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An Interview with David Sanford

TOM MOORE

David Sanford, born and raised in Pittsburgh, PA, is professor of music at Mt. Holyoke College in western Massachusetts, and his interests and influences range from dodecaphonicism through big band to funk and R&B. We first met as new arrivals at Princeton University in 1989, where he was an incoming doctoral student in composition, and I was the new librarian in charge of the Music Department's recording collection. We talked via Skype on February 1, 2010.

MOORE: Where did you grow up? What was the musical environment in your household?

SANFORD: I grew up in Pittsburgh, PA, until I was eleven. My mother was a choir director, and would play the piano at home. My father was into jazz, but they divorced when I was six, so I don't remember him playing it around the house, but he was the one who turned us on to it, when we were a little bit older. What we used to hear was my mother practicing, and I think we tuned that out – that was “old folk's music” – dead dull music. Pop music-wise, when we got in the car people would play R&B radio. The station, which is still there, is WAMO. I also had a baby-sitter when I was five who would play it all day. The songs I remember, which I wish I could have played 100 times if I had owned the records, were Cloud Nine by the Temptations, Say It Loud by James Brown, and Grazing in the Grass by Friends of Distinction. Those were in heavy rotation. We got the rhythm and blues from that era, and then the Jackson Five came along, and that was the center of our universe for a while. And that edition of the Temptations – I never liked the earlier, more pop, audience-friendly, love-song Temptations as much as the protest-era Temptations. Psychedelic Shack, Ball of Confusion – which today is still one of my three favorite pieces in the world. Runaway Child, Running Wild, Can't Get Next to You – all of those were the best songs in the world. As we got older, when my brother and I started buying records, it was invariably R&B of that sort. We got into Earth, Wind and Fire, I was into the Isley Brothers, Sly and the Family Stone. My mother had Aretha Franklin records, which we just heard as “my mother's music”. It was only much later that I realized that this stuff was as funky as what we were listening to. We tended to tune her out, and it wasn't until I was in my teens that I started to appreciate the classics, particularly the love songs -- Al Green, Marvin Gaye, although we owned “Let's Get It On.” The real smooth ballads we didn't get into until much later. We moved to Colorado when I was eleven. That is when I first got into big band. We had a great band director named William McMosley. Like us, he was one of the few black people in that part of Colorado Springs -- a big, scary, imposing tyrant of a band director. It was the first marching band I was in, and I thought it was really great. The jazz band I first heard when my brother was in eighth grade and I was still in grade school. They were doing a piece called Barn Burner -- in fact, I have the sheet music sitting here because my brother loaned it to me -- Harry Stone is the composer.

It was one of those pieces that changed my life. After that I got into junior high school, and Mingus and Dizzy Gillespie were the records we started taking out of the library, Miles Davis, Birth of the Cool. I played those to death. I tried to get into Coltrane early, but the first record I listened to was Expression, so I ran back the other direction from that for a while. It was a long time before I got in classic big band. Of course, everyone was listening to Maynard then, and for me via that Woody Herman, Stan Kenton, Thad Jones, Mel Lewis, Toshiko Akiyoshi. That was also when I was reading Downbeat magazine, so by the time I was thirteen I knew the names of all the famous jazz musicians, even though I couldn't find a lot of the records in Colorado Springs. I knew who all the free jazzers were, and so forth. At that point I was thinking that Anthony Braxton would be the future of jazz, because of what Downbeat was saying. By high school, I was getting more in classical music. And with respect to R&B, once disco came in, I was tuning out, by about '76 to '77. Everyone started to do more disco-ish, canned beats. The lyrics had been about protest and social issues, and all of a sudden it started to be about dancing. In the late seventies there was also drum and bugle corps, which introduced us to classical music in the “wrong” way. The first time I heard Firebird, it was being played by a drum and bugle corps, and I loved it. Marche Slave, Petrushka, Verdi Requiem, New World Symphony -- of course if you had heard the original first, it might drive you up the wall. There is an amazing Shostakovich 10th out there for drum and bugle corps that I would still say is incredibly listenable. It gets at what Shostakovich wanted. And The Firebird, played by the Phantom Regiment in 1978 I actually like a little bit better, although I shouldn't put that on tape...

MOORE: Why not?

SANFORD: It was this savage, primal thing -- a perfect use of the medium. In college I started getting more into Stravinsky, but in high school I was heavily into the Leonard Bernstein Mass, thanks to the same library, which had the recording. The drum corps played Spartacus by Khachaturian, so we loved that. And a lot of concert band music. Back then, to me the great composers were John Barnes Chance and Clifton Williams. It wasn't till later that we figured out who Schoenberg and Boulez were...

MOORE: Did you have any involvement with your mother's church choir?

SANFORD: Never. In high school, my brother as a junior joined choir for the first time. I hated singing. I [heard] them, and I liked the music, so I joined when I was a junior. We were doing bits from the Creation... I don't think I admired what my mother was doing at the time. I admired that she could play the organ, but we didn't listen to the choir and think “Wow, that's really cool...”

There were a few spirituals: I thought *Soon I Will Be Done* with the *Troubles of the World* was great. *Hospodi Pomilui* was clever and fun. But most of them we would just tune out, unfortunately.

MOORE: What was it that led you to pick up trombone?

SANFORD: I was nine, my brother had started trombone earlier, and I wanted to not play trombone. So I started playing trumpet, but I couldn't get a sound out of it. I still can't -- I have just never had the chops for it. They gave me a euphonium; I played that for about a half a year, the middle key stuck, they sent it out for repairs, and gave me a trombone in the meantime. They needed trombones, and let me stay with it, which set in motion a really bad competition between my brother and me. We would invariably be competing for the same things. He was always better than me, but I was good at working up showy pieces for auditions, and beat him out a couple of times. I never loved the trombone as a sound for me. Given the choice, I think would have preferred tenor sax. But you would not have gotten to play in the orchestra playing sax. Even the tenor sax parts in concert band are not that interesting. I am perfectly happy to have played trombone because of the windows that it opened.

MOORE: Your brother is two years older than you are?

SANFORD: Yes. He sings pop. We went in completely different directions, even though we went to the same college. He went to Music Education, and I went to Theory and Composition. This was at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley, which is actually a very good big band school. It was while we were there and still is. Good brass, good percussion. At the time the orchestra was less so, but it has gotten much better. The chorus was pretty good, I thought, and they had the best vocal jazz ensemble in the country when we were there. We both sang in that. He got into the vocal jazz, and also sang in a church that had a pop Christian choir. He saw Schoenberg and Webern as something amusing -- the oddity of these weird Germans -- whereas I took to it.

