

# 21ST CENTURY MUSIC

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DECEMBER 2009

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

Subscription rates in the U.S. are \$96.00 per year; subscribers elsewhere should add \$48.00 for postage. Single copies of the current volume and back issues are \$12.00. Large back orders must be ordered by volume and be pre-paid. Please allow one month for receipt of first issue. Domestic claims for non-receipt of issues should be made within 90 days of the month of publication, overseas claims within 180 days. Thereafter, the regular back issue rate will be charged for replacement. Overseas delivery is not guaranteed. Send orders to 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC, P.O. Box 2842, San Anselmo, CA 94960. email: mus21stc@gmail.com.

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# Iannis Xenakis

PHILLIP GEORGE

Iannis Xenakis (May 29, 1922, Braila, Romania – February 4, 2001) was the eldest son of Clearchos Xenakis, a Romanian businessman, and Fotini Pavlou. His parents were both interested in music, and his mother provided his early introduction to the art. Her early death, when the composer was five, proved a traumatic experience that, in his own words, "deeply scarred."

Xenakis was educated by governesses, and then, in 1932, sent to a boarding school on the Greek island of Spetsai. He sang at the school's boy's choir, where the repertoire included works by Palestrina, and Mozart's Requiem, which Xenakis memorized in its entirety. It was that the young musician studied notation and solfège, and became enamored with Greek traditional and sacred music.

In 1938, after graduation, Xenakis moved to Athens to prepare for entrance exams at the National Technical University of Athens. Although he intended to study architecture and engineering, he also took lessons in harmony and counterpoint with Aristotelis Koundourouff.

Two years later, he successfully passed the exams, but his studies were cut short by the Greco-Italian War, beginning with the invasion of October 28. Although Greece eventually won, it was not long before the German army joined the Italians in April 1941. This led to the Axis occupation during World War II, which lasted until late 1944, when the Soviet Army began its drive across Romania. Xenakis joined the communist National Liberation Front early during the war, participating in mass protests and demonstrations, and later becoming part of armed resistance -- a painful experience Xenakis refused to discuss until much later in life.

After the Axis forces left, the British forces stepped in to assist in the restoration of the monarchy; they were opposed by the Democratic Army of Greece, and the country plunged into a civil war. In December 1944, during the period of Churchill's martial law, Xenakis (who was by then a member of the communist students' company of the left-wing Lord Byron faction) became involved in street fighting against British tanks. He was gravely wounded when a shell hit his face; and his survival has been called a miracle.

He survived seriously scarred, and lost his left eye.

Despite all this, Xenakis was able to graduate from the Technical University in 1946, with a degree in civil engineering, and was then conscripted into the national armed forces. Around 1947, the new government began hunting down former resistance members and sending them to concentration camps. Xenakis, fearing for his life, deserted and went into hiding. With the help of his father and others he fled Greece through Italy. On November 11, 1947, he arrived to Paris. In a late interview, Xenakis admitted to feeling

tremendous guilt at leaving his country, and that guilt was one of the sources of his later devotion to music:

"For years I was tormented by guilt at having left the country for which I'd fought. I left my friends -- some were in prison, others were dead, some managed to escape. I felt I was in debt to them and that I had to repay that debt. And I felt I had a mission. I had to do something important to regain the right to live. It wasn't just a question of music."

In the meantime, in Greece he was sentenced (in absentia) to death by the right-wing administration.

Although he was an illegal immigrant in Paris, Xenakis was able to get a job at Le Corbusier's architectural studio. He worked as engineering assistant at first, but quickly rose to performing more important tasks, and eventually to collaborating with Le Corbusier on major projects, which included a kindergarten on the roof of an apartment block in Nantes (Rezé), parts of government buildings in Chandigarh, India, the "undulatory glass surfaces" of Sainte Marie de La Tourette, a Dominican priory in a valley near Lyon, and the Philips Pavilion at Expo 58 -- the latter project was completed by Xenakis alone, from a basic sketch by Le Corbusier.

Xenakis' compositions from 1949 to 1952 were mostly inspired by Greek folk melodies, as well as Bartók, Ravel, and others.

He met his future wife Françoise Xenakis (née Gargouïl), journalist and writer, in 1950. Back in Greece, his in-absentia death sentence was commuted to ten years' imprisonment the next year.

During this period, while working for Le Corbusier, Xenakis was studying harmony and counterpoint, and composing. He worked long and hard, frequently far into the night, and sought guidance from a number of teachers, most of whom, however, ultimately rejected him.

Such was the case with Nadia Boulanger, who was the first person Xenakis approached about lessons. He then tried studying with Arthur Honegger, whose reaction to Xenakis' music was unenthusiastic. As Xenakis recounted in a 1987 interview, Honegger dismissed a piece which included parallel fifths and octaves as "not music." Xenakis, who was by that time well acquainted with music of Debussy, Béla Bartók, and Stravinsky, all of whom used such devices and much more experimental ones, was furious and left to study with Darius Milhaud, but these lessons also proved fruitless.

Annette Dieudonné, a close friend of Boulanger's, recommended that Xenakis try study with Olivier Messiaen.

Xenakis approached Messiaen for advice: should he once again begin harmony and counterpoint? Unlike Honegger and Milhaud, Messiaen immediately recognized Xenakis' talent: I understood straight away that he was not someone like the others. He is of superior intelligence. . . . I did something horrible which I should do with no other student, for I think one should study harmony and counterpoint. But this was a man so much out of the ordinary that I said . . . 'No, you are almost 30, you have the good fortune of being Greek, of being an architect and having studied special mathematics. Take advantage of these things. Do them in your music.'

Xenakis attended Messiaen's classes regularly from 1951 to 1953, where the elder composer and his students studied music from a wide range of genres and styles, with particular attention to rhythm.

