

A photograph of a stage performance. In the foreground, a man with a white beard and hair, wearing a light blue suit and a dark bow tie, sits in a wooden chair, holding a dark hat. Behind him, a man with a beard and sunglasses, wearing a grey suit, stands. To the left, another man in a light blue suit is partially visible, holding a brass instrument. The background is a large chalkboard with the word 'APPOMATTOX' at the top, 'FARMVILLE' below it, 'PRINCE EDWARD' below that, and 'BURKE'S' on the right. Dashed lines connect the words on the board. Two American flags are visible in the upper right corner.

**21ST
CENTURY
MUSIC**

DECEMBER 2007

INFORMATION FOR SUBSCRIBERS

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.

Typeset in Times New Roman. Copyright 2007 by 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC. This journal is printed on recycled paper. Copyright notice: Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use is granted by 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC.

INFORMATION FOR CONTRIBUTORS

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

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

INFORMATION FOR ADVERTISERS

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

21ST CENTURY MUSIC

December 2007

Volume 14, Number 12

AUTHOR	An Interview with Rodney Waschka II TOM MOORE	1
CONCERT REVIEWS	Appreciating Music at Marin Symphony PHILLIP GEORGE	9
	The Sincerest Form MARK ALBURGER	9
	Tenting Today BRIAN HOLMES	10
	Bringing in the Sheaves of Song	11
CHRONICLE	Of October 2007	12

ILLUSTRATIONS:

- i Philip Glass - Appomattox
- 2 Guitar
- 3 Nelson Mandela
- 8 Frederic Rzewski
- 12 Allen Ginsberg
- 12 Harrison Birtwistle

Editorial Staff

Mark Alburger
EDITOR-PUBLISHER

Harriet March Page
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Patti Noel Deuter
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Erling Wold
WEBMASTER

Alexis Alrich
Ken Bullock
David Cleary
Jeff Dunn
Phillip George
Brian Holmes
Jeff Kaliss
Michael McDonagh
Stephen Moore
William Rowland
CORRESPONDENTS

An Interview with Rodney Waschka II

TOM MOORE

Composer Rodney Waschka is on the faculty of North Carolina State in Raleigh. He has been active for many years in the area of computer music, and especially in the area of algorithmic composition, which informs his works for more traditional media as well.

We spoke at Duke University, in Durham, North Carolina, on Sept. 18, 2007.

MOORE: You were born in Memphis, TN. Was there music in your family – were your parents or grandparents musicians? How did music enter your life?

WASCHKA: I was born in Memphis and grew up in Texas. We moved when I was in the second grade – seven or eight years old. My parents weren't musical, and didn't play instruments or sing regularly. Both sets of grandparents lived in Memphis, and there wasn't a strong musical background there either. My grandfather's brother loved to listen to Italian opera. My mother's side of the family were the Cardosi's, from Italy. I remember a story told about him. After Sunday dinner with the large family, he would go to his chair and demand not to be disturbed while he listened to the broadcast of the Metropolitan Opera.

I moved to Texas when I was quite young and grew up in that musical environment – lots of country/western, pop, rock. I began to play the guitar, and became interested in classical music for the guitar, so I had a huge collection of Andrés Segovia records, with repertoire ranging from Renaissance to contemporary music, most of the latter conservative to extremely conservative contemporary music, but it was present. He did commission pieces from living composers. That led me to other guitar players and other composers and musicians. I listened to Julian Bream, which led me to hear lute music, and John Williams playing other kinds of things.

MOORE: Where were you living in Texas?

WASCHKA: We lived in between Dallas and Fort Worth. My parents still live there. They had some land out in East Texas. That was wonderful. I had a horse and enjoyed learning to ride, and having places to ride where things were open and not constantly constrained by fences.

MOORE: When I think of the guitar in the 60s and 70s, I think of rock and roll. How did you get into classical guitar? Was there a pop phase?

WASCHKA: There was a brief pop phase. Our son, who plays viola and piano, recently taught himself the guitar, and pop music is all he plays on the guitar. He was asking me if I ever played in a garage band, and in talking to him I realized that there was a very short period in middle school, which came and went quickly. Art music for the guitar was just so much more interesting for me.

MOORE: Was there a circle of students who were interested in classical music?

WASCHKA: I was not in a group where this was strong, partly because of my instrument. The guitar does not have a lot of chamber music – I wasn't playing in the orchestra, wasn't playing in the band.

MOORE: You mention recordings of Segovia and Bream and Williams. If you grow up close to a city you have access to its musical life there. What was the concert life like in Dallas-Fort Worth when you were growing up?

WASCHKA: I didn't really participate in that – I might go to a concert if there was a guitar player playing – until I went away to school, and became more aware of certain things.

MOORE: Were you already thinking of a life in music as an adolescent? Were there issues with your parents?

WASCHKA: My parents were not supportive of the idea that I would be a musician, so I spent quite a bit of time studying other things as well. That remained the situation for some years. It was around the time I finished my bachelor's degree that they realized that this was the path I was taking, and that maybe it could be OK.

I remember that my father bought some very expensive tickets for us to see Segovia in Houston, and drove us down just for the concert that night, and we drove back. At the concert my father and mother seemed impressed. Here was a man playing this music to a full house with the audience clearly appreciating it. It wasn't half-bad – maybe it wasn't Willie Nelson, but it wasn't half-bad.

MOORE: Where did you go for undergraduate school?

WASCHKA: I was at the University of North Texas. I started, briefly, at the University of Texas at Austin. It was impossible for me to study there because, as it was quaintly put, I didn't play an instrument. It was my fault that I played classical guitar, for which they had no professor.

MOORE: Mind-boggling that there was no guitar professor at UT Austin.

WASCHKA: There was none at that time, so I transferred to the University of North Texas, and that worked out well.

MOORE: You were a composition major already. Was that something you had been exploring before you got to university?

WASCHKA: I must have, though I don't remember much about it. The entrance requirements in composition included submitting works, and I must have submitted works for guitar, and for guitar and flute. It was clear to me that I was not talented enough as a player to go in that direction, and I had a stronger interest in composition.

MOORE: Perhaps the interest in composition might be correlated with studying guitar, since guitar, more so than piano, is focused on a 20th-century repertoire. You can't play guitar at an advanced level without modern music, whereas a piano professor might be happy to never assign you something written after 1900.

WASCHKA: I think there is something to that. I have noticed that there are many composers I have encountered in my generation for whom guitar was the instrument, and it naturally put us in touch with 20th-century music. Not necessarily the best, in all cases, but it had to be part of the spectrum – one couldn't escape it.

