

21ST  
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# 21ST CENTURY MUSIC

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# Arch Vision from Richard Einhorn

ANDREW SHAPIRO

I spoke with Richard Einhorn in New York, on August 13, 2002

SHAPIRO: The first thing that raised an eyebrow about you was that I learned you produced a Yo Yo Ma record that won a Grammy. Not everyone does that...

EINHORN: [Well, I don't know about that! I think anyone that produces a Yo Yo Ma record comes close. I was working for CBS Masterworks for a time as a record producer -- it's the only straight job I've ever had. I guess he was assigned to me because I was young and he was as well.

SHAPIRO: This was 1982?

EINHORN: Actually it was 1980 when we started to work together. We made the record in '81 and then it was released and won the Grammy in '82. He was amazing, he was incredible then and he's even better now. Amazing.

SHAPIRO: Were you up on stage with him at the ceremony?

EINHORN: Oh, no.

SHAPIRO: The classical people never go up on stage. They usually say something coming out of commercial like, "before the televised ceremony began, awards were given to so and so for best world documentary soundtrack" or some other obscure category like that.

EINHORN: And yet it always seems to be the obscure stuff that's interesting. I remember Tito Puente getting like four or five awards and the woman could never pronounce his name correctly. So bizarre.

SHAPIRO: Your harp piece *New Pages* for two harps is wonderful. It's the first thing that I heard of yours in the form of a 90-second mp3 clip. Very soothing in the way that the parts fall over one another. Is that just one harpist, multi-tracked?

EINHORN: Right. It was actually originally for piano but Elizabeth Panzer liked it so I made an arrangement for harp that basically consisted of me copying the score with a few changes for harp. It was called *New Pages* because the piece was literally a test-- I got annoyed with the manuscript paper that I was using. I couldn't find good paper so, I commissioned a graphic artist to make me new paper. I figured that the best way to see if the paper worked for me was to write a piece. I wrote *New Pages* in a day and a half. It's only about four minutes. I've always liked that piece because I had fun writing it. That must have been in the late 80's because I've since stopped caring about manuscript paper!

SHAPIRO: I should ask every composer I interview "at what point did you stop caring about the manuscript paper that you use?"

EINHORN: King brand was definitely the best! But the problem was the size. It's too big. Where can you get the paper photocopied?

SHAPIRO: The recording of your Joan of Arc piece, *Voices of Light* sold something like 85,000 to 100,000 copies. That's a pretty big deal for a classical record, you were on the Billboard charts for seven weeks!

EINHORN: Right.

SHAPIRO: And it was also successful as a live performance piece.

EINHORN: Right, it sold out. We toured it for two seasons. 1996-7. But we had had six performances before that. The premiere up in Northampton [MA] in '94 and then it came to the Brooklyn Academy of Music in '95. During the tour we had performances all over the place. Now upcoming performances are in South Africa and in Australia in the Sydney Festival. I just found out that it's going to Singapore in 2003. I never expected this. My idea of success for the project was the one everyone else has: getting a second performance. Suddenly, it seemed to touch a chord with some people. I wish I knew how I did it!

SHAPIRO: So, you wrote the music knowing it was going to be played along with the silent film?

EINHORN: It wasn't quite a film score. For me the film broke naturally into 15 sections. I wrote movements with lengths that corresponded to the length of a particular section but within that, whatever happens, happens.

SHAPIRO: It's sort of a strange story. I read something about how the film had disappeared only to be found years later in a broom closet in a mental institution.

EINHORN: Anywhere you go in the story it gets weird. The film was burned by fire twice. The film was entirely reconstructed and then burned again. But the truth of the matter is that back then that happened a lot because the materials used for the film was nitrate and so it was very flammable. I've been told that some crazy amount of silent films, like 90% of them have been destroyed because of fire. In the case of *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, of the two prints, one was sent back to Paris and one went to a collector who happened to be the head of a mental institution and it's possible that it was shown. But it's also possible that it wasn't and that it just sat there, forgotten about in Oslo.

And then one day they were cleaning out the janitors closet and they found cans of old nitrate film and they got an expert to open it up. They sent it off to the Oslo film museum and they opened it up and it was like, "Oh my god, here's this undiscovered masterpiece." Here's an original print of a masterpiece that everybody had thought had been truncated or lost in some way. It's quite a story.

SHAPIRO: The liner notes in the jacket for were generous, but not like an irritating composer going on forever about something cerebral or something like that.

EINHORN: Well, I'm sure what happens with a lot of composers is that writing the piece is actually the end of a really long process. If you write a large piece you're going to be involved with it for a long time. Discovering all of that stuff about Joan of Arc and about the movie and the text was amazing. Being able to put it all together in terms of writing the notes was like summarizing the entire story. There's a level for me where it's hard to talk about the music because I think it's either fairly obvious or it's so obscure and just a part of your process. Who's going to be interested in that? I mean, the really exciting stuff for me to talk about is the stuff that's "around" the piece. Otherwise, why would you write it? When I was at Columbia, and I don't know if this is still true, to get your doctorate you had to not only write a piece but you also had to write an analysis of the piece. That struck me as something totally wrong and it was one of the reasons why I dropped out of the program. Everyone would do the obvious thing: you'd write the analysis first and then write the music based upon that. If you write the piece first, then you'd have to then discover stupid justifications about what you're doing such as finding some sort of hexachordal bull. The bottom line is that if you write a piece and you're not really thinking in a strictly musical context then there's something seriously wrong. A lot of priorities are screwed up there because you can't really focus on the music--

SHAPIRO: --while you're trying to write something at the same time you're hoping that what you're doing is going to be approved and sanctioned by your teachers.

