 4220 2 perc, str). C.F. Peters, Edition 67709, rental.

Siren Song (1995, 1-1/2'), ostinato piece on Italian ambulance sirens.

Two Can Play That Game (1995, 4' 15") for bass clarinet and marimba, C.F. Peters, Edition 67710. (for Peter Josheff)

Weather Jazz (1995, 3' 40") for high voice and Pierrot ensemble or voice and piano. C.F. Peters, Edition 67712, 67712a. (Poem: Joseph Duemer)

Boy in the Dark (1996, 18'), ballet/fantasy for children dancers, children's chorus and Pierrot plus percussion. C.F. Peters 67748. (for Boston Musica Viva)

The Burning Woman Revisited (1996, 7') for soprano and clarinet. C.F. Peters, Edition 67711. (Poems: Joseph Duemer) (for Susan Narucki and Beth Wiemann)

Sesso e Violenza (1995-96, 23') for fl/picc, fl/afl, vln, vla, vc pno, perc. C.F. Peters, Edition 67734. (commissioned by the Koussevitzky Foundation for Ensemble 21)

Tight Fit (1996, 5') for 'cello and piano. C.F. Peters, Edition 67732. (for Rhonda Rider and Lois Shapiro)

Attitude Problem (1996-97, 15') for piano trio. C.F. Peters, Edition 67776. (for the Triple Helix)

Persistent Memory (1996-97, 21') for chamber orchestra (2(picc)22(bcl)2 2000 str(5-4-3-3-1). C.F. Peters, 67862, rental. Pulitzer Prize finalist, 1999. First movement, Elegy, may be performed by itself. (commissioned by the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra with funds from the Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust)

Dances in the Dark (1996, 98; 14') for Pierrot plus percussion. C.F. Peters Edition 67748a. (concert suite from "Boy in the Dark")

Rowell Come Back Now (1997, 98, 18') for 5-string electric violin solo. C.F. Peters, Edition 67844. (for Mary Rowell)

Take Jazz Chords, Make Strange (1997, 12') for clarinet and string quartet. C.F. Peters, Edition 67823. (for Beth Wiemann, The Lydian String Quartet and the 50th anniversary of Brandeis University)

Feslpimal (1998, 10') for clarinet, cello and piano, for teenagers (commissioned by Sara Doniach)

The Squeaky Wheel (1998, 1-1/2') for E-flat clarinet solo. (for Beth Wiemann)

Pied-à-Terre (1999, 10') for violin and piano. C.F. Peters, Edition 67943. (for Bayla Keyes and Lois Shapiro)

The Gardener (2000, 5') for soprano, clarinet, violin, viola, cello and piano. C.F. Peters, Edition 67749. (Poem: Sophie Wadsworth) (for Network for New Music) (also song #2 of Sex Songs)

Georgic (2000, 2-1/2') for soprano and piano. (poem by Phillis Levin) (commissioned by James Goldsworthy for Judith Bettina). C.F. Peters, Edition 68130.

Gut Reaction (2000, 15') for clarinet, violin, viola, cello and piano. C.F. Peters, Edition 67843. (commissioned by Network for New Music)

Martian Counterpoint (2000, arr. 2003, 7') ca. 25 clarinets (concerto group of 10, ripieno group of ca. 15 (9 parts) and one percussionist). C.F. Peters, Edition 67978a. For the clarinet section of the US Marine Band.

Sex Songs (2000, 2004-5, 21') for soprano, clarinet, piano and string trio. For Susan Narucki. Poets include Sophie Wadsworth, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Ida Thøenkkittüpp, and Rick Moody (for Susan Narucki).

Ten of a Kind (Symphony No. 2, 2000, 27'), for clarinet section (Eb, 6 Bb, alto, bass, Bb contrabass) and wind ensemble (picc, 2fl, 2 ob, EHn, 2 bsn, Cbsn, 2 ASax, TSax, BSax, 4 hn, 4 tpt(C), 4 trb, 2 euph, Tuba, 4 perc). C.F. Peters, Edition 67978. Pulitzer finalist, 2002. (commissioned by "The President's Own" United States Marine Band)

When the Bow Breaks (2000, 13') for violin solo. C.F. Peters, Edition 67871. (for Curtis Macomber)

Locking Horns (2001-2, 18') for horn and chamber orchestra. (commissioned by Sequitur) C.F. Peters, Edition 67995.