MOORE: The other thing that is true for the guitar is that to a much greater extent than the piano it is the instrument of worldwide popular music, so that there is no way of avoiding having in your ears what is going on with the guitar outside classical music.

WASCHKA: Perhaps for some folks that helped them make a transition into electronic music. As jazz is for the saxophone, electronic manipulation of sound is part of the guitar world that can't be escaped.

MOORE: I like the way you put that, because that seems to be an area of analysis that is virtually untouched by traditional harmonic or melodic analysis. With a piano there is no way of manipulating the sound, whereas the fundamental thing you take away from Jimi Hendrix is not his choice of notes, but the changes of timbre from note to note over the structure of a solo.

WASCHKA: I think there are two problems. One is developing a language – one needs to name things in order to be able talk about them, to think about them in finer ways. First, there is just the gross naming of things. I think that *is* being developed, we are developing terms in computer music, to talk about things, sometimes with a great deal of sophistication. There is a recent book edited by Mary Simone about the analysis of electronic music, with chapters by different folks, including Mary, that could be helpful in this matter. It is called *Analytical Methods of Electroacoustic Music*.



Then one comes to the second problem, which is that musicians may be aware of certain things, but they don't understand things in technical terms. They can't name it, and have to spend a certain amount of time learning about it, which for some people seems like a very big wall. Some of my colleagues in computer music say, "It's wonderful -- you can learn everything in two years!" as opposed to other types of literature, chamber music, for example, which would take your lifetime. What happens is that our colleagues become part of the lay public, and we have to converse about this without using technical terms, or have to bog down the conversation by explaining. On the other hand, one could think, we have been at this for about sixty years, and perhaps, given that time period, we are making wonderful progress.

MOORE: What was the compositional climate at UNT in the late seventies?

WASCHKA: There were six composers on the faculty, and in your first semester you had a course in which each of them taught for a few weeks, and then would hand it off to the next. They would introduce the students to their music and their way of teaching, and so you could make an intelligent decision about your choice of teacher. Larry Austin, Merrill Ellis, Thomas Clark, Newell K. Brown, and William Latham were on the faculty. Soon after came Phil Winsor, and I think that when William Latham retired they hired Cindy McTee, although I can't trust my memory on exactly when folks came and went.

Ellis was very interested in electronic music, as was Austin. Martin Mailman was chair of the department. He was well-known, and continues to be well-known after his death, for his band music. Newell K. Brown is well-known for music he wrote for the Church of Latter-Day Saints. Latham wrote orchestral and band works -- one of his most popular pieces is a saxophone concerto. Clark was interested in creating fluid chamber music pieces, with notation that is less highly-defined -- all the parameters are addressed in some way. There wasn't a high serialist on the faculty, and there was a more conservative group consisting of Mailman and Brown and Latham, with a more avant-garde side of Ellis, Clark and Austin, if I had to put them on a spectrum. Clark is now the Dean of Music at the North Carolina School of the Arts.

MOORE: What were the compositional models? Were there anti-models as well? Sometimes the anti-models are as important as the models.

WASCHKA: I studied with Austin, and so received a more avant-garde compositional approach to instruction. I also worked quite a bit with Clark and studied one summer with Mailman, which a very good experience. You always knew where you stood with him. He disliked electronic music, and consequently most of the things I was working on were of no interest to him. He would not compliment guest composers if he didn't care for their music, or anyone whose music he didn't like. He was extremely gentlemanly, even courtly, although to students he displayed a somewhat gruff exterior.

I remember at one point I wrote a piece for mixed chorus and electronics. Apparently the director didn't want me to attend the rehearsal. They were also rehearsing a Mailman piece at the same time. I saw Mailman in the hallway, and this one piece he happened to like, and so it meant a lot to me that he said he liked it, because I knew he wasn't kidding. He had been willing to tell me that he didn't like most of my music.

MOORE: What sort of technical resources did you have at your disposal in electronic music? It seems like another age, another epoch, another glaciation. Looking back from 2007, it is hard to even imagine what was available.

WASCHKA: Undergraduates were allowed to use the analogue studio, which Merrill Ellis had put together, and which contained the second or third synthesizer that Robert Moog had built. That was available, and as a grad student one got time on the mainframe, and wrote programs and had the cards punched, and turned them in. That was a very brief moment – I went from working in an analogue studio to working with the Synclavier – a computer music system that had a small refrigerator-sized computer that was actually there in the studio, with a keyboard, a monitor, and an alphanumeric keyboard to allow you to type commands to the computer right there. The turn-around time was magnificent in comparison to working with the mainframe, where you would ask it do something for you, and would come back the next day to see if it had completed the program run.

We were able to work with the Synclavier system, which at the time (in the 1980s) was incredibly expensive. I remember that Larry Austin was part of the group of folks who got the grant from the NEA to put the studio together.

MOORE: What came after your undergraduate work at UNT?

WASCHKA: I got my master's at UNT, and at that point wanted to go to the Institute of Sonology in the Netherlands. In 1981 at UNT, Larry Austin and Thomas Clark organized and hosted the International Computer Music Conference. I played guitar in a piece for eight guitars and soprano, *May All Your Children Grow Up To Be Acrobats*, by David Jaffe, and met Lejaren Hiller and John Cage who was there (I would eat breakfast with Cage, because he was staying in the same dorm where I lived and none of the other students knew who he was) and many other people, and the music was interesting and often fun. There was an extent to which I didn't understand, I didn't get it. In that situation people either turn away from things, or they become fascinated. I became fascinated.

I also spent a summer at Brooklyn College with Charles Dodge, studying computer music. That was the first time that I met Max Matthews, Paul Lansky, Jon Appleton, though I might have met Appleton at North Texas. The idea of the Synclavier was that it was a portable instrument – it doesn't seem like it now. You could put it in your van and tour with it. I think Appleton would go from university to university that had one and actually perform. His idea was that it was for live performance, one shouldn't just use it as a studio synthesis system.

I organized everything in order to study with Gottfried Michael Koenig, and made all the arrangements to go to the Netherlands in August of 1985. In April or May a letter came saying that they had decided to move the Institute from Utrecht to Den Haag, and that he expected that during the fall semester they would be packing, and in the spring semester unpacking, so that for the first year, I wouldn't be able to get any work done, but that I should come on over anyway, and enjoy the beer, and so forth.