MOORE: "I can like things that are weirder than anyone else can..."

SANFORD: It's the same thing with punk rock, death metal, Goth -- if you feel alienated, you can be drawn to music that other people are running away from. You think, "here are people who know what it is to be alienated, here is music that speaks that language." That wasn't the intention of the Second Vienna School, but that's how I heard it back then.

MOORE: How did you start as a composer?

SANFORD: I actually began in junior high. I wanted to write big band charts. I did an arrangement, without even having a tape of the song, of the theme by Pat Williams for Bob Newhart. Around the same time I wrote my first composition, called *Tempest*. I have it somewhere in a box, I think. At the time I would go to the music store and they had big band scores -- Woody Herman's version of Billy Cobham's *Crosswinds*., things like that.

So I got into doing big band pieces then. By tenth grade, they had changes and sections, a 3/8 thing like *La Fiesta*, and then a funk thing in F ... I think the riffs probably weren't that bad. Of course the trumpet parts were way too high. I discovered the [octatonic] scale as a sophomore in high school, although I didn't hear them call it octatonic until graduate school. I started a couple of pieces like that for choir, which probably would have been very difficult to sing. By the time I was in college I was writing more conventional compositions. I did about three or four big band compositions as an undergraduate, and during the whole time I was at New England Conservatory I didn't write any. I was doing "serious" composition, studying with Arthur Berger, so I was writing 12-tone music. And I didn't write any at Princeton, either. The first big-band composition I wrote in 15 years was for my wife -- we had a big band play when we got married. That opened the floodgates -- I got to go to Rome in 2002-2003, and my project was to write big band music. If you know David Rakowski, he works on etudes when he is not doing bigger pieces. When I am not doing bigger pieces, I am writing for big band.

MOORE: And those etudes by David Rakowski have been extremely successful...

SANFORD: Yes -- they are everywhere -- everyone plays them.

MOORE: Please talk about NEC.

SANFORD: I was into the idea that they had a jazz department there. I had a choice of studying with Tom McKinley or Arthur Berger, and I saw Berger as someone rigorous, who would do the twelve-tone thing, and I wanted to write more complex music, more strident music, more "serious" music, and thought that that was the way to go. Berger's opinions seemed to be coming from Mount Olympus. There are not so many people whose opinions mattered so much to me, even though esthetically I was coming from a completely different ballpark.

MOORE: What year did you start there?

SANFORD: In the fall of 1985. I did a composition master's, which I got in '87, and then went back for a theory master's, which I got in '89. While I was there I was working various jobs in order to support myself. NEC, then, had a tuition that was an exorbitant \$8000 a year, and my apartment was \$400 a month, which seemed outrageous then as well. It's funny to look back on that now... I had a scholarship plus work study jobs. I worked at *Au Bon Pain* for 2½ years, and then full time on stage crew. So I was working 40 hours a week as well as studying. I got to a lot of concerts, a lot of movies -- but I didn't have anywhere close to the amount of time that I needed for studying scores etc. I didn't write a ton of significant music there -- a few pieces that helped get me into Princeton, but I wish that I could have spent more time immersing myself in music there, like a full-time student.

MOORE: Were there things from the jazz scene in Boston at the time that made an impact?

SANFORD: I would say big-time. Jazz-wise Northern Colorado was musically pretty conservative as a rule, except for some grad students that were there, like Hugh Regan, who was there during my first year, and there was an odd free-jazz bent for a lot of the undergrads. My second year a guy came in by the name of Jack Walthrop, who was a big fusion sax player. I remember going to a party after a concert, and he put on a tape of Pangea, and I thought "Oh my gosh, who's that??" "Miles Davis, man..." I had heard that Miles was doing electric things, but I had never heard anything. I couldn't believe that it sounded like the funk of my youth -- it put me on a path to believing that I was digging in the right place if Miles liked the same stuff that we did... By the time I was a senior, the big bands were all playing arrangements that seemed really cheesy to me. It was a time when jazz had become really conservative too. By the time that I got to NEC there was a really vibrant jazz community there. John Medeski was there, Cuong Vu was there, Chris Speed, Josh Roseman, whom I have known ever since then -- he was a freshman when I was starting grad school, and we were on stage crew together. There were a lot of guys who have gone on to do big things on the scene. At the school you had people who were just saying, "hey, find your own thing", they weren't ragging on Wynton Marsalis -- Russell himself, Bob Moses, Dave Holland came later on. Jimmy Giuffre was there, John McNeil, Ran Blake had this third-stream department -- this was all after Gunther Schuller's time, but they were still preaching that aesthetic. Every big band concert was loaded with interesting stuff. Ken Schaphorst was around -- I think he had just graduated, but he led a big band in town that really played well. It was a great community, although I didn't get to hear nearly as much music as I would have liked to. Ron Della Chiesa at WGBH brought a band called UYA, a bunch of undergrads from NEC who were playing a funk thing, in the studio playing live over the air -- I thought that was incredible... I was invariably inspired by whatever I heard on his show. A life-changing moment was my first month there, when they had a Boston Jazz Festival on the Esplanade. George Russell's big band was playing one night. At that time I was living in Chelsea, and it was a pain in the neck to get to the Back Bay from there, but my roommate was driving in, and he dropped me off near the Auditorium stop. As I was walking toward the Hatch Shell, you could hear George Garzone playing from about five blocks away, and I thought, "that is my favorite sound in the world!" The concert was riveting. This was the big band I had always wanted to hear; it was the first time I had heard people exploring the territory that I was into. So it was a life-changing experience. Unlike the situation with the strings at Northern Colorado, when I got to NEC you would walk through the halls and hear student groups doing Brahms chamber music, Beethoven string quartets, Bartok -- things I had not heard at all earlier, except occasionally on records. Not music that you would hear in the hallways at Northern Colorado. I loved hearing that level of music all the time at NEC. I also sang with the Tanglewood Festival Chorus -- I met John Fitz Rogers in that choir. We did Symphony of Psalms, we did three of the tableaux from St. Francis by Messiaen, we did Elektra -- that was life-changing, just absolute fun. Boston had a vibrant musical atmosphere, with the early music scene, something I always have enjoyed.