At the end of his studies, Xenakis married Françoise.

After studying with Messiaen, Xenakis discovered serialism and gained a deep understanding of contemporary music, in part thanks to other pupils at the time, who included Jean Barraque, Pierre Boulez, and Karlheinz Stockhausen. Messiaen's modal serialism was an influence on Xenakis' first large-scale work, *Anastenaria* (1954): a triptych for choir and orchestra based on an ancient Dionysian ritual. The third part of the triptych, *Metastaseis B* (*Metastasis*, 1954), is generally regarded as the composer's first mature piece, and was additionally based directly on architectural concepts. The work included independent parts for every musician of the ensemble.

In late 1954, with Messiaen's support, Xenakis was accepted into the *Groupe de Recherches de Musique Concrète*, an organization established by Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry, dedicated to studying and producing electronic music of the *musique concrète* variety. Shortly after that, Xenakis met conductor Hermann Scherchen, who was immediately impressed by the score of *Metastaseis* and offered his support. Although Scherchen did not premiere that work, he did give performances of later pieces by Xenakis, and the relationship between the conductor and the composer was of vital importance.

His daughter Mâkhi, later a painter and sculptor, was born in 1956.

By late 1950's, Xenakis slowly started gaining recognition in artistic circles. In 1957 he received his first composition award, from the European Cultural Foundation, and the next year his first official commission, from *Service de Recherche of Radio-France*.

Also in 1958, he produced a *musique concrète* piece, *Concret PH*, for the Philips Pavilion.

After leaving Le Corbusier's studio in 1959, Xenakis was able to support himself by composition and teaching, and quickly became recognized as one of the most important European composers of his time.

By 1960, Xenakis was well-known enough to receive a commission from UNESCO, for a soundtrack for a documentary film by Enrico Fulchignoni.

In addition to composing and teaching, Xenakis also authored a number of articles and essays on music. Of these, *Musiques formelles* (1963) became particularly known, as collection of texts on applications of stochastic processes, game theory, and computer programming in music.

After the fall of The Regime of the Colonels in 1974, Xenakis's old imprisonment sentence was finally nullified.

The composer became especially known for his musical research in the field of computer-assisted work, for which he founded the *Equipe de Mathématique et Automatique Musicales* (EMAMu) in 1966 (known as CEMAMu: *Centre d'Etudes de Mathématique et Automatique Musicales*, since 1972).

1966 was also the year of one of his compositions that introduced spatialization by dispersing musicians among the audience -- *Terretektorh*.

Xenakis taught at Indiana University from 1967 to 1972, and established a studio similar to EMAMu there.

*Musiques formelles* was revised, expanded and translated into English as *Formalized Music: Thought and Mathematics in Composition* (1971) during this time.

Xenakis worked as visiting professor at the Sorbonne from 1973 to 1989.

The composer frequently gave lectures, particularly during his stint from 1975 to 1978 as Professor of Music at Gresham College, London. He taught composition students including Pascal Dusapin, and his works were performed at numerous festivals worldwide, such as the Shiraz Arts Festival in Iran.

During this time, he also produced the percussion pieces *Psappha* (1975) and *Pléiades* (1979).

By 1979, he had devised a computer system called UPIC, which could translate graphical images into musical results. His architectural drawings' various curves and lines could be interpreted by UPIC as real time instructions for the sound synthesis process. *Mycenae-Alpha* was the first of these pieces he created using UPIC as it was being perfected.

In 1982, Xenakis developed his *Music Timbre and Cadence Scale* which is used quantifying musical styles in modern music.

The composer completed his last work, *O-mega* for percussion soloist and chamber orchestra, in 1997. His health had been getting progressively worse over the years, and by 1997 he was no longer able to work. After several years of serious illness, in early February 2001, the composer lapsed into a coma. He died in his Paris home several days later, on February 4, at 78.

Xenakis pioneered electronic, computer music, the application of mathematics, statistics, and physics to music and music theory, and the integration of sound and architecture. He used techniques related to probability theory, stochastic processes, statistics, statistical mechanics, group theory, game theory, set theory, and other branches of mathematics and physics in his compositions. He integrated music with architecture, designing music for pre-existing spaces, and designing spaces to be integrated with specific music compositions and performances. He integrated both with political commentary. He viewed compositions as reification and formal structures of abstract ideas, not as ends, to be later incorporated into families of compositions, "a form of composition which is not the object in itself, but an idea in itself, that is to say, the beginnings of a family of compositions."

Specific examples of mathematics, statistics, and physics applied to music composition are the use of the statistical mechanics of gases in Pithoprakta, statistical distribution of points on a plane in Diamorphoses, minimal constraints in Achorriopsis, the normal distribution in ST/10 and Atrées, Markov chains in Analogiques, game theory in Duel and Stratégie, group theory in Nomos Alpha (for Siegfried Palm), set theory in Herma and Eonta, and Brownian motion in N'Shima. At the Persepolis Shiraz Arts Festival, he designed Polytope as mixed-media composition specific to the historic site. He was commissioned by Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (the Shah of Iran), to compose Nuits, which Xenakis dedicated to political prisoners in protest at the Shah's atrocities.

Andrew Hugill, writing in 2008, noted, "Xenakis had originally trained as an architect, so some of his drawings,

which he called 'arborescences', resembled both organic forms and architectural structures."

In conversation, Iannis Xenakis frequently distanced himself from being seen in too strict terms -- like many other composers for whom method and structure were the easiest aspects of music to discuss verbally, he sees the role of such things as relative. One way to envisage this approach is that the method constitutes a thematic germ, a starting-point, and from there the normal musico-aesthetics, personal obsessions and practical considerations play their normal role in finishing and shaping the piece. Indeed from the 1970s onwards Xenakis' use of method became deeply assimilated into his general musical thinking and he reports in interviews from that time that the strict application of statistical processes was no longer necessary to produce the results he was looking for.