I didn't have the money to just hang out and enjoy the beer for a year, so I had to scramble. I had had the idea to go somewhere else to do a doctorate, but it was too late to enroll anywhere but UNT, where they already knew me. I started work on my doctorate, but it's so hard to transfer credits that you are stuck. I went to the Netherlands and earned the certificate at the Institute of Sonology, in my mind, a sort of second master's, and then returned to North Texas. When I arrived in the Netherlands, I found that the government had offered Koenig a sweet deal on early retirement, and he had taken it. It became clear that I was not destined to study with Gottfried Michael Koenig, and that turned out to be a fabulous thing for me, because I had not realized the degree to which he was married to serialist concepts. I was aware of his algorithmic work, but did not appreciate how closely it was tied to serialism. At least that was the way it appeared to me. I studied with a wonderful teacher, an American, Paul Berg, who went to Europe one summer, and thought he would hang out in the Netherlands for a while, and then go on to the "real Europe." He dropped in on the Institute of Sonology and didn't leave, just called his parents to tell them to pack his things and send them. I also studied with George Lewis and Joel Ryan – very fruitful for me, just not what I had expected.

MOORE: When I hear the name "George Lewis" I think jazz.

WASCHKA: George was in residence at STEIM in Amsterdam, and he was completely interested in computer music. He wanted to create real-time interactive systems that would respond to his trombone playing. He made a big piece called *Voyager*, for which there is a CD recording, which is essentially the computer system responding to the trombone. He was also making a big piece for the 1986 International Computer Conference, which was being organized by Paul Berg. George was making a commissioned piece called *The Empty Chair*, being helped with the technology in part by Joel Ryan, also in residence at STEIM.

Things weren't going well. George felt he was not being supported by the Conservatory, and I believe he felt he was not being supported because the piece was about Nelson Mandela, who at that time was in prison. The empty chair was the chair that Mandela was *not* sitting in.



One week we went to class, and George didn't show up. The next week we went to class, and George didn't show up. Being the American in the crowd, I went to the administration and notified them that we had no teacher. It was only then that they realized that George was no longer in the country -- he had gotten so fed up that he had left. I later told George that he should have told his students, that we were always ready to march on the administration, and that he would have had our full support.

In the end the piece was made and performed, but I don't think that George was happy with it, that he was satisfied with the realization that was supported. So more work was done and I believe it was performed again, at the Conservatory, but by that time I had returned to the States.

Another composer with whom I studied in the Netherlands who was both influential and fun was Clarence Barlow.

MOORE: This is one of those mysterious names who seems to be ever-present, but one never hears his music.

WASCHKA: He is quite charming, and gets away with unbelievable stuff because he is so charming. As a musician he was constantly running out of money at that time. He was living in Cologne, and would take the train to come teach in The Hague. He would track his finances with functions on his computer, and when his German bankers were getting upset with him, he went in and showed them that, based on his mathematical models, it was clear that, although he was in the red now, he would be in the black again, and they should leave him alone, and that everything would be OK.

Clarence was interested in what he called parametric composition. My impression was that his ideal compositional machine would look like a mixing board, with faders for things like tonality, and metricity, and that he would in real time be able to move these faders -- increase or decrease timbral complexity, sense of meter, sense of tonality. He outlined this theory in a book called *A Bus Journey to Parametron*, which was written on an amazing bus journey which Clarence made more than once. He would travel from Cologne to see his parents in India, by bus. The book is hilarious -- it has a preface in which the words are arranged to make a profile of Clarence's face. It is the first book I encountered in which every single word was indexed.

One of the reasons that people may not know so much of his music is that he, at least at that time, was not prolific. There are not so many pieces to know. My favorite would be the *Variazioni*, a big piece for midi-controlled piano, variations on the arietta movement of Beethoven's *Piano Sonata No. 32 in C minor*, Opus 111.

MOORE: It seems that computer music exists in a parallel universe, in which the esthetic battles are different -- you don't have the dichotomy serialist-minimalist situation. To go back to the question of analysis the parameters are different. Is there a spectrum of aesthetic positions, a circle of possibilities? If so, how would you characterize yourself?

WASCHKA: I would situate myself, differentiate myself, by pointing out that my main area of research is compositional algorithms, so there are many computer music composers who are mainly interested, some perhaps exclusively interested, in timbral questions. It's all about micro-control of timbre, something they don't have with human players. I hesitate to name names, because they will say immediately "that's not my only interest!", and they would be right. But definitely there are pieces by James Dashow, or a younger composer like Elaine Lillios, that are focused on that kind of thing, and pieces by others who don't even make that much computer music -- a composer like Cindy McTee who has a great many other interests, but a couple of the computer music pieces that I know of hers are clearly focused on timbral issues.

There are composers who have interest in both, like Charles Dodge, who will work with algorithmic composition, but has a fabulous talent in the area of synthesis techniques. Jean-Claude Risset, a composer who is a pianist, and clearly enjoys working with human performers, is famous for his work with timbre, and his ability to make interesting timbres, and control them in interesting ways. For years, Paul Lansky made almost exclusively electronic pieces without humans involved. In more recent years he has been making pieces just for humans -- he's broadened his directions.

I was always fascinated by the algorithmic aspects of composing. It seems so liberating to me in lots of ways. One no longer had to sit at a piano and hope to find a melody or chord structure or something that would be useful. I could generate vast swaths of material and function as an editor. I had the feeling that I might not be very good at building things brick by brick, but I could often, more often than not, recognize good from bad music. Functioning as an editor seemed easier, more enjoyable.

For me it turns out to be a sort of multi-pronged process happening simultaneously. I am always on the lookout for things that could be the basis of a computer program which I would write to help me make music. At certain times I have made pieces using fractal processes, I have worked with genetic algorithms and Markov processes. I might have a piece that needs to be written, with a date to be finished. One of the first things I think about is, are there computer programs that I have already written, producing certain kinds of output, that I can use to make this piece? If there are, I can go to my toolbox, and take out tools that I have used before. If not, I may have to create another tool for myself. This is different from two other ways that composers work. There are composers who imagine the piece upfront, and then their goal is to realize that through notation or electronics.

MOORE: They have a concept of the structure, and then they fill in the details.

WASCHKA: They may even have a concept of the details. Austin describes Milhaud composing like Mozart -- he would start at measure one, and write the whole first measure, then the whole second measure, from the beginning to the end of the piece.

This is amazing to me, in many ways. I am used to writing a section, and not even being sure where that section is going to fit. There are also composers who think that they are working from beginning to end, but have no idea. Morton Feldman said "when I get to the point where I don't know what I am doing, that is when I start composing." They get themselves out there. I think novelists work this way as well -- the characters tell the story to them, the writer, and they feel their way along.

I think of my way of working as somewhere in between, or perhaps something different, because I think about what kind of output that the computer programs I have worked with can give me.