Elegy (2002, arr. 2005, 3'). Sara arranged for organ by Carson Cooman. C.F. Peters, 68131a

Memorial (2002, 10') for clarinet, viola and piano. (commissioned by Richard and Linda Kerber in memory of Alan Widiss)

Sara (2002, 4') elegy in memory of Sara Doniach. Commissioned by Judith Bettina and James Goldsworthy for Sara's students. C.F. Peters, Edition 68131.

Trompe L'Oeil (2002, 2') for two marimbas. (for Double Play: Stephen Paysen and Dominic Donato)

Sibling Revelry (2002-2003/2004, 14') for wind ensemble (picc, 2fl, Afl, 2ob, Ehn, Ebcl, 3cl, Acl, Bcl, CBcl, 2bsn, Cbsn, 2ASax, TSax, BSax, 4hn, 4tpt, 4trb, 2euph, Tuba, 4 perc). Arrangements of four piano études (Zipper Tango, Strident, Bop It and Moody's Blues) C.F. Peters, Edition 67928ff.



Dream Symphony (Symphony No. 3, 2003, 28') for string orchestra (8-6-5-4-2) (for the New England String Ensemble). C.F. Peters, Edition 68135.

Twofer (2003, 6') for violin and 'cello. (commissioned by Dinosaur Annex for dance by the Nicola Hawkins Dance Company). C.F. Peters, forthcoming.

Violin Songs (2003, 18') for soprano and violin. (Poetry: Chuileanean, Frost, W.C. Williams, Gluck, Rukeyser) (for Susan Narucki and Curtis Macomber).

Beezle Nose (2004, 1-1/2') for Robert Ceely's retirement tribute concert.

Four Rivers (2004, 10') for flute, clarinet, horn and marimba, for high school musicians (commissioned by the Rivers Music School)

Rule of Three (2004, 10') for fl, cl and piano (commissioned by Kettle's Yard, University of Cambridge). C.F. Peters, Edition 68133.

Seven Duets (2004, 1' each) pno 4-hands for beginning to intermediate students aged ca. 10-11 (commissioned by James Goldsworthy)

The Bacchae (2005, 25'), 35 cues of varying lengths, for string quartet and timpani. For spring 2006 Brandeis production of the play by Euripides, directed by Eric Hill, sound design by J Hagenbuckle. With funding from the Poses Foundation.

Inside Story (Piano Trio #3, 2005, 14') for violin, cello and piano. C.F. Peters, Edition 68134 (Curtis Macomber, Norman Fischer and Jeanne Kierman, and Music in the Mountains).

It Takes Nine to Funk (2005, 4-1/2') 6 cl, 2 BCl, CBCl. An arrangement of Absofunkinlutely. C.F. Peters, Edition 67928gg

Snaggle (2005, 10') for solo hand drums, in three movements. (commissioned by Michael Lipsey). Calabrese Brothers Publishing.



# Concert Review

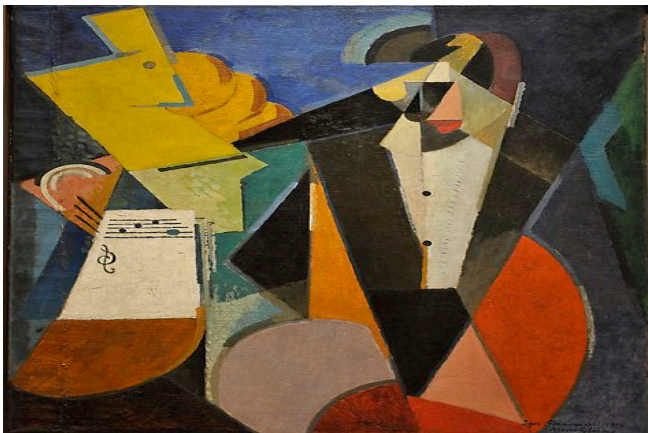
## A Nightingale San on Van Ness Avenue

MARK ALBURGER

All good things come to those that wait.

It took awhile -- 91 years, in fact -- but Igor Stravinsky's first opera, *The Nightingale*, arrived at Davies Symphony Hall on December 9, with Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony continuing a tradition of presenting innovatively staged drama in a concert space, on a double bill with the composer's *Oedipus Rex*.