EINHORN: Right, it's the worst kind of audience. There are plenty of things going on in *Voices of Light*. But my favorite part of it is where I was able to reduce the language down to just a C Major chord and an A minor chord. It just alternates between those two chords. That's it! The more important thing for me at that point is what's going on there in a literary way. I'm setting words by Hildegard that say, "Oh, feminine form, how beautiful you are." There's a lot of different ways of looking at that but for me when I was writing the music I was laughing. It's like "Hey, I'm a guy, a heterosexual guy." In the seven years that the piece has been going around, nobody else has found that amusing but I always thought it was hilarious.

SHAPIRO: One time I was talking to one of my teachers at Oberlin about the Grateful Dead song "Eyes of the World" that bounced back and forth between two chords [EMaj7 and A] for like 10 minutes that I thought was fascinating. He just said, "Oh, that sounds boring."

EINHORN: Yes. The trick is to be simple. It's easy to write complicated music-- it's the easiest thing in the world. All you have to do is sit there and tally your little numbers up and it's easy. What's really hard to do is write C Major and really believe in it.

SHAPIRO: Do you think that that has something to do with the popularity of the record?

EINHORN: The fact that it's simple?

SHAPIRO: Right. I mean if you happen to know what polyrhythmic activity and other types of things like that are, you're listening to it on a certain level. But if you don't and just throw the record on and don't care about those sorts of things does that contribute to 100,000 copies sold?

EINHORN: Well, Mozart wrote this letter to his father saying that he was writing a new piece and it's got all of the details that a connoisseur would want and yet it's so simple that anyone could get it on a first hearing. That strikes me as just common sense. It's like a lot of things that Mozart wrote about his music-- when in doubt, jump an octave.

SHAPIRO: You mean leap an octave?

EINHORN: Right. It's a really common sense, natural and normal thing to do. There's nobody alive that doesn't write for an audience. It might be an ideal audience, an audience of one or 1,000. So if you don't think that people aren't going to appreciate and understand your music on many different levels You're a fool. If you listen to *The Rite of Spring*, it's like, "wow, that's amazing, listen to those rhythms. Then if you go back to it again it's the same thing, but this time it's about the chords and then it's just "who cares about the rhythms and the chords. It's all just incredible!" And it's that kind of layering that I love.

SHAPIRO: You made the record with Sony Classical. It must be nice to hook up with people like that, the sort of outfit where if they want to put up a poster up about you in Auckland, they can do easily. There are people that would give up body parts to get that sort of deal. But you said in your notes that when you were asked by Sony to give them the music you said no!

EINHORN: To this day the whole thing still blows my mind. You have to look at it from my point of view and then from Peter Gelb's [the head of Sony Classical] point of view. Again, from my point of view, I'm just happy that there's been a second performance. The piece is impossibly expensive and it costs a fortune to promote it since to mount the piece you've got to get an orchestra and chorus you've got to get four soloists. If you're going to do it with the film you've got to rent it and you've got to find a hall big enough for it. You've got to fund raise like crazy. Who has the money to do this? The other half of it is that it's too expensive to record. Why go through all the aggravation to sell only 4,000 records?

Why go through all of the aggravation and all of the upset and the worry of finding out whether or not you're going to get accepted by a label when you know as a foregone conclusion that it will never happen? But now look at it from Peter's point of view. What big record companies want are big projects. Why? Because big projects attract big publicity.

SHAPIRO: The broom closet story must have been good for a few articles.

EINHORN: Right. They don't want little projects. They don't want recordings of the chamber music of Louis Spohr. They can't afford to record it. But what they can afford to record is stuff that can somehow make a splash in the major press. From Peter's standpoint, here was an undiscovered film and a large piece that could attract large orchestras and good soloists.

SHAPIRO: The movie helps because it's Joan of Arc and it's a good movie--

EINHORN: --and nobody has seen it and there's an amazing story to it. By sheer accident I had done something that was of interest to a large company. It was a six-year effort but I knew I would do a good job and that it would be successful.

SHAPIRO: Was the Sony stuff going on before or after you wrote the piece?

EINHORN: After. Nobody is interested in an idea. They're interested in objects. I think that there was nobody who believed less that it would actually get recorded than me. I didn't believe it until I was on the plane going over to Holland! A great thing in all of this was meeting a lot of different people who had totally different takes on the piece. I've heard a lot of different groups do the piece in totally different ways as well as hearing feedback from audiences that heard totally different things in the piece.

SHAPIRO: Like the difference in the reactions from the Brooklyn Academy of Music and then somewhere else.

EINHORN: Like Elgin, Illinois. Two very different audiences - as big a difference you can imagine. Elgin is a working class town; they have a choir that's been together for 50 years. It was the 50th anniversary of the choir and they decided to perform "Voices of Light." BAM was great. It's a wonderful place and all of my friends were there. It was like a dream. I thought that it would be an ideal sort of thing for the Next Wave Festival but it never occurred to me that I'd be in a position where that could happen. But I got very lucky and it happened and it was one of the best experiences that I've had with the piece. So if you take an audience like that which is very sophisticated and demands an awful lot and then take an audience like Elgin which is a rural area pretty far away from Chicago, it's a totally different thing. Elgin is a working class, heartland sort of place. There are probably no Catholics around so Joan of Arc isn't connecting immediately to them. So the piece means different things to different people, which, by the way, is a good reason to have a second performance. You get different insights into how your music comes across.

SHAPIRO: So, a couple of years after finishing up at Columbia you produced a Meredith Monk record.

EINHORN: Well, at that time she was a friend of a friend's girlfriend who was in one of Meredith's early singing groups. Meredith needed someone to produce some demo tapes and so she suggested me. I went down and met her and then one thing led to another and I ended up producing a record for her called *Tablet and Songs from the Hill*. They're both beautiful pieces. She's amazing. A genius.

SHAPIRO: I wonder how you assemble your texts. For instance, the text of *Carnival of Miracles*.

EINHORN: I'm very proud of that text. The choices are really carefully done. Typically I'll read thousands of pages in order to get one sentence.

SHAPIRO: Do you read with a highlighter in hand?