MOORE: What do you mean exactly when you talk about output? Harmonic structures? Rhythmic structures?

WASCHKA: All of that. There are programs I can use to give me certain melodic structures, others that will give certain rhythmic structures, others that will give harmonic structures, though I tend not to think about that. I tend to be pretty medieval -- very linear -- whatever results harmonically is usually OK, unless it turns out to be very anomalous.

I suppose I am thinking about kinds of textures. It could be, depending on what kind of group I am writing for, what kind of instruments they play, that I might think about melodic structures, or rhythmic structures, but not necessarily, and then I either start fiddling with a computer program, or alter one, or sit down and write one. But I start with the program, and it generates material that I then use.

MOORE: This seems like an approach that could equally well be applied to producing sounds by computer or notes on paper for human beings. How widely is this technique applied by people who want to write string quartets, or music for piano, people who are not in the computer milieu?

WASCHKA: Not very much. They may be missing out on something. There are students who think, "I want to write music that humans are involved with. I am not interested in electronic music," and then they don't find out about this other aspect of computer music.

On the other hand, I have the feeling that these days all young composers learn something about electronic music, if only in self-defense, and are at least exposed to it. They know algorithmic composition exists, and that some people make music that way. It's probably true that one doesn't find someone who makes mainly orchestral music doing that. People involved with algorithmic composition are usually involved to some extent with electronic music.

MOORE: How does this interface with what people may think of as the "American" sound of minimalism, which may sound as if it is produced by a pattern generator, and the details tweaked? Is there a connection?

WASCHKA: I don't see a connection, or at least I don't feel it. A lot of what has been done in algorithmic composition came from a different direction. You had Koenig with serialism, John Cage with chance music, his *I Ching* program, people like Lejaren Hiller basing programs on well-understood or not so well-understood ideas of theory.

I don't feel that connection.

MOORE: Let's talk about specific pieces. You write music for computer and music for performers -- string quartets, piano -- more traditional media. What are the connections between the two parts of your production?

WASCHKA: Often it depends on what the people who would like to perform my music are interested in. They may be quite honest, and say, "You can write this piece for me and electronics, and I will play it. Or you can write it for just me, and I will play it a lot." This clearly tells me that they don't frequently work with electronics, that it would be a chore for them to make sure that the sound system is available, to train someone to run the electronic part. Other performers are very much interested in that. Steve Duke has said to me, "It just doesn't make sense to me that the saxophone always plays with the piano. I don't think they sound good together."

There were years when he would not play with the piano, and in doing that he was commissioning pieces for saxophone and electronics which he feels work well together.

He was wonderful to work with. He said, "I want to do something different. I am tired of just being a saxophone player. Give me something else to do."

At the time I think he wanted a much smaller piece than I gave him [*Saint Ambrose*]. I wanted to write an opera, so we had to come to a compromise. I would get to write an opera. He was willing to take acting lessons, and did, but I could not ask him to sing. He wanted something for soprano saxophone.

One thing just shocked me. The piece is forty minutes long, and the performer is asked to speak, play the saxophone, with electronic music going, and there are considerable speaking parts, and acting parts. He memorized the whole thing. At the time he was commuting, and would practice on his commute, which was just about the right length to go through the piece.

I wrote the piece in scenes, with the expectation that if something went awry, things could get back on track at the beginning of a new scene, or if a pause was needed -- because a key is sticking, or you need a drink of water.

Steve was unhappy with that. He wanted a 40-minute electronic part, fixed on CD, with exact timings for pauses in between scenes, down to the second. I had to remake the part in that way, and that is the way he performs it. Someone starts the recorded part, and he doesn't stop for 40 minutes. Between the "Definitions" aria and the rant which comes after it, he asked for a one-minute computer music piece, in order to rest, and he said "Make it really computery!"

MOORE: Tell me about the string quartets. Listening to *Laredo*, I thought "Wow! This sounds like nothing I have ever heard before," but at the same time it sounds very American. The rhythmic structure is compelling. It's a unique voice, which I guess must be due to the algorithm you are using to generate it. With the string quartet you have this weight of tradition, about what strings do, and this piece is from some other planet.

WASCHKA: There are two string quartets. One is called *String Quartet: Laredo*, and the other is *String Quartet: Ha! Fortune*. *Laredo* uses an Irish tune that made its way to America, and took on various texts, one of which is *Cowboy's Lament*, and it is also called *Streets of Laredo*.

When I started work on that, I was also in the beginning stages of working with genetic algorithms, so that piece is a kind of exploration of what I could get them to do for me. You're right, part of the reason it sounds like it does is because of the genetic algorithms. The tune brings something that we associate with Copland, but there is something else, perhaps a result of putting the algorithms together with this particular tune.

MOORE: Perhaps the very diatonic sound.

WASCHKA: One of the things that I didn't put in was that whole language of Bartok. While there are a few snap pizzicati and glissandi, by and large that whole vocabulary is not included. I didn't think to include it in the computer program, so it has a certain atmosphere.

At the same time I became interested esthetically in clarity, being as transparent as possible. When I begin experimenting with these algorithms, it is a natural thing to use things like diatonic structures, because one understands them intuitively so well, that they become like a control factor in an experiment. It's easier to understand the actions of the algorithm, because you understand the pan-diatonicism so well.

MOORE: What we take away from our British Isles/Anglo-American folk music is its diatonicism, *unlike* the folk music that Bartok was working with. When we hear a diatonic set we think, "this is the way our music was before the guys from Vienna brought over that slimy chromaticism."

WASCHKA: One can hear a difference between *Laredo* and *Ha! Fortune*. *Laredo*, in the second movement, uses a North Korean melody, from a people's opera, from a time when composers were not identified, so I can't credit it. I happened to find the booklet of the opera at my mother-in-law's house. She had it as gift, since as far as I know she has never been to either of the Koreas. I found it, and thought, "OK, maybe I can use this tune."

MOORE: Machaut is someone who seems to be interesting to contemporary composers because there are interesting structural things going on. Everyone loves *My End Is My Beginning*. The music is not harmonic, but linear, which seems to be particularly interesting to 21st-century composers. Were there aspects of the model which you brought into your construction of the string quartet?

WASCHKA: This linear aspect of his work attracts me. He has always been one of my favorite composers because of that. I do like to work that way. When I was casting about, working on the second string quartet, I came upon this piece of his, and decided to make use of the melody from it. There are a number of recordings, and they are wildly different performances of the work. I used it as grist for my genetic, evolutionary algorithms.

MOORE: What projects are coming up for you?

WASCHKA: One thing that is just finished is that Eduardo Miranda and Al Miles have edited a book on evolutionary algorithms and their use in composition. I wrote a chapter for that about my program GenDash.