I had never heard that much, unless I was singing in it, but Boston has all those top-level groups, with Joel Cohen, Banchetto Musicale, David Hoose....

MOORE: What was it that drew you to Princeton from NEC?

SANFORD: I was thinking that Columbia was where I had to go. My initial assumption was that I had to go to Juilliard, because Babbitt and Carter and Sessions and Diamond were all there. But I had the realization that A. if you get in you won't get very much support and B. you probably won't get in anyway. I had narrowed it down to Harvard, Princeton and Columbia. I had always wanted to go to Harvard because if you are in Boston it seems like the center of the universe, although I probably would not have been a very good fit from what I could tell. Columbia -- I thought New York was the final frontier, and I loved the Upper West Side, and still do. Princeton seemed like a distant third. Peter Robles went there, whom I had known from my first two years at NEC. We studied with Berger. He was always saying "You've gotta come down -- Steve Mackey is here, and Paul Lansky, and they're brilliant..." I didn't know so much about what they were writing, didn't know so much about the place, but thought it was a long way from New York. They called me up, so I took a train down, and they were incredibly nice. They were not full of BS about what music was, and as much as I loved Arthur Berger and Pozzi Escot, the music that I wanted to write was nothing like theirs. Princeton seemed to be so open to so many things. I also met Bob Sadin, and he played a recording of a piece by Richard Argosh, and I thought "they have got an ensemble here that will play your stuff?" And the fact that you could get to New York so easily by train for so cheap... And the campus was beautiful. The bottom line was that Columbia let me in with no money, Harvard didn't accept me, and Princeton gave me a full fellowship. If Columbia had given me some funding I might have thought about it, but as it was it wasn't even close. And Columbia and Harvard seemed to be, in my surface experience, only tolerant of jazz, whereas Princeton was aware that it was part of their spectrum. Jim Randall was someone who had an elastic intelligence that could encompass anything that you threw in his direction.

MOORE: Quite a remarkable guy. I remember at the time thinking, nevertheless, that you were pushing the envelope by writing a dissertation on Miles Davis's Agharta.

SANFORD: My original plan was to do a project that looked at three pieces on the fringes of jazz -- Agharta, on the R&B/populist/minimalist/primitivist end, Graettinger's City of Glass, from the overly European/unswinging end, and Mingus's Three Worlds of Drums, a sort of unnatural/unstable combination that was in a volatile dialectic that was about to blow itself apart -- I still love that about that piece. Jack Walrath put a lot of that together -- the melodic and harmonic scheme is Mingus's, but Walrath says that he did a bunch of it. In the end I did a ton of research on the Miles. I was working at Merrill Lynch at that time, so my research hours were always in the evening, and I had problems getting my hands on the score for City of Glass, and I amassed so much material on Agharta that I thought I would simply limit the dissertation to that.

I don't if anyone else has approached that piece since -- but there are now a lot of people talking about the electric Miles. I see that album as a significant work, although there are people who still don't...

MOORE: What does a listener take away from those recordings in terms of style? It's a place that jazz has not gone back to since then.

SANFORD: I don't know that much music has. There was a period there that began in the sixties, with James Brown, Sly and the Family Stone, Funkadelic, the Isley Brothers, Hendrix, to some degree -- which had the same energy as what free jazz was, but coming from a rhythm and blues context, so that you might have only one chord. People say "that's just a drone." If you call it "modal jazz" people get all excited about the possibilities; if you put a funk beat, they think it's a trite example of someone who doesn't know how to get out of the key... yes, if you just play a blues scale over, but these guys weren't just playing a blues scale over it. Ultimately, Miles often was, and we know that he was the one who opened up the possibilities of modal jazz. His solo, particularly in Prelude, is fascinating. I am hardly a minimalist, but as jazz goes, Miles set the standard for not showing off. He was always economical, but here he takes a melody and repeats it over and over again, somewhat like what he was doing earlier with heads of tunes, like Nefertiti, for example, or Circle in the Round. He is helped by the fact that the other players don't do that -- Sonny Fortune does all the things Coltrane and Shorter were doing, with more of a blues edge to it. He was the thing that drew me to those recordings. Pete Cosey is even farther out. I didn't love his solos when I first heard them -- I wasn't a big rock fan, and had no context for guitar solos. Greg Tate did a very important article on the electric Miles for Downbeat in the early eighties, and he said that he didn't believe that his "esteemed colleagues" had the rhythm-and-blues background to be able to evaluate the work. I think you did have to grow up listening to rhythm and blues from that period, listening to things like Bootsy's Rubber Band -- it can just stay here, that's perfectly fine. You have to be able to appreciate something that way. You have to hear that Miles was trying to do that. Now, why was Miles trying to do that? The ferocity with which he does it, along with things from around that time -- Calypso Frelimo, Rated X -- expresses to me a real anger. One of my arguments is that Miles always had an anger in him. Jazz musicians were generally applauded for taking black anger and sublimating it in this very elegant musical language. Miles is glowering, he's got this raspy voice, he was beaten by the cops -- there was an appeal to the fact that whatever anger he had as a person was sublimated in his music -- whatever there was might have been expressed by someone else in his band -- Coltrane, Tony Williams, but never him. But at this point, it's coming straight from him. He was a different person then, too. There's a new book that says he was depressed, something that I didn't know when I was writing the dissertation. This is either music that precedes his death, or the hiatus that followed.

MOORE: They say that it is the people who are depressed who see reality more clearly than the rest of us.

SANFORD: I am not quite sure that I am depressed, but even at Princeton I was drawn to guys who walked that edge -- Eliot Handelman could be that way, Stan Link was that way. For better or for worse -- I don't know if that helps you write music. It probably doesn't help you get teaching jobs, but I always admired their honesty which to me seemed to feed their musical understanding.

MOORE: But, in terms of Miles, that music from that period - - such as Rated X -- is still the most difficult to assimilate, which is why I can't imagine how people can accuse the style of having its origin in wanting to sell recordings.

SANFORD: It's funny -- I taught a course in transgressive music this semester, which was all first- year students at Mt. Holyoke, and none of them seemed to be shocked by it. You can't shock anybody anymore. That abrasive sound didn't seem to bother them. I was offended by Bill Laswell, who did a remix for Panthalassa, saying that the original sound was so bad. I loved the original, I loved the abrasion. There's a certain self-flagellation in immersing yourself in so much grating high-frequency sound, which is continuous and sustained.