Xenakis appeared easily bored in interviews when people attempted to take an overly simplistic view of him as "complex" -- the various clichés surrounding him appeared to greatly annoy him in interview and he would frequently make recourse to the wider aesthetics of music in general and the other arts, in order to contextualise his contributions to music-making. In a sense his early statements about "looking at music statistically" were a response to what he saw as the mistake of placing too much emphasis on the likely benefits of applying methodology too rigorously.

Composers who have acknowledged the influence of Xenakis include Krzysztof Penderecki and Toru Takemitsu.





# Solidity with Solidarity

CINDY WHITE

San Francisco Cabaret Opera presents Patrick Dailly's Solidarity. September 27, Live Oak Theatre, Berkeley, CA. Repeated October 3, 10, 11, Flux 53 Theater, Oakland. Reviewed October 11.

It's not every day that one has the opportunity to hear and see Pope John Paul II, Lech Walesa, and Ronald Reagan sing and dance, but such was the case at Oakland's rustic Flux 53 Theater, where San Francisco Cabaret Opera (Harriet March Page, Artistic Director) presented the world premiere of English-Netherlandish composer Patrick Dailly's Solidarity -- musical-theatrical romp through a variety of styles including minimalism, chant, and Broadway.

This 75-minute chamber opera, starring the wondrous soprano Kristen Brown as Walesa, is an adventure in style and substance, collapsing the adventures of the Polish Solidarity trade union and the imposition of martial law under Wojciech


Jaruzelski (impressively portrayed by Eric Carter) through the tempestuous years of the early 1980's.

From the sparkling prelude, rendered here by an expert ensemble of pianist Keisuke Nakagoshi, accordionist John Bilotta, and clarinetist Nora Jones, under the direction of Mark Alburger -- the work's breathless pace thrills in the opening chorus of workers surrounding the pope (the engaging Nathan Markam) through the shattering closing moments (respectively interpreted in radiant high notes by Indre Viscontas and Eliza O'Malley).

Other engaging aspects included Roger McCracken's richly sinister and comic portrayals of Leonid Brezhnev and Zbigniew Brzezinski, Dalyte Kodzis's graceful voice and choreography (of such equally lithe spirits as Julia Hathaway and Sarah-Nicole Ruddy), and Justin Marsh's poignant tenor lines.

Goat Hall Productions / San Francisco Cabaret Opera presents  
A World Premiere Chamber Opera

PATRICK DAILLY  
**SOLIDARITY**  
September 27, Live Oak Theater, North Berkeley  
October 3, 10, 11, Flux53 Theater/Artspace, Oakland



An opera about the Solidarity movement in Poland from its birth to the imposition of martial law in 1982. The music swings from Klezmer to Jazz to Lyric Opera. The story evokes Shakespeare, Greek Tragedy, and Bertolt Brecht. With singers, clowns, keyboard, clarinet and accordion.

<b>Berkeley Preview</b> Sun., Sep. 27, 7:00 pm Opening Gala 6:00 pm Live Oak Theater 1301 Shattuck Avenue	<b>Oakland Performances</b> Sat., Oct. 3 & 10, 8:00pm Sun., Oct. 11, 7:00pm Flux53 Theater/Artspace 5306 Foothill Blvd.	<b>Tickets: \$20 / \$15</b> Online at <a href="http://www.goathall.org">www.goathall.org</a> or phone 415-289-6877
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# Chronicle

October 17

Death of Vic Mizzy (b. 1/9/16, New York, NY), at 93. Los Angeles, CA. "[He wrote the] catchy themes for the television comedies *The Addams Family* and *Green Acres*. In a musical career that stretched over eight decades . . . Mizzy wrote pop hits, novelty songs and movie scores, but his most enduring compositions were the two humorous theme songs he created in the mid-1960s. Asked in 1964 by his friend David Levy, the head of programming for NBC, to provide music for a new comedy called *The Addams Family*, based on Charles Addams's sinister cartoons, Mr. Mizzy came up with a da-da-da-dum beat followed by two finger snaps. The parody of beatnik ennui fit with the show's satirical, proto-hipster humor. The theme, sung by Mr. Mizzy, was so distinctive that it remained popular far beyond the series's two seasons. Just one year later, Mr. Mizzy wrote the theme song for *Green Acres*, a comedy about Manhattanites returning to the land, which ran from 1965 to 1971. Once again he combined a gallumphing rhythm (similar to *The Addams Family* opening but faster) with lyrics that stayed in the mind. . . . As with the "Addams Family" theme, Mr. Mizzy was also involved in the direction of the title sequence. . . . He attended Alexander Hamilton High School and New York University, where he wrote songs and sketches for campus shows. He later wrote for radio and Broadway with an early collaborator, Irving Taylor. . . . Mizzy married the radio singer Mary Small, who performed many of his songs publicly for the first time, and the couple had two children. The marriage ended in divorce, as did a later marriage to Shirley Leeds. . . . Before he worked on "The Addams Family" and "Green Acres," Mr. Mizzy had written music for other television shows . . . . Mr. Mizzy continued working well into his 80's. . . . None of his output, however, could overshadow those snapping fingers in *The Addams Family*. And that was fine with Mr. Mizzy. 'That's why I'm living in Bel Air,' he said last year on the CBS program *Sunday Morning*. 'Two finger snaps and you live in Bel Air'" [Mike Hale, *The New York Times*, 10/21/09].