These were welcome and beautiful productions, the first of a work rarely seen or heard -- indeed, even the extracted ballet/concert work *The Song of the Nightingale*, sort of a *Rite of Spring*-also-ran, is presented infrequently, and the opera hardly at all (a recent Metropolitan Opera presentation being a notable exception). Certainly the piece is problematic: Stravinsky composed the first act prior to *The Firebird*, and the subsequent two after the stylistic catalysts of *Petrushka* and *The Rite*, so a lot of compositional water under the bridge, and a bit of a disconnect, too. But as Maurice Ravel echoed along with the composer, the style change, from a Claude Debussyesque palette to one of neoprimitive Russo-chinoiserie, is justified internally by a drama that moves from nature into the bustle of oriental urban life, with a lovely "Fisherman's Song" that works in both contexts.



This is important music, even if destined to be a sort of stylistic footnote to the "big three" ballets of the previous years, and Tilson Thomas and company gave it their all, with a sumptuous set and an expert lineup of singers headlined by Paul Groves (*The Fisherman*), Olga Trifonova (*The Nightingale*), Catherine Cook (nicely doublecast as both *The Cook* and *Death*), Tigran Martirosian (*The Emperor*), and Ayk Martirosian (*The Chamberlain*). Courtesans Sandra DeAthos, Sonia Gariaeff, Valentina Osinski, and Darla Wigginton provided able support; and Harold Meers, Brian Frutiger, and Eugene Brancoveanu checked in as comic, albeit a bit racist (a view of Japan through imperial Chinese eyes), Japanese envoys, with European suitjackets and penitidious bowings.

The work, in its Parisian premiere, split the difference between opera and ballet, with dancers on the stage and singers in the orchestral pit, and, while this may have been due to Stravinsky's evolving impersonal, "objective" aesthetics, it is easy to imagine this being primarily due to ballet impresario-producer Sergei Diaghilev's dance orientation (indeed, much crucial Stravinskian aesthetics can be traced to Diaghilev -- right down to the turn to neoclassicism embodied by his commissioning of *Pulcinella* as an orchestration of early classic Pergolesi and the like).

San Francisco's presentation split the difference, with the singers acting and the dancers dancing almost on top of each other on the magical but tight stage, with sensual and macabre pirouetting from Natalie Willes (*The Nightingale*), Titus West (*Death*), and Joe Duffy (*Spectre*). And what a knockout was *The Mechanical Nightingale*, as embodied by a trio of gold-plated contortionists (Fleeky Fanco, Tracy Piper, and Alexis Greene), who provided what was undoubtedly one of the more arresting interpretations of this role ever.

The San Francisco Symphony Chorus was in good voice, too -- maybe too good, as the clangorous instrumental fireworks that open Act II were partially obscured.

Small peeve in an excellent rendition, and the excellence continued in Oedipus Rex. Narrator Carey Perloff took the right stentorian part -- if a little flip at times. Michelle DeYoung was perfection personified both physically and vocally as Jocasta: here was a Mother-for-a-Son-to-accidentally-marry ever worthy of the part... sensuous, dangerous, and tragic. Stuart Skelton was her apt foil in the title role, decked out in a white suite and incongruous long ribbon, against her clingy voluptuousness. Tigran and Ayk returned respectively as Creon and Tiresias, and they were fine, but they set one wondering about Stravinsky's scoring. Certainly he needed all these basses as foils to his tenor Oedipus, and certainly the composer was interested in a dark male sound, what with the males-only chorus, but is the accompaniment right for these voices?

OK, let's take the gloves off (as opposed to the chorus, which looked greatly snappy in evening clothes, half-masks, and Michael Jackson one-glove-only reds). Does this music always work?

There are an awful lot of minor third triplets, and sometimes the composer sounds as if he's cruising (where does repetition-as-ominous monumentality end and I-can't-think-of-anything-better-to-do begin?).

Promising melodies ramble down dark paths and then disappear into fusty, though intriguing, if not fascinating, arcana of counterpoint.

While Stravinsky remains at the top of my list of composers (all of him -- primitive, neoclassic, serial), Oedipus remains a personal also-ran. Certainly, it has its glories: the stirring opening/closing, the triplets before they go on too long, the vulgar descending major arpeggios, the wild "Gloria" counterpoint (why did the narrator's line "To kill his father and to wed his mother" not immediately precede the recap?), the Hollywood-Bowl trumpet fanfares, and the story is a Freudian keeper; but, perhaps partly due to the wink-wink artifice of a chopping up into traditional "numbers" (arias, duets -- do we need to hear these singers together, to move the non-drama along?), it doesn't add up to a whole. But maybe that's fine, too....