MOORE: It was clearly intentional.

SANFORD: And the stopping and starting -- I compared that to what Stockhausen was doing with Trans and Stop. There were hands outside the music which put these violent "ceases" into the music that made you contemplate nothing. It's unrelated to anything in pop music, and almost like water torture to some people. It stops and starts again, stops and starts again.

MOORE: What about the famous moment in Cosey's solo where he goes beyond just notes, beyond one-chord into simply noise?

SANFORD: That is the point where I was thinking that this guitarist is doing things that you don't hear other guitarists do. It's gone beyond what you are "supposed" to do, which is what I eventually liked about it. What you are supposed to do is play pitches, and if you are going to do effects, you let the feedback and the amp do it. In the case of Cosey, you get the sense that here is a guy who has gone beyond language... he is choking the heck out the neck like someone who is trying to strangle the guitar. It's a wonderful moment, and when he comes out of it... going into it and coming out of it are the most ferocious parts of the piece. Before I would listen to Sonny Fortune, and then just take it off; but it was as I was transcribing that that I started listening to more and more of the guitar solo. What fun it is!

MOORE: If you think of how Coltrane would build his solos, he would arrive at a point of ecstasy beyond which you couldn't possibly go, the moment where he brings it back, and within five or ten seconds you are at the head again.

SANFORD: Yes, there is the same thing there.

In the case of Cosey, I never really knew that much about his background. There were a few things that referenced him as belonging to the AACM, so yes, I think he knew free jazz and Coltrane, but people simply thought of him as a blues guitarist, like Blood Ulmer, who is equally interesting in his own way.

MOORE: Let's talk about some of your pieces, perhaps starting with some things that are more on the classical side.

SANFORD: Almost everything I have done recently has been swinging more toward the jazz end of things. There are a few things I did with Speculum. The first was Chamber Concerto No. 3, which came out on CRI in the mid-90's [CRI CD 705, 1996]. That was influenced by Mingus in a lot of respects. It takes lines from Three Worlds of Drums, and quotes from a few other pieces. I tell people that, and they say "there's no jazz in there." At that point, for me, Speculum was the center of the universe -- that was where music was going. I had been a "sound mass" guy as an undergraduate -- I wanted to write big pieces like Berio, and the wind ensemble composers -- Karel Husa, with big percussion batteries, and brass taking your head off. Via Arthur Berger, I got the idea that chamber music was where it's all at. It's been a long road to get back to writing large ensemble music. Allen Blustein ended up playing the Chamber Concerto No. 3 more jazzy than I had intended -- and I liked it that way. He would swing some of the 16ths, and there's a little bit of Bartok's Contrasts later on, which was not intentional. I was working with the tone row, although there are tonal centers all through, except for the third movement, where I was trying to be as abstract as possible. At that point I was quoting like crazy, but I also had more time to write that piece. I took the year off to live in New York, which was also really depressing -- just the wrong time in my life. It was a fertile scene, but I didn't have tons of money to go to concerts every night. I was sort of a loner. I would occasionally come into Princeton, see concerts, hang out with people. And I didn't have a piano in my apartment. It was a tough year to do something like that. Consequently I ended up stressing over every idea and every measure. There are quotes from Mingus, but also from Elvis Costello, and from Jesus Christ Superstar (which I can't reveal, or it will kill that part of the piece if I say what it is...) There's a break in the clarinet solo that should sound exactly like the break in Sonny Fortune's solo from Prelude on Agharta. There's a little Primus thing that sounds nothing like Primus, but I was listening to them at that point. It was a really overwrought piece, and I kind of like that aspect of it. I wish I could still write overwrought pieces, but then I think about the time it took -- I remember spending two weeks just to copy the thing (and doing nothing else, because at that time I could). Of course, now, in the days of Sibelius, nobody does that any more. I remember sitting in my room and playing all these different recordings -- Nevermind by Nirvana, which was new, Pierre Dorge and the New Jungle Ensemble, Very Very Circus by Henry Threadgill, Dylan's Blood on the Tracks -- playing those while I copied music all day. That Zen of copying, where you could play music in the background, is gone. I kind of miss that.

MOORE: Please talk about the CD with the Pittsburgh Collective.

SANFORD: These are charts that I have been wanting to write for the last 20 or 25 years. To be specific, I can remember being in a bar in Boston in 1987, and thinking "wouldn't it be great to do City of Glass to a beat like "Super Stupid" by Funkadelic? It would work really well." I wanted to do a bop tune like Gillespie, which became Alchemy. I wanted to do a shuffle -- Sting had a version of Shadows in the Rain which he did on the Dream of Blue Turtles album. If you ever see the documentary about that -- which is impossible to watch, because he comes off pretty pompous -- the opening of the concert is that version. I thought "What a great way to open a concert," so I wanted to do that, with a long tenor sax solo running through the whole thing. That became Fenwick. There were all these tunes that I knew I would write from day one -- it was just a matter of having the time to do it. Those ideas are simple things -- charts, rather than grand compositions. The "big pretentious" ideas I had for writing, where all the streams of what I am doing would coalesce, really haven't started kicking in so much. V-Reel has a little of that; Scherzo Grosso is because I was talking to Matt Haimovitz, and saying that I wanted to write a piano concerto, and he said "why not a cello concerto?" Within about two years that piece came together.

MOORE: Had you known Haimovitz at Princeton?

SANFORD: I never met him at Princeton. He started the same year that we did [1989]. Peter Robles told me who he was -- I had no idea at the time. His DG discs from when he was in high school were on sale at Sam Goody's. He played one piece on a composition concert there over in Taplin Auditorium. That was the one time that I saw him play. And then he was gone. He dropped out, and ended up transferring to Harvard. I met him at UMass, while I was at Mt. Holyoke. Mary and I were in one of the few local Korean restaurants, and he was there with a cello, and I walked over and said "Are you Matt Haimovitz?" and introduced myself to him and his wife, the composer Luna Pearl Woolf. Not so much later they called me up and asked me to write a piece for their Anthem album. It was originally for solo cello, and is on the Pittsburgh Collective album as well. This was Seventh Avenue Kaddish, which was an elegy for 9/11. I have to say that I am not usually that kind of a writer -- sentiment is something that I do badly. It follows the pattern of Coltrane's A Love Supreme, with four movements. An opening, free cadenza, then a tough 12/8 thing which is kind of aggressive, slightly rhythmic, in a Latin way, a jazzy third part, not unlike "Pursuance" in A Love Supreme, and the final elegy is like the "Psalm." My main idea was that of a street musician, which really he took to, since he was playing in pizza parlors and nightclubs and CBGB's and so forth. It fit esthetically with what he was doing. For [the version of that on] the Pittsburgh Collective CD I added a drummer, Mark Raynes, and told him to think of it like Interstellar Space [duo between Coltrane and Rashied Ali]. The drum part is not written out -- I gave him where things will change, and other than that they just interact as they will. And Haimovitz was very big on the idea of the big band concerto. Oxingale, which put it out, is his and Luna's company. We did a Miller Theater concert of it back in 2007.