I am trying to finish the third of what was conceived of as three operas. The first was *Saint Ambrose*, then I wrote one called *Sappho's Breath*, which is radical in that it actually has a singer, and arias. Beth Griffith commissioned the piece, and she has performed in North Carolina. The premiere was in New York City, and she has also sung it in South Africa. We've recorded it, so one of things on the to-do list is to edit and get it out as a CD.

I am finishing the third of those, which is called *The Second* (II), based on the life of Hiroshige the Second, a Japanese artist who made wood-block prints.

MOORE: Ukiyo-e.

WASCHKA: *The Floating World*. He was the successor to the famous Hiroshige, known for his landscape prints. Japanese artists take their name from the person with whom they studied.

I found his life story interesting. He died relatively young, in his forties. Hiroshige adopted a woman, the daughter of a relative, as his daughter, and arranged for Hiroshige the second to marry her. But it seems that there were major problems and a divorce, and she remarried a different student of Hiroshige. The divorce put him on a road to disaster—he lost all of his money, could only find work putting labels on boxes of goods to be shipped overseas, and died penniless. Around this time, there was the first showing in the West of these prints in France, and he was among the first to be exhibited.

My idea with all of these characters is to present them from their own worldview. He's a Buddhist who believes in reincarnation, and the fact that he can remember this past life is a sign from the gods that he should tell this story. He is quite serene in the telling, even though it is disastrous. I hope that I have the character telling it with some calmness and humor – I hope it's funny as well.

MOORE: You must be one of the few American composers who can boast that his works are banned outside the USA. Time was that contemporary music was transgressive, and a performance could make a political statement. Now it seems to be impossible to shock the bourgeois. What present, what future is there for a political voice in contemporary music?

WASCHKA: There is plenty of future. It's wide open; one can do all kinds of things. There are problems that we face, because, unlike pop music, it typically takes quite a bit of time for a composer to make a piece. We are not good at extremely topical responses. On the other hand, it turns out that wars go on for years and years, and you actually *do* have years to make your piece.

As I have tried to remind folks in *Saint Ambrose*, nothing changes. Human nature being what it is (very very very slow to learn), we still have the same kind of cheating that was rampant in ancient Rome: the ducking of responsibility, outright lies in order to generate money, and the justification murder and mayhem.

I have been making political pieces since the early 90's, and it has definitely cost me. There was a performer, who is also a composer, who contacted me, had heard a piece of mine, and wanted to present it on a concert. The performer (not the same person, a member of the group) already had the score, and just needed the electronic part. Would I be so kind as to send it? I sent it right away, along with a nice letter, "Thank you very much! Please send me a program. I hope to hear how the performance goes." I never heard another word. I wondered about that. It seemed very unprofessional, and very weird. There are unprofessional folks out there. It was only the other day that I happened to run across this composer's name, and attached to it was a piece, with a title that was clearly political. It dawned on me that he probably stumbled across another of my pieces that was antithetical to *his* politics, and so probably he just ditched my piece, and doesn't want to deal with me in any way.

I think the piece in question was *Singing in Traffic*, which is about the environment and ecology.

MOORE: He liked that.

WASCHKA: That was good, but he probably bumped into another piece criticizing President Clinton and others. I am an equal-opportunity hater of politicians. I find them all disgusting, but am also disgusted by the academic and supposed-intellectual elite's embrace of the Democratic party, which I find indistinguishable from the Republican party, except perhaps in the nature of their excuses for killing people, messing up the environment. That's one of the reason I was attracted to Ambrose Bierce, because more than 100 years ago he was saying the same things. And nothing has changed.

There are many stories like that, in which performances have been pulled, or nearly pulled; someone is enthusiastic, and then they learn a little bit more about my political stances and won't have anything to do with me.

The last thing I would say is that very often the political stances that makers of art take are very safe ones. To make a movie which is anti-slavery at this point is political, but it is very, very safe. It is smart for your career.

I haven't made political pieces because I wanted to be a provocateur – I felt forced, by the circumstances around me, dealing with things I never thought I would have to deal with.

MOORE: For decades we had a poor opinion of Soviet composers, since we perceived that forces compelled them to make political pieces in which they were fatally compromised by their complicity with the authorities. The mirror of that situation is one in which the American composer, for professional reasons, is compelled to have no politics.

WASCHKA: One way out of that, at least for me, has been electronic music. If you are trying to make an orchestra piece, an opera, if you have a significant minority dead-set against your message, they can sabotage the whole thing, whereas with electronic music the machines don't complain. It's also possible to make pieces with electronics where that is what will give you the great swathes of sound -- your orchestra -- along with a soloist, in which case you only have to have one accomplice, one person who is willing to go out on a limb with you. One is easier to find than a hundred!

I have been able to do things with electronics which might not otherwise get performed.

MOORE: A piece of political music which is non-verbal and at the same time completely explicit is the *Star-Spangled Banner* played by Jimi Hendrix at Woodstock. It's full of opinions and images, without words, but full of commentary.