Composer Portraits: Iannis Xenakis in New York. Miller Theater, Columbia University, New York, NY. "The six works that the percussionist and conductor Steven Schick and the International Contemporary Ensemble played . . . were written from 1975 to 1997 and offer a glimpse of Xenakis's late period, when the vast, dense sonorities of his earlier orchestral scores often gave way to greater refinement and focus. In most of the pieces performed here, stretches of old-fashioned melody are disguised but not entirely obscured by layers of dissonant harmony. Not that harmony is always an issue in Xenakis's music. Mr. Schick opened the concert with *Psappha* (1975), a high-energy percussion solo that evolves from a steady, unadorned beat into a whirlwind of rhythmic counterpoint and textural contrast: delicate, high-pitched melodies played on short metal tubing at one extreme and fortissimo bass-drum thwacks at the other. Mr. Schick used the score's punctuating silences as an increasingly dramatic element as well. He was also an eloquent soloist in the closing work, *O-Mega* (1997), a fascinating spatial piece in which the woodwinds and brasses (in the hall, on either side of the audience) and the percussion and strings (on either side of the stage) conversed in bursts of fanfarelike grandeur. In *Akanthos* (1977), Xenakis puts an assertive microtonal vocal line into a frame of rough-hewn string figures and sharp-edged woodwind and piano writing. The soprano Tony Arnold's deft reading highlighted the ritualistic quality of Xenakis's vocal style. In *Thallein* (1984), for chamber orchestra; *Échange* (1989), where the protagonist is a bass clarinetist (Joshua Rubin); and *Palimpsest* (1979), with its madcap piano solos (Cory Smythe), Xenakis's most striking quality is a capacity for surprise: fortissimo passages give way to whispers, and aggressive dissonance suddenly becomes triadic harmony, moves that, without preparation, are just as startling as the other way around" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 10/18/09].



October 18

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center presents New York premiere of David Del Tredici's 35-minute Magyar Madness (with David Krakauer and the Orion String Quartet) plus Bela Bartok's String Quartet No. 3 and Erno Dohnanyi's Piano Quintet No. 2 (with Anne-Marie McDermott). Alice Tully Hall, New York, NY. "[t]he large audience stayed to hear what all the madness was about. It was not always apparent, despite an extensive program note from Mr. Del Tredici. The first of three movements is called 'Passionate Knights,' and you have to assume, given the composer's recent musico-erotic fixations, that the title is a double-entendre: the more so since he puns in the note, 'This was (one could say) a knight well spent.' (One could, but one shouldn't.) Not that the music is in any way insinuating or titillating. To the contrary, it is mostly square and straightforward. Since his Alice phase, Mr. Del Tredici has shown a fondness (not to say mania) for simple melodies. The prime material of this work is scales or scale segments, rising and, more often, falling. The first movement makes heavy use of a four-note descent. After a brief string quartet arrangement of a song (from a cycle celebrating sex) comes an extended finale -- called 'Magyar Madness,' like the work as a whole -- that makes even heavier use of a four-note descent, usually as part of a longer descent. . . . As for the Magyar part, Mr. Del Tredici offers a wealth of vaguely Eastern European gestures, beginning with klezmer for the clarinetist and Gypsy fiddling for the quartet. Mr. Krakauer, showing the full range of his virtuosity, and the Orion seemed masters of a work written for them. . . . The Orion gave a gripping account of the single-movement Third Quartet of Bartok, with, at its center, a sort of deconstruction and apotheosis of folk dance" [James R. Oestreich, 10/19/09].

Bleecker Street Opera Company presents Italo Montemezzi's L'Amore dei Tre Re. Theaters 45 Bleecker Street, New York, NY. "A verismo rarity composed in 1913 by Italo Montemezzi, the opera was popular during the first half of the 20th century but has mostly languished since. Montemezzi's music, which blends lithe Italian lyricism with Wagnerian lushness and Debussian languor, is worth hearing. That the opera disappeared might have more to do with its slender plot: Archibaldo, an old blind king, menacingly guards his daughter-in-law, Fiora, against the advances of her lover, Avito, a vanquished prince. Three corpses hit the ground before an unhappy ending. . . . Where the Bleecker Street Opera departed most from its forebear [Amato Opera] was in the quality of its instrumental component: the music director, Paul Haas, conducting a 15-piece chamber orchestra positioned beside the stage, offered a passionate, refined and keenly balanced account of Paul Fowler's skillful reduction. . . . On the whole the performance showed that the Amato legacy is in good hands" [Steve Smith, The New York Times, 10/19/09].

October 21

Bernard Haitink conducts the London Symphony Orchestra in Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 4. Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY. "[S]maller scale goes only so far in Mahler; the Fourth still runs an hour and uses a large orchestra (here almost 90 players). But . . . briskness, trimness and compactness can serve well in Mahler's Fourth, with its lively, childlike spirit, announced at the opening by sleigh bells, and its gleaming but contained climaxes. Mr. Haitink set an extremely deliberate tempo in the opening movement, as if to savor the little grotesqueries of harmony and instrumentation. There was indeed much to savor . . ." [Anthony Tommasini, The New York Times, 10/22/09].