Nevertheless, in wholes and parts it was an arresting night of opera-ballet and opera-oratorio in the concert hall, and we look for further contemporary music-drama engagements with the San Francisco Symphony.



# Chronicle

December 2

Tobias Picker's *An American Tragedy*. Metropolitan Opera, New York, NY. "For a company of such international standing, the Metropolitan Opera has had an inexcusably timid record of commissioning operas in recent decades. Consequently, when the Met presents a new work, the stakes are almost impossibly high. . . . *An American Tragedy*, Tobias Picker's long-awaited operatic adaptation of Theodore Dreiser's landmark 1925 novel, with a libretto by Gene Scheer, opened at the Met. What composer would not covet Mr. Picker's success at winning this commission? But this was only the company's fourth premiere since the James Levine era began in 1971. Talk about pressure. Though *An American Tragedy* is essentially a conventional work and whole stretches of Mr. Picker's score would not be out of place in a Broadway theater, the opera is accomplished, dramatically effective and thoroughly professional. It's hard to imagine a more compelling cast. . . . The production by the director Francesca Zambello could not be more gripping. Still, in getting behind this project, the Met was playing it safe. The subject is taken from a lofty, though still relevant and troubling literary work. Mr. Picker embraces opera as a populist art form. Those wary of contemporary music will find Mr. Picker's Neo-Romantic idiom much easier on the ears than, say, that garish shocker Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*. While John Adams (in *Doctor Atomic*), Thomas Adès (in *The Tempest*) and Poul Ruders (in *The Handmaid's Tale*) have pushed at the boundaries of the genre, Mr. Picker hews to melodramatic and operatic conventions. Yet he does so with undeniable skill. This is Mr. Picker's fourth opera (*Emmeline* is among the others) and in a recent interview he said that by now he had learned how to write for the voice, to pace the drama, to structure arias and ensembles. Many composers with greater musical originality could learn from Mr. Picker's know-how about the theater. Yet you almost always sense his controlling hand at work. . . . [T]he rousing music is generic and superficial. Paradoxically . . . [a] revealing moment seems a standard set piece with an applause-line final flourish, one of many set pieces in the score.

Every time Mr. Picker summons his modernist vocabulary, closer to the idiom of his days as a young serialist, the music becomes more involving. . . . There are other . . . moments when you sense Mr. Picker working harder, taking more chances . . . . Below deceptively placid vocal lines, the orchestra erupts with quietly scurrying counterpoint and lurching, unhinged harmonies. Such moments stand out in a score that is mostly too eager to please with its undulantly lyrical outpourings and film-scorish flourishes. The bustling scene when we first see the chorus of women working at the shirt factory is very derivative, like pale Prokofiev" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 12/3/05].

December 3

*Alarm Will Sound* in five John Adams pieces. Miller Theater, Columbia University, New York, NY. "What makes Adams Adams or Adams American or Adams an artifact of his time begins with the idea that the world sounds different than it used to. It can shriek, bang and whine through loudspeakers. There was not a flowering lea or a mist-shrouded mountaintop in the *Chamber Symphony* at the end of this evening. Mr. Adams likes electrified guitars and keyboards, clarinets and brass in their upper-register jazz mode, and rock-band drum sets. On a street corner or in front of a television set, such sounds are received as intrusive, even hurtful. Mr. Adams tries to convince us that they are beautiful. *Gnarly Buttons* takes American folk and pop apart and reassembles them in looser fragments; only in *Put Your Loving Arms Around Me* does sadness sing out at length, here in the well-played clarinet solos of Elisabeth Stimpert. In *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*, arranged for piano and played by John Orfe, sheer brutality made its claim for respect. Mr. Adams's true fascination is with motion. And if American optimism is to be found in his music, look for it in the transformations of time and rhythm. *Scratchband* at the start of the evening, like the *Chamber Symphony* at the end, tells our ears that the motion we are hearing at this instant is more than itself. It bears the seeds of other kinds of motion.