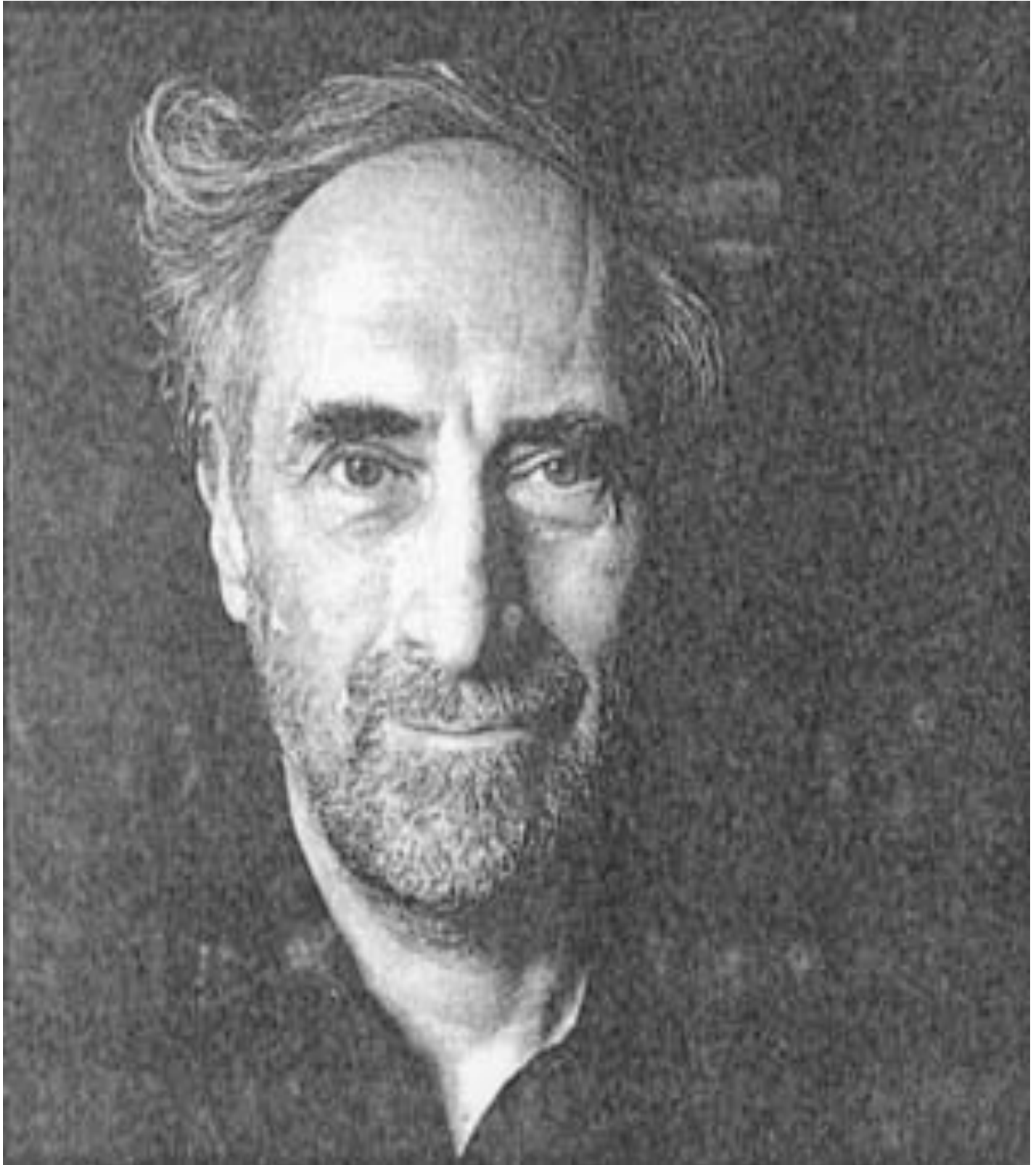
WASCHKA: Although that can be ambiguous. It was completely clear at that time and place, but I don't know whether it will be fifty years from now, since when the text was written there were bombs, there was all this violence, and so one could misinterpret it as a very patriotic piece full of wonderful word-painting.

I encountered this very problem. I met with Fredric Rzewski, and thought he might have something to say to me about the political nature of the pieces I was working on, and he did. I have a piece called *Ravel Remembers Fascism* - the performer plays the cello, and doesn't say anything. The politics of it are in the program notes. Rzewski said, "What if the DJ doesn't read the program notes? You need to put it in the piece."

Since then I have been putting *you can't miss it and you can't misinterpret it* texts in most of the pieces which I want to be explicitly political.

MOORE: Let's hope that our country doesn't end up in a situation where we *need* to be ambiguous.

WASCHKA: Maybe we should leave it there.



Concert Reviews

Appreciating Music at Marin Symphony

PHILLIP GEORGE

Symphony season openers can often seem like a night music appreciation course (and I oughta know, since I teach one): a little of this, a little of that -- not too demanding for the fashion set that only turns out for the once-yearly galas.

So it is a pleasure to report that opening concert of the 2007-2008 season of the Marin Symphony was nothing like this. Actually, there was one connection, that being the use of visuals. But Music Director Alasdair Neale and his musical comrades took us where comparatively few Americans have dared to go, back to the turbulence of the old Soviet Union, in a screening of Sergei Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin*, set to a collage of excerpts from symphonies of Dmitri Shostakovich.

This intermissionless set was, from one perspective, quite the heavy bill of fare; from another, it was just a glorified night out at the movies, in the quaint tradition of silent film graced by live accompaniment. But what live accompaniment! The orchestra played with fervor and polish, particularly in the passages from *Symphony No. 4*, *8* (unacknowledged in the program), *10*, and *11*. If the passages from *No. 5* seemed overly-measured, this certainly seemed to be in recent (and perhaps earlier) performance tradition as related by the composer. For my money, however, I still seem to fall back on the breakneck speeds that Eugene Ormandy took with the Philadelphia Orchestra for the second and fourth movements.

As in Walt Disney's usage of the Igor Stravinsky *Rite of Spring* in *Fantasia*, the music in this accompaniment to *Potemkin* is sliced, diced, and re-ordered to fit the cinemagraphic vision. In both cases, the music appreciation teacher in me says, "whatever works to bring people to the art." And, as a composer, I maintain that, from an artistic perspective, anyone has the right to do anything with anything. Of course, as listeners, we also have a right to appreciate or not any end result.

And from this perspective, the violence done to Shostakovich's music was jarring. Further, as a musicologist, I appreciate the historic connections, and there were little or none here. While Eisenstein's film was to have been heard with a Sergei Prokofiev score, the collaboration fell through, such that the initial screening was given in 1925 with a cobbled potpourri from works of Ludwig van Beethoven, Henry Litolf, and Peter Tchaikovsky. Edmund Meisel's original music, heard in the movie's German premiere a few months later, became the score of record for 25 years, whereupon a new score was provided by Nikolai Kryukov in 1950.

By the time of the jubilee re-release of the film in 1976, both Eisenstein and Shostakovich were dead (respectively in the years 1948 and 1975), and, according to Jon Kovachi's program notes in the Marin Symphony booklet, "a decision was made to produce a new score made from portions of Symphon[ies] . . . of Dmitri Shostakovich." Well, whose decision and whose production? In fairness to Mr. Kovachi, I could not find any answers to these questions, either, in a brief Google on the Internet re these topics.

But, hey, these are quibbles. Let's talk about entertainment value. It was a powerful night of some of the greatest film and music that the Soviet Union had ever known -- what was not to like and, indeed, appreciate?!

The Sincerest Form

MARK ALBURGER

Despite all of his striking changes over the years, John Adams has been faulted for being overly indebted to earlier minimalist composers such as Steve Reich and Philip Glass. Now Glass has returned the modeling favor in recent work, such as the premiere of his *Appomattox*, which opened on October 5 at San Francisco Opera.