Meredith Monk's *Songs of Ascension* (with video artist Ann Hamilton). BAM Harvey Theater, New York, NY. "The wonder of Meredith Monk is that having created a musical language and theatrical style, she has been able to stretch and refine them with just about every work. Her recent music, including *Songs of Ascension* . . . sounds nothing like the assertive pieces she wrote and sang in the 1980's. Yet enough musical DNA remains, in the form of idiosyncratic warbling and interlocking rhythms, that you would not mistake it for anyone else's work. Ms. Monk has written that her inspiration for *Songs of Ascension* was the imagery associated with spiritual quests, including the circular symbols of Buddhism, and the sense of spiritual ascension common to many religions. Circling was plentiful. In several of the work's sections, Ms. Monk and her singers (formally, Meredith Monk and Vocal Ensemble) and the accompanying musicians (the Todd Reynolds String Quartet, with John Hollenbeck on percussion and Bohdan Hilash playing winds) were deployed in circular formations, either moving or static. And Ms. Hamilton's shadowy fast-moving projections were shown not only on the back wall of the stage but on the theater's walls as well, surrounding the audience. *Ascension* imagery was more scarce; the singers were as likely to descend (moving down the theater's aisles, toward the stage) as to ascend, although the sudden appearance of large choirs in the balcony had the effect of pulling the music (or at least, the audience's attention) upward. That said, Ms. Monk's music and staging are serene, slow-moving and decidedly ritualistic. Her stage pictures are in constant flux, as singers and instrumentalists rearrange themselves, sometimes in opposing lines (the players across the front of the stage and the singers in a small circle at the back, or the singers to the right and the players to the left), more often interspersed. At times Ms. Monk's score hints at antiquity. One piece (no titles are given for the individual songs) has a soprano singing a solo passage that evokes plainchant. But the historical allusion is fleeting: the other musicians gradually add lines of counterpoint until the texture becomes fascinatingly complex. Much of the string writing has the insistent repetitiveness of early Minimalism. But those Minimalist figures regularly blossom into more complex styles: late Brahmsian string writing and Vaughan Williams-like choral polyphony, for example. Ms. Monk's use of her own invented language underscores the sense of otherworldly mystery inherent in the piece. Often, her vocalizations, matched by her singers, suggest bird song or the calls of nocturnal forest animals. Elsewhere, they seem to be strings of cognates: you have no idea what she's singing about, but you have the odd feeling that you do. The members of Ms. Monk's ensemble are thoroughly drilled in her musical style, and they perform it expertly. The instrumentalists seemed comfortable with it, as well, even though they were often required to move around the stage as they played (even the cellist, Ha-Yang Kim)" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 10/22/09].

October 24

Jacaranda presents excerpts from Philip Glass's *Einstein on the Beach*, plus Morton Feldman's *Rothko Chapel* and Ben Johnston's *String Quartet No. 4* ("Amazing Grace"). First Presbyterian Church, Santa Monica, CA. "Glass offers the option of replacing the women's voices at the end with a children's chorus and that is what Jacaranda did. Asking youngsters to show up late at night to sing the last eight minutes of a five-hour avant-garde work is, obviously, unreasonable. Then again, little about putting on *Einstein on the Beach* has ever been practical. Glass has presented the score in concert on several occasions and performed the *Spaceship* scene with his ensemble at the Hollywood Bowl last summer. But despite repeated attempts to find funding for a revival, the magnificent Wilson production has not been seen for a generation. Four years ago, Jacaranda did its bit by turning the opera's most modest segments, the five *Knee Plays* (Wilson's term for short connecting scenes) into a 40-minute concert work. Saturday, a block from the beach, the *Knee Plays* were back, this time with three dozen angelic Einsteins, courtesy of Los Angeles Children's Chorus. For many of us who have found *Einstein on the Beach* in the theater a religious experience, *Einstein* in a church is not a stretch. Still, Jacaranda's concert made a considerable spiritual statement. . . . Feldman's score for chorus, viola, celesta and percussion was intended for Houston's interfaith *Rothko Chapel*, built to house haunting late paintings by the American Abstract Expressionist Mark Rothko. This is music in which no notes touch ground, no downbeat is felt and pianissimo is the dynamic of choice. The chorus is asked to sing chords with a consistent 'open hum.' The viola has the wisps of melody, slightly Hebraic at first and hinting at Ravel later. Performing *Rothko Chapel* is like capturing wind. Feldman asks for a calm 30 minutes; this reading conducted by Mark Alan Hilt was an ever-so-slightly nervous 24. Still, the choral singing was sensitive; Tamara Bevard handled the soprano solos smartly and Alma Lisa Fernandez was a soulful violist. Fernandez is a member of Jacaranda's superb resident Denali Quartet, which has made Johnston's 'Amazing Grace' its calling card. Johnston pulls the 18th-century hymn tune in directions it has never been and asks the players to use pure tunings. The result is the amazement of grace made palpable in sound. The Denalis made that evident in, to repeat the only word that describes the music and its rendition, an amazing performance. Following all this, the "Einstein" *Knee Plays*, which Hilt conducted with evident affection, were in danger of too much churchliness. They began with a pipe organ intoning the bass line Glass played in more rock'n'roll fashion on an electric organ. The chorus' 'libretto' consists of either counted numbers of the changing meters or the solfege syllables of the pitches. The impressive Jacaranda Chamber Singers made even these sound more eloquent than spunky. A solo violin – the Denali's Joel Pargman – played Glass's classic minimalist etudes with style and two actresses (the familiar radio personalities Gail Eichenenthal and Sandra Tsing Loh) alluringly read stream-of-consciousness texts that included an incantation on the line 'Oh these are the days my friends and these are the days my friends.' I would have liked more electronic punch from Eichenenthal and Loh, who were amplified, but they were not displeasing as exquisite aural

wallpaper. Einstein ends with a final speech about lovers on a park bench that was written and originally delivered by an elderly actor in the original. Ken Page read it wonderfully for Jacaranda, accompanied by the solo violin, organ and the children singing their one-two-threes and do-re-me's with marvelous clear voices lifted to heaven. There are critics who once called Einstein on the Beach baby opera. But those were other days my friends. Saturday, Jacaranda brought Einstein to the beach and it was transcendent" [Mark Swed, Los Angeles Times, 10/25/09].

October 25

A spokeswoman for Andrew Lloyd Weber announces that the 61-year-old composer has prostate cancer [Associated Press, 10/25/09].