I also did an orchestral version of it 2006, which Nagano conducted at Berkeley and Marin Alsop did at the Cabrillo Festival. Even though I am making some connections in the straight classical market, it still feels like it is more via that jazz angle.

MOORE: Is there a big upcoming project?

SANFORD: One thing that I am doing with Haimovitz is a series of jazz arrangements for his cello group, Uccello, which is anywhere from two to eight celli. They played those last summer [2009], and will record them in May [2010]. Those have been a lot of fun. We did Liza in the style of Django Reinhardt, with four celli, Open Country Joy by Mahavishnu, and Haitian Fight Song, which on paper you might think “would that work??”

It’s odd, it’s a bit weird, but I think that it works really well. You have to suspend your disbelief, and realize that Mingus and Dannie Richmond and Booker Ervin are not on stage here... My “big composition,” something I have been wanting to write for three years, is a concerto grosso with the big band and Speculum Musicae. I have a ton of ideas for it.

MOORE: Is there a working title for it?

SANFORD: I don’t have a title for it yet, but it will be a big, long work. We’ll see what we can do with it for one concert in New York and then take it from there. That’s what I am most excited about right now.



A Tradition of Change

MARK ALBURGER

It's hard to believe that electroacoustic music has been around for more than 60 years. Dating back at least to 1948 with Pierre Schaeffer's first tape compositions (a style dubbed *Musique Concrete*), the genre flourishes in many contexts. One such is chamber music of a live acoustic soloist in consort with electronically generated sounds, and it was this type of concert that was presented, with resounding success, on July 16, by sfSound at Community Music Center.

The featured group was EKG, the duo of oboist / English hornist Kyle Bruckmann and analog electronician Ernst Karel, heard in two works: Christopher Burns's *The Mutiny of Rivers* (2010) and Morton Feldman's *Oboe and Orchestra* (1976). The former was an improvisational tour-de-force, where English hornist Bruckman was given 13 unordered large sheets of music (some notational, some instructional) against 6 streams of electronics, from which Karel could sample and further alter before making audible. The result was a fevered thrill ride down a sonic cascade.

The Feldman was just about the opposite, as expected. Known for his extended, meditative, tangentially-minimalist soundscapes, Feldman offers here about 20 minutes of plaintive, plangent, lonely motives -- fairly engaging, but a little difficult to fully assess in this realization. In truth, the piece probably should have been redubbed "Oboe and Electronics, by EKG, after Morton Feldman," as the electronic score, intriguing as it was, bore little resemblance to what Feldman's intentions may have been vis a vis an orchestra.

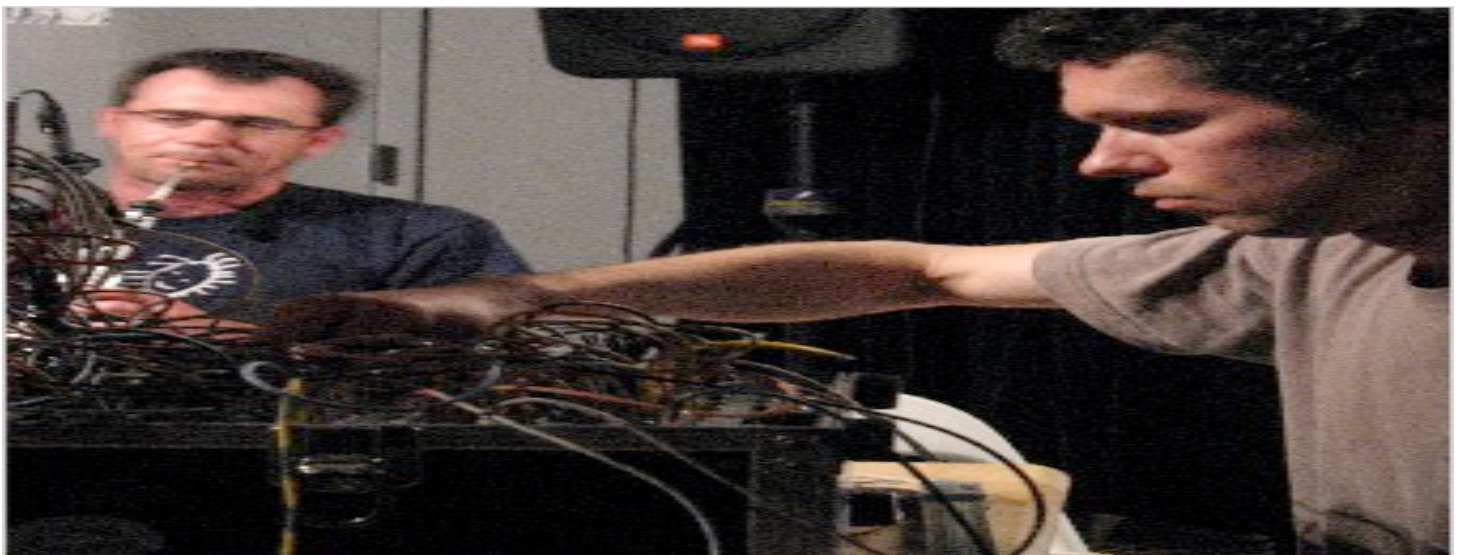
Burns cited in his program notes the influence and inspiration of Luigi Nono, and we were treated to the underplayed Italian master's *...sofferte onde serene...* (1976), one of three "old-school" compositions featuring electronic sounds on

electromagnetic tape. Here the sonorities of pianist Christopher Jones intentionally blended in with altered pianistic pings on the pre-recording, as a dark, sonorous soundscape.

