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Words

TAN DUN

Some 20 years ago, I was still planting rice in China. And now I'm conducting orchestras in all the great concert houses of the world: La Scala, the Met, the Berlin Philharmonic. I still can't believe it.

Tea is from the inside. Coffee is from the outside.

One plus one makes one.

Hunan is the home of philosophy, of yin and yang, of shamanistic culture. It has good feng shui.

Just imagine. We've got permission to perform The First Emperor on the Great Wall of China for the Beijing Olympics. We'll have a worldwide audience of billions!

Imagine, you were told to report to an office and made to swear to leave your family, to feed pigs, to plant rice, for your entire life. I cried. How could I do this for my entire life? In fact, the required length of time depended on the purity of your thoughts.

Everyone experienced bitterness, but I had fun. The farmers, who were experts in ghost operas, couldn't let anyone hear their songs. But I found a way around this by setting Maoist texts to their folk melodies. Everybody understood the ruse, and they loved it. Since then I became an avant-gardist, not from New York, but from that village in Hunan.

The traditional ghost opera has three acts: you welcome the ghost, you entertain the ghost, then leave with the ghost. [T]he last life, our present life and the next life.

People were so hungry. Professor [Alexander] Goehr completely reopened the door for us. It was like hearing the stories of 1001 Nights. We were so fascinated. It was so new to us. Because our beloved professor influenced me so much, I spent years trying to catch up with Schoenberg's atonal music. But it's too easy to lose yourself in a system like that, and I caught cultural jet lag. I remember Professor Goehr telling us to avoid ethnic content, to be neutral and independent. But right after he left, I tried to use Beijing opera and folk music. If you want to be a Chinese avant-garde artist, the safest way is to stick to your grandmother's tone. The most dangerous way is to follow Western music from the Romantics to 12-tone. This period is poison. I could only use the techniques as a recipe for my fusion cooking.

If you are too sophisticated, you lose courage. [Theory] makes for more boundaries. Competing with the Europeans, by being more sophisticated, is to resist yourself. One plus one makes one. Yin and yang, inside and outside, honesty and pretension. I have practiced this philosophy for the last 20 years.

The farmers were more open [to The Map] than the civilized bourgeoisie. They touched the cello, because it was shiny and beautiful and they were worried that it was too cold. They talked to the instrument as if it were alive, in the spirit of the ghost operas.

I used folk resources [in On Taoism and Nine Songs] to compete with the 12-tone system, as a challenge to Goehr and Schoenberg.

[About *Tea: A Mirror of Soul*,] I can remember the young women, planting tea, getting covered in green from handling the leaves, their hands, their arms, their legs. I had an almost erotic fantasy of the soul going green too.

When I came to New York in 1986 to study composition at Columbia University, I lived downtown. At first I didn't know how to bridge the musical distance between uptown and downtown. At Columbia, you immediately got into the atonal system. But downtown is so diverse: jazz, rock, the Blue Note, the Village Gate, the La MaMa theater. So I got jet-lagged. But I found a way to fix the distance. At night, downtown, I would meet with Meredith Monk, John Cage and Philip Glass. My jet lag between uptown and downtown reminded me where I was from. I looked back to the Eastern music I played before moving to Beijing. It all came back to me through my fascination with experimental music in downtown New York. Greenwich Village taught me about Chineseness from a world point of view.

Before John Cage, I didn't pay attention to Lao-tzu or the I Ching. But every time I spoke to Cage, it was as if I were talking to Lao-tzu, not an American, not John. We had dialogues about music in a very philosophical way — everything is an unanswered question.

I'm a Marco Polo going backward from East to West.

It's not just listening to music. Also, the way we're eating dinner, no more just French, Italian; we eat Mexican, Cantonese, Russian, Indonesian, Japanese. . . . [Globalization offers new opportunities] not to standardize, or neutralize, but by giving people a chance to be seen.

[Commercialism] is inescapable. You can't avoid being commercialized. I don't want to be, but I cannot resist it. I'm pushed that way. If my name is not a brand of Chinese culture in the avant-garde, Peter Gelb is not going to be behind me at the Metropolitan Opera.

[The First Emperor] will no longer be a Western form, as it is no longer an Italian form. In the shamanistic sense, there is no East or West; all is human. Plácido and Zhang Yimou are also shamans.

A major commission from China is still focused on patriotic things. Like Shostakovich, sometimes we have no choice. But you can still express yourself. By doing *Symphony 1997*, I could study bronze bells and introduce Yo-Yo Ma, as well as Western concepts, to China. There's a way to educate the Communists without using their methods. The First Emperor reflects my own life, and that of Shostakovich.

To me, it is the way for shamans to behave. I want to be playful, like a child, teasing the world, teasing the whole system. That is Taoism. It is not about political or cultural messages. It is a performance. Performance art.

I have no ego. The ego is to illustrate philosophical strangeness, to be a musical Taoist. And you know what? This strangeness helps my business. I have always worked with the best orchestras in the world. And never once did one of them fail to ask me back.

Concert Reviews

On Becoming Gandhi

MICHAEL MCDONAGH

My dear late best friend Danny Cariaga, classical music critic extraordinaire of The Los Angeles Times, once observed that people went to Wagner's operas when they were new because they had more time. But now, with the onslaught of e-mails, IMs, cells with text messaging, to say nothing of headsets, call waiting, call forwarding, numeric pages and the like, time seems fractured beyond repair. Are we really that far gone? And if so how can we get back to the unalterable truths of life, like love and death?

These questions came to mind when I caught The Metropolitan Opera's penultimate performance of Philip Glass's 1979 opera *Satyagraha* on April 28. One of its subjects is time itself, and Glass's mature music has always played with our perceptions of it. How long is short, and how short is long? Glass's exquisite and utterly involving three-act meditation on Gandhi -- its subtitle is M.K. Gandhi in South Africa (1893-1914) -- shows how he transformed himself from an ordinary barrister thrown off a train into one of the most seminal spiritual and political figures of the last century whose ideas continue to reverberate. A tall order, for sure, but one that co-director designers Phelim McDermott and Juilan Crouch's Improbable Theatre made incredibly vivid and tremendously moving.

Glass and his scenarist Constance De Jong, assembled their libretto from the The Bhagavad-Gita (Song of the Lord), and the verses they culled from it pinpoint what *Satyagraha* is really about: self-mastery in the service of spiritual growth. Gandhi developed his non-violent passive resistance movement, *satyagraha* (roughly translated as "truth force," or even "the force of love" during his work in South Africa, which Glass's opera dramatizes in seven highly allusive and mysterious scenes. The composer cites his absorption in the Khatikali theatre of Kerala, South India, and the extended and abruptly short mosaic-like approaches in Brecht plays like *Gallileo* and, of course, his own (with Robert Wilson) *Einstein on the Beach* (1975), as inspirations for *Satyagraha* though a Western source, or point of reference, is Stravinsky's (from Sophocles via Danielou) and Cocteau's opera-oratorio *Oedipus Rex* (1926-27) though their aim, like the ancients, was to provoke pity through terror. Glass's aim is entirely different. His music and its staging strive to educate the audience in the most non-didactic way to what Gandhi and his followers were all about. And he and his collaborators here do this through slowly evolving sonic and visual images which provoke, distance (the Brecht, Lehrstuck and Stravinsky neo-classic tactic -- and enthrall.

Much has been made of Glass's supposedly "simple" music, as if his "poverty of means" translated into poverty of effect, and affect, but nothing could be further from the truth. Of course, he fashions each scene as a series of ground basses or chaconnes, but his imagination is in full flower here, even through this is his first orchestral piece since his Juilliard days (1958-1962). And it really does show how he's bent his pit band of 3 flutes, 3 oboes, 3 clarinets, 1 bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, violins 1 and 2, violas, cellos, and double basses, and a Kurzweil synthesizer, to his own deeply expressive ends.

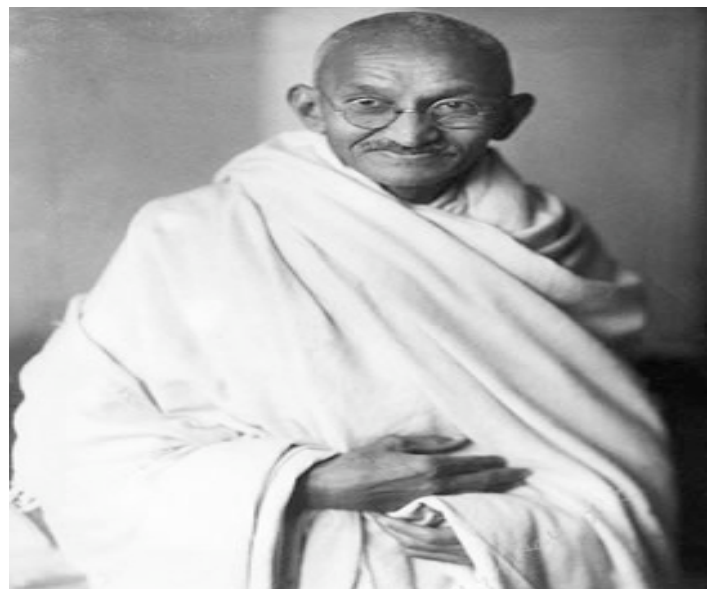
Act 1's opening scene, The Kuru Field of Justice, unfolded from its 2+3, 2+3, 2+3, 2+2... rhythmic structure, like a steadily opening flower, with Gandhi (tenor Richard Croft), in barrister suit and briefcase at the lip of center stage, being set upon -- his valise rifled

by the supers -- as his solo's joined by that of mythological figures Prince Arjuna, in blue face (tenor Bradley Garvin), and in Indian cap and white tunic pants Lord Krishna (bass Richard Bernstein), while warring parties, representing the internecine conflict of the Kuru clan, in Victorian and Indian dress, face off, and larger than life papier mache puppets, do battle.

The succeeding scene, Tolstoy Farm (1910), was just as imaginatively realized, as Gandhi, his wife Kasturba (mezzo Maria Zicak), Gandhi's German secretary Miss Schlesen (soprano Rachelle Durkin), Mrs. Naidoo (soprano Ellie Dehn); and Improbable's co-workers built Gandhi's ashram in miniature. And nowhere could Gandhi's and Glass's means be shown to more effect than in the long (60+ minutes, though 31 minutes in Christopher Keene's CBS LP set) single scene of Act 3 -- Newcastle March (1913) where the composer's "limited means" -- roughly three themes / harmonies, became Gandhi's much longed for peace -- which seemed to burrow into the listeners' psyches / hearts, until all was "released" at the final but not so final cadence / chord.

Glass' music has always trafficked in the down to earth and the mystical, and *Satyagraha* provides both as two sides of the same coin. And it's not for nothing that the third, and concluding scene of Act ii, Protest features more textural, harmonic, and yes, melodic variety than all of the rest of *Satyagraha* combined. The Met's forces rose to its challenges as true "athletes of the spirit," proving that it shares deep yet deeply contrasting familial resemblances to its other siblings in Glass' portrait trilogy, *Einstein* and *Akhmatov* (1983). And that his spectacularly moving 2005 opera of John Coetzee's 1980 *Waiting for the Barbarians* -- which Orange Mountain Music will release this June -- continues even more difficult explorations of the human condition. "A man lost in a cruel and stupid dream / But still I keep walking / Walking."

This Metropolitan Opera / Improbable production differed in many respects from the Bruce Ferden led (sadly dead from AIDS in 1993) version of the David Pountney / Robert Israel 1980 Netherlands Opera production (which I caught twice -- and once with Danny Cariaga -- at the San Francisco Opera in 1989). And its immersion in themes of social injustice -- will they ever be solved? -- continued in Glass's SF Opera commission, *Appomattox*, which bowed last November.