October 26

Ancient Paths, Modern Voices: Ensemble ACJW presents works of Chen Qigang, Chen Yi, Bright Sheng, Guo Wenjing, and Zhou Long. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY. "Mr. Chen studied with Messiaen in Paris and his *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin* for solo piano, ably performed by Gregory DeTurck, reflects his mentor's aesthetic. Pentatonic themes are woven through the mystical interludes of this colorful piece, whose percussive nature evokes the gongs and cymbals used in Peking Opera. That genre was also represented in Mr. Guo's *Parade for Six Peking Opera Gongs*, which blends Western influences like Cage, Steve Reich and Xenakis with the traditions of Mr. Guo's native Sichuan Province. It was played here by three percussionists, including David Skidmore. Before the performance Mr. Skidmore demonstrated the ascending sound that results from striking the gong. The three percussionists also performed in Mr. Zhou's *Taigu Rhyme for Clarinet, Violin, Cello, and Percussion*, which evokes the Tang Dynasty's "dagu" drumming style. In this intensely visceral work, a throbbing beat underpins a rhapsodic (and almost klezmer-sounding) clarinet part, played with aplomb by Sarah Beaty. The clarinet evokes the guanzi, a double-reed instrument used in ancient temple music. In Chen Yi's meditative *Qi for Flute, Cello, Percussion, and Piano* the flute and cello (played with striking sensitivity by Nicholas Canellakis) reflect the sonorities of Chinese instruments. Mr. Sheng lived in Tibet during the Cultural Revolution, and his *String Quartet No. 3* was inspired by a Tibetan folk tune as well as by Bartok, another major influence in his career. The quartet reflects that Hungarian composer's style of incorporating traditional melodies into a modernistic idiom. The ensemble, led with panache by Joanna Marie Frankel (the first violinist), gave a heartfelt performance of the work, which blends haunting solos with grittier interludes" [Vivien Schweitzer, The New York Times, 10/27/09].

Ancient Paths, Modern Voices: Tan Dun. Alice Tully Hall, New York, NY. "For all his accomplishments and accolades, Tan Dun is a genuinely gracious celebrity. An Academy Award winner with a Metropolitan Opera commission under his belt, Mr. Tan is the only composer to have a concert of his own during Carnegie Hall's festival Ancient Paths, Modern Voices. Yet at the event, presented at Alice Tully Hall in Lincoln Center on Monday night, Mr. Tan redirected praise toward his collaborators: the Juilliard School musicians playing his works; the violinist Cho-Liang Lin, featured in the premiere of Mr. Tan's *Violin Concerto*; and the school itself. The program was shrewdly chosen. In four pieces you got a remarkably good overview of Mr. Tan's stylistic development. The quirky instrumentation of *Concerto for Six* is that of the ensemble it was written for, the *Bang on a Can All-Stars*: bass clarinet, guitar, cello, double bass, piano and percussion. An exuberant piece from 1997, [it] . . . showed Mr. Tan's knack for juxtaposing Chinese and Western idioms. In one jazzy exchange Sean Rice, the bass clarinetist, played bluesy bends over Kyle Brightwell's patter of cymbals. Elsewhere, musicians shouted Chinese numerals; Cameron O'Connor fluttered on his guitar strings in a manner reminiscent of a pipa player's technique; and Conor Hanick stroked a piano's strings as if playing a guzheng. *Silk Road*, a 1989 setting of a whimsical poem by Arthur Sze, for soprano and percussion, mixed atonal vocal lines with the mannered delivery and explosive cadences of Beijing opera. Mr. Tan is exceptionally skilled at writing for percussion, fashioning the subtlest gradations of touch and timbre. Michael Truesdell, the percussionist, played with sensitivity and dexterity; Jennifer Zetlan was an extraordinary partner, singing with technical assurance, gleaming tone and abundant charisma. *Secret Land*, a 2006 work for 12 cellos, alternated solos and duos in modes explicitly redolent of Chinese idioms, with murky swarms of collective motion. More effective as a catalog of effects than as a sustained utterance, the work at least demonstrated the depth of Juilliard's cello department. Mr. Tan's new *Violin Concerto*, subtitled *The Love*, showed the more approachable side he has recently favored. The piece — in three continuous sections meant to evoke young love, romantic love and philosophical love — included material reworked from an earlier violin concerto, *Out of Peking Opera*. The opening section, *Hip Hop*, was lean and angular, with free-time violin soliloquies and violent outbursts. But a steady funk-rock drum beat and brash whoops from the brass section made the music unusually playful and accessible. The middle movement, *Malinconia*, recalled Mr. Tan's lushest film-score work; Mr. Lin's warm playing was surrounded with a plush bed of strings. Energy dipped slightly during the final section, *Dramatico*, with its constant shifts of pace and mood. But Mr. Lin's exuberant playing held your attention, and Mr. Tan drew a performance of exceptional assurance from the Juilliard Orchestra" [Steve Smith, The New York Times, 10/27/09].