EINHORN: Yes. And another thing that I do is type them into a word processor. I like the collage method. What interests me about the text in "Carnival" is the way that people construct emotional meanings from where text comes from. For instance, if you know that a bit of text comes from someone that you like, you think you like it. But if the text is coming from a place that you don't like then you don't like the idea. So, in *Carnival of Miracles* I played with that idea by taking a text by Victoria Woodhull, a feminist, and I mixed and matched it with a quote from the Marquis de Sade. Most of us would agree that your right to love or not love is almost an inalienable right. But when the Marquis de Sade says it then it means something totally different! The idea is that the listener's perception as to what is good and correct and proper gets screwed up. Right now I'm doing something with Old Testament, New Testament and Qu'ran text with the Albany Symphony. Having those texts side by side, someone will listen to it and not know -- I don't even know anymore -- which text is coming from which source.

SHAPIRO: It's all in English?

EINHORN: Yes, for two reasons: one so that it can be understood. The other reason is because there's a tradition in Islam that the Qu'ran cannot be translated -- to translate it into something else is basically to distort the word of God. So, in a sense, translating the word of God is, in effect, corrupting it. I wanted to address that.

SHAPIRO: When is it going to be performed?

EINHORN: September 12, 13, and 15.

SHAPIRO: For *Carnival of Miracles*, what is it that brings all of the texts together? They're from such diverse places.

EINHORN: The texts are all connected by the idea of freedom. It's a very strange collection of texts that all deal with different aspects of freedom. I started with the text from "The Thunder: Perfect Mind" from the Gnostic Gospels. I knew the texts for many, many years and I loved it because that stuff stood for the notion that there isn't a mediator between you and whatever you think of as being God. That's a very strange notion, particularly in Christianity because you need Christ and the Church as your mediator in your own striving towards God. The Gnostics took away that mediator and gave a sort of direct pipeline to God that gives one a different sort of freedom, one that you don't have otherwise. Then I found a Szymborska poem from 1986. I created an abridgment of it because I needed a certain length. The poem is about all of these very simple miracles, the final one being that the unthinkable can be thought. After reading it for the first time I thought, that's a beautiful poem, why is it affecting me the way that it is? I was really crying when I finished it and I thought that it was about possibility.

SHAPIRO: Like about what was going on in Poland at that time.

EINHORN: Exactly. Then I bought a Polish dictionary and I looked up the words.

SHAPIRO: You made the translation yourself?

EINHORN: No, I found an English version but I checked it out for myself to see if any of the words had alternate meanings. Many of the words were almost like a code talking about gaining freedom from an oppressive regime. I realized then that the juxtaposition of that poem with the one from the Gnostics gave me a great thing to hang a piece of music on--the notion of different kinds of freedoms. Some of these conflict with each other, like religious and scientific freedom in the sense of the Galileo quote that I used "...and yet it moves". So at that point I'm forced with the issues of how I can make all of these aspects come out succinctly. With Galileo it's easy. If you know his story all you have to say is his one statement that sums up the entire story.

SHAPIRO: What about the Beethoven quote, "Does he suppose that I am thinking about his miserable violin when the spirit is speaking to me?"

EINHORN: Well, with him obviously that's talking about artistic freedom which is something that we all cherish. It sort of goes back to Beethoven in a way. He's saying what do I care about your damn fiddle when the spirit is running through me? It's sort of true but it's also pompous and self-important. So I wanted to poke some fun at that.

SHAPIRO: Would it be true to say that for you, it all goes back to the text?

EINHORN: Well, these days it's totally true but one of my favorite pieces that I've done is *The Silence* which doesn't have text. It's a piece for double string quartet that I feel was a big breakthrough. It was such a pain to get a quartet together so when it finally came around to writing for string quartet I figured I might as well get two for the price of one. So I expanded it.

SHAPIRO: What about your film scoring in Los Angeles?

EINHORN: Getting into that business is a really great way to lower your self-esteem quickly because everybody will try to use you as a punching bag.

SHAPIRO: But if you have written something like *Voices of Light* and loads of other things outside of that business then it's like producers and directors want you to give them your "sound."

EINHORN: Right, when they call you up there's a sort of built in understanding where it's like you do what you do. The best way I've found to deal with the film business is entirely on your own terms. But that doesn't mean acting like a fool-- it means knowing what your music is and knowing what you'd like to contribute musically to a specific project. Just like with chamber music or ballet or opera or whatever. If you don't and you're sensitive in some way you can be ripped to shreds because there is so much money and ego there and it attracts very unstable people who are in positions of power. Most films that come out every year are really bad. And then there are a handful of them that are really good and they don't necessarily correlate with money but to some extent they do. And of those films, unless you're an incredible chameleon, you're only qualified for like one or two of those films at best. And the amount of money that you'll make from it very quickly wears off when you realize how much work is involved.

SHAPIRO: So if you were going out to L.A. and you wanted to try it what would you do? If there are a just a few of movies that would be "in my pocket," how do you go about finding them and become friends with the people that are making them?

EINHORN: The best way of getting a shot there when you're young is to write absolutely the best music that you can, no matter what the project is and then to get it recorded in the most professional way that you can, with the best players, the best sound, edited, mixed, etc. Put that stuff on a demo tape and blow everybody away. That's the best thing to do. But there are so many other better things to do with your life-- it's awful work. You're talking about six to eight weeks of 14-hour days. You don't see your significant other and you don't eat well. It's tremendous stress and the deadlines are awful. And besides, at the end, the music gets drowned out by a garbage can or something--

SHAPIRO: --or, I'm sure this has happened to you, when I've composed cues for closing credits or even for something that's going inside the film, the director or producer ends up using that music for a different part of the film.