Rich Threepenny in Santa Cruz

MARK ALBURGER

Santa Cruz Chamber Orchestra's May 8-11 production of the Kurt Weill / Bertolt Brecht *Threepenny Opera* (in the Mark Blitzstein translation), at the Pacific Cultural Center, proved instrumentally to be as excellent as one would expect (despite the compromised instrumentation featuring electric piano and lacking bassoon, banjo, cello, and bass, and a few other niceties according to the Philharmonia score), but also equally impressive dramatically and vocally, with a dark with a dark yet radiant supporting cast of whores, thieves and priest, and first-rate principals, including Igor Vieira (Mr. Peachum), Lori Rivera (Mr. Peachum), Tamra Paselk (Lucy Brown), Krista Wigle (Jenny), J. Raymond Meyers (MacHeath), Elizabeth Russ (Polly Peachum), Sascha Joggerst (Tiger Brown), and Bill Welch (Street Singer / Filch / Walt / Smith / Messenger), conducted by Maya Barsacq and directed by Daniel Helfgot.

This was a demonstrative and edgy production, right from the Overture's downbeat, where Welch was able to evoke the in-your-face aggressive energy of the original German even in Blitzstein's tamed-down lyrics for The Ballad of Mack the Knife.

Vieira's accented, powerful Peachum was perfectly balanced by Rivera's voluptuous tone and presence -- the pair able to bring out both the comedy and menace in Peachum's Morning Song, Instead of Song, Ballad of Sexual Dependency, and Useless Song.

Russ made for an intriguing Polly -- beautiful, ditzy, with a surprising tough-as-nails psychic split that surprises even her, and totally believable. She smoked her way through Pirate Jenny and took no prisoners, then recaptured her poignant side in her Love Song with MacHeath.

And, yes, as for J. Raymond Meyer's Mac the Knife? Older, wiser, more dignified yet funnier, again completely believable as a loveable charmer despite or because of his big, boyish good looks. And can he sing? Most definitely, putting across a steller Cannon Song with partner-in-crime-on-the-semi-legit-side-of-the-law Sascha Joggerst, who gave off a credible dichotomy of macho and milquetoast in the oft-caricatured role of Tiger Brown.

If the singers were all on their toes to keep projecting over the prominent accompaniment, it somehow just lent more angsty spirit to this spirited production, where even the thieves chorus Wedding Song was not allowed to simply lie down and enjoy itself.

The First Threepenny Finale had the parodic operatic schtick required and the Second had its knives out. Wigle's turn at Jenny manifested a beauty and psychosis in her increasingly, impressively angry Pimp's Ballad, ably abetted by Meyers. Paselk was in cahoots as well, for a touching Barbara Song and a hair-raising Jealousy Duet with the coquetish Russ, where the orchestra's increasingly dynamic performance proved a challenge.

Meyers captured the irony, humor, and pathos as necessary in The Ballad of the Pleasant Life, Call From the Grave, and Grave Song, in some ways still as plucky as a politician down on his luck. Wigle knew all about it in her worldly-wise rendition of Solomon Song.

The Third Threepenny Finale put some members of the audience on the run, just as much as the fugitive MacHeath had been earlier, as a too-small-hangman's noose descended from the front middle ceiling of the seating. Welch's Messenger was a wild cross between recitative and speech, and the entire ensemble -- including sexy whores Miya Mikheyenko (Dolly), Lane McKenna (Betty), Samantha Bartholomew (Molly), Danielle Crook (Marie), and Nicole DeBergalis (Coaxer); dashing thugs Dan Galpin (Matt), Richard Gaughan (Jake), and Eric Vineberg (Bob); and manly man-o-the-cloth Bruce Cozinni (Reverend Kimball) -- gave their all.



Chronicle

May 1

Jessye Norman, with Mark Markham, in *The Five Seasons*, with Kurt Weill's *September Song*, Richard Danielpour's *I Envy Public Love*, Vernon Duke's *April in Paris*, Joseph Kosma's *Autumn Leaves*, George Gershwin's *Love Walked In* (arranged to a tango rhythm), and music of Olivier Messiaen, Arnold Schoenberg, Alban Berg, Harold Arlen, and Michel Legrand. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY. 'It consisted, she explained, of the usual four, and she added *The Eternal Season of Love*.' . . . And how is Ms. Norman doing at 62? Well, she is not what she once was, but then, who is? . . . [She still ha] 'clear yet restrained diction, [and] was absolutely lovely. . . . The lazy, drifting atmosphere of Richard Danielpour . . . was nicely realized. . . . Markham had much to do, playing virtuoso accompaniments with skill and following Ms. Norman's free-style phrasing and tempo changes with sympathy and alertness' [Bernard Holland, *The New York Times*, 5/3/08].

Dolly Parton's *Backwoods Barbie Tour*. Radio City Music Hall, New York, NY. "[Her image] masks her more subversive message: Nothing is as it seems. Between the songs and her nonstop patter -- she is an assassin of dead air -- the show was a seminar on the peril of accepting received wisdom, whether the subject was drag queens, the rural poor, working stiff, politicians, Pentecostals, young media stars or bosomy women. She granted pretty much everybody a complex interior life, and the power of independent thought. 'I've always been misunderstood because of how I look,' she sang in *Backwoods Barbie*, from her new album of the same name. 'Don't judge me by the cover, 'cause I'm a real good book.' There are traces of earnest emotional investment there, but that connotes being trapped by your songs, and Ms. Parton isn't. She's like the bird in her song *Eagle When She Flies*, looking at her subjects and herself from a great height. Some of her lyrics stoop to hoary clichés . . . but she urges you not to be one. She twittered; she told endless jokes. 'There's two kinds of mountain women: the kind that get married and have a bunch of kids, and the kind that stay single and have a bunch of kids,' she said. She race-walked the line between dumb and smart. 'Someone told me I should run for president. I said, don't you think that we've had enough boobs in the White House?' Referring to her earlier postponement of this tour, because of back problems, she self-deprecated. 'They say my tour is in shambles. Well, welcome to shambles.' Her band is stolid and full of guitars. It's not a shambles; it's precise and fairly characterless. . . . [S]he played a bit of dulcimer, autoharp, electric guitar and piano, all of them white and rhinestoned' [Ben Ratliff, *The New York Times*, 5/3/08].

May 3

Pianist Olga Kern and the Richardson Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Anshel Brusilow in Sergei Rachmaninoff's *Piano Concerto No. 3*. Eisemann Center, Richardson, TX. "The former Cliburn Competition gold medalist played a work long associated with that contest: Rachmaninoff's massive *Third Piano Concerto*. She gave another first-prize performance, easily conquering its bravura passages while creating a gripping musical drama. Equally as impressive as the power she produced was the clarity of her playing and its lyric beauty. And three cheers to Ms. Kern for her avoidance of the histrionics that are so popular nowadays, particularly among young artists. She's never stiff, but there's no wild arm movements and soulful gazing at the ceiling. The drama comes from the music. Mr. Brusilow and the orchestra gave her decent if not inspired support" [Dallas News, 5/4/08].

Francis Poulenc's *Dialogues of the Carmelites* (1956), based on the true story of 16 Carmelite nuns sent to the guillotine by French revolutionaries in 1794. Mannes Opera, Kaye Playhouse, New York, NY.

May 4

Tashi reunites, for the first time in 30 years, for a performance of Olivier Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*, Charles Wuorinen's settings of Josquin des Pres and Thomas Morley, and Toru Takemitsu's *Quatrain II*. Town Hall, New York, NY. "The house was packed for the event, part of the *Free for All* at Town Hall series. At the end, after Tashi's rhapsodic, mystical and commanding performance of Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*, the work that originally brought these musicians together, the audience responded with the classical-music equivalent of frenzied hysteria: a prolonged standing

ovation. The four members of Tashi . . . were already notable young musicians when the group was founded in 1973. In the years since, they have all had major careers and maintained their individual commitments to contemporary music. As a fellow member of their generation, who heard Tashi in its heyday, I have to say that they all looked great. Gone are the dashikis, ponytails and love beads. That was then. . . . This is also Messiaen's centennial. It was to commemorate his birth that Tashi regrouped for a tour, prominently featuring the work it performed more than 100 times during the 1970's and recorded to acclaim in 1975. Messiaen scored the piece for the four instruments available to him while a captive in a German prisoner-of-war camp in Silesia. With three others he gave the first performance of it there in 1941. . . . [The] program began, though, with a work that Charles Wuorinen wrote last year in anticipation of Tashi's reunion, his ingenious arrangements of two Renaissance vocal works: Josquin des Prez's *Ave Maria* ... *Virgo Serena*, and Thomas Morley's *Christes Crosse*. The Josquin emerges here as calmly beautiful, with undulant modal counterpoint. The Morley is restless, alive with fidgety lines that break loose from the harmonic backdrop. After this the musicians gave a riveting account of Toru Takemitsu's *Quatrain II*, composed for Tashi in 1977. That was the year that Takemitsu met Messiaen in New York. Messiaen played his quartet at the piano for the younger composer, who was so inspired that he created a work in homage to the piece, incorporating motifs that mimic its themes. Takemitsu captures the cosmic atmosphere and neo-modal harmonic sound world of Messiaen's music, though his language is more beholden to the 12-tone aesthetic, if not the theory and rules. The Takemitsu work set the mood for Messiaen's 55-minute, eight-movement quartet. The Tashi musicians played the piece with as much youthful boldness as ever. The *Dance of Fury*, for the Seven Trumpets, in which the instruments play a skittish, metrically irregular, decisively urgent line in unison for nearly six minutes, bustled with on-the-edge daring. But the contemplative movements were also enthralling, through the final *Praise to the Immortality of Jesus*, for solo violin and piano, played with eerie calm and glowing sound. There are no plans for Tashi to continue as an ensemble. But you never know" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 5/6/08].

Yale at Carnegie, in music of Sergei Prokofiev -- his *Piano Concerto No. 4* ("For the Left Hand"), *Symphony No. 1* ("Classical"), and excerpts from *Romeo and Juliet*. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY. offered different come-ons to different constituencies on Sunday night. . . . Academics could celebrate the new Prokofiev Society of America, based at Yale and intended as a clearing house for international research and promotion. . . . [The concerto] is not a friendly piece. The language is bitter and acidic. The long slow movement is gracefully shaped but moves through a barren landscape. Prokofiev had the gifts to write any kind of music he chose. Here he follows a 20th-century aesthetic that assigns to music the obligation not to please but to report in musical terms on the harsh circumstances of life around it. If the piece is unkind to listeners, it is even more unkind to pianists, and no one could help admiring Mr. Berman's fluency with such dense and fiercely complicated piano writing. Prokofiev was one of a number of composers commissioned by Paul Wittgenstein (Ludwig of the *Tractatus* was his brother), who had lost his right arm in World War I. Wittgenstein was not pleased with the Prokofiev submission, saying it was music he did not understand. Maybe Prokofiev should have counted his blessings. Ravel, whose *Concerto for the Left Hand* is the most enduring of these commissions, was said to have been appalled by Wittgenstein's interpretation of it. Friends of Yale might have been attracted to Sunday's concert just to hear how the school's current music students are doing. You heard a lot of fine individual playing, but not all of it exactly at the same time. You came away from the "Classical" Symphony realizing how hard it is to make this ubiquitous piece precise" [New York Times, 5/6/08].

May 5

Radiohead. Cruzan Amphitheater, West Palm Beach, FL. "[N]obody onstage was tan. 'We've just spent the last three days in Miami Beach,' said Thom Yorke, the band's lead singer, looking incredulous. 'What's going on there? Some kind of reconstruction. For once I was proud to be white, pale and English.' It sounded as if he were talking about plastic surgery, of which you might guess he takes a dim view. There's a line in a recent Radiohead song, *House of Cards*: 'The infrastructure will collapse.' . . . Radiohead's music often also feels broad, looming and nonspecific, a growing wash of three-guitar harmony and rhythmic texture that hits sweet or sickly spots and subsides. Somewhere in that spectrum, quite possibly, is something you'll

like. Its members are human-condition musicians; they're universalists. . . . Comparatively subdued, Radiohead ran through 24 songs in two hours, with two sets of encores. The songs were well played -- 10 new, most of the rest choices included on the band's first best-of album, to be released next month by Capitol (without the approval of the band, which has left the label) — and then suddenly over, with quiet and slightly tense shifts between songs. [Thom] Yorke got inside the music as he normally does, singing like a bowed string instrument, meshing his long vocal tones with the rest of the ensemble, shaking his head from side to side. But he was rarely fully submerged. It was a limbering-up show. Jonny Greenwood's loops and digital machinations weren't particularly arresting, and the group appeared to hit a bump in *Weird Fishes/Arpeggi*, one of the strongest songs on its most recent album, *In Rainbows*, with Phil Selway's steady, stiff motor rhythm as its I-beam. The band stopped for 20 seconds or so, and started again from the middle. ('Ve obviously did not practice dis one enough,' Mr. Yorke said afterward, feigning a taskmaster's voice.) . . . Radiohead last toured two years ago, which isn't a long time for some bands. But it is for this group at this point in time: its audience responded rapturously to last year's pay-what-you-wish Internet release of *In Rainbows*. . . . A little catharsis was finally reached in the half-hour of encores, with the three-guitar scrum of *Optimistic*, and then the acoustic duet between Mr. Yorke and Mr. Greenwood in *Faust Arp*, with its entropic images about the forced marches and red tape of existence . . . (It took five minutes to write the music, Mr. Yorke remarked from the stage, then a year and a half to write the lyrics.) And finally, in "House of Cards," Mr. Yorke's gloomily provocative version of a love song, with Mr. Greenwood's watery, dirty slide-guitar sound, the tension and the prettiness sounded equally matched" [Ben Ratliff, *The New York Times*, 5/7/05].