Ancient Paths, Modern Voices. Michael Tilson Thomas conducts the Juilliard Orchestra in music of Chen Qigang, Lou Harrison, and Gustav Mahler. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY. "The Family of the Court, the opening section of Harrison's *Pacifika Rondo* (1963), was included as a curtain raiser because the composer's lifelong fascination with Asian forms and timbres yielded an idiosyncratic hybrid of Eastern and Western sounds. Here he imagined -- rather cinematically -- the music of the Tang dynasty, which ruled China for almost 300 years starting in the early seventh century. You would not bet the store that Tang music actually sounded like . . . [this] but the Juilliard musicians gave the score, with its sliding string and flute melodies and full-throttle percussion, a vigorous, colorful reading. Mahler earned his berth on the program by drawing the texts for *Das Lied von der Erde* from *Die Chinesische Flöte* (The Chinese Flute), Hans Bethge's collection of Chinese poetry, also from the Tang period. Mahler's approach to his Chinese inspiration was to ignore it: he was drawn to these texts because of their universality, and nothing in his vast score alludes to Chinese music, real or imagined. This was, however, the Juilliard Orchestra's moment in the sun, and it responded to Mr. Thomas, an eloquent Mahler conductor, with power, flexibility and, in the quieter movements, an admirable transparency. Mr. Kunde sometimes strained in the upper reaches of Mahler's tenor line, but otherwise sang attractively. Ms. von Otter's performance was the picture of interpretive subtlety, with carefully calibrated dynamics and coloration and a velvety tone that perfectly suited these graceful world-weary texts. [Lang] Lang presided over the part of the program devoted to actual Chinese music. With the stage to himself -- the orchestra cleared off -- he played four of the short folk-song-inspired piano works of the sort he sometimes performs as encores. For an American listener these called to mind the music of Ethelbert Nevin and other late-19th-century salon composers, not because of any musical similarities but because, like Nevin and his colleagues, the composers here -- He Luting, Lu Wencheng and Sun Yiqiang -- sought a hybrid of distinctively national themes and European harmonies and textures. Debussy and Chopin's influence, particularly, was palpable. Mr. Thomas and the orchestra rejoined Mr. Lang for Mr. Chen's *Er Huang*, a piano concerto written for the occasion. Mr. Chen's inspiration was traditional Peking opera. Its title refers to a family of gracefully melancholy themes, and in a way this gentle, often dreamy score is a requiem for a dying style. Mr. Lang, who can be a hyperkinetic performer, played this music -- and the solo pieces as well -- with the gracefulness and dignity it demanded, and couched Mr. Chen's melodies in a rich, singing tone" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 10/29/09].

Jay Farrar, of the Midwestern alternative-country band *Son Volt*, and Benjamin Gibbard, of the Northwestern indie-rock band *Death Cab for Cutie*, in music from their new album *One Fast Move or I'm Gone: Music From Kerouac's Big Sur* (F-Stop/Atlantic). Webster Hall, New York, NY. "The album, which grew out of a similarly titled documentary film, involves lyrics borrowed from Kerouac's prose, rearranged and set to music. It came about after Mr. Farrar and Mr. Gibbard were enlisted in 2007 to record songs for the film. Working together for the first time, they bonded over a mutual inspiration and decided to take the project further. Mr. Gibbard went so far as to hunker down in the Pacific coastal cabin that inspired *Big Sur*, a memoirlike study in sodden disillusionment. The title track of the new album is his invention, a folk-rock ballad with a ruminative lilt and a labored melody. Arriving early in the set, it simply wafted by, innocuous and wan. Much of the show felt harder and more purposeful" [Nate Chinen, *The New York Times*, 10/29/09].

Alexander Zemlinsky's *String Quartet No. 2* (1915) performed by the Escher String Quartet, as well as Anton Webern's *Five Movements for String Quartet* (1909). Alice Tully Hall, New York, NY "[Zemlinsky] was devastated when his student Alma Schindler rejected him and married Mahler in 1902. Several years later, the painter Richard Gerstl committed suicide after an affair with Zemlinsky's sister, Mathilde, who was married to Schoenberg. . . . Pierre Lapointe, the group's violist, writes that the first time he heard Zemlinsky's quartet, he was scared by its craziness.' This densely chromatic, symphonic and potentially expressive piece seems to evoke the personal traumas of Zemlinsky's inner circle, with an anguished polyphony of vehement discourse tempered with gentler, bittersweet interludes. The ensemble offered a passionate rendition, conveying the full spectrum of grief and turbulence in this 40-minute work of Wagnerian proportions. Each member of the group -- Adam Barnett-Hart, first violinist; Wu Jie, second violinist; Andrew Janss, cellist; and Mr. Lapointe -- played with a glowing tone and insightful musicianship, resulting in a characterful whole. Many of Zemlinsky's colleagues, including Schoenberg, deemed his sensual, late-romantic music too conservative. The program also included the *Five Movements for String Quartet* (1909) by Webern . . . who helped persuade Mathilde to return to her husband" [Vivien Schweitzer, *The New York Times*, 10/29/09].