The sound world of Dennis Smalley's *Clarinet Threads* (1985), as brought to life by clarinetist Matt Ingalls, was considerably more, well, electrifying, in hair-raising high notes that commanded attention. The virtuosity in this performance, against a fixed electronic component, was impressive -- indeed the quality of the live performers throughout the evening was first rate.

And the excellence continued in cellist Monica Scott's realization of a Mario Davidovsky classic: *Synchronisms No. 3* (1965). This, the oldest work on the program, was near ground zero of the whole live-soloist-and-electronics category, and had an almost nostalgic and pristine quality in its careful alteration of media. Scott brought technique and tone to the table, and the electronic score perked agreeably.

By contrast, while Per Bloland's *Quintet* (2005) was not quite the newest work on the program, it certainly pointed towards future directions. Saxophonist John Ingle became his own one-man band, with the assistance of an Apple laptop, in realizing five-part music in real time that animated and thrilled. The precise cut-offs alone were worth the price of admission (OK, I got in free as a critic, but still...), and bespoke of the excitement of the evening, taken in by an enthusiastic capacity crowd.



Chronicle

July 8

Garage a Trois. Maxwell's, New York, NY. "The terminology can't be trusted when it comes to Garage a Trois, a band consisting of the drummer Stanton Moore, the saxophonist known as Skerik, the percussionist Mike Dillon and the keyboardist Marco Benevento. That's four people, not three, despite the group's chosen name; it doesn't have much stake in garage rock, either. And while Garage a Trois fits the profile of a jam band, its music feels more focused and less freewheeling than that particular pigeonhole might suggest. Garage a Trois formed just over a decade ago, originally with Mr. Moore, Skerik and the guitarist Charlie Hunter. Its sensibilities have skewed grittier and more psychedelic with the current lineup, largely because of the fuzz-tone output of Mr. Benevento. . . . [T]he band played a shrewdly overdriven show, combining heavy-riff distortion with a rough-and-tumble funk delirium. Almost all the songs were from its most recent release, *Power Patriot* (Royal Potato Family), a respectable album but only a faint intimation of what Garage a Trois can do live. (That may ultimately be the strongest link the group shares with its jam-circuit brethren.) The band's life force is rhythm, both at a subterranean level and on the surface. Mr. Moore is also a founding member of Galactic, which has evolved into an all-purpose New Orleans house band equally at home with bounce music or Mardi Gras funk. He has a knack for disarming bombast with elasticity, sounding sly and adaptable even when jackhammering at his toms. And he had a ready sidekick in Mr. Dillon, who began the set on vibraphone before turning to congas, tablas and effects. There was mathematical complexity in some of the tunes, like *Rescue Spreaders*, which involved a whorl of superimposed meters, in groupings of four and five. (During a vibraphone solo by Mr. Dillon the rest of the band shifted neatly into swing.) But it was no less satisfying to hear the album's relatively simple title track rendered tougher and wilder, with Mr. Dillon socking a pair of cowbells and Skerik howling through his horn. One tumultuous stretch of the tune recalled the Brecker Brothers at their fusioneering peak, when their sound was best described by the title of a live album: *Heavy Metal Be-Bop*. Skerik and Mr. Dillon also played an opening set as two-thirds of the Dead Kenny G's. (The other third is Brad Houser, on bass and baritone saxophone.) Their rapport in this setting was a bit more feverish than in Garage a Trois, and their tone a lot more juvenile. Skerik was freer and more impulsive with his improvising as the trio pinballed between styles: Afro-pop, Balkan klezmer, pocket funk lashed to Middle Eastern modality. The jumpiness felt a little dated and obvious — very 1990's Knitting Factory — as did the ostensible target of the band's fury. There are few easier marks than Kenny G, the living symbol of simpering instrumental pop. Skerik and crew know this, but why would they let that stop them? What's in a name, anyway? [Nate Chinen, *The New York Times*, 7/11/10].

July 13

Washington Square Music Festival Chamber Orchestra. St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church, New York, NY. "Karl Amadeus Hartmann's *Tanzsuite* (1931) [is] a light-spirited, zesty quintet by a composer best known for intensely emotional scores like the *Concerto Funèbre*, and for having removed himself from German public musical life as a protest during the Nazi years. The suite shows why the Nazis would have frowned upon his music. You hear in it the same jazz and cabaret impulses that animate Weill's early music, as well as some Stravinskian snarkiness. The program ended with the *Dixtuor* — a double quintet for winds and strings — by Théodore Dubois, a French composer who flourished around the turn of the 20th century and directed the Paris Conservatoire briefly. His influences seem decidedly Germanic: much of this 1906 work draws on Wagner's rich harmonic world, and with the help of the church's resonance it had an almost symphonic heft" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 7/14/10].



New York Philharmonic and the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra, Great Lawn, Central Park, New York, NY. "For the first time in the 46-year history of this summer music tradition, the Philharmonic was sharing a parks program with a guest ensemble, the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra. All day Monday the forecasts were predicting a strong likelihood of thunderstorms. But the Philharmonic administration took a chance, as did some 30,000 people who showed up, according to New York Police Department estimates. The air was thick with humidity, but the skies were fairly clear, and the concert went on as planned. And not until 10:45, just as the ovation started at the end of the Philharmonic's performance of Ravel's "Boléro," the final work on this long double program, did it start to rain. People scattered, and as had previously been announced, the postconcert fireworks display was skipped. The Philharmonic made one concession to the iffy weather predictions: the order of the program was switched, and the Shanghai Symphony played first, with the Philharmonic following after intermission. On one level this was the polite thing to do: guests first. But there was more to it. This leading Chinese orchestra was in town, in part, to promote World Expo 2010, taking place in Shanghai. By sharing this parks program, the Shanghai Symphony was basking in the Philharmonic's renown and reaching new audiences. For the privilege, the Chinese orchestra helped defray the cost of the concert. So it was more essential to get in the performances by the visitors. There was no possibility of a rain date, since the Shanghai musicians were scheduled to leave New York on Wednesday. In any event, it was a pleasure to hear this impressive Chinese orchestra, which won standing ovations throughout its performances. . . . Ode to the Expo by Guang Zhao [was] a lush, soaring neo-Romantic crowd pleaser that made the composer seem a Chinese Andrew Lloyd Webber. Lang Lang, the superstar Chinese pianist, joined the Shanghai Symphony for its final work, Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue. As always, there were stunning aspects to Mr. Lang's playing: uncanny control of inner voices; sensitivity to color and nuance that came across even through loudspeakers; impressive lightness in rustling passagework; chiseled tone for steely bursts of chords and octaves. He played the piece with jazzy vitality, as if he were improvising on the spot. But -- also a Lang Lang trademark -- he teased melodic lines for maximum expressiveness and jerked the music this way and that. The Chinese orchestra sounded quite at home in Gershwin, complete with bluesy wawa trumpet solos. . . . Finally, Andrey Boreyko, the dynamic Russian conductor, led the Philharmonic in vibrant performances of . . . Bernstein's Symphonic Dances From "West Side Story" and Boléro [Anthony Tommasini, The New York Times, 7/14/10].