Organist David Briggs in Olivier Messiaen's *Vision of the Eternal Church* and Marcel Dupre's *Prelude and Fugue in G Minor*. Park Cities Presbyterian Church, Chicago, IL. "If I say "Huh?" a lot this week, it's because I lost a chunk of hearing Monday evening at Park Cities Presbyterian Church. In a town with several very loud organs, PCPC's new Schoenstein may be the loudest of all. Of course, one doesn't have to pile on all those massive foundations and loud reeds and couplers. But organist David Briggs, presented by the Dallas Chapter of the American Guild of Organists, repeatedly built up roars worthy of a jet engine at close quarters. Mr. Briggs, a Briton now based in Boston, has formidable technique, both for playing notes and for kaleidoscopic stop changes and pumpings of swell pedals. . . . And he demonstrated his genius at improvisation at both piano (in the hypnotic style of the French composer/organist Olivier Messiaen) and organ (in the razzle-dazzle manner and deliciously saturated harmonies of another Frenchman, Pierre Cochereau). He masterfully sustained and built tension through Messiaen's *Vision of the Eternal Church* and tossed off Marcel Dupre's flashy *Prelude and Fugue in G Minor* with insouciant brilliance" [Scott Cantrell, *The Dallas Morning News*, 5/6/08].

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra announces that it has engaged Riccardo Muti as its next music director. Chicago, IL. "Mr. Muti, 66, will take over in the 2010-11 season. His contract will run for five years, and he is expected to conduct a minimum of 10 weeks a season and lead tours. 'I would like to make this last engagement as music director in my life something that can enrich people,' Mr. Muti said Monday in his first interview after signing the contract. As recently as last September, Mr. Muti had emphatically rejected the idea of taking over the responsibilities of an American music directorship and all the nonmusical duties the job entails. But his tone shifted after an electric month conducting the orchestra at the start of this season, half in Symphony Hall in Chicago and half on a European tour. Mr. Muti, after leading the Philadelphia Orchestra from 1980 to 1992, turned down the music director's job at the New York Philharmonic in 2000. Last year he agreed to take on the position of principal guest conductor, expected to spend six to eight weeks a season with the orchestra and lead it on tours, beginning in 2009, although he now says that he did not agree to a specific number of weeks. Speaking from his villa in Anif, Austria, near Salzburg, Mr. Muti said he would continue his association with the Philharmonic but suggested that his new schedule would reduce his time there. 'The number of weeks, I don't know,' he said. 'I can't say now.' Mr. Muti suddenly found himself available for a full-time position in April 2005, when he stepped down in an operatic kerfuffle at the Teatro Alla Scala, where he had been music director for 19 years. Orchestra musicians and other workers at the theater had turned against him in an internal political wrangle. Mr. Muti has said that offers came pouring in at the time, but that he kept his suitors at bay. In the interview, he stressed that he was not picking Chicago over New York. 'When I left La Scala, I thought it was time for me to be absolutely free, like the birds in the air,' he said. 'Birds go around and they enjoy their happiness, their freedom. But sometimes it can happen they find a tree and they like to stop on a tree, and they didn't know about the tree before. It doesn't mean one tree is better

than another tree. It just happens at the right moment in life.' He likened the hiring to the experience of a confirmed bachelor who finds love and marriage at one fell swoop. . . . 'From my years in Philadelphia I know exactly what I'm expected to do as music director of an American orchestra,' Mr. Muti said. 'To be music director of an American orchestra doesn't mean only to try to make good music with the orchestra for the audience that comes to the hall but to serve the community. . . . He called the Chicago Symphony 'a perfect machine,' technically speaking, with the versatility to play huge works like Prokofiev's *Symphony No. 3* or Scriabin's *Poem of Ecstasy* and to perform with the refined delicacy needed for Schubert. The Chicago Symphony began looking for a new music director nearly four years ago, after Daniel Barenboim announced he was leaving, partly for the same reason Mr. Muti expressed lack of interest in such a job. Mr. Barenboim said he no longer wanted the administrative headaches, and left after the 2005-6 season. He had been in the post since 1991. Chicago's orchestra management found an interim solution in two other high-profile conductors, naming Bernard Haitink principal conductor and Pierre Boulez conductor emeritus. The two men will continue in their positions until Mr. Muti's arrival. Deborah R. Card, the Chicago Symphony's president . . . said she learned that widespread preconceptions about Mr. Muti were false, like his lack of interest in engaging with an orchestra in nonmusical ways or his reputation for arrogance. 'This man is not arrogant by any definition,' she said. 'He has standards.' . . . Now, Mr. Muti said, 'I have found a situation, how can I say, that has made more sweet my dry heart'" [New York Times, 5/5/08].

May 6

Philippe Quint plays John Corigliano's *The Red Violin*, George Gershwin's *It Ain't Necessarily So* from *Porgy and Bess*, and his own (in collaboration with guitarist Michael Bacon) *Seduction Blues*, for cabdrivers, as a thank-you for one driver's honesty. Newark Liberty International Airport, Newark, NJ. "The violinist stood on a makeshift stage between two lampposts crowned with a patina of bird droppings, under a weathered vinyl canopy hastily erected outside Newark Liberty International Airport in the taxicab holding area. The audience watched him in awe, about 50 drivers in three rows, their yellow cabs a few feet behind, some lined up neatly, others askew. As Philippe Quint spent half an hour playing five selections, the cabbies clapped and whistled. They danced in the aisles, hips gyrating like tipsy belly dancers. 'Magic fingers, magic fingers,' one called out. Another grabbed the hand of Mr. Quint's publicist and did what looked like a merengue across the front of the 'stage.' Afterward, the virtuoso was mobbed by drivers seeking his autograph on dollar bills, napkins and cab receipts. 'It was so pleasing to see people dancing -- that never happens,' said Mr. Quint, 34, a Grammy-nominated classical violinist. 'These people, they work so hard, I doubt they get a chance to get out to Carnegie Hall or Lincoln Center.' So Mr. Quint took Carnegie Hall to them, in a miniconcert that was his way of expressing a simple sentiment: Thank you. On April 21, Mr. Quint accidentally left a Stradivarius violin, valued at \$4 million, in the back seat of a cab that he took from the airport to Manhattan on his return from a performance in Dallas. After several frantic hours, the Newark police told him the violin had been found and was at the airport taxi stand with the cabdriver who had taken him home. The two connected, and the violin was returned. 'Anybody out here would have done the same thing,' said the driver, Mohammed Khalil, waving a hand at his laughing, dancing colleagues. The city of Newark awarded Mr. Khalil, who has driven a taxi here since 1985, a Medallion, its highest honor. Mr. Quint gave him a \$100 tip when the violin was returned, but he wanted to do more, so he arranged for Tuesday's concert in a parking-lot-turned-theater. Clad in black, with his dark hair falling over his closed eyes, Mr. Quint dazzled the crowd . . . But despite the setting -- or maybe because of it -- Mr. Quint's audience seemed particularly moved by his gesture. 'I like that he came here,' Ebenezer Sarpeh, 46, said, in the accent of his native Ghana. 'And, yeah, the music, I like it.' . . . 'Everything we find is valuable to someone,' Mr. Khalil pointed out. "If you lost your pen, you would think it was valuable." The violin that Mr. Quint left behind, which had been lent by two benefactors, was still being inspected for any problems from its journey, so he played the Tuesday program on a Guarneri. Afterward, Mr. Quint posed for photographs with Mr. Khalil, whom he has also invited to a September concert at Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall. As he signed autographs, he retold the story of his lost violin and its triumphant return. 'He saw how distressed I was,' Mr. Quint said of Mr. Khalil. 'He just gave it back to me and he noticed I was in no condition to go home by myself. So he said, 'Why don't I give you a ride home?' I said, 'No, no, it's OK, I'll take a bus, I'll take another taxi. He said, 'No, I'm happy to give you a ride back, because you're my last customer.' As he had planned for months, Mr. Khalil retired from driving a cab the day he took Mr. Quint home" [Richard G. Jones, *The New York Times*, 5/8/08].

Pianist Till Fellner plays Heinz Holliger's *Elis* (Three Night Pieces). Zankel Hall, New York, NY. "In . . . a cool if dark-hued traversal of three angular studies that Heinz Holliger composed in 1961 (and revised in 1966), before he became the world's most famous oboist, Mr. Fellner's playing was all brainy abstraction" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 5/8/08].

Christoph Eschenbach conducts the Philadelphia Orchestra in Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 8 ("Of a Thousand"). Carnegie Hall, New York, NY. "Though the relationship between the conductor Christoph Eschenbach and the players of the Philadelphia Orchestra clearly did not work out, the reasons are still being debated. Even critics in Philadelphia cannot seem to agree. Whatever the case, Mr. Eschenbach, who became the orchestra's music director in 2003, will leave at the end of this season. Against this contentious backdrop, the triumph of his appearance with the Philadelphia Orchestra at Carnegie Hall on Tuesday night, a performance of Mahler . . . must have been a deeply gratifying but bittersweet experience for all involved. Just amassing the forces necessary for Mahler's sprawling, 80-minute symphony and getting everyone through a performance is reason enough for an audience to cheer. And the Philadelphia Orchestra can claim a historic association with this score. Leopold Stokowski led the orchestra in the first American performances in 1916 (six years after Mahler conducted the premiere in Munich). Stokowski assembled a chorus, an orchestra and soloists totaling 1,068 performers (about 40 more than Mahler had in Munich). In keeping with practice today Mr. Eschenbach had far fewer performers: 335, including 205 choristers and eight vocal soloists. Still the stage had to be extended with a platform that swallowed up the first four rows in the auditorium. The chorus included four ensembles: the Philadelphia Singers Chorale, the Westminster Symphonic Choir, the Mendelssohn Club of Philadelphia and the American Boychoir. Mr. Eschenbach, as vigorous as ever at 68, managed the traffic cop aspects of conducting this daunting work very well. He can sometimes be a fussy interpreter . . . What distinguished this performance was its directness and clarity. In other symphonies Mahler can sound tortured and fitful. But he sketched the Eighth Symphony in, for him, an astonishingly short burst of inspiration" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 5/8/08].

May 7

New York Philharmonic performs Frederick Loewe's *Camelot* (libretto by Alan Jay Lerner). Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY. "[I]ts charming performance . . . before an adoring audience [was billed as] a semistaged production. Actually the staging is fairly elaborate" [NYT, 5/9/08].

May 9

San Francisco Cabaret Opera presents *Horsewomen of the Apocalypse: The Black Horse with a Touch of Gray*, Mark Alburger's *San Rafael News: Ten Deathsongs*, Cynthia Weyuker's *Potato Famine*, John Partridge's *Whitman Songs*, four songs by Peter Josheff, three pieces from Sheli Nan's *Saga*, an excerpt from Mary Watkins's *Queen Clara*, and music Kurt Weill and Jacques Brel. St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church, San Francisco, CA.

Kurt Weill's *Threepenny Opera*. Pacific Cultural Center, Santa Cruz, CA.

Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians presents a trio of George Lewis, Muhal Richard Abrams, and Wadada Leo Smith, with a pre-concert panel featuring multi-reed-player Henry Threadgill. Community Church, New York, NY. [Richard Muhal Abrams's] words would have consequences, yielding everything from runic silence to braying cacophony, from open improvisation to orchestral scores. Baubles and bells. Bicycle horns. The rumble of a hundred tubas. Ancient drums and electronic striations, and flashes of full-tilt swing. The pianist and composer . . . uttered [his] statement of purpose one afternoon some 43 years ago, in a meeting on the South Side of Chicago. In the process he laid the groundwork for the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, an organization that has fostered some of the most vital American avant-garde music of the last 40 years. Though noncommercial, often pointedly conceptual and unabashedly arcane, this music has had a profound influence over the years on several generations of experimental musicians worldwide" [NYT, 5/2/08].

Mitsuko Uchida plays Kurtág's *Jatekok* (Games). "Kurtág makes us laugh by abandoning decorum. No formal introductions or rules of rhetoric here. . . . Slowly descending chromatic scales, five-finger flurries and lonely little tunes or atmospheric whispers all disappear into pregnant silences before we have quite grasped them. Mr. Kurtág's pieces have a hit-and-run funniness; they

jolt, stab or sigh, then run away. They leave listeners empty-handed but somehow charmed" [Bernard Holland, *The New York Times*, 5/12/08].

May 10

Esa-Pekka Salonen conducts the Los Angeles Philharmonic, with Lili Paasikivi and Anthony Dean Griffey, in Gustav Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* (Song of the Earth) and Paul Hindemith's *Mathis der Maler* Symphony. Disney Hall, Los Angeles, CA. "[Das Lied] is symphony for tenor and mezzo soprano. Having learned of his incurable heart infection, the distraught composer turned to Chinese poetry for solace, understanding, a wisp of beauty. He wrote quickly at his cottage in the Alps the summer of 1908, still vital but frustrated that he was no longer permitted his energetic hikes or racing around on his bicycle. So with *Das Lied*, he began a remarkable three-part symphonic farewell to the world (which concluded with the Ninth and unfinished Tenth). Typically, he fought death and found acceptance. Untypically, he then reached a state of transcendence. Incredibly, the greatest symphonist of his age (I'd say the greatest of them all) gave voice to that transcendence. . . . Salonen conducted a mesmerizing *Das Lied* . . . Paasikivi sang her last word of text, "ewig," over and over, ever more slowly, going lower and lower into her deepest alto range as the Finnish mezzo endlessly drew out the German word for eternity. The orchestra monitored final life signs. The symphony's heart slowed to a few erratic pulses on the harp, a last hopeful tinkle on the celesta. The flat line came with a barely audible chord in the violins and horns. Mahler's genius, though, was to make those last notes not fade but seem as though they could continue forever, and the Disney acoustic sounded at that moment designed for just such a moment. The audience needed a good minute to find the breath to cheer. Mahler was 48 when he wrote *Das Lied*. Salonen is a vigorous 49. I'm told he's greeting his birthday next month with mordant Finnish fatalism, quipping that 50 is the new 70. Recognition of mortality, but not an ounce of sentimentality, could be sensed in an interpretation of *Das Lied* that was clear-headed yet profoundly expressive. . . . Mahler may not have shared Samuel Beckett's taste for brevity, but spiritually and stylistically, he was the composer who seemed as though he couldn't go on but went on. . . . [The tenor] must sing of drink and carousing while staring down dark death, and Griffey did so, going on with disquieting abandon. The mezzo, though, is the singer of the earth, an earth knowing nothing of global warming as brief autumn fades to long-lasting winter. Griffey puts a lot of vibrato into his tone, creating a sense of frightening urgency. Paasikivi uses little vibrato and is all the more moving for the purity of her burnished sound. Dying is, of course, all about living, and we embrace *Das Lied* because it feels, in the end, so alive. The Chinese poetry, which is set in German translation, and the Chinese melodies that Mahler adapted evoked new sensations to 20th century Europeans. Mahler used the orchestra mostly as a collection of soloists, and that too implies a life force. The playing from everyone -- winds, strings, brass, percussion -- was outstanding. . . . As he did in *Das Lied*, Salonen avoided religiosity but not description in a vividly colored reading [in *Mathis*]" [LA Times, 5/12/08].

Diablo College Philharmonic Orchestra in music of Chris Carrasco and Sebastian Najand. Pleasant Hill, CA.

Nathaniel Stookey's *The Composer Is Dead* (text by Daniel Handler, a.k.a. Lemony Snicket) performed by the Philadelphia Orchestra. Philadelphia, PA. "Think of it as a fey [Sergei Prokofiev] Peter and the Wolf, a cross between the [Benjamin Britten] Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra and Clue. It's a murder mystery for narrator and orchestra, and it introduces children to the orchestra - whether or not they want to be introduced," said Handler after a performance of the work last month in Verizon Hall for a group of schoolchildren who, in fact, looked remarkably rapt. Handler and Stookey knew each other in high school, lost touch, and after reconnecting decided to write a piece together. Why did the duo, who both live in San Francisco, decide on this theme? "If you think about it," said Stookey, "every composer you can think of is dead." [ha-ha. or will be - ed.] But to hear Handler tell it, the reason to write something was that existing pieces dead composers wrote for children were not very good. One need not mention names, but Handler does, and he says he set out to write something better. We don't know about better. But it is louder. Handler's outsize stage personality accounts for much of the work's captivating power. It's hard to imagine anyone but him delivering gags with the same mood swings - from understated and dry to over-the-top, shouting delirium. . . . Composer is a word which here means a person who sits in a room muttering and humming and figuring out what notes the orchestra is going to play. This is called... composing. . . . But last night, the composer was not muttering, he was not humming, he was not moving or even breathing. This is called... decomposing [ha-ha - op. cit.] Stookey's music - which will be recorded by the San Francisco Symphony to accompany

a book version of the piece to be released in January - is skilled and memorable. He's an admitted lover of Peter and the Wolf, and a shade of Prokofiev shows up in the first few bars of the work. One of the funniest and most strangely satisfying sections is a duet for a milquetoast tuba and his landlady, the harp. You don't hear that combination every day. The roles Stookey gives to instruments, though, are generally idiomatic - a flamboyant solo for the concertmaster, for instance, and march-happy but sometimes violence-prone writing for the brass instruments. Before the murderer is revealed, Stookey cycles through a deft weave of quotes from his dead colleagues - the Marcia funebre from Beethoven's Symphony No. 3, Bach's St. Matthew's Passion, Brahms's A German Requiem, Mozart's Requiem, Schubert's Death and the Maiden, Haydn, Mahler, Chopin, Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky, Schoenberg . . . a Who's Who of Death in Music. The list is offered as proof that the murderer has, it turns out, been stalking composers for years. 'It was by far the hardest part of the piece,' said Stookey, who dovetailed the quotes in their original keys, referencing them for just enough notes to be recognizable. The Composer Is Dead also indulges in the arcane repertoire of musician humor and the curious way in which players often share characteristics with their instruments -- poking fun at the self-pitying violas, the egomaniacal concertmaster, the shifty oboe player, rude brass players. . . . 'As Daniel says, it's a piece that tricks people into listening,' says Stookey, using a phrase that here means you'll probably learn something about the orchestra without even realizing it" [Philadelphia Inquirer, 5/4/05].

May 11

City Opera Orchestra in Scott Davneport Richards's Charlie Crosses the Nation, David T. Little's Soldier Songs, Alice Shield's Criseyde, Justine F. Chen's Jeanne, and Robert Manno's Dylan and Caitlin. Skirball Center for the Performing Arts, New York University, New York, NY.

The St. Paul Chamber Orchestra and Dawn Upshaw in Igor Stravinsky's Pucella Suite, Two Poems of Konstantin Bal'mont (1911/1954), Three Japanese Lyrics (1913), Maurice Ravel's Trois Poems de Stephane Mallarme, and Osvaldo Golijov orchestrations of four Schubert songs. Zankel Hall, New York, NY. "The songs Mr. Golijov chose -- Wanderers Nachtlied, Lied der Mignon, Dass sie hier gewesen, and Nacht und Träume -- are all slow and achingly melancholy, and his orchestrations magnified passions. At times his scoring made the songs sound almost Mahlerian; in other passages, sparkling percussion timbres, the wheeze of a chamber organ and judicious use of dissonance pulled the songs toward our own time. Schubert's melodies were unchanged, but Ms. Upshaw sang them with a hushed, velvety tone and an irresistible intensity, though also with a sense of the atmosphere that Mr. Golijov wove around them" [Allan Kozinn, The New York Times, 5/13/08].

Tan Dun's The First Emperor. Metropolitan Opera, New York, NY. Yet The First Emperor was not greatly loved, the main complaint being that it droned on relentlessly. So Mr. Tan has tweaked it considerably. He beefed up the Chinese elements, which include exotic percussion and zheng (zither) passages, sliding string figures and elements borrowed from Beijing Opera, and he added music that points up the conflicts within the emperor's family. These additions notwithstanding, the work has been trimmed by nearly a half-hour. It could be shorter still. The arias, each an odd blend of lyricism, angular leaps, weirdly placed melismas and declamatory passages, frequently outlive their welcome, and some scenes -- the concluding coronation, for one -- would be more wrenching if tighter. But the score, which Mr. Tan conducted deftly, has appealing moments, most notably the imaginative, otherworldly interludes and the first-act love duet between Yueyang, the emperor's daughter, and Gao Jianli, the musician commanded by the emperor to compose a glorious anthem for the imperial inauguration. Mr. Domingo, returning to the title role . . . is in fine voice, although Mr. Tan's melodic leaps make singing Emperor Qin an unflattering task. Mr. Domingo's performance also reminds you how uncomfortable he sounds singing English, a weakness notable mainly on his misbegotten crossover recordings" [The New York Times, 5/12/08].

May 12

Death of Robert [Milton Ernest] Rauschenberg (b. 10/22/25, Port Arthur, TX), of heart failure, at 82. Captiva Island, FL. "A painter, photographer, printmaker, choreographer, onstage performer, set designer and, in later years, even a composer, Mr. Rauschenberg defied the traditional idea that an artist stick to one medium or style. He pushed, prodded and sometimes reconceived all the mediums in which he worked. Building on the legacies of Marcel Duchamp, Kurt Schwitters, Joseph Cornell and others, he helped obscure the lines between painting and sculpture, painting and photography, photography