EINHORN: There's a level at which that is done. Today, when you're talking about the whole filmmaker, director, editor, producer world, you're talking about very unsophisticated people unless they're really great. It's amazing the movies that they don't know! And they really need to know them. But the best filmmakers that I've worked with know what they're doing. Arthur Penn knows exactly what he's doing as do Kathryn Bigelow and Walter Murch. They can draw from a lot of stuff and the best part is you can learn a lot about drama, theater and film making from them. But you'll often work with someone who hasn't seen the major Bergman films or hasn't even seen Hitchcock films. More often than not they've reinvented the wheel, meaning that by accident, they've done something that someone did 10 or 15 years ago. You have to contrast that with someone who knows what they're doing when they take your music and move it from point A to point B. If they've done great work in the past you trust their sensibility insofar as when they move your music around you realize that it's actually not too bad an idea and you wish you'd thought of it! But it's very rare that you run across something like that. For me, what happened was that I went from one bad movie to another and it didn't matter how good my work was.

SHAPIRO: What year are we talking about?

EINHORN: Mid-80's. I would get great reviews in *Variety* and *Hollywood Reporter* and my friends would see the movies and love the music, but who cares? The movies were terrible. They were unwatchable. When they start praising the music you know something is really bad. That's what happened. Not every time but a lot of times. I got fed up with it.

SHAPIRO: So there's nothing on your screen right now in film music?

EINHORN: Yes, but some of *Voices of Light* was used in *K-19*, the Harrison Ford film. I think that the music is used brilliantly. Totally differently than I would have ever expected. They said they were going to mash it up and I thought, oh shit. But then I heard that Walter Murch was going to do it --he's a brilliant man, the editor of *Apocalypse Now* and *The Conversation* -- and so I thought to myself he can do whatever he wants! And then I met Walter and Kathryn Bigelow. They said, you've got to understand, we've really mashed it up. I was really worried by that point but it was great. I told Walter that I had wished that I had thought of some counterpoint he created. He had layered two different sections of *Voices of Light* on top of one another and it was really wonderful. So, when you work with really good artists, the best thing you can do is just stay out of people's way. They know the same thing about you. For instance, when I was working with Arthur Penn, he absolutely did not want to hear every piece of music. He said, we'll deal with it later and he gave me carte blanche.

SHAPIRO: So, you never had a spotting session or something like that before starting your end of things?

EINHORN: Right.

SHAPIRO: I don't really like spotting sessions. You have to sit there and pretend to be things that you're not and prove yourself by saying the key phrase that's going to make the director and the producer say yes to you being brought on to the project.

EINHORN: Sometimes there are good things that can come out of spotting sessions. Your best bet is to talk their language. By the way, that's always a pretty good idea, I've found. If you're talking to a performer that's playing your music and you start talking about flowers in the fields and your personal reasons for writing this greatest of your great masterpieces, sooner or later, a player is just going to say, "Would you mind telling me the tempo please?" Tell people what they need to hear in order to get their job done. It's common sense but I think that that's something that takes a while for some people to learn.

SHAPIRO: Are you someone that looks to very old music as inspiration and then really modern stuff as inspiration and not really much in between?

EINHORN: It seems that everybody I know of my generation, with some notable exceptions has almost the same template of taste. Somewhere around Bach our interest starts to wane and by the time you get to Liszt we're just totally uninterested and then it picks up a lot with Debussy and Stravinsky. Then when you get to 1950 it starts to--

SHAPIRO: -- get bad again?

EINHORN: Get very exciting! It was very exciting music for us to be listening to at that time. Of course tonality reared its head again but with exciting rhythms. *Gesang der Junglinge* was something that I listened to obsessively. *Telemusik*, which hardly anyone knows, is another electronic piece of Stockhausen's that I love but it would be hard to know that from listening to the music that I write now. With Boulez, I didn't really know that much of it when I was a kid but I've started to listen to more of it and then of course rock music which transformed everything.

SHAPIRO: What songwriters do you like?

EINHORN: PJ Harvey. Kate Bush is as great a songwriter as Gershwin or Schubert. She's a genius. It's hard to believe that she's someone who is totally unsellable in the United States. You can't give her records away here. She's fantastic. With PJ Harvey, for the kinds of songs that I like she's enormously talented. My interest in pop music peaked with Frank Zappa and Captain Beefheart. But that was in 1971. That's when I started to turn away. I came back up again with the Talking Heads but then turned away until Kate Bush.

SHAPIRO: It said on your website that you like Nirvana.

EINHORN: Yes! I like that stuff. I'm also an obsessive Captain Beefheart fan, of course. Wonderful! I went to Gary Lucas's show where he did Beefheart covers. I interviewed Beefheart when I was 19. I had a chance to do that when I was working at a radio station. One of the high points of my life!

# Concert Reviews

## Three (or Four) Great Orchestrators

MARK ALBURGER

San Francisco Symphony, conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas, in John Adams's *My Father Knew Charles Ives* and Igor Stravinsky's *Violin Concerto*, with Hilary Hahn. May 1, Davies Hall, San Francisco, CA.

It was a showcase of great and varied orchestrators last week at the San Francisco Symphony (May 1, Davies Hall). The most traditional was Peter Tchaikovsky, in his "Suite No. 3," which was heard to lovely effect as well on another recent earlier concert.

Perhaps Tchaikovsky's most recent avatar is John Adams, whose orchestrations are relatively colorful and excellent. But in Adams's *My Father Knew Charles Ives*, heard in its premiere, the early 20th-century New Englander appears a close collaborator. Adams offers an expert homage to Ives, and the three movements -- "Concord," "The Lake," and "The Mountain" -- seem to be, as the composer acknowledges, *Three Places Farther North in New England*. The Berkeleyan is almost too good at what he does: sometimes the music seems like undiscovered Ives; but in the most engaging sections, Adams brings his own post-minimalism into the mix for telling syncretic effects.