A little tic of movement, a tiny pattern from within, takes on its own life, blossoms and matures, leaving its parent phrase to die away. Mr. Adams's music is about birth and rebirth: life changes, life goes on. The result is terribly complex: a nightmare of sight reading for Alarm Will Sound's ardent and intrepid players and especially their conductor, Alan Pierson. What draws us to these pieces, I think, is the confidence and certainty that all this eccentricity exudes. What ought to make us nervous doesn't. The other music was from "I Was Looking at the Ceiling and Then I Saw the Sky" and addresses California's clashing cultures in a kind of busy, but almost tender, oratorio. The visiting singers (almost everyone in the band sang as well) were Masi Asare, Evangelia Kingsley and Alan H. Green. The composer was on hand and spoke briefly" Bernard Holland, *The New York Times*, 12/5/05].

#### December 4

Emanuel Ax in a program of ballades, including works of Franz Liszt, Chen Yi, and Kaija Saariaho. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY. "The ballade is a notion disguised as a musical form. It doesn't adhere to formal dictates, like a sonata, or a defined rhythmic pattern, like a waltz. It doesn't even evoke a particular mood or distinct imagery, like a nocturne or a barcarolle. In theory, its roots are in the simple contours of the ballad, but most composers who have used the title have offered something structurally and dramatically grander. . . . Chen honored the form's roots by using Chinese folk melody as the basis of her ballade *Ji-Dong-Nuo* (2005), but if the traditional melody created the work's initial sound world, it was quickly submerged in thickets of Western modernism. By the middle of the work, which lasts less than five minutes, the simply harmonized melody heard in the opening bars had evolved into a virtuosic, texturally complex work that evoked Bartok's reconfigurations of Hungarian folk songs. Ms. Saariaho's *Ballade* (2005) is also a work of about five minutes, and like Ms. Chen's piece, it demands both a tightly focused technique and a poetic ear, two qualities that have long been prominent in Mr. Ax's arsenal.

But Ms. Saariaho's ballade is concerned less with melody than with texture, or at least with the interplay between the score's emotionally tense figuration and the melodic strands that briefly arise from it. In some ways, Ms. Saariaho seems to have taken a page from Liszt's playbook for ballades. Though her work is more substantial than Liszt's *Ballade No. 2* in B minor in every way but length (the Liszt is three times as long), they share rumbling basses and splashy, involved passage work. And by playing them side by side, Mr. Ax put a spotlight on their unlikely kinship" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 12/6/05].

#### December 8

Japan Society presents Miyako Itchu XII and ensemble. Three centuries ago in Japan, a former Buddhist priest turned musician named Miyako Itchu forged a style of narrative musical theater. His approach, *Itchu-bushi*, became the foundation of classical Japanese theater music, setting stories as suites that change seamlessly as a tale progresses. *Itchu-bushi* is sparse, somber music. Voices intone the stories in sustained phrases, swooping between speech and song. They are accompanied by a few notes plucked on shamisens . . . and peeped from a wooden flute (*hayashi*), to be punctuated by hand drums. Every so often a rhythm takes over and a melody is shared. For the stage, the austerity of *Itchu-bushi* gave way to a more vigorously rhythmic style, *Tokiwazu-bushi*, now regularly heard in Kabuki theater. But *Itchu-bushi* has survived as chamber music. . . . [T]he shamisen player who has been designated Miyako Itchu XII led an 11-member ensemble with pieces in both styles. The *Itchu-bushi* pieces were stories of enlightenment and contemplation. In *Dojo-ji Temple*, monks freed the troubled spirit of a princess from their temple bell, with music that moved from chantlike reverence to busy contention to stillness again. *Chapter of Flowers*, with lyrics taken from Junichiro Tanizaki's novel *The Makioka Sisters* [1943-1948], celebrated the fragile beauty of cherry blossoms. It was a duet by Mr. Itchu and the vocalist Miyako Ichisumi, whose voice could be sweet, almost disembodied or deliberately rough-edged. The *Tokiwazu-bushi* pieces were less abstract -- steadier in their rhythms, more succinct in their melodies -- but equally meticulous.

Feather Robe on the Pine, about a celestial maiden whose robe is taken by a fisherman, featured a Kabuki dancer, Hanayagi Kiyohito, who grew convincingly fragile and earthbound without her divine robe, then turned regal when it was returned. Sanja Festival depicted a bustling, almost kaleidoscopic street scene with repeating, folksy melodies and almost rowdy vocal interjections. It was easy to hear how Tokizawu-bushi supplanted the older style: its pleasures are simpler" [Jon Pareles, The New York Times, 12/10/05].