and printmaking, sculpture and photography, sculpture and dance, sculpture and technology, technology and performance art -- not to mention between art and life. Mr. Rauschenberg was also instrumental in pushing American art onward from Abstract Expressionism, the dominant movement when he emerged, during the early 1950s. He became a transformative link between artists like Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning and those who came next, artists identified with Pop, Conceptualism, Happenings, Process Art and other new kinds of art in which he played a signal role. No American artist, Jasper Johns once said, invented more than Mr. Rauschenberg. Mr. Johns, John Cage, Merce Cunningham and Mr. Rauschenberg, without sharing exactly the same point of view, collectively defined this new era of experimentation in American culture. Apropos of Mr. Rauschenberg, Cage once said, "Beauty is now underfoot wherever we take the trouble to look." Cage meant that people had come to see, through Mr. Rauschenberg's efforts, not just that anything, including junk on the street, could be the stuff of art (this wasn't itself new), but that it could be the stuff of an art aspiring to be beautiful -- that there was a potential poetics even in consumer glut, which Mr. Rauschenberg celebrated. 'I really feel sorry for people who think things like soap dishes or mirrors or Coke bottles are ugly,' he once said, 'because they're surrounded by things like that all day long, and it must make them miserable.' The remark reflected the optimism and generosity of spirit that Mr. Rauschenberg became known for. His work was likened to a St. Bernard: uninhibited and mostly good-natured. He could be the same way in person. When he became rich, he gave millions of dollars to charities for women, children, medical research, other artists and Democratic politicians. A brash, garrulous, hard-drinking, open-faced Southerner, he had a charm and peculiar Delphic felicity with language that masked a complex personality and an equally multilayered emotional approach to art, which evolved as his stature did. Having begun by making quirky, small-scale assemblages out of junk he found on the street in downtown Manhattan, he spent increasing time in his later years, after he had become successful and famous, on vast international, ambassadorial-like projects and collaborations. Conceived in his immense studio on the island of Captiva, off southwest Florida, these projects were of enormous size and ambition; for many years he worked on one that grew literally to exceed the length of its title, "The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece." They generally did not live up to his earlier achievements. Even so, he maintained an equanimity toward the results. Protean productivity went along with risk, he felt, and risk sometimes meant failure. The process -- an improvisatory, counterintuitive way of doing things -- was always what mattered most to him. 'Screwing things up is a virtue,' he said when he was 74. 'Being correct is never the point. I have an almost fanatically correct assistant, and by the time she re-spells my words and corrects my punctuation, I can't read what I wrote. Being right can stop all the momentum of a very interesting idea.' This attitude also inclined him, as the painter Jack Tworikov once said, 'to see beyond what others have decided should be the limits of art.' He 'keeps asking the question -- and it's a terrific question philosophically, whether or not the results are great art,' Mr. Tworikov said, 'and his asking it has influenced a whole generation of artists.' That generation was the one that broke from Pollock and company. Mr. Rauschenberg maintained a deep but mischievous respect for Abstract Expressionist heroes like de Kooning and Barnett Newman. Famously, he once painstakingly erased a drawing by de Kooning, an act both of destruction and devotion. Critics regarded the all-black paintings and all-red paintings he made in the early 1950's as spoofs of de Kooning and Pollock. The paintings had roiling, bubbled surfaces made from scraps of newspapers embedded in paint. But these were just as much homages as they were parodies. De Kooning, himself a parodist, had incorporated bits of newspapers in pictures, and Pollock stuck cigarette butts to canvases. Mr. Rauschenberg's Automobile Tire Print, from the early 1950s -- resulting from Cage's driving an inked tire of a Model A Ford over 20 sheets of white paper - - poked fun at Newman's famous 'zip' paintings. . . . Mr. Rauschenberg frequently alluded to cars and spaceships, even incorporating real tires and bicycles into his art. This partly reflected his own restless, peripatetic imagination. The idea of movement was logically extended when he took up dance and performance. There was, beneath this, a darkness to many of his works, notwithstanding their irreverence. . . . Interview (1955), which resembled a cabinet or closet with a door, enclosing photos of bullfighters, a pinup, a Michelangelo nude, a fork and a softball, suggested some black-humored encoded erotic message. There were many other images of downtrodden and lonely people, rapt in thought; pictures of ancient frescoes, out of focus as if half remembered; photographs of forlorn, neglected sites; bits and pieces of faraway places conveying a kind of nostalgia or remoteness. In bringing these things together, the art implied consolation. Mr. Rauschenberg, who knew that not everybody found it easy to grasp the open-endedness of his work, once described to the writer Calvin Tomkins an encounter with a woman who had reacted skeptically to Monogram (1955-59) and Bed in his 1963 retrospective at the Jewish Museum, one of the events that secured Mr. Rauschenberg's reputation: 'To her, all my decisions seemed

absolutely arbitrary — as though I could just as well have selected anything at all — and therefore there was no meaning, and that made it ugly. So I told her that if I were to describe the way she was dressed, it might sound very much like what she'd been saying. For instance, she had feathers on her head. And she had this enamel brooch with a picture of The Blue Boy on it pinned to her breast. And around her neck she had on what she would call mink but what could also be described as the skin of a dead animal. Well, at first she was a little offended by this, I think, but then later she came back and said she was beginning to understand.' . . . [I]n Port Arthur, Tex., a small refinery town . . . 'it was very easy to grow up without ever seeing a painting,' he said. (In adulthood he renamed himself Robert.) His grandfather, a doctor who emigrated from Germany, had settled in Texas and married a Cherokee. His father, Ernest, worked for a local utility company. The family lived so frugally that his mother, Dora, made him shirts out of scraps of fabric. Once she made herself a skirt out of the back of the suit that her younger brother was buried in. She didn't want the material to go to waste. . . . A decade or so later he made history with his own assemblages of scraps and ready-mades: sculptures and music boxes made of packing crates, rocks and rope; and paintings like Yoicks, sewn from fabric strips. He loved making something out of nothing. Mr. Rauschenberg studied pharmacology briefly at the University of Texas at Austin before he was drafted during World War II. He saw his first paintings at the Huntington Art Gallery in California while he was stationed in San Diego as a medical technician in the Navy Hospital Corps. It occurred to him that it was possible to become a painter. He attended the Kansas City Art Institute on the G.I. Bill, traveled to Paris and enrolled at the Académie Julian, where he met Susan Weil, a young painter from New York who was to enter Black Mountain College in North Carolina. Having read about and come to admire Josef Albers, then the head of fine arts at Black Mountain, Mr. Rauschenberg saved enough money to join her. Mr. Albers was a disciplinarian and strict modernist who, shocked by his student, later disavowed ever even knowing Mr. Rauschenberg. He was, on the other hand, recalled by Mr. Rauschenberg as 'a beautiful teacher and an impossible person. "He wasn't easy to talk to, and I found his criticism so excruciating and so devastating that I never asked for it," Mr. Rauschenberg added. "Years later, though, I'm still learning what he taught me." Among other things, he learned to maintain an open mind toward materials and new mediums, which Mr. Albers endorsed. Mr. Rauschenberg also gained a respect for the grid as an essential compositional organizing tool. For a while, he moved between New York, where he studied at the Art Students League with Vaclav Vytlacil and Morris Kantor, and Black Mountain. During the spring of 1950 he and Ms. Weil married. The marriage lasted two years, during which they had a son, Christopher, who survives him, along with Mr. Rauschenberg's companion, Darryl Pottorf. Mr. Rauschenberg experimented at the time with blueprint paper to produce silhouette negatives. The pictures were published in Life magazine in 1951; after that Mr. Rauschenberg was given his first solo show, at the influential Betty Parsons Gallery. "Everyone was trying to give up European aesthetics," he recalled, meaning Picasso, the Surrealists and Matisse. "That was the struggle, and it was reflected in the fear of collectors and critics. John Cage said that fear in life is the fear of change. If I may add to that: nothing can avoid changing. It's the only thing you can count on. Because life doesn't have any other possibility, everyone can be measured by his adaptability to change." Cage acquired a painting from the Betty Parsons show. Aside from that, Mr. Rauschenberg sold absolutely nothing. Grateful, he agreed to host Cage at his loft. As Mr. Rauschenberg liked to tell the story, the only place to sit was on a mattress. Cage started to itch. He called Mr. Rauschenberg afterward to tell him that his mattress must have bedbugs and that, since Cage was going away for a while, Mr. Rauschenberg could stay at his place. Mr. Rauschenberg accepted the offer. In return, he decided he would touch up the painting Cage had acquired, as a kind of thank you, painting it all black, being in the midst of his new, all-black period. When Cage returned, he was not amused. "We both thought, 'Here was somebody crazier than I am,'" Mr. Rauschenberg recalled. In 1952 Mr. Rauschenberg switched to all-white paintings which were, in retrospect, spiritually akin to Cage's famous . . . 4 minutes and 33 seconds . . . Mr. Rauschenberg's paintings, like the music, in a sense became both Rorschachs and backdrops for ambient, random events, like passing shadows. "I always thought of the white paintings as being not passive but very — well — hypersensitive," he told an interviewer in 1963. "So that people could look at them and almost see how many people were in the room by the shadows cast, or what time of day it was." Kicking around Europe and North Africa with the artist Cy Twombly for a few months after that, Mr. Rauschenberg began to collect and assemble objects -- bits of rope, stones, sticks, bones -- which he showed to a dealer in Rome who exhibited them under the title 'scatole contemplative,' or thought boxes. They were shown in Florence, where an outraged critic suggested that Mr. Rauschenberg toss them in the river. He thought that sounded like a good idea. So, saving a few scatole for himself and friends, he found a secluded spot on the Arno. "I took your advice," he wrote to the critic. Yet the scatole

were crucial to his development, setting the stage for bigger, more elaborate assemblages, like Monogram. Back in New York, Mr. Rauschenberg showed his all-black and all-white paintings, then his erased de Kooning, which de Kooning had given to him to erase, a gesture that Mr. Rauschenberg found astonishingly generous, all of which enhanced his reputation as the new enfant terrible of the art world. . . . Around that time he also met Mr. Johns, then unknown, who had a studio in the same building on Pearl Street where Mr. Rauschenberg had a loft. The intimacy of their relationship over the next years, a consuming subject for later biographers and historians, coincided with the production by the two of them of some of the most groundbreaking works of postwar art. In Mr. Rauschenberg's famous words, they gave each other 'permission to do what we wanted.' Living together in a series of lofts in Lower Manhattan until the 1960s, they exchanged ideas and supported themselves designing window displays for Tiffany & Company and Bonwit Teller under the collaborative pseudonym Matson Jones. Along with the combines like Monogram and Canyon (1959), Mr. Rauschenberg in that period developed a transfer drawing technique, dissolving printed images from newspapers and magazines with a solvent and then rubbing them onto paper with a pencil. The process, used for works like 34 Drawings for Dante's Inferno, created the impression of something fugitive, exquisite and secret. Perhaps there was an autobiographical and sensual aspect to this. It let him blend images on a surface to a kind of surreal effect, which became the basis for works he made throughout his later career, when he adapted the transfer method to canvas. Instrumental in this technical evolution back then was Tatyana Grossman, who encouraged and guided him as he made prints at her workshop, Universal Limited Art Editions, on Long Island; he also began a long relationship with the Gemini G.E.L. workshop in Los Angeles, producing lithographs like the 1970 Stoned Moon series, with its references to the moon landing. His association with theater and dance had already begun by the 1950s, when he began designing sets and costumes for Mr. Cunningham, Paul Taylor and Trisha Brown and for his own productions. In 1963 he choreographed Pelican, in which he performed on roller skates while wearing a parachute and helmet of his design to the accompaniment of a taped collage of sound. This fascination with collaboration and with mixing art and technologies dovetailed with yet another endeavor. With Billy Klüver, an engineer at Bell Telephone Laboratories, and others, he started Experiments in Art and Technology, a nonprofit foundation to foster joint projects by artists and scientists. In 1964 he toured Europe and Asia with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, the same year he exhibited at the Whitechapel Gallery in London and the Venice Biennale as the United States representative. That sealed his international renown. The Sunday Telegraph in London hailed him as 'the most important American artist since Jackson Pollock.' He walked off with the international grand prize in Venice, the first modern American to win it. Mr. Rauschenberg had, almost despite himself, become an institution. Major exhibitions followed every decade after that, including one at the Pompidou Center in Paris in 1981, another at the Guggenheim in 1997 and yet another at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art that landed at the Metropolitan Museum in 2005. When he wasn't traveling in later years, he was on Captiva, living at first in a modest beach house and working out of a small studio. In time he became that Gulf Coast island's biggest residential landowner while also maintaining a town house in Greenwich Village in New York. He acquired the land in Captiva by buying adjacent properties from elderly neighbors whom he let live rent-free in their houses, which he maintained for them. He accumulated 35 acres, 1,000 feet of beach front and nine houses and studios, including a 17,000-square-foot two-story studio overlooking a swimming pool. He owned almost all that remained of tropical jungle on the island. After a stroke in 2002 that left his right side paralyzed, Mr. Rauschenberg learned to work more with his left hand and, with a troupe of assistants, remained prolific for several years in his giant studio. "I usually work in a direction until I know how to do it, then I stop," he said in an interview there. "At the time that I am bored or understand -- I use those words interchangeably -- another appetite has formed. A lot of people try to think up ideas. I'm not one. I'd rather accept the irresistible possibilities of what I can't ignore." He added: "Anything you do will be an abuse of somebody else's aesthetics. I think you're born an artist or not. I couldn't have learned it. And I hope I never do because knowing more only encourages your limitations." [Michael Kimmelman, The New York Times, 5/14/08]. "Something inherently theatrical about Robert Rauschenberg's talent -- always evident in his radical feeling for color, light, composition and new ingredients and juxtapositions -- prompted him to his boldest and freshest conceptions when he worked onstage. From the early 1950's until 2007 he designed for dance. And in the late 50's and early 60's, when he first came to fame, he was recurrently (at times constantly) occupied in dance theater. When he won the international grand prize at the Venice Biennale in 1964, he said he regarded the Merce Cunningham Dance Company as his biggest canvas. Although the remark offended some in Cunningham circles (primarily the composer John Cage, who seems to have felt it sounded too proprietorial),