Igor Stravinsky was in many ways another mix-and-match composer in terms of stylistic influence but, like in Adams, the varied influences always add up to a very distinct personality. Stravinsky's neoclassic *Violin Concerto*, with the youthfully virtuosic Hilary Hahn, is as singular in the repertory as can be imagined. Conductor Michael Tilson Thomas clearly delineated all the details of line and motion, from the pungent wind solos that open the accompaniment, to the spiky, athletic string pulsations that pop up toward the conclusion. Throughout, Hahn plunged into the music in full commitment to its wayward energy. This was a tour de force for conductor, orchestra, and soloist.

## Symphonies from Symphony

MARK ALBURGER

These days, it's not often that one goes to the Symphony and hears virtually nothing but symphonies, but such was the case this past week (February 6-8) when Mstislav Rostropovich conducted the San Francisco Symphony in symphonies by Sergei Prokofiev and Dmitri Shostakovich.

It was not to have been. The program billed a major work by Henri Dutilleux, which evidently was shelved due to lack of rehearsal time. Instead, after a very brief curtain raiser by the same composer ushered in an 11th-hour reading of Prokofiev's Symphony No. 1 ("Classical") which still manifested charm and elan, despite relatively slow tempi and a rather ponderous rendition of the witty third-movement scherzo.

The main bill of fare was the Shostakovich Symphony No. 8, where ponderousness, not to mention portentousness and pomposity were the welcome order of the evening. The late soviet modeled the first movement of this work somewhat along the lines of a combo plate of his previous fifth and sixth symphonic endeavors, the former for structure and the latter for length -- and in all there is a Russian mid-20th-century updating of Gustav Mahler. Like the Symphony No. 5, this later work has a dotted introductory figure; a mysterious descending first theme for first violins; a lyrical second melody (also violins) accompanied by pulsating drone figures in low strings; and an actively elaborate development for the full orchestra. It still sounds a bit like a TV episode blown up into a movie, but it is not without interest to dedicated listeners.

The second and third movements are both parodies, and here Rostropovich's heavy-handedness served in good stead. Brutal triads and shrieks capture the tone of Shostakovich's depiction of hells both personal and political, and there is a certain testosterone-addled sensibility that is impressively relentless. It all makes sense in an alternate-universe sort of way. So does the somber passacaglia of the ensuing section and the blithely out-of-touch finale, which seems to whistle in the dark (as Mahler also did at times) against the raging atrocities of fortune.

All in all, Slava, the boisterous cellist-turned-conductor, made a good showing with repertory from the old regime. Despite the commonalities seemingly implied by two symphonies by two mid-20th-century Russians, there was plenty of variety and interest.

# Glass Glass Glass

## MICHAEL MCDONAGH

Philip Glass. June 18, American Repertory Theatre, Cambridge, MA..

Philip Glass is often accused of repeating himself. But his numerous projects -- especially his music theatre ones -- are remarkably varied in terms of both dramatic intent and expressive affect. Each sets up its own distinct terms, and each succeeds or fails according to how well he's worked out or left open its inherent tensions. Despite its origins as a pair of 1983 Japan-set 1-acters by David Henry Hwang, Glass's latest music theatre project turns out to be something of a hybrid. He doesn't approach it as a well-made play, but one which has psychological undercurrents its four obsessive characters -- two each in *The Sound Of A Voice*, and *House of the Sleeping Beauties* (here re-named *Hotel Of Dreams*) -- can only hint at. Glass achieves this end by making subtle and very evocative use of an orchestra of four, who play flute, bamboo flute, piccolo; pipa; cello; and a large and highly varied battery of percussion which includes both western and non-western instruments, like the tar, which is a circular framed drum found in the Arab world, and the goblet-shaped dumbeck, also found in that part of the world. This is a mini orchestra, and far smaller than the ones Monteverdi used in his operas, which get their expressive power from pinpoint solos and subtle mixtures, as Glass does here.

Glass's instrumentation locates the story both ethnically and psychologically. His writing for Wu Man's pipa conjures up exotic distances and scary intimacies. The scoring for three winds (all played by Susan Gall) adds yearning and nostalgia to the mix, while the music for cello (Rebecca Patterson) is mostly used for rhythmic support and harmonic color.

Glass's orchestration also functions as a kind of window into the characters -- the loneliness of the unnamed woman (soprano Suzan Hanson) and the strained elegance of the madame of the brothel (mezzo Janice Felty). The wandering samurai in *Sound* (bass-baritone Herbert Perry) tends to get more aggressive music, while that for the visiting elderly novelist Yamamoto (baritone Eugene) is quite citified.

Glass also gives each of the two halves -- both are about fifty minutes long -- a specific yet complementary character. The first is in nine compact scenes, while the second has four, and you could say that *Sound* focuses primarily on rhythmic variations, and *Hotel* on melodic ones. But the kicker here is Hwang's text, which tends to be flat, even neutral, and was obviously a challenge for Glass, who decided to make the vocal lines as conversational as possible, but also obviously sung. This makes for a certain monotony, except when he gets to set longer, more excited lines. His singers managed their parts with aplomb, though Hanson tended to over sing the strong but mysterious character she played. Her acting, however, could not be faulted, nor can her definite and very strong stage presence. The Perry brothers, though sometimes given less intrinsically interesting music, fared better. Felty did wonders within the carefully calibrated yet highly dramatic range of her part. Glass ended her role in *Hotel* with a stunning vocalise, which expressed all the pain and sorrow her character had been covering up. Glass's dramatic instincts were in high gear here, with fascinating and highly nuanced sounds emerging from the pit band directed with spot-on clarity and urgency by Alan Johnson.

# Holding Its Own

MICHAEL McDONAGH

*The A Team*, works by Thomas Ades and John Adams, Marin Alsop, conducting the orchestra of the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music. August 9, Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium, Santa Cruz, CA.

Cabrillo's organizers had the clever idea of calling the August 9 concert *The "A" Team*, which conjoined and contrasted the widely dissimilar compositional styles of John Adams and Thomas Ades.