#### December 9

Bejun Mehta, with pianist Kevin Murphy, sings music of Ralph Vaughan Williams, Roger Quilter, and Gerald Finzi. Temple of Dendur, Metropolitan Museum, New York, NY. "[T]his was Mr. Mehta's evening, and his clear, cultured countertenor sound came through relatively unobstructed, at least to a listener three rows in front of him. The Vaughan Williams, Gerald Finzi and Roger Quilter songs created a bucolic, lyrical English style colored by syntheses of modal scales" [Bernard Holland, The New York Times, 12/12/06].

Death of Gyorgy Sandor (b. Budapest, Hungary), at 93. New York, NY. [He] studied [piano] with Bartok and remained a champion of his music throughout a long career as a performer and teacher. Mr. Sandor . . . [took] composition with Kodaly at the Liszt Academy of Music there. He began to travel widely as a concert pianist in the 1930's, and settled in the United States after his American debut at Carnegie Hall in 1939. Though the program of his debut at Carnegie featured Brahms, Schumann and Bach, he became best known for his performances and recordings of Bartok and Prokofiev. He recorded the complete solo piano works of Prokofiev and Kodaly, and the piano music and concertos of Bartok, for which he won the Grand Prix du Disque in 1965. Critics praised his style for its grace and delicate coloration even in the brawniest and most technically demanding music, like Bartok's dense cluster chords. 'His playing serves as a chastisement to those who play Bartok with percussive sound,' Anthony Tommasini of The New York Times wrote in a review of a four-disc set that Mr. Sandor recorded for Sony Classical after his 80th birthday in 1992.

In the 1940's he gave the premieres of Bartok's Dance Suite and Piano Concerto No. 3, and four decades later performed Bartok's long-lost piano reduction of his landmark Concerto for Orchestra. Bartok produced it in 1944 for a choreographic version of the piece by American Ballet Theater -- which never materialized -- and it was found in 1985 by the composer's son Peter, who asked Mr. Sandor to prepare it for performance and publication. Mr. Sandor maintained a busy touring schedule around the world, even after a heart attack three years ago. His last concert was in Turkey in April, his son said. He was also influential as a teacher. He taught at Southern Methodist University in Dallas from 1956 to 1961 and was then the director of graduate studies in piano at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor until 1981. The next year he joined the piano faculty at the Juilliard School. Among his students were Malcolm Bilson, Barbara Nissman and Hélène Grimaud. He wrote *On Piano Playing: Motion, Sound and Expression* (1981), and he recently completed the manuscript of a book on Bartok and his music, his son said. His marriage to Christina Sandor ended in divorce. Besides his son, of Manhattan, he is survived by two stepdaughters, Alejandra de Habsburgo de Riera of Barcelona, Spain, and Inmaculada de Habsburgo of Manhattan" [Ben Sisario, The New York Times, 12/14/05].

#### December 19

*Speculum Musicae*. Merkin Hall, New York, NY. "David Rakowski wrote *Inside Story* this year, while Charles Wuorinen's *Fortune* goes back to 1979. . . . Some of the music was very good, most of it interesting and all of it very well played. Curtis Macomber, violinist, Aleck Karis, pianist, Allen Blustine, clarinetist, and Chris Finckel, cellist, faced musical and technical puzzles with remarkable skill and true engagement. . . . Jacob Druckman's *Dark Wind* and Toru Takemitsu's *From Far Beyond Chrysanthemums* and *November Fog* shared, in their different ways, an earnest pursuit of beautiful sound. Mr. Druckman's combinations of violin and cello tone showed a man in love with both instruments; the Takemitsu finds delicacy in the extreme ranges of the violin and the piano.

Their mirror opposite was Mr. Wuorinen's two-movement quartet at the end, hard-bitten and complex - a tough guy next to these two soft and curvaceous duos. Chou Wen-Chung's Windswept Peaks, also for all four instruments, was high-strung, tumultuous and given to sending short phrases back and forth between the different parts. Mr. Rakowski's three movements begin with scurrying figures and sharp banging interruptions; they continue with a kind of baritonal nocturne and end with rumbling tremolos and a terribly complicated piano part running beneath them. Beauty in the feel-good, hedonistic sense was as absent here as it was in Mr. Wuorinen's Fortune. One could split the evening into two camps. One side says, 'The sensuous is still important'; the other, 'Here is the news, not all of it pretty'" [Bernard Holland, 12/21/11].