it was completely justified. At that time there was no better place to see the range of Mr. Rauschenberg's inventiveness than the Cunningham repertory. Mr. Rauschenberg wasn't just the designer of most pieces Mr. Cunningham had choreographed in the previous 10 years; he was also a permanent colleague. He toured America and, in 1964, the world as stage manager to the Cunningham company, adjusting the lighting and costumes, making several of the dancers into his long-term friends, helping turn the itinerary of a dance company into a fulcrum of ideas. In 1954 Mr. Rauschenberg was the first stage designer to follow the principle of artistic independence already established by Mr. Cunningham and Cage. All he needed to know was which dancer to design costumes for, and if Mr. Cunningham had any further specifications. So when Mr. Cunningham asked (in 1954) for décor around which the dancers could move, Mr. Rauschenberg placed a large red free-standing combine center stage in *Minutiae*; though the choreography has not survived, the décor is still used in some Cunningham Events. Sometimes Mr. Cunningham gave not specifications but poetic clues. For example, for *Winterbranch* (1964) he said to Mr. Rauschenberg, 'Think of the night as if it were day.' Mr. Rauschenberg's response was to think of images like being caught in the headlights of a car, and he made all-black costumes and lighting that sometimes threw the stage into darkness while viewers were shielding their eyes from the light. . . . In the 1960's Mr. Rauschenberg was involved in the radical dance-theater experiments at and around Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village and was close to Cunningham-connected experimentalists like Carolyn Brown, Viola Farber and Steve Paxton; he even choreographed himself. Mr. Rauschenberg's full-time connection to the Cunningham company ended with its 1964 world tour. Though he and Cage had stimulated each other profoundly and were in many ways like-minded, their egos had clashed; Mr. Rauschenberg's 'my biggest canvas' remark sounded like colonization in a dance theater where the point was independence. But others led him back to dance theater, nobody more beautifully than Trisha Brown. Her *Set and Reset* (1983) was an instant masterpiece, largely thanks to Mr. Rauschenberg's astonishingly imaginative designs. Three screens simultaneously broadcast separate video collages in black and white (more than 20 years before a video component became the norm in new choreography), while the dancers rippled around the stage in part-translucent costumes marked with gray and black figures that resembled newsprint. Mr. Rauschenberg and Mr. Cunningham did collaborate again -- though collaboration may have always been too tight a word for the freedom they gave each other -- on several pieces over the decades. The last of these was only last October, *XOVER* (pronounced "Crossover"), which had its premiere at the Hopkins Center at Dartmouth College. . . . More glorious yet - the most marvelous Rauschenberg stage designs I have seen, and supremely theatrical -- were what he made for Mr. Cunningham's *Interscape* (2000). . . . Each costume was individual (Mr. Cunningham said he knew the dancers were happy from the noises he could hear them making as they returned from their fittings) and demonstrated Mr. Rauschenberg's extraordinary feeling for color combinations. . . . Impresarios have occasionally assembled programs that illustrate Picasso and the Dance, but Mr. Rauschenberg's work for dance was far more prolific than Picasso's, as a whole season could be presented to demonstrate. If only that could happen, its range of designs . . . would easily establish his place in the forefront of architects of theater" [NYT, 5/14/08].

May 13

The National Endowment for the Arts establishes a yearly Opera Honors awards, and names the first four recipients: James Levine, Leontyne Price, Carlisle Floyd, and Santa Fe Opera general director Richard Gaddes -- each receiving \$25,000 prize. Washington, DC. "To put the \$100,000 total in context, the endowment is giving \$2.5 million in direct opera grants this year and \$7 million in other classical music grants, according to Dana Gioia, its chairman. Total grants to the arts are \$72 million, with another \$48 million sent to state arts councils to make their own allocations. Mr. Gioia said the awards have an 'enormous symbolic value' and were established in part to stir awareness and appreciation for the art form. While \$25,000 could mean a lot more to a struggling singer, say, than to Mr. Levine, who may make more than that for a guest-conducting engagement, Mr. Gioia called the prize 'a lifetime achievement award'" [Daniel J. Wakin, *The New York Times*, 5/13/08].

Avenue Q by Robert Lopez, Jeff Marx and Jeff Whitty. Sanford and Dolores Ziff Ballet Opera House, Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts, Miami, FL. Through May 17. "Marx, who grew up in Hollywood, Fla., and sang with a bar mitzvah band while he went to Pine Crest School (being a bar mitzvah star was "a great thing for an insecure gay kid," Marx says with a laugh), had ditched his dream of becoming an actor by 1997. After graduating from law school, he joined the BMI Musical Theater Workshop in New York, hoping to find talented young clients. Lopez, a Yale grad from Greenwich Village, had also joined the workshop. The two became friends and

discovered they liked similar music. So they started writing together. One project, seven songs written for what they imagined could be a Muppet movie titled *Kermit, Prince of Denmark* (with a Dane both melancholy and green), won them a major musical theater award. But it wasn't until they had been working together for almost two years, searching for one great idea, that *Avenue Q* -- the unconventional little show that became a monster hit -- was conceived" [Christine Dolen, *Miami Herald*, 5/11/05].

John Scott leads the St. Thomas Choir in 7th-grader Daniel Castellanos's *Eternal Light* (2008), Samuel Barber's *Agnus Dei* (1967, the choral version of *Adagio for Strings*), Nico Muhly's *Bright Mass With Canons* (2005), Eric Whitaker's setting of E.E. Cummings's *I Thank You God for Most This Amazing Day*, Randall Thompson's *Alleluia* (1940), Ned Rorem's *O God, My Heart Is Ready* (1992), Aaron Copland's *In the Beginning* (1947), Leonard Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms* (1965), and spiritual arrangements by Gerre Hancock and William Dawson. St. Thomas Church Fifth Avenue, New York, New York. "Eternal Light . . . a setting of a prayer by the eighth-century abbot Alcuin of York, is straightforward, serene and attractively harmonized; nothing about it marks it as the work of a child, and it sounded entirely at home alongside the choir's velvety rendering of Samuel Barber's *Agnus Dei*. . . . If . . . *Bright Mass With Canons* . . . seems staid . . . it is thoroughly practical: Composed for this choir, it treats the five sections of the Mass reverently, painting the traditional texts with an evocative chromaticism and the appealing rhythmic energy that canonic writing invariably yields. . . . Eric Whitaker's graceful setting of an E. E. Cummings poem, *I Thank You God for Most This Amazing Day* [is] a score that seems on its way to becoming a contemporary choral staple. Curiously, the works by the younger composers were less overtly dramatic than those of their elders, although that probably had more to do with Mr. Scott's choices than with a generational change of style. . . . *Alleluia* . . . begins with a devotional gentleness but gradually becomes a brisk, fortissimo celebration. . . . *O God, My Heart Is Ready* . . . is turbulent and driven from the first note. In Aaron Copland . . . the music's evolving texture mirrors the unfolding of *Creation*. . . . Castellanos . . . was the treble soloist in the middle movement of . . . *Chichester Psalms* . . . a work that draws on Bernstein's rhythmically vital theater style as well as his gift for surprising melodic modulation, and is one of his strongest concert scores. The Bernstein opened the program and was accompanied by Frederick Teardo, organist; Anna Reinerman, harpist; and Maya Gunji, percussionist. The choir sang it with the vigor, precision and beauty that Bernstein's Hebrew settings demand" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 5/15/08].

The Movado Hour presents tenor Paul Groves and pianist Pedja Muzijevic in Benjamin Britten's *Winter Words* (Thomas Hardy) Baryshnikov Arts Center, New York, NY. "Groves, now appearing in *The First Emperor* at the Metropolitan Opera [presented] a fascinating cycle. . . . Apart from a few unsettled high notes during the first verse of the rangy, disorienting *Midnight* on the Great Western, he sang with an untroubled ease and beauty of tone. . . . In *The Choirmaster's Burial* and *At the Railway Station*, Upway, each a drama in miniature, he subtly varied his tone and posture to convey varying perspectives. Mr. Muzijevic was an alert accompanist" NYT, 5/15/08].

May 14

Opera Pacific in Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah*. Orange County Performing Artscenter, CA. "With more than 230 productions and 700 performances in the U.S. and Europe, Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah* is one of the most popular American operas, second perhaps only to *Porgy and Bess*. Critics, however, have run hot and cold about it. After its New York premiere in 1956, the city's Music Critics Circle named it the season's best new opera. But just this year, after its belated first professional production in England, one reviewer called it 'tawdry, faux-naïf stuff.' Floyd, though . . . takes such reactions with the proverbial grain of salt. 'I'm just happy that the critics weren't standoffish initially, or it probably would never have become the staple that it's become,' the composer, now 81, said by phone recently from the home he shares with his wife of 50 years in Tallahassee, Fla., where *Susannah* was first performed in 1955. . . . Inspired by the Apocryphal story of Susanna and the Elders -- a frequent inspiration of Renaissance painters but something Floyd said he never actually read until years after completing his version -- *Susannah* tells the story of an innocent young girl in rural Tennessee who is falsely accused of wickedness by church fathers. The arrival on the scene of an itinerant preacher, Olin Blitch, leads to fatal consequences. . . . Much like that of Robert Frost's poetry, the opera's musical style is superficially devoid of artifice -- but deceptively so. Canadian baritone Desmond Byrne, who sang Blitch in Berlin in 1997, said then that he had found the role more taxing than Alban Berg's famously challenging *Wozzeck*. 'There are huge leaps, and the orchestration is very heavy,' Byrne said. 'Blitch is a terribly difficult role to

sing, although musically it sounds simple. It took me six weeks to learn.' South Carolina-born Floyd wrote the opera, including the libretto, when he was in his late 20's. 'Nobody knew me, and I had no reputation to lose,' he said. "' felt very confident of the material, and I also felt confident of my ability at the time to bring it to the stage musically. I just make the assumption that I'm the first person to bore. At least I hope I am.' Written during the McCarthy era, Susannah has prompted many observers to draw parallels to that time, when reputations were destroyed by rumor and guilt by association. 'Where they really nail me with those questions is in Europe, curiously enough -- especially in Germany,' Floyd said. 'I remember talking to very well-informed and very literate journalists there, but they didn't seem to see the connection of fascism and its various manifestations.' Still, he did not write the opera as a polemic. 'Not at all,' he said. 'First of all, I think the theater is not the place for that. If it is, it should be subliminal. . . .' Since Susannah, Floyd has written seven full-length operas, including *Of Mice and Men* (1970) and his most recent, *Cold Sassy Tree*, which premiered in 2000. But his maiden effort holds a special place for him. . . . 'I have such affection for Susannah because it was a very exciting time of my life when it first was launched,' he said, 'and I am immensely pleased that audiences still continue to take my opera to their hearts after all these years. . . . The thing that makes opera so vulnerable to ridicule and also keeps people at arm's length sometimes is a very sharp demarcation between recitative and aria . . . I would say if I had any kind of mission -- and I have -- it was to elide those various ways of using the voice so that the audience is really unaware of the change and not bounced out of the illusion that's been created onstage. Otherwise, it just gets to be very dry and gray. A lot of contemporary operas hurt from that kind of grayness of vocal writing.' Asked if he cared to name names, he demurred. 'No. I'm no fool. . . . Nobody wants to be a one-time wonder. . . I hope I've escaped that. It would certainly otherwise be no growth for me, artistically or otherwise.' And although he has no new work on the horizon, he wouldn't rule out the possibility of another opera. 'I'm a composer who doesn't find subject matter that easily You have to commit yourself to a very long period of work, and I want to be sure that I have something that I continue to be interested in. But I'm never going to say 'never'[LAT, 5/14/08].