While the three Ades pieces presented here weren't theatrical, they did show an instinctive grasp of timing. The first, "... but all shall be well" (1993), draws its inspiration from the last of Eliot's *Four Quartets*. It's a slow, somber ten-minute meditation on sin, death, and eternity, and an exploration of the power of perfect fifths. Music director Marin Alsop is obviously a believer in Ades's merits. But opening with a piece this serious was like being confronted with a heavy main course, when a tantalizing appetizer would do. Its start-and-stop melodies, and its shifting straying line would challenge any conductor, and certainly seemed to do so here. And though the sudden *tutti*s provided strong cadences, the piece as a whole sounded tentative -- and a bit underehearsed -- as if God couldn't make up his mind at the pearly gates. Things improved with yet another dour yet virtuosic seven-minute meditation for solo piano, *Darknesse Visible* (1992). Christopher O'Riley prefaced his performance with an intro so enthusiastic that we expected the piece to be an anticlimactic dud. Well, it wasn't, and Ades's writing for piano was both idiomatic and full of carefully weighted sonorities which comment on John Dowland's lute song "In Darknesse Let Mee Dwell" (1610), and the piece never outstays its welcome. The same could be said of the ten-minute *Concerto Conciso* (1997), for piano and ten-member ensemble, which thankfully, wasn't somber at all, but full of wit and high color. The collision between different kinds of classical and vernacular musics was vigorous -- especially the New Orleans jazz bits -- and imaginative.

The piano, though obviously a starring player, was also a supporting one too, as it is in Ravel's two concertos and Alex North's single essay in this form. Riley was again the redoubtable soloist, and Alsop and her concertmaster Yumi Hwang-Williams untangled its rhythmic difficulties. Still, we had the nagging suspicion that Ades, like many other British composers, makes something of a fetish of the past.

Or, as Gertrude Stein remarks in her lecture, *What is English Literature* (1935) -- "They (the British) thought about what they were thinking and if you think about what you are thinking you are bound to think about it in phrases, because if you think about what you are thinking you are not thinking about a whole thing." You're explaining, and in a slightly academic way you're promoting what you know, instead of moving into what you don't.

Adams, who's as erudite as Ades, has a penchant for using 19th-century forms, and tweaking them to 20th-, and now 21st-century ends. His weaker pieces, like the hugely inexpressive and deeply self-conscious *Violin Concerto* (1993), fail to put any new, much less personal, wine into the old bottles, while the stronger ones, like his piano concerto, *Century Rolls* (1996), are highly effective and entertaining too. Though that one is almost pastiche, Adams is clever enough to make it work on his own terms. Though his two pieces here seem like concertos, they're really free fantasies by a post-modern Romantic. The 15-minute *Eros Piano* (1989) is the composer's response to Takemitsu's Joyce-inspired *Riverrun* (1989), and Adams says it begins "exactly where (it) ends, with the falling motive of perfect fifths." The resultant work is full of lush pedal points, and textures both sonorous and evocative. It was like being trapped in a really beautiful dream, full of circular and never fully resolved harmonic gestures. O'Riley and the festival orchestra made these feel almost miraculously tactile.

The 24-minute *A Guide to Strange Places* (2001), which got its West Coast premiere here, felt just as unconscious. And its developmental plan seemed, paradoxically enough, both non-rational and completely thought out. Adams has honed his orchestral skills over the years so that his instrumental mixtures give real pleasure. His writing for each choir here was both distinctive and expressive, with especially striking passages for mixed winds and brass. And though Adams' Guide has references and steals galore -- we think we heard the *Petrushka* chord and some stamping ones from *Sacre* -- these are knit into whole cloth. Adams sometimes approaches the orchestra as a big band. There was some of that kind of writing here, and this abutted and happily co-existed with more conventional writing, just as these two kinds of musics are on speaking terms in Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*. Alsop's orchestra gave it their all and the audience went wild. Although the all-purpose Civic is basically unfriendly to music, most of the sounds were hearable -- we sat in two different parts of the hall -- and had punch. Tom Ontiveros's lighting design, a la that used for Kronos by their designer, gave visual distinction to the proceedings.

# Record Reviews

## The Gorgeous White North

MARK ALBURGER

John Luther Adams. *In the White Silence*. The Oberlin Contemporary Music Ensemble, conducted by Tim Weiss. New World Records.

John Luther Adams. *The Light That Fills the World* [The Farthest Place. The Light That Fills the World. The Immeasurable Space of Tones]. Cold Blue Music.

The longer John Luther Adams lives in Alaska, the more beautiful his music becomes. The white silence and the alternately lush and austere landscapes have taken over. The soaring, heroic mountains and the seemingly limitless flatlands have made their sonic affects.

*In the White Silence*, from Tim Weiss and the Oberlin Contemporary Music Ensemble [New World], is paradoxically impersonal yet deeply felt. It has the sheer gorgeous stillness of some of that other John Adams (the world of the slow motion "Onward Christian Soldiers") and Ingram Marshall, and the monumental time scales of Morton Feldman and La Monte Young. As in Harold Budd, this music is unapologetically sensuous; as in Charles Ives, there are spiritual polymeters. Sustained strings, as in Aaron Copland and Steve Reich lay down a bed, over which more active lines wend their way (in this case, often metalophones and harp). The music is a 75:15 tonic for what ails you.

The same qualities permeate the second Adams release -- this one from Cold Blue -- *The Light That Fills the World*. This is blindingly beautiful, a fullness that sustains the spirit in peace and quite energy. The three titles (*The Farthest Place*, *The Light That Fills the World*, and *The Immeasurable Space of Tones*) are sumptuously performed by Marty Walker (bass clarinet), Amy Knoles (vibraphone and marimba), Bryan Pezzone (piano), Nathaniel Reichman (electronic keyboard and sound design), Robin Lorentz (violin), and Barry Newton (double bass). The overall atmosphere is hushed and expectant, with sustained bass clarinet, electronic keyboard, and strings against mallet tremoli). But there is danger, grandeur, mystery, and power, too: a searing Great White sensuality that cannot be ignored.