New York City Opera presents Hugo Weisgall's *Esther*. David H. Koch Theater, New York, NY. "New York City Opera, ornery and independent as ever, opens its abbreviated fall season . . . with a revival of Hugo Weisgall's last opera, *Esther*. 'Inexplicable,' a recent editorial in the influential British periodical *Opera* grumbled. Several American commentators seem equally baffled by the choice, an opera by a composer whose name is no longer familiar and whose music has long since fallen from fashion. The work was respectfully received when the City Opera gave its premiere in 1993, but Weisgall's edgy, dissonant style, angular lyricism and free adaptation of classical atonal methods may pose problems for audiences accustomed to today's new American operas, which are more eager to please. On the other hand, the opera's subject matter could not be more appealing. *Esther*, having married Xerxes of Persia, saves her people from mass extermination at the hands of the king's evil prime minister, Haman: this is among the most inspirational and upbeat of biblical stories. Even at that, Weisgall's elevated treatment of the material hardly promises the sort of festive opening-night opera one might expect from a troubled company under new management, still struggling for survival and lacking the flashy media savvy that energizes the Metropolitan Opera these days. Yet viewed from a different perspective, the whole spirit of the project reflects one of the important reasons the City Opera was founded in 1943: to search out, perform and nurture recent American operas of quality, especially those that have fallen into neglect. Weisgall, who died in 1997 at 84, wrote 12 stage pieces of varying shapes and sizes, a sufficient body of work for the 1986 *New Grove Dictionary of American Music* to proclaim him 'one of America's most important composers of opera.' 'I gratefully read that compliment,' Weisgall once told me, 'and promptly had a nightmare. I dreamed that despite such a generous assessment, no company in the country was performing my operas any longer and had no intention of doing so. Then I woke up with a start and realized my dream was true.' That was an exaggeration perhaps. I've never spoken to a living American composer who felt sufficiently recognized, however much he or she was performed, discussed and argued about. Weisgall's operas may not have become repertory pieces, but I have seen most of them produced over the last 50 years. Beyond that, Weisgall was an active presence as an administrator and a teacher as well as a conductor; even, on rare occasions, as a singer. The many institutions he served included the Juilliard School, Johns Hopkins University, the H. L. Miller Cantorial School of the Jewish Theological Seminary, Queens College, and the Lyric Opera of Chicago, where he was director of the composer-in-residence program from 1988 until his death. . . . Some never took to Weisgall's special voice, which always presupposed an active listener. Although his music avoided strictly doctrinaire 12-tone techniques, there was always that provocatively spiky sound to negotiate, albeit one that over time became increasingly expansive and lyrically expressive as it explored the dramatic life of each opera's special theatrical world. And what a variety of subjects attracted him. Weisgall drew inspiration from classic sources of every stripe -- Wedekind, Strindberg, Pirandello, Yeats, Shakespeare, Racine, Mishima and the Bible -- and he never flinched from

the thorny moral and philosophical issues they examined. I first encountered a Weisgall opera in the spring of 1960, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, based on the famous Pirandello play. The City Opera had given the premiere a year earlier. The power of the opera, the performance and the production knocked me flat. The play's tense conflict arises when the blasé members of a professional theater troupe (changed here to an opera company) actually confront the six emotionally scarred characters of the dysfunctional family they are impersonating. Weisgall's score, an astonishingly original manipulation of traditional opera techniques, seizes on this explosive situation in a carefully structured linear music-theater piece that takes full advantage of a composer's right to interpret and reimagine the drama through purely musical means. The City Opera was putting on a festival of new American opera during that 1959-60 season, but compared with the theatrically sophisticated *Six Characters*, the pleasantly tuneful offerings of Douglas Moore, Gian Carlo Menotti, Carlisle Floyd, Robert Ward and Norman Dello Joio seemed cozy and flat. A budding opera composer myself at the time, I immediately presented myself to Weisgall in hopes of individual instruction, but his busy schedule did not allow private pupils. We did, however, become friends, and I was flattered when he solicited my opinions. I seldom saw his prickly side, which could be sharp indeed, but mostly benefited from his astute musical insights, immense culture and generosity. No composer of his generation wrote music with more passion and sincerity, and he used the voice he felt to be right and true for him. Yet he was receptive to an amazing range of musical idioms and could recognize genius when he heard it. One contemporary opera that always moved him deeply was Virgil Thomson's *Mother of Us All*, with its crazy-quilt score of Protestant hymns, country marches and Americana ballads. 'I can think of nothing farther removed from my own style, musical identity and ethnic background,' Weisgall once said to me. 'But the piece is a miracle of sorts. The marbleized apotheosis of Susan B. Anthony at the end always leaves me in tears.' He was also greatly impressed by the ease and naturalness of Thomson's ability to set the English language to music, the more so since Weisgall himself was a master of the craft. After his success with the conversational intricacies of *Six Characters*, Weisgall turned to a more epic style in *Athaliah* (1964), a grandly scaled choral opera based on Racine's play. His most ambitious stage work was produced by the City Opera in 1968: *Nine Rivers From Jordan*, another complex blend of reality and fantasy, but this time a huge panorama that deals unflinchingly the moral dilemmas of World War II. That is perhaps the Weisgall opera most urgently in need of revival and reassessment, but my personal favorite is its successor, *Jenny*, or the *Hundred Nights* (1976), after Mishima. Its orchestral score is exquisitely diaphanous, and its arching vocal lines subtly reflect the stylized shapes of the librettist John Hollander's poetic language. After getting to know Weisgall, I gradually began to suspect that his gentle refusal to take me on as a pupil, after perusing a few of my student scores, stemmed from politeness toward a young composer with no talent rather than a lack of time on his part. And the more of his music I got to know, not to mention his unsparing critiques of composer colleagues, the more that suspicion grew. While at work on *Esther*, Weisgall dropped a few hints that this probably would

be his last opera. He put everything into it: not just the compositional skill and canny dramatic instincts that came from a lifetime of writing music for the theater but also his deep love and knowledge of the Jewish liturgical traditions that were so firmly rooted in the fabric of his style. As I recall it, the City Opera production of *Esther* modestly but effectively caters to the opera's cinematic organization. The action flows back and forth in time and space against a series of projected films on sliding flats that reflect both the subject's archaeological grandeur and private drama. This heartwarming story gave Weisgall precisely what he needed to sum up his achievement, employing a fastidious, finely worked out operatic technique that could combine the intimate detail of *Six Characters* with the grand epic scale of *Nine Rivers From Jordan*.

All the traditional elements you look for in a major operatic experience are present: large choral scenes, tender love exchanges, hot moments of jealousy and political intrigue, subtle suggestions of local coloring, even a brief ballet. The whole score represents Weisgall at the peak of his powers. His orchestra never sounded more sumptuous, and his vocal writing was never more fluent and expressive. . . . By bringing back *Esther* on such an important occasion, the City Opera may yet confound its critics. More important, the revival allows the company to reaffirm its mission and offers a second opportunity to savor the last work of a great American opera composer" [Peter G. Davis, *The New York Times*, 10/28/09].







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