May 15

Death of Alexander "Sandy" Courage (b. 12/17/19, Philadelphia, PA) at 88. Pacific Palisades, CA. "[He] composed the soaring theme for the Star Trek TV series in the 1960's and was an Emmy Award-winning, Oscar-nominated arranger. Courage . . . had been in declining health since 2005. After launching his 54-year career as a composer for CBS Radio in 1946, Courage became an orchestrator and arranger at MGM in 1948. . . . He later was an orchestrator for musicals including *My Fair Lady*, *Hello, Dolly!*, *Doctor Dolittle*, and *Fiddler on the Roof* -- as well as for films . . . He made a very big contribution to the musical life of Hollywood from the end of the second World War to recent years,' Oscar-winning composer John Williams told *The Times* on Thursday. . . . 'He was known to most musicians in the community as having been one of the architects of what we used to refer to as the MGM sound, which meant that most of the musical films from MGM had a particular style of orchestration, which was an extension and development of what was done in the theater in the 1920's,' Williams said. 'They actually took that to a very high art form.' . . . Composer Ian Fraser, who met Courage after he had moved to 20th Century Fox in the '60s, said Thursday that Courage's 'knowledge of all the genres of music was really monumental. He was part of the wonderful music department at 20th Century Fox,' Fraser said. 'With the passing of [composer] Earle Hagen this week, the last of that group are gone, never to be replaced.' . . . He began composing for television in 1959 and wrote music for more than 350 episodes of series that included . . . *Lost in Space* Then there was *Star Trek*, the legendary science-fiction series that ran on NBC from 1966 to 1969. Courage was no science-fiction fan when *Star Trek* creator Gene Roddenberry asked him to score the pilot episode in 1965. 'I never have been' a sci-fi fan, Courage later told film music historian Jon Burlingame. But I thought, 'Well, what the heck. It's another show.' ' Roddenberry, Courage recalled, said he didn't want the show's score to sound like 'space music,' nothing 'far out.' He wanted something that had some . . . drive to it,' Courage recalled. 'In fact, he told me to always write that way through the show, all of it.' The eight-note brass fanfare that Courage wrote to herald the starship *Enterprise* became one of the most familiar musical signatures in TV history. 'I'd argue that it's the most famous fanfare in the world,' Burlingame, who teaches film music history at USC, said Thursday. 'It's been around 42 years -- and it's all around the world -- and when you hear those eight notes you immediately think of the *Enterprise*,' he said. Courage . . . moved to New Jersey as a boy. He began playing the piano when he was 5 and later played the cornet and horn. A 1941 graduate of the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, N.Y., he enlisted in the Army Air Forces in January

1942 and served as a band leader on bases in California and Arizona. Courage, who was one of the founders of the Composers and Lyricists Guild of America, also was an award-winning photographer whose pictures appeared in *Life*, *Collier's* and other magazines. His third wife, the former Shirley Pumpelly, died in 2005" [Dennis McLellan, *Los Angeles Times*, 5/30/08].

Houston Symphony in Joaquin Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez* (with Eliot Fisk), and Manuel de Falla's *El Amor Brujo* (with Katherine Ciesidecornski) and *Nights in the Garden of Spain*. Jones Hall, Houston, TX.

May 16

Death of composer and musicologist Wilfrid Mellers (b. 4/26/14, Leamington Spa, UK), at 94. Scrayingham, North Yorkshire, UK. He was 94 and had homes in Scrayingham and the nearby city of York. "Particularly notable among his books was *Music in a New Found Land: Themes and Developments in the History of American Music* (1964), an absorbing overview that traced American composition from Colonial times through jazz (with glancing mention of rock), published at a time when European musicologists paid scant attention to music in the United States. His *Twilight of the Gods: The Music of the Beatles* (1973), the first full-length serious analysis of the Beatles' songs, was published only three years after the group split up. . . . He also published . . . Percy Grainger (1992), as well as *Singing in the Wilderness: Music and Ecology in the Twentieth Century* (2001). . . . In the early 1960's he was a visiting professor of music at the University of Pittsburgh, during which he wrote *Music in a New Found Land*. . . . Mellers's compositions, though rarely performed in the United States, had champions in England. Among them were several operas, including *The Tragical Historie of Christopher Marlowe* (1950-52) and *The Borderline* (1958), and dozens of stylistically varied choral and vocal works" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 5/23/08].

May 20

Members of Concertante play Joaquin Turina's *Piano Quartet in A Minor* and Gabriela Lena Frank's *Hypnagogia* for String Sextet. Merkin Concert Hall "[I]t was hard to tell where classical music left off and the dance halls and cafes of Spain began. And maybe it was best not to ask. This appealing music makes classification unimportant. It was classical music simply by being performed in a concert hall. Put the same piece in a cabaret setting and listeners might get up and dance. There were also Turina's sonorities, which seem to have learned a lot from Ravel's String Quartet and early French 20th-century style in general. Concertante is essentially a string sextet. Six is a nice number for a chamber group. Reduce it by one or two, and you have one of music's strongest repertoires. Add a few players, and there is still a sense of family. . . . Frank cites dreams and the descent into sleep as inspirations. A series of episodes featuring the viola playing of Rachel Shapiro are separated by sharp pizzicato attacks, and plucked strings are indeed a major component here, especially in the quiet final moments" [New York Times, 5/22/08].

The Oratorio Society of New York, under Kent Tritle, in Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* and Alessandro Caderio's *Cantata for Revival*. Carnegie Hall, NY.

May 21

Pianist Taka Kigawa in Kira Tanaka's *Crystalline*, Claude Debussy's *Images*, Books 1 and 2, Tristan Murail's *Territoires de l'Oubli* (Forgotten Territories), and Igor Stravinsky's *Three Movements from "Petrushka"*. Greenwich House Music School, New York, NY.

May 22

John Duykers premieres Erling Wold's *Mordake* (libretto by Douglas Kearney). Shotwell Studio, San Francisco, CA. "Buoyed by tenor John Duykers' bravura performance in the title role and Wold's cagy, restlessly lyrical electronic score, the piece holds the listener's attention forcefully What the opera does boast, though, is a number of striking set pieces and a score that at least adapts itself deftly to the ever-changing stylistic landscape. In *Mordake*, Wold builds upon the luscious, rootless minimalism of such earlier works as *A Little Girl Dreams of Taking the Veil and Queer*, injecting it with a newly anguished urgency. At some points, it is the Expressionist harmonies (Expressionist, that is, by Wold's standards) that carry that mood; at others, as in the expansive phrenology aria, it's the tense, bubbling,

synthesized accompaniment. Now and again, electronic wizardry creates a duet between Duykers' voice and its feminine counterpart - a wonderful sonic image that cries out for a firmer theatrical context. Then there are the memorable passages where Wold indulges his melodic bent, as in the final lullaby. In the opera's most striking scene, Mordake presents his story as a ghoulish children's tale . . . sung with a keening melodic simplicity that is heartbreaking. . . . Duykers . . . commands a nearly bare stage with just his vocal and theatrical bravura (along with a few props and some video effects) to keep him going. He storms, he blusters, he bewails his fate - and, when necessary, he taps into reserves of sweetly tuned lyricism. It's a dynamic, affecting performance" [Joshua Kosman, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 5/26/08].

Met Orchestra, conducted by James Levine, in Elliott Carter's *Variations for Orchestra* (1955) Carnegie Hall, New York, NY. "Who could have predicted then that more than 50 years later Mr. Carter would still be producing ingenious works? In this piece Mr. Carter does not use the variation form in the traditional way, in which a single theme spurs a series of contrasting variations. Besides the official theme, an extended and twisting melodic line, Mr. Carter's piece has two other melodic ideas that are subjected to bold variation: scalelike patterns of notes, one that picks up speed as it unfolds, and another that slows down. His goal was to write a work of exhilarating variety. Indeed, one way to listen to this piece is to forget everything about the theme-and-variations form and revel instead in the boldly contrasting moods, harmonies, colors and characters of the music. The performance Mr. Levine elicited invited you to experience the piece that way. Every shifting, restless, fragmentary or prolonged musical idea -- skittish volleys of notes from the woodwinds, ruminative melodic lines for dusky strings, somber harmonic passages that evoke the aching atonal romanticism of Berg's *Wozzeck* -- was vividly executed. Yet Mr. Levine brought balance and clarity to the multilayered textures and found a linear thread that runs through the 23-minute score, giving the music narrative urgency for all its fitful activity. Mr. Carter, though a little unsteady on his feet, walked near to the stage to greet Mr. Levine and then turned around to bask in the ovation from the audience" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 5/24/08].

Pianists Stephen Gosling and Anthony Coleman in Igor Stravinsky's *Piano Rag Music* (1919), Conlon Nancarrow's *Tango?*, Gyorgy Ligeti's *Musica Ricercata*, Christian Wolff's *For 1, 2, or 3 People* (1962), Coleman's *ALVB* and *Six Short Pieces for Piano*, Jelly Roll Morton's *Freakish*, and Steve Reich's *Piano Phase*. Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY. "[The Stravinsky] sounds like Scott Joplin filtered through *The Rite of Spring*. Mr. Gosling also played with colorful bite in Conlon Nancarrow's manic "Tango?," composed in 1983 after many years writing for player pianos. With vivid clarity Mr. Gosling then conveyed the varied moods and intricacies of Ligeti's fascinating "Musica Ricercata" (1951-53). Ligeti described that work, . . . influenced by Bartok and Stravinsky, as 'hovering between academic orthodoxy and deep reflection: between gravity and caricature.' The first of the 11 movements uses only the note A, exploring a range of dynamics and rhythms and building in intensity to the musical equivalent of a panic attack. At the end Ligeti adds D, and those two pitches make up the eerie second movement, which evokes paranoid, Shostakovichian shadows. (This piece was also used by Stanley Kubrick in his film *Eyes Wide Shut*.) Each consecutive section incorporates another tone from the chromatic scale. The dissonant 10th section particularly irked the Hungarian Communist authorities, who branded it "decadent." . . . Coleman . . . also played the world premiere of his *Six Short Pieces for Piano*, an eclectic, abstract work that blended (among other styles) jazz and Weberian dissonance. The program concluded with the two pianists' brilliant rendition of Steve Reich's kaleidoscopic *Piano Phase* (1967), representing the first time Mr. Reich used the inventive phasing techniques of his tape works in a piece for live performers. Listening to the work creates the sensation of being pleasantly hypnotized while remaining acutely alert to undulating layers of sound and unexpected shifts of rhythm, color and sonority" [Vivien Schweitzer, *The New York Times*, 5/25/08].

Anthony Davis's *Amistad*, Spoleto Festival U.S.A., Charleston, SC. "The composer has revised and trimmed the production since its debut at the Chicago Lyric Opera in 1997. It is the central work at this summer's Spoleto Festival U.S.A., whose host is Charleston, a city fully freighted with slavery's legacy. The relevance has not been lost on African-Americans involved: the composer, the librettist, performers and audience members. . . . In an interview on Friday, Mr. Davis, the composer, said a number of white Charleston residents had mentioned to him how painful it was to hear the harshly derogatory language thrown at the Africans by white characters. It was even difficult for the singers in rehearsal, Mr. Davis said. With Charleston's history, he added, 'there's a sense of a lot of people trying to get beyond these words.' Yet the mood is a far cry from that of 2000, when some performers withdrew from the festival and audience members boycotted it because of the controversy over the Confederate flag that flew over the state

capitol, in Columbia. This year is also the 200th anniversary of the American ban on the importation of slaves. . . . *Amistad* also has a difficult score, with jazzy, funky themes; syncopated rhythms; multiple meters; and challenging vocal parts. The verdict freeing the captives, for example, is announced by a complex and dissonant brass fugue. The toughest role is the Trickster God, who is called on to scat and sing high C's and soaring, lyrical lines. Michael Forest, a tenor, handled the part" [Daniel J. Wakin, *The New York Times*, 5/24/08].

