

# 21ST CENTURY MUSIC

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DECEMBER 2004

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# Cold Blue Fink

## MARK ALBURGER

Michael Jon Fink (b. 12/7/54, Los Angeles) has three releases out on the Cold Blue label. I spoke with him recently by phone about life, the universe, and everything.

ALBURGER: Perhaps we should start with what the Cold Blue label notoriously lacks: bio and program notes!

FINK: I've heard that complaint before! I was born and raised in Los Angeles. I studied guitar growing up and playing in bands.

ALBURGER: What kind of music did you play?

FINK: Just rock stuff, from I'd say the mid to late 60's.

ALBURGER: Specifically?

FINK: I was listening to Jimi Hendrix, Cream, and The Yardbirds. I was an aspiring guitarist, so I was covering as best I could!

ALBURGER: Particular favorite songs or albums?

FINK: Early Led Zeppelin, the first three Cream albums, and all of Hendrix. Also blues. I came to blues through British blues, and then worked backward to American blues -- particularly Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf. Then at 16, I ran into a folk singer who was a real classical guitarist. So I studied with him and went to California Institute of the Arts.

ALBURGER: And his name was....?

FINK: Len Novi. He actually recorded on Adco -- Cream's label. I haven't heard or talked to Len since but he was very influential. My private studies with him were just prior to being accepted at Cal Arts. And once I got there, I noticed there were other really good classical guitarists.

ALBURGER: So composition was your "safety school"?

FINK: My theory teacher told me about a composition class, so I enrolled with William Kraft -- he was teaching timpani at Cal Arts and agreed to teach composition. He really gave me guidance.

ALBURGER: What did your early pieces sound like?

FINK: I was very much influenced by Anton Webern, Toru Takemitsu, Earle Brown, and Morton Feldman for the first three years -- especially due to the old *Time* records of Brown and Feldman.

ALBURGER: The Feldman influence can be heard in your work to the present day.

FINK: He's been a pervasive aura for several reasons, in fact. My next teacher at that time was Harold Budd -- I studied with him for a couple of years. A two-CD set just came out called *Avalon Sutra* -- one is Harold's miniature-type pieces, some with string quartet. The second is a remix: remixed *Akira Rabelais*.

ALBURGER: When did you study with Harold?

FINK: When I was 18 to 22 -- '72 through '76.

ALBURGER: Then you went off to Redlands.

FINK: Not exactly. I took some time off -- which included doing some performances with Chas Smith, another Cal Arts person who had graduated the year before. Then I went to Redlands and studied with Barney Childs. It was there that I met Jim Fox [the founder of Cold Blue Records] -- many of the people on Cold Blue went to Redlands. I was introduced to him through Barney, who also knew Marty Walker.

ALBURGER: So you got your masters at Redlands?

FINK: Well, Barney was a great teacher but the program wasn't working out for me. So I went back to Cal Arts to study with Mel Powell. That was interesting, because I was already doing tonal music at that point -- rather minimal with chords in it. Mel was a pretty staunch atonalist, but because I knew the literature, he let me do what I wanted. Deep down our artistic voices were not very different. We shared an idea of clarity, of no wasted notes, no filler, delicacy, beauty, and elegance (he in post-Webern language). Mel used the word "utterance" -- what's really being put forth -- so we weren't that different in a way. On the surface, it wasn't the same, of course. So the studies worked out fine. I also studied w/ Alain Chaplin -- he was primarily a theorist but was a great composition teacher. Back in the days, you could get a couple of lessons from another perspective, in this case from someone who was very, very careful. Mel had a beautiful view as to how to compose, a global perspective. Mel was the forest and Chaplin the trees.

ALBURGER: How did you turn tonal-minimal?

FINK: While I was first at Cal Arts, I heard Harold's *Madrigals for the Rose Angel*. I felt after I heard that in '73 that I knew that at some point I wasn't going to be writing atonally. There was something in *Rose Angel* that I wanted to go towards. Bill Douglas -- a bassoonist, composer, pianist, *Hearts of Space* guy had made transition from really complex to tonal -- so I had a model for someone who was doing that. In about 1975 over the summer, I wrote some very ultra-minimalist almost pseudo-scientific pieces.

ALBURGER: Heavily numerical?

FINK: More like poetic exploration of acoustical things. I wasn't measuring things with frequency, but I wrote pieces with tone colors that changed: *White Pieces for 14 Instruments*, *Piece for Six Violins, Trombones, Cellos, Basses, and Percussion* (all tuned). It was nothing like La Monte Young's music, but instead inspired by post-abstract-expressionist art. I didn't start writing pretty melodic stuff. Rather, it was spectral and timbral music. I did some pieces entitled *Veils*, and later I found that Morris Lewis the painter had done a similarly titled series. These were long tone pieces that could go on 10-20 minutes. When I first went to Redlands and showed these to Barney Childs, he said, "You've got long pieces with a few notes. Now write me a short piece with a lot of notes!" One of the old Cold Blue ten-inch releases includes one of the results: the second movement of *Two Pieces for Piano Solo*, 1979. This was the beginning of a new style -- more traditionally sectional. It gave me a real new look that I could do something that I liked in a new context. The long tone pieces are fine but I had been doing them a while by that point. So I went home and wrote the *Two Pieces* in less time than I ever had spent before.

ALBURGER: Is that one of the *Five Pieces* on *I Hear It in the Rain*?

FINK: No, that's a much more recent piece.

ALBURGER: Interesting, since I perceived incorrectly that the long-tone pieces all post-dated the short sectional ones. Of course, it was hard to know, given that there are no dates of composition given on any of the sections!

FINK: My feeling is that the idea of putting the date is a very sort of classical-modern thing to do. Cold Blue is a different niche. Aesthetically, Jim doesn't like seeing that stuff.

ALBURGER: Is *A Temperament for Angels* a more recent piece?

FINK: Recently recorded [2003-2004], but the piece dates back to the time of some of the *Rain* pieces: 1996-97.

ALBURGER: So despite the fact that *Rain* was recorded earlier, some of the music is not really earlier than *Temperament*?

FINK: Yes, and earlier still is the music I did for one of the first 10-inch series records from Cold Blue. It included another piano solo, the *Piede Vocalise* -- plus *Tile for Cello and Piano*, and a *Veil* piece for two pianos, with the pedals down the whole time. But by the time I wrote *Five Pieces*, they were composed really carefully and the intention was not to cloud them up too much with a lot of pedal.

ALBURGER: So *I Hear It in the Rain* was your first solo CD on Cold Blue?

FINK: Yes, once Jim restarted the company.

ALBURGER: And the *Five Pieces* are dated?

FINK: '96-'97, about the same time as *Temperament*.

ALBURGER: What about some of the other pieces on *Rain*?

FINK: *For Celesta*, for Aki Takashi, 1985. The *Two Preludes* '95-'96, maybe. *Living to be Hunted by the Moon* was composed and actually put together all the way back in 1989. It was going to be released on another company. The title piece *I Hear It in the Rain* also originated in 1985, for Stillife -- that was a group with Michael Bennett, who has since gotten into art and then not. We formed a group to play our own music, and put out our first album in 1981, by then with Rick Cox