July 15

New York Philharmonic in music of Anatoly Liadov, Alexander Glazunov, Erwin Schulhof, and Sergei Prokofiev. Great Lawn, Central Park, New York, NY. "But occasionally the orchestra offers rarities at these summer concerts, and the program . . . was split evenly between the novel and the familiar. That can be tricky: a virtually unknown curtain raiser by Liadov and obscure saxophone concertos by Glazunov and Erwin Schulhoff made up the program's first half, but as an audience lure, the Philharmonic engaged the popular saxophonist Branford Marsalis as soloist. . . . The conductor was Andrey Boreyko, a 52-year-old Russian with podiums in Bern, Switzerland, and Düsseldorf, Germany, who made an impressive Philharmonic debut in 2007. If Russian music is his comfort zone, he did not stray far from it. Only Schulhoff, a Czech composer, represented a different corner of the repertory. (And Schulhoff took Soviet citizenship in 1941, just before the Nazis deported him to the Wülzburg concentration camp, where he died in 1942.) Mr. Boreyko began with Liadov's Baba-Yaga, an evocation of the same folk-tale witch whose hut makes an appearance near the end of Mussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition. But where Mussorgsky painted in crude, powerful strokes, Liadov was more expansive, surrounding the witch's dramatic, low-lying theme with splashes of color from the woodwinds and brasses. Glazunov filled the solo line of his Concerto for Alto Saxophone and String Orchestra (1934) with sweet melodic turns and ample filigree, and he gave the instrument a richly detailed, virtuosic cadenza. The work's connections to jazz are few and fleeting, but you hear them, distantly, in its slow movement. Even so, the music seemed perfectly suited to Mr. Marsalis's velvety tone, lush vibrato and soulful approach to phrasing. Schulhoff's Jazz Concerto is actually a recent arrangement of his Hot-Sonate, a 1930 work for saxophone and piano, by Richard Rodney Bennett. Schulhoff loved jazz. You can hear it in the bluesy turns of this work's Andante and in the zesty syncopations of the Molto vivo finale, which in Mr. Bennett's scoring hints at a big-band sound. Mr. Marsalis's energetic, beautifully proportioned reading made a powerful case for the work. . . . [A]nyone who wanted to hear the orchestra at full throttle had the chance after intermission, when Mr. Boreyko led a vigorous, rich-hued suite from Prokofiev's ballet score Romeo and Juliet [Allan Kozinn, The New York Times, 7/16/10].

July 20

New York Sufi Music Festival. Union Square, New York, NY. "Hands waved overhead. Voices shouted lyrics and whooped with delight. Children were hoisted onto parents' shoulders. In the tightly packed crowd a few dancers made room to jump. T-shirts were tossed to fans from the stage. Yet in the songs that Abida Parveen was singing, saints were praised. They were Islamic saints, the poets and philosophers revered by Sufism, the mystical branch of Islam. It was the first New York Sufi Music Festival, a free three-hour concert . . . and it had music from the four provinces of Pakistan, including traditional faqirs who perform outside temples, Sufi rock, and a kind of rapping from Baluchistan. The concert was presented by a new organization called Pakistani Peace Builders, which was formed after the attempted bombing in Times Square by a Pakistani-American. The group seeks to counteract negative images of Pakistan by presenting a longtime Pakistani Islamic tradition that preaches love, peace, and tolerance. Sufism itself has been a target of Islamic fundamentalists; on July 1 suicide bombers attacked Pakistan's most important Sufi shrine. Pakistan's ambassador to the United Nations, Abdullah Hussain Haroon, spoke between sets . . . 'What we're here to do today,' he said, is 'to be at peace with all of America.' The music's message was one of joyful devotion and improvisatory freedom. Ms. Parveen, one of Pakistan's most celebrated musicians, was singing in a Sufi style called kafi. Like the qawwali music popularized worldwide by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, kafi sets classical poems -- about the love and intoxication of the divine, about seeking the spirit within -- to visceral, handclapping rhythms and vocal lines that swoop and twist with passionate volatility. Ms. Parveen carried songs from serene, hovering introductions to virtuosic euphoria. Long, sustained notes suddenly broke into phrases that zigzagged up and down an octave or more; repeated refrains took on an insistent rasp and became springboards for elaborate leaps and arabesques; quick syllables turned into percussive exchanges with the band. Each song was a continual revelation, making the old poems fully alive. While the crowd was there for Ms. Parveen's first New York City performance in a decade, the rest of the program was strong. The Soung Fakirs, from Sachal Sarmast Shrine in Sindh, danced in bright orange robes to devotional songs with vigorous, incantatory choruses. Akhtar Chanal Zehri, though he was introduced as a rapper, was backed by traditional instruments and seemed more of a folk singer, heartily intoning his rhythmic lyrics on a repeating note or two and, eventually, twirling like a Sufi dervish. Razaqat Ali Khan, the heir to his family's school of classical singing (khalay), was backed only by percussion, pushing his long-breathed phrasing into ever more flamboyant swirls and quavers. The tabla player Tari Khan, who also accompanied Razaqat Ali Khan, played a kinetic solo set that carried a 4/4 rhythm through variants from the Middle East, Europe, New York City and (joined by two more drummers) Africa. There was also instrumental music from the bansuri (wooden flute) player Ghaus Box Brohi. On the modernizing side, Zeb and Haniya, two Pakistani women who started their duo as college students at Mount Holyoke and Smith, performed gentler songs in the Dari tradition, a Pakistani style with Central Asian roots, with Haniya adding syncopated electric guitar

behind Zeb's smoky voice. Under wooden flute and classical-style vocals the Mekaal Hasan Band plugged in with reggae, folk-rock and a tricky jazz-rock riff. But the lyrics quoted devotional poetry that was 900 years old, distant from the turmoil of the present" [Jon Pareles, *The New York Times*, 7/21/10].