David Robertson and the New York Philharmonic in Erich Korngold's *Violin Concerto*, with Glenn Dicterow. (1945). Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY. "Korngold has had a rough time finding his place in the history of 20th-century music. As a child prodigy, he was encouraged by Mahler, taught by Zemlinsky, and produced four operas by the time he quit Vienna for Hollywood, in 1934. At a time when classical music listeners had little time for film music, his scores for *Captain Blood*, *The Adventures of Robin Hood* and *The Sea Hawk* were guilty pleasures. His concert works, though, were rarely heard. The *Violin Concerto* was the exception, though it has been amply disparaged: mention it to listeners of a certain age, and they're likely to respond, 'More corn than gold.' Never mind that. Korngold gave violinists what they want -- a work that lets their instrument sing sweetly and constantly, with appealing dollops of chromaticism to keep the rich melodies from becoming too predictable" [New York Times, 5/24/08].

May 23

Bachiana Chamber Orchestra in Mateus Araujo's *Suite Brasileira* and his orchestrations of Luiz (Antonio Carlos Jobim and Adios Nonino (Astor Piazzolla). Carnegie Hall, New York, NY.

May 24

Xanthos Ensemble in Pierre Boulez's *Derive I*, Mario Davidovsky's *Flashbacks*, Charles Wuorinen's *New York Notes*, Derek Clark's *What Do the Birds Think?*, Daniel Knagg's *Three Nature Songs*, Pozzi Escot's *Aria IV*, and Donald Hagar's *I Am Not a Clock*. Roulette, New York, NY. "That Mr. Boulez is modern music's foremost voluptuary is no secret. Much of his ensemble music seems as much descended from the gauzy Impressionism of Debussy and the instrumental brilliance of Ravel as from any modernist vein. *Derive I*, a brief work scored for the now-standard Pierrot-plus configuration - flute, clarinet, violin, cello, piano and percussion -- was a brief, intoxicating cloud of trills and flutters. Equally mysterious if less outright sensual was Mr. Davidovsky's *Flashbacks*, in which sharp eruptions and skittering figures repeatedly rupture a placid rumination. The percussion part makes daunting demands of its player with its rapid-fire alternations of timbre and technique. George Nickson handled the role with ease and flair. Most appealing of all was Mr. Wuorinen's *New York Notes*, in which six players mix and match in a cheerfully choreographed bustle. The opening movement is filled with jazzy rhythms and snatches of nostalgic melody. A throaty cello monologue in the second movement is followed by a passage in which flute and violin curl seductively around a lonely clarinet. In the final movement, a wild barrage of impressions, you can't help but be swept away by Mr. Wuorinen's giddy thrill in writing for virtuoso players" [Steve Smith, 5/26/08].

May 25

Terry Riley plays *A Persian Surgery Dervish* in the Nursery, *Universal Bridge*, and *Salome Dances for Peace* on "Hurricane Mama." Walt Disney Concert Hall. "Terry Riley -- a Space Age Prospero dressed in black, wearing a black skull cap and in striped stocking feet, his long gray beard flowing -- walked to the organ consol. The hall was darkened. The wooden pipes were illuminated deep purple. No longer 'French fries,' a nickname Riley told the audience he felt inelegant, the pipes were newly dubbed 'radiant columns of Orfeo.' Hurricane Mama is his name for the Disney organ. For the next two hours, Hurricane Mama howled and roared. Orfeo's columns traced the shapes of swirling galaxies and accompanied accelerating quanta as they collided releasing astonishing quantities of energy. They strung out strings of space-time and hymned drones of mystical oneness with the universe. All of that came before lift-off, which occurred in a long-held ground-shaking, gravity-defying final chord. Riley and the organ are a match made on the other side of Mars, namely heaven. . . . [Mark Swed, *Los Angeles Times*, 5/27/08]

Comment / Item

First of all, No. 1, there's original music, only.

Muhai Richard Abrams

Publication

George Lewis. *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The A.A.C.M. and Experimental Music*. University of Chicago Press. The pianist and composer Muhai Richard Abrams . . . laid the groundwork for the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, an organization that has fostered some of the most vital American avant-garde music of the last 40 years. Though noncommercial, often pointedly conceptual and unabashedly arcane, this music has had a profound influence over the years on several generations of experimental musicians worldwide. Reconstructing that inaugural meeting from audio tapes, Mr. Lewis conveys not only Mr. Abrams's aim but also the vigorous debate begun by his notion of 'original music.' (Whose music? How original?) From the start, it's clear, the association expressed its firm ideals partly through collective discourse. . . . Lewis narrates [The Association's] development with exacting context and incisive analysis, occasionally delving into academic cultural theory. But because the book includes biographical portraits of so many participating musicians, it's a swift, engrossing read. "I told George, 'It's like you wrote a Russian family novel of the A.A.C.M.,"' said the critic Greg Tate . . . Mr. Abrams reflected on the book and the organization last week in a conversation on the roof terrace of the apartment building in Clinton where he has lived since 1977. 'The A.A.C.M. is a group of individuals who agree to agree, or sometimes not to agree,' he said. 'Our cohesiveness has been intact because we respect each other's individualism.' Mr. Lewis, the Edwin H. Case professor of American music and the director of the Center for Jazz Studies at Columbia University, offered a similar thought. 'As I saw it,' he said in his office, 'here's a group of people who had a robust conversation going on, with basically no holds barred, and yet managed to manage their diversity without falling apart, without falling into factionalism.' Such is the basic philosophy of an association once pegged by the jazz critic Whitney Balliett as 'a black musical self-help group.' Three years ago, as part of its 40th-anniversary celebration, some clearer definitions emerged at a colloquium presented by the Guelph Jazz Festival in Ontario. The saxophonist Roscoe Mitchell began by recalling how the organization grew out of the Experimental Band, led by Mr. Abrams on the South Side of Chicago. 'We wanted to have a place where we could sponsor each other in concerts of our original compositions; provide a training program for young, aspiring musicians in the community; reach out to other people and other cities; and have exchange programs,' he said. Noticeably absent from Mr. Mitchell's description, and from the language of the early planning meetings, was the word jazz. This was partly in keeping with the arm's length the organization intended to establish between its art and the commercial realm of nightclubs, then the de facto setting for any African-American art music. Partly, too, these musicians were concerned with a breadth of style that reached beyond jazz, to encompass serious classical composition, as well as music from Africa and the East. Having inherited the new freedoms of 1960's jazz innovators like John Coltrane and Ornette Coleman, the artists in this movement were ready for a next step, one they could claim as their own. 'This is a book about mobility and agency,' Mr. Lewis said. He links this impulse conceptually to the Great Migration, illuminating how the association's first generation came from families that had moved to Chicago from postslavery South. . . . Mr. Lewis's book takes a clear-eyed view of the historic tensions between the Chicago and New York chapters of the association. Within his narrative those tensions sit side by side, unresolved, as they are in real life. The flutist Nicole Mitchell, a younger member of the organization who now serves as its first chairwoman, suggested as much in an e-mail message this week: 'New York and Chicago will continue to be very distinct organizations.' . . . The association's practices can also be found around [New York] on a regular basis, thanks to artists like the pianist Vijay Iyer, a nonmember who has worked extensively as a sideman with Mr. Smith and [Roscoe] Mitchell. . . . For Mr. Lewis, who began work on *A Power Stronger Than Itself* more than a decade ago as a professor in the music department at the University of California, San Diego, the association presents a continuing story. . . . Mr. Abrams made much the same point. 'Certainly there has been great development, and I think at the base of that development is constant work,' he said. And at the heart of that work? Originality, of course. Or as Mr. Abrams put it, 'The word and the work are the same.'" [Nate Chinen, *The New York Times*, 5/2/08].

Recordings

Philip Glass. *Songs and Poems*; "Tissues" from "Naqoyqatsi." Wendy Sutter, cellist; David Cossin, percussionist; Philip Glass, pianist. Orange Mountain Music, CD. "Glass has written relatively little for solo instruments, perhaps because rhythm and texture are often crucial to the way his works unfold. But his recent "Book of Longing" (2006), a setting of Leonard Cohen poetry, included striking solo interludes, and one of the most ear-catching was a cello piece, performed in concert and on Mr. Glass's recording by Wendy Sutter, the cellist in the composer's ensemble. Mr. Glass went on to write *Songs and Poems* (2007), a set of seven movements for unaccompanied cello (outpacing Bach by one in his six suites) for Ms. Sutter. The work is already freighted with lore: Mr. Glass and Ms. Sutter fell in love during its composition, affording future music students a 21st-century Robert and Clara Schumann story, except that Mr. Glass is not barking mad. Oddly, given that undercurrent, Ms. Sutter is quoted in the notes describing the work as "massively tragic." Mr. Glass has never been a Schumannesque Romantic; even the most heartfelt, dramatically pointed scenes in his operas are the work of a careful rationalist. And at first the principal difference between this and earlier Glass works is that his repeated phrases are so intricately chromatic that repetition seems a necessity rather than a technique; you need to hear the music again to mine all its implications. But the shift toward the dramatic begins by the third movement, and you finally see what Ms. Sutter means when you reach the work's centerpiece, Song V, with its intensely arching melodies, implied dialogues and passionate double-stopped passages. Ms. Sutter's rich-hued, supple playing conveys that passion and drama vividly, and she is equally compelling in a varied selection of movements from Mr. Glass's *Naqoyqatsi* film score (2002)" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 6/1/08].

Franz Schmidt. *Das Buch mit Sieben Siegeln* (The Book With Seven Seals). Chandos. "It doesn't help your legacy as a composer to give the Nazi salute in 1938 at the premiere of your greatest work. Nor is it good for your cause to tell a young Herbert von Karajan that he has no future in conducting. So it may not be a total surprise that the Austrian composer Franz Schmidt is little known to the wider world, given his difficult character and distasteful political associations. Yet Schmidt has a dedicated band of prominent interpreters on the podium, among them Franz Welser-Möst, Fabio Luisi, Nikolaus Harnoncourt and Neeme Jarvi. The latest champion to emerge is Mr. Jarvi's son Kristjan, whose 2005 live recording of Schmidt's masterpiece, that 1938 work *Das Buch mit Sieben Siegeln* (The Book With Seven Seals), has just been released by Chandos. *Das Buch* is a strange and intense work, a sprawling, dense and complex oratorio based on the less-than-cheery biblical Book of Revelation, which Kristjan Jarvi calls 'an official guide to the worst-case scenario.' It features organ solos, huge choruses, contrapuntal passages reminiscent of the Bach Passions, and orchestral writing that is delicate and monumental. There are operatic vocal quartets, a heldentenor St. John the Divine and a Wotan-like Voice of God. Schmidt, who had a near-fatal heart attack while writing *Das Buch*, distilled Revelation into something close to a narrative. But the essentially mysterious, symbolic nature of the book, with its scenes of violent destruction, plague, war and redemption, remains. The piece has stuck in my head since college, when a roommate added a recording someone had given him to the communal record shelf. Gleefully, we used to play one section in particular for its gloriously menacing and unattractive sound. The passage depicts the opening of the second seal and the unleashing of the Red Horse of the Apocalypse, the bringer of war. 'Kill, strangle, slay the foe! Murder, destroy, slay the foe!', as the English translation has it. Now, several decades later, the arrival of the new version by Mr. Jarvi, a hip, unconventional musician, has prompted deeper exploration and raised troubling questions. Schmidt was born in 1874 in Pressburg (now Bratislava, Slovakia). He and contemporaries like Alexander Zemlinsky (a refugee from the Nazis and thus on the other side of the political fence) are part of a second tier of big-scale symphonists overshadowed by Bruckner and Mahler. But their music is worth mining, and Mr. Jarvi said he hoped his recording would lead to 'a small, or maybe not so small, resurgence of interest in Schmidt's music. 'I see him really as this great Mahlerian-type composer who really has a lot to offer to the world,' Mr. Jarvi, 35, said from Vienna, where he lives. Mahler is a name that keeps coming up in connection with Schmidt, who attended the conservatory in Vienna as a teenager, studied composition with Bruckner and joined the cello sections of the Vienna Philharmonic and the Vienna Court Opera at 22. He taught cello, piano and composition at the conservatory and later became director and rector. A year after he joined the Court Opera, Mahler arrived as conductor. Mahler recognized Schmidt's talent and made him principal cellist, reportedly wanting him to play every performance Mahler conducted" [Daniel J. Wakin, *The New York Times*, 5/25/08].