What Glass and Adams now share is a neo-Wagnerian predilection for recitative-like text-setting, over an ongoing argument in the orchestra. The minimalist patterns -- Glass's signature arpeggios, intervallic oscillations (Mi Sol Mi Sol), and scalar meanderings -- have now taken on a role not unlike W.A. Mozart's usages of Alberti bass lines (Do Sol Mi Sol) and topical clichés of his era: simply ways of getting from one place to another.

This is a world away from the early Glass of the trilogy of portrait operas (*Einstein on the Beach*, *Satyagraha*, and *Akhmatov*), where large cyclic structures and vocal set pieces were the norm, so, far from merely coasting, the composer is still breaking new ground, at least for himself, in his later years.

Not that there wasn't some coasting, and not that the overall conception always worked. *Appomattox* opens with a trio of simultaneous intercut solos by the wives of the principal protagonists (Julia Dent Grant / Rhoslyn Jones; Mary Custis Lee / Elza van den Heever; Mary Todd Lincoln / Heidi Melton), seemingly right up the Glassian staging alley, which was striking and lovely, yet a bit overly-politically correct and slow going.

Also Wagnerian was the tendency to tell, rather than show during not only the aforementioned Prologue, but also in the early scenes of Act I, featuring the commanding vocal presences of Jeremy Galyon (Abraham Lincoln), Andrew Shore (Ulysses S. Grant), and Dwayne Croft (Robert E. Lee), the latter managing a Southern twang without timbral compromise.

The youthful movie-goer contingent (that of car chases and fisticuffs) really perked up in the striking scene of refugees fleeing Richmond, with the violent images of suspended dead horses and the urgent contributions of the chorus making their telling effects. Again, as with Adams, Glass's choral writing manifested a kind of Claudio Monteverdi split when compared to solo essays, manifesting an almost Renaissance-like lightness. The found Civil War melodies, however, were less successful mild Charles Ivesian interpolations, in some ways prolonged and work-a-day.

Aside from the choruses, this was an opera of narrative interplay, with scant contrapuntal interplay and overlap among the voices, in marked contrast to such set pieces as, say, the lovely duet of Akhnaten and Nefertiti.

Overall, Glass's music served the drama, in an almost cinematic fashion -- perhaps not surprisingly, given the composer's by-now-years-of film scoring since his earliest operatic endeavors. One had a sense of the decency and dilemmas of most of the characters, including Noah Stewart's T. Morris Chester exulting over the ruins of the Confederate Congress.

Act II's interweaving of later unresolved race issues during the careful negotiations of Grant and Lee at Appomattox Court House (the town's name, the meeting of which took place in a private household), mostly worked, but again, with a similar flavor to the Prologue. The souvenir pillaging after the treaty was effective both musically and visually, and was followed by a gripping scene of Ku Klux Klan racist Edgar Lee Killen (Philip Skinner) alone and isolated in a wheelchair (if a Protestant minister is ever portrayed in a positive light, I may fall off my chair).

This may have been the end of Act II or beginning of the Epilogue -- the San Francisco Opera program booklet was unclear on this account, as they often are, but they were crystal clear on providing a first-class account of this worthy new work, from all dramatic and musical perspectives. Dennis Russell Davies's vibrant conducting and Riccardo Hernandez's arresting sets were standouts, as were the contributions by Director Robert Woodruff, Costume Designer Gabriel Berry, and Lighting Designer Christopher Akerlind. Chorus Director Ian Robertson's work had the final say, in a closing vocal ensemble that lingered in the ears and pulled at the heartstrings. Oh that our next hundred years could be less contentious, yet as beautiful.

Tenting Today

BRIAN HOLMES

When I was a Boy Scout in Alexandria, Virginia, I earned my hiking merit badge on the Civil War battlefields of Manassas, Chancellorsville, Spotsylvania, Fredericksburg, and Gettysburg. During rest stops, particularly if cannons lurked nearby, we would reenact key moments in the military struggle. These reenactments were gravely imbalanced, since I was generally the only Scout willing to stand up for the Union side. At Gettysburg, this meant all I had to do was man the cannon, while my fellow Scouts, faithful to the Southern cause, relived Pickett's charge, marching hundreds of yards under the toasty summer sun to die highly ornamental deaths at the foot of my stone wall. "Save your confederate money, boys!" they shouted, "The South will rise again!" "Save your confederate money, boys!" I answered, "The North needs toilet paper." I never shared their enthusiasm for this lost cause, nor their casual racism.

The Civil War and race are the topics of Philip Glass's new opera *Appomattox*, now premiering at the San Francisco opera. The major characters are Lee, Grant, and their wives. Lincoln and his wife also figure in it. The music sounded familiar -- there were several sections reminiscent of Glass's opera *La Belle et le Bete*. But the music was darker and more subdued. A contrabass clarinet added its gloomy voice from the pit. Unlike many Glass operas, this one was in English, and the quiet orchestration was part of an effort, successful I think, to allow the words to be heard and understood. But the music remained quiet even when one would expect it to show some oomph, such as the occasion when an officer described the progress of a battle. Curiously, the most dramatic music of the first act was a long crescendo intended, I think, to illustrate Grant's migraine headache.

Glass broke the Glass mold to include some music from the era -- *Tenting on the Old Camp Ground* in one case, and a song sung by black soldiers involved in the taking of Richmond. (Actually, only the words of this latter were from the era: the music shows that Glass could have given Henry Clay Work a run for his money.)

I could discern no particular musical personality in any of the major characters. The word setting was supple, idiomatic, and unmemorable. Glass writes his music in long paragraphs, so that it does one thing for five minutes, and another the next five, and so on. This method does not work if, God forbid, two things were to happen in five minutes. The songs from the era were nice, but they tended to stop the action. Two verses of *Tenting* are charming. Five verses, sung offstage, without any musical variation, while a bunch of guys hang around on stage in uniforms and beards, gets old.

The most vivid parts of the opera were scenic. In a big chorus scene showing the overthrow of Richmond, explosions (apparently taking place behind the audience) produced vivid and interesting lighting effects. After the surrender, the house where Lee and Grant met was torn apart by people seeking souvenirs— a nice way to get a scene change without having to close the curtain. The set was modernistic, with metal latticework on the floor, and a long metal ramp toward the back, tilted as if some window washers had made a mistake and severed one of their support ropes. Sinister objects, vaguely equine, hung from ropes – they may have been intended to suggest lynched blacks in the closing chorus.

The best scenes were in the second act. The surrender is interrupted every now and then (in fact, every five minutes) to show some event taking place in the future. Mary Lincoln vividly recounted Lincoln's dream prefiguring his assassination while a funeral cortege passes by. The other interruptions had racial themes – a massacre, a murder, and finally an utterly chilling narrative by Edgar Ray Killin, telling about his participation in the murder of three civil rights workers. At the end, the female leads and choristers recapitulated the opening of the opera, singing of the sorrow of war. It was clear that the Civil War was not the only war they meant. Here, at last, the music and the scene combined to powerful effect.