## New Hat

MARK ALBURGER

*The Shock of the Old: Common Sense Composers' Collective and American Baroque* [Belinda Reynolds. *Circa*. Marc Mellits. *9 Miniatures*. Randall Woolf. *Artificial Light*. Dan Becker. *Tamper Resistant*. Carolyn Yarnell. *More Spirit Than Matter*.... John Halle. *Spooks*. Melissa Hui. *Shall We Go?* Ed Harsh. *Authentically Classic*]. American Baroque. Santa Fe Music Group.

Common Sense Composers Collective has done it again: another engaging collaboration, this time with American Baroque in *The Shock of the Old* [Santa Fe Music Group]. The "old" to some ears, however, is perhaps not the fresh sounds of early-music instruments in these new contexts, but how much classic minimalism gets woven into the mix. Steve Reich and Philip Glass, whose definitive early-minimalist works are now a good three or four decades old, are very much present tense here.

Belinda Reynolds begins with an evocative and stimulating *Circa*, which weaves all manner of lushness into a 7-minute Reichian revel. Mark Mellits offers 9 pithy Glassian and sparkling *Miniatures*. Among the highlights are the hilarious "Lunacy" (a kind of mad cinematic romp), the wandering "Nomadic," the good-spirited pointilism of "Lego," and the folkish-baroque "Elegy for Lefty," left in a lurch. Randall Wolff follows in the electro-acoustic deconstruction *Artificial Light* -- Lukas Foss *Baroque Variations* for a younger minimalist-techno generation -- lovely, funny, frightening.

For sheer fun and good spirits, plus a deep sensitivity, one can turn to Dan Becker in his *Tamper Resistant*, a respectful deconstruction that celebrates rather than violates. Paradoxically this is the closest to the old notion of "parody," in that Becker incorporates not only melodies but wholesale harmonizations into his strategy. This all makes a nice dovetail into Carolyn Yarnell's brooding, hip *More Spirit Than Matters*... with its pop phrasings, quirky syncopations, and meditative meanderings.

John Halle's *Spooks* is like a Kronos Quartet hoe-down, pulsating and hocket-hiccupping with energy, evolving into a wonderful train-wreck of a piece: bells and whistles, chugs and slugs. Melissa Hui checks in with one of her trademarked hushed-atmospheric oeuvres, *Shall We Go?*, which manages to find the Eastasian connections to the early European consort -- Hovhaness meditated along similar paths. Ed Harsh lives up to his name in the baroquely and brusquely stirring *Authentically Classic*. The marked dotted rhythms not only are resonant of the old French overture but have surprisingly Spanish overtones. Andrea Fullington's fully resonant soprano tones are ver effective in the sustains. Purcell would be proud, even in the pop Jean-Baptiste Lully / Louis XIV bits.

## Remix Remix

### MARK ALBURGER

Mark Applebaum. *The Janus ReMixes: Exercises in Auto-Plundering* [Narcissus ReMix. Mt. Moriah ReMix. Dead White Males ReMix. Triple ReMix. Anesthesia ReMix. Elegy ReMix. Sargasso ReMix. Scipio ReMix. Tlon ReMix. Chameleon ReMix. Janus ReMix]. Innova.

The good composer steals, according to the Igor Stravinsky bon mot, or was that stolen from Pablo Picasso? But does the good composer steal from himself? Apparently that has been the case for some, including Sergei Prokofiev, and now Mark Applebaum in *The Janus ReMixes: Exercises in Auto-Plundering* [Innova].

Appropriation and cannibalism (artistic and otherwise) are perhaps ever-present notions, receiving new attention in these days of post-modernism, hip-hop, and cultural pluralism. Applebaum proves a master in the ongoing debate, and his auto is a fast, shiny one zooming through the artistic night -- downright erotic.

From the sliding cascades and funky rhythms of *Narcissus Remix* to the stately Noh and craggy spaciness of *Janus ReMix*, nothing is quite what it seems, thanks to the wonders of electronics. There are plenty of adventures along the way -- diabolic industrial Crumb strings in *Mt. Moriah*, a Stravinsky brass band with a minimalist descending minor third for *Dead White Males* (although Glass is still with us), and an eerie Ligetian (though at times almost mellow with a hint of a backbeat) *Triple..* Applebaum's ties with Mississippi, where he taught in the mid-90's, seem clear in the bumpitous country ornithology of *Anesthesia*, and the composer gets down in the riffs of *Sargasso*. The amazingly wet sounds of the *Tlon Remix* are mostly those of altered page turns and conductorly grunts. In all this the composer clearly bumps up against other personalities and times. Despite the intentional limitations of self-thievery, truly no individual is an artistic island.. There's "evil" and "good" music aplenty -- decidedly uncommercial and engaging.

## Bentley to the Bow

### PHILLIP GEORGE

Karen Bentley. *Dancing Suite to Suite* [Ole Pullar Saxe. Dance Suite for Solo Violin]. Neptunus/Ariel.

Stuart Diamond. *Konzerto. Succubus.* Karen Bentley and Kerry Walsh. Electronic Artists.

"Grand Ole Saxe" is what came to mind listening to Karen Bentley's grand violin playing in Ole Pullar Saxe's *Dancing Suite for Solo Violin* [Neptunus/Ariel], dedicated to the performer.

The William Burroughs character "Old Bull Lee," from Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* also came to mind, for this is sprightly music that might have roused the old drug addict from his revels.

Written in the spirit of a J.S. Bach unaccompanied dance suite, this music is similarly rich in contrapuntal and multicultural implications. Just as the old baroque composer made the rounds of English, French, German, and Italian dances -- so Ole Saxe takes a world tour that includes flamenco, jig, rhumba, salsa, tango, and ziga (the latter Bosnian). This is engaging music that never touches on the tedium sometimes encountered in unaccompanied contexts.