July 23

Music of Terry Riley and Lou Harrison performed by the Voxare Quartet. Bargemusic, New York, NY. "Artists often argue that their works are wrongly categorized, and they are not alone. While introducing compositions by Terry Riley . . . members of the Voxare Quartet said they disagreed with the Minimalist label assigned to [him]. The concert was the first in a three-part weekend series featuring the Voxare Quartet and celebrating the 75th birthday of Mr. Riley, best known for *In C*, his 1964 masterpiece, which boldly defied the rigid intellectual and emotionless constraints of the modernism then in vogue. With its repetitive interlocking patterns and hypnotic, uplifting mood [the work] became a benchmark of the Minimalist movement and is now a repertory classic. The personable and passionate Voxare players -- Emily Ondracek and Galina Zhdanova, violinists; Erik Peterson, violist; and Adrian Daurov, cellist -- took turns introducing the works played on Friday, some of which certainly had Minimalist hallmarks: rhythmic ostinatos, repetition and slow harmonic development. But the eclectic mix also showed that Mr. Riley, whose interests include jazz and Indian raga, is not so easily pigeonholed. The program opened with his optimistic and visceral *Sunrise of the Planetary Dream Collector*, composed in 1980 for the Kronos Quartet, a longtime collaborator of Mr. Riley's. During the 1970's he focused on improvisation and North Indian raga instead of formal composition, but at Kronos's insistence he notated the score for *Sunrise*. Still, as Ms. Ondracek explained, he wrote sections of the score on different sheets of paper so the performers could decide the order of performance. The Voxare Quartet offered a spirited, high-energy performance, vividly conveying the work's beautiful colors. In total contrast were the spare, stark textures of Mr. Riley's *String Quartet* (1960), his first work in that genre, written when he was a graduate student and under the influence of La Monte Young, who is sometimes called the first Minimalist composer. Mr. Riley was inspired by foghorns in San Francisco Bay, and the music conveys their distant, misty sounds, although the concept doesn't effectively sustain the work. The Voxare players also offered a vibrant interpretation of *The Wheel/Mythic Birds Waltz*, which opens with a wistful ballade, then fuses ragtime, jazz and Indian raga in the contrapuntal and metrically complex waltz; and *G-Song*, which incorporates a set of variations on a melancholy G-minor theme that Mr. Riley used for a French film score. The concert ended with Lou Harrison's striking *String Quartet Set* (1979), which reveals Mr. Harrison's affinity with world and early music. The richly scored five-movement piece ranges from the melancholy *Plaint* to the exuberant *Estampie*, which uses the cello as a percussive instrument. The performance was excellent, with distinctive contributions from each player" [Vivien Schweitzer, *The New York Times*, 7/26/10].

July 28

Ethel Fair: The Songwriters. Damrosch Park, New York, NY. "From its start, in 1998, [Ethel] has used amplification as well as the same pedals and sound-processing devices that rock bands use, and it plays only new music, including pieces by its members. . . . Ethel moved more decisively into the pop world by joining forces with performing songwriters from several corners of rock, pop and folk music. . . . [T]he concert . . . included collaborations with the Argentine singer and guitarist Juana Molina, the bluesy folk singer Dayna Kurtz, the guitarists Tom Verlaine and Patrick A. Derivaz and the guitarists turned film-score composers Mike Viola and Adam Schlesinger. As a prelude of sorts Ethel performed a few pieces on its own, starting with Marcelo Zarvos's energetically rhythmic *Arrival*. In the best rock band spirit, it offered a couple of selections from its *Cantaloupe* CD *Ethel*, the post-Minimalist *March* from Phil Kline's *Blue Room and Other Stories* and John King's quirkily bluesy *Shuffle* from *Sweet Hardwood*. But in the best spirit of a classical ensemble, it neglected to mention the disc. The pop collaborations were fun, if a bit frustrating for an Ethel fan. The quartet stood toward the back of the stage, ceding the front and center to its guests. And the distinction was not only visual; often Ethel's contributions were more deferential than substantial. But not

always. Its accompaniment to Ms. Kurtz's incendiary *It's the Day of Atonement*, 2001 included an ornate violin part, played by Mary Rowell on an instrument owned by Ms. Kurtz's grandfather. Ms. Molina's *Pastor Mentiroso* and Mr. Verlaine's *Prove It* were augmented by appealingly involved string writing. And Ethel coalesced as a tight band around Mr. Schlesinger's account of *That Thing You Do*, the title song from the 1996 Tom Hanks film about a Beatlesesque rock band, and Mr. Viola's song *The Clap* from this year's film *Get Him to the Greek*. The one time you heard more of Ethel than you might have expected was in the full-cast finale, a version of George Harrison's *While My Guitar Gently Weeps*. On balance, the arrangement was lovely, with attractive imaginatively filled-out textures, graceful vocal harmonies and striking individual contributions from Ms. Kurtz and Ms. Molina. But with several properly equipped guitarists onstage, not least Mr. Verlaine and Mr. Schlesinger, the song's instrumental break turned out to be not a weeping guitar line but vigorous chordal interplay by Ms. Rowell and Cornelius Dufallo, the group's violinists, Ralph Farris, its violist, and Dorothy Lawson, its cellist" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 7/29/10].



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ERLING WOLD (b. January 30, 1958) is a San Francisco based composer of opera and contemporary classical music. He is best known for his later chamber operas, especially *A Little Girl Dreams of Taking the Veil* and his early experiments as a microtonalist. Although he rejected religion in his teens, he returned many times to religious themes in his works, including many of his operatic works, and his Mass named for Notker the Stammerer commissioned by the Cathedral of St Gall. His earliest music was atonal and arrhythmic, but the influences of just intonation and the music of the minimalists led to the bulk of his music being composed in a variety of tonal genres. He was attracted by the theater and much of his music is either directly dramatic or is based on dramatic rather than purely musical structures. Wold is an eclectic composer who has also been called "the Eric Satie of Berkeley surrealist/minimalist electro-art rock" by the Village Voice. He composed the soundtracks for a number of films by the independent film director Jon Jost.

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