The cast, drawn mostly from the Adler Fellows of the San Francisco Opera Institute, featured no famous names. But all were strong and sang with confidence.

The libretto, by Christopher Hampton, was easy to understand and faithful to the period. There was even a little humor in the words, though not in the music. The southern accents were effective, and Killin's voice, thick with "r" sounds and other verbal ticks, was creepy. I had thought in advance that the interruptions in the second act would be intrusive, but they proved to be pretty interesting. However, too much of the action was described, rather than shown. In a movie, you could cut away to show such action. It would have been more effective, for example, if Lincoln had recounted or enacted his own dream, or if the racial killings mentioned in the second act had been shown.

The librettist and Glass missed the chance to make more of Lee's final address to his troops -- the soldiers were invisible, and Lee had his back to the audience. Though I favor the Union, I have always found Lee to be a sympathetic character, and this moment, when Lee gives up the cause, with his heart laden with more than he could utter, could have been quite touching.

This was a piece about generals and presidents. It gave us no chance to meet an individual soldier, though much of the pity of the Civil War arises from the deaths of so many soldiers.

So many deaths. And so much unfinished business.

Bringing in the Sheaves of Song

MARK ALBURGER

Chamber music can be an acquired taste. For those used to the multiple bells and whistles of symphony orchestras and operas, there is a gearing down necessary to appreciate the delicacy and intimacy of small-ensemble music. But once the re-orientation has taken place, one can find a garden of delights in such a program as the Harvest of Song concert at Berkeley Art Center on October 28.

The five featured composers were all at the top of their games in providing engaging music for a thinking audience. Ann Callaway's *Silvery Blue* began the evening as a lovely endeavor for vocal octet (sopranos Cheryl Keller, Nora Martin, Jennifer Owen, and Calloway; altos Elizabeth Baker, Deborah Benedict, Tina Harrington, and Claudia Stevens) and maraca, with neo-folkish elements that never pandered. Her Rilke Songs allowed Richard Mix to demonstrate the full basso profundo of his impressive range, in consort with the excellent playing of clarinetist Peter Josheff, violist Darcy Rindt, and cellist Dan Reiter.

Composer-baritone Allen Shearer then joined Josheff and the dexterous marimbist Joel Davel in an alarmingly striking *Moly*, a transformative setting of a section of Homer's *Odyssey* where Ulysses discovers his porcine nature in a series of grunts and squeals from singer and clarinetist which raised the roof. His *Songs of the Moment*, by contrast, were quieter atonal essays which required every ounce of musicianship from the octet in their crabbed, chromatic, yet poignant existential outcries.

Alexis Alrich's *Songs* utilized laundry-list style texts of Salon.com writer Cary Tennis's advice column. These unlikely prose passages provided Alrich an opportunity to demonstrate her facility in harvesting musical poetry along the lines of Leonard Bernstein's *Recipe Songs*. Her facility in handling an Arnold Schoenberg-like *Pierrot* ensemble-minus-piano (the excellent flutist Tod Brody joining Josheff, Rindt, and Reiter) was most impressive. Soprano Eliza O'Malley's lithe lines floated with ease over neo-minimalist settings that both astonished and soothed.

Laurie San Martin was next called to the fore in the only non-vocal selections of the evening. Her *Dances for Solo Piano* were arch reinterpretations of unusual steps, resonantly brought to life by Karen Rosenak. A second work, *Epithalamion*, for Rindt and Reiter, solemnly sustained epigrammatically.

At last Josheff came to center stage as composer, with two offerings highlighting his gifts as creator as well as realizer, the first another excerpt from his opera-in-progress with the imaginative librettist Jamie Robles entitled *Inferno*. This diabolical wonderland, heard in another surreal context earlier this year at San Francisco's Thick House, was a perfect pre-Halloween precursor to all things dangerous, with O'Malley and Mix mixing it up in beautiful and evil undertakings. The composer's laconically appolated *Viola and Mallets* reflected Steve Reich not only in its naming but in its lush patterings, punctuated by more unexpected wanderings that emphasized its progressiveness.



Chronicle

October 1

Pianist Marc Peloquin in Aaron Copland's *Piano Fantasy* (1957), and David Del Tredici's *Ballad in Yellow* (1997), *Gymnopedie No. 3 ("My Loss")* (2004), and *S/M Ballade* (2006). Thalia Theater, Symphony Space, New York, NY.

October 3

Kronos Quartet, with Kimmo Pohjonen and Samuli Kosminen, in the latter two's *Uniko*; plus *Dear Mme*, with Erik Sanko; Amon Tobin's *Bloodstone Remix I*; and *Shuffle 25*, a composite of past performances by the quartet. Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York, NY.

October 4

50th anniversary of the clearing of Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* on a charge of obscenity. San Francisco, CA. "Yet today, a New York public broadcasting station decided not to air the poem, fearing that the Federal Communications Commission will find it indecent and crush the network with crippling fines" [Joe Garofoli, San Francisco Chronicle, 10/4/07].

October 6

Orchestra of St. Luke's world premiere of *In the Grace of the World*, a multimedia work inspired by the music of Peteris Vasks, Arvo Pärt, Toru Takemitsu, Alan Hovhaness, Charles Ives and J.S. Bach. The Alexander Kasser Theater, Montclair State University, NJ.

October 7

Vocal and Chamber Music of Charles Griffin. National History Museum, Riga, Latvia. Concerts through October 15.

October 24

Harrison Birtwistle's *Night's Blackbird* performed by the New York Philharmonic. Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY. "I am probably not the first to attach the term 'black hole' to Harrison Birtwistle's music. Not much light escapes from pieces like *Night's Blackbird*, a 12-minute essay in darkness and inertia The intermittent flashes of brightness, when they come, come suddenly, like shafts shooting through gaps in a prevailing cloud cover. Piccolos and high clarinets offer shrill birdcalls, indicating life after dark in the branches of nightscapes. High brass has a lightninglike effect. But light is not the idea here. Light serves as a fragmented background to Mr. Birtwistle's carefully arranged layers of baritone groans and howls. The music goes nowhere, transforming itself into different shapes and sizes from a fixed position. For all its apparent threats, *Night's Blackbird* is very welcoming to the listener. Doom-ridden on the surface, it is actually the work of a hedonist, a man whose love of orchestral sound just happens to exist more at the bottom of its range than its top" [Bernard Holland, The New York Times, 10/26/07].