About the opposite end of the accessible-contemporary music spectrum, in terms of density, is Bentley's collaborations with composer Stuart Diamond in *Konzerto / Succubus* (Electronic Artists Records). The music of the first title is very cinematic / new age in lush textures of electric violin and synthesizer orchestra. Romantic, upbeat, this is a work that pulls no punches in its melodramatic effects. A darker, yet related world is evoked in *Succubus* (a medieval female demon), with ethereal soprano solos delivered by Kerry Walsh.

Watch yourself, or you'll get carried away by the music to mysterious lands. Bentley is at her virtuosic best in both of these albums, which are very listenable.

## Steady as He Goes

### MARK ALBURGER

Michael Byron. *Awakening at the Inn of the Birds* [Continents of City and Love. Tidal. Evaporated Pleasure. Awakening at the Inn of the Birds. As She Sleeps]. Sarah Cahill and Joseph Kubera, piano, Kathleen Supové, synthesizer; FLUX Quartet, Gregg August, contrabass. Cold Blue Music..

"Steady-State" and "Trance" were early terms used to apply to minimalism, and they seem appropriate when reveling in the sonic worlds of Michael Byron, whose *Awakening at the Inn of the Birds* calms and stimulates. The composer could hardly have better advocates for his artistry: pianists Sarah Cahill and Joseph Kubera in Continents of City and Love and Tidal -- two works separated by 20 years (2001 and 1981, respectively) but with related aesthetics -- supported by ethereal sustains from the FLUX QUARTET, synthesizerist Kathleen Supové and bassist Gregg August.

The string quietude evokes the calmer sides of Philip Glass, Charles Ives, Ingram Marshall, and Steve Reich in a unique combination further dressed up by piano filigree. On the other hand, *Evaporated Pleasure* leaves hard Nancarrowesque nuggets splayed all over pianistic landscape. Very disturbing. Mad. And impressively maintained. Bang bang. And the fevered stringish *Awakening at the Inn of the Birds* sounds like a medieval bee factory (probably all the perfect intervals and trills). O.K., it's supposed to be aviary but I hear apiary...

However you hear it, it's stunning. Talk about your rude awakenings. Imagining a rising to this at a B&B and you're definitely talking money back. On the other hand, listening to this wide awake on a stereo, and it's a fascinating listen.

The final cut -- *As She Sleeps* -- is all hush hush from Sarah Cahill (a cycle of four cells) as a perfect antidote, the birds having finally flown the coop.

## Calendar

October 2

Michael Tilson Thomas conducts the San Francisco Symphony in Colin Matthews's *Reflected Images*. Davies Hall, San Francisco, CA.

October 3

*Composer Portraits.* Peter Lieberson. Miller Theatre, Columbia University, New York, NY.

October 11

*Big Bang.* NACUSA presents Pacific Sticks in Anne Baldwin's *The Frogs are Singing in the Lily Pond*, Sondra Clark's *Summer Scenes*, Ilana Cotton's *Women's Voices, Women's Words*, Steve Ettinger's *Kotekan Jam*, Herb Gellis's *Air*, Lorie Griswold's *Our Life Sails on the Uncrossed Sea* and *this is the garden*, Yu Hong Ja's *Oriental Rhapsody*, Warner Jepson's *Judy Jolly*, and Dale Victorine's *Temple Garden*. Art Center, Palo Alto, CA.

October 16

*Bowling Green New Music and Art Festival.* State University, Bowling Green, OH.

October 19

Diablo College Chamber Orchestra and San Francisco Composers Chamber Orchestra in Mark Alburger's *Camino Real Prologue*, Anne Baldwin's *Veteran's Day*, Stan McDaniel's *Rain*, Lisa Scola Prosek's *Chilkat*, Jan Pusima's *Wind Quartet*, Igor Stravinsky's *Histoire du Soldat*, Kurt Weill's *Threepenny Opera Overture*, Ralph Vaughan Williams's *Symphony No. 8* and *The Wasps*. Performing Arts Center, Diablo Valley College, Pleasant Hill, CA.

October 22

Evelyn Glennie in Chen Yi's *Percussion Concerto*. Davies Hall, San Francisco, CA.

## Chronicle

August 5

Death of Metropolitan Opera vocal coach Walter Taussig, at 95. New York, NY.

## Writers

MARK ALBURGER is an eclectic American composer of postminimal, postpopular, and postcomedic sensibilities. He is Editor-Publisher of 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC, an award-winning ASCAP composer of concert music published by New Music, oboist, pianist, vocalist, recording artist, musicologist, author, and music critic. His *Camino Real Prologue* will be performed on October 19 by the San Francisco Composers Chamber Orchestra.

PHILLIP GEORGE is an editor for New Music, and serves on the staff of 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC.

MICHAEL MCDONAGH is a San Francisco-based poet and writer on the arts who has done two poem/picture books with artist Gary Bukovnik, *Before I Forget* (1991) and *Once* (1997), the former being in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, The Berkeley Art Museum, and the New York Public Library. He has also published poems in journals including *Mirage*, and written two theatre pieces -- *Touch and Go*, for three performers, which was staged at Venue 9 in 1998; and *Sight Unseen*, for solo performer. His critical pieces have appeared in the San Francisco Chronicle, San Francisco Review of Books, 3 Penny Review, California Printmaker, Antiques and Fine Art, The Advocate, High Performance, and In Tune. He writes for The Bay Area Reporter and heads the Bay Area chapter of The Duke Ellington Society. He co-hosted nine radio shows on KUSF with Tony Gualtieri with whom he now shares a classical-music review website -- [www.msu.edu/user/gaultie3](http://www.msu.edu/user/gaultie3) -- which has also been translated into Russian and appears in Intellectual Forum.

ANDREW SHAPIRO (b. 1975, New York City) holds a degree in music composition from the Oberlin Conservatory. Shapiro lives in New York where he composes for a variety of different areas including dance pieces, film scores, the concert hall, and club bookings with his group, ShapiroEnsemble.