November 27

Alban Berg's *Wozzeck*. Metropolitan Opera, New York, NY. "If James Levine could zap himself back in time and conduct the premiere of any opera in history, what among his favorites might he choose? . . . My guess . . . is that Mr. Levine would choose the 1925 premiere at the Berlin State Opera of Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* . . . . Adapted by Berg from Georg Büchner's play *Woyzeck*, which was left in sketches when the author died at 23 in 1837, the opera was largely denounced by the critical establishment at its premiere. Yet it stunned and excited Berlin audiences with its excitingly radical musical language and brutally modern dramatic content. When Mark Lamos's arrestingly abstract 1997 production of *Wozzeck* returned . . . Levine once again showed himself the living master of this extraordinary work. It remains one of the greatest achievements of his career. Since coming to the Met in 1971, Mr. Levine has found it hard to fashion the company into a place that fosters new works, though he and the Met have done better at this in the last 10 years. But he has succeeded at another important goal: to make a few major operas from the early 20th century essential components of the Met's repertory, works like Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron*, and Berg's unfinished masterpiece, *Lulu*.

He has said that simply by bringing these works back regularly he is convinced that he can win over Met patrons and the public. . . . During . . . [this] decade, *Wozzeck* has been presented in four seasons, including this one. . . . Many people would not consider this bleak, atonal opera appropriate holiday fare . . . . Levine could not have asked for a more attentive and appreciative audience. With his brilliant and searching conducting and an inspired and excellent cast, I could not imagine a more compelling production. Mr. Levine's achievement in *Wozzeck* comes from his ability to fuse its musical and dramatic elements. . . . On the surface the music seems volatile and fractured, teeming with Expressionistic fervor. . . . Though Mr. Levine illuminates . . . structure, the message of his performance to listeners is: 'Let me worry about all that; you just sit back and let yourself respond to dramatic sweep and musical power of this tragic story.' Through careful voicing of chords, attention to details, coaxing of inner lines, expressive nuances and sheer intensity, he drew an electrifying performance from the Met orchestra, revealing this pungent score to be deeply emotional and excruciatingly beautiful" [Anthony Tommasini, The New York Times, 12/29/06].



## Books

Michael Segell. *The Devil's Horn: The Story of the Saxophone, From Noisy Novelty to King of Cool*. By Michael Segell. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. "Would someone please forward Segell the memo that states that books about jazz are supposed to be academic and soporific? His freewheeling tribute to the instrument of Coltrane, Hawkins and Rollins begins with a wild retelling of the life of its 19th-century inventor, Adolphe Sax, who endured disfiguring accidents, assassination attempts and a cancerous tumor on his lip so that his namesake horn might outlive him. It's a story that could easily be its own book (or at least a movie starring Tom Hulse), but the rebellious, obsessive spirit of Sax figures prominently throughout Segell's explorations, as the author encounters modern-day disciples who have dedicated their lives to perfecting saxophone mouthpieces or archiving out-of-print saxophone music and recordings. He even attempts to learn the instrument himself from scratch. Some of Segell's journalistic wanderings (like his brief stint performing in the Purdue University marching band) feel frivolous, but based on the exuberance that is everywhere to be found in *The Devil's Horn*, it's clear he grasps the jazzman's dictum that it's the journey, not the destination" [Dave Itzkoff, *The New York Times*, 12/4/05].



Studs Terkel. *And They All Sang: Adventures of an Eclectic Disc Jockey*. New Press. "In the introduction to his latest indispensable oral history, adapted from interviews he conducted for his radio show on Chicago's WFMT, Terkel laments that 'many names will be unknown to younger readers.' He's probably right: aside from a 1963 chat with an unconvincingly modest Bob Dylan ('I'm just sort of trying to find a place to pound my nails') and an eerily prophetic conversation with Janis Joplin ('I'm not going to sing 'Down on Me' for 20 years'), Terkel's dialogues with more than 40 legends of jazz, blues, folk and classical music may not immediately resonate with the Total Request Live crowd. But his singular gift for bringing his subjects to life in their own words should strike a chord with any music fan old enough to have replaced a worn-out record needle. Miss this volume, and you will miss Louis Armstrong's stories of halting a civil war in Africa, Leonard Bernstein's (favorable!) comparison of the Beatles to Porgy and Bess, and a charming little anecdote about how Enrico Caruso once ended up in jail ('I just pinched her fanny a little')" [Dave Itzkoff, *The New York Times*, 12/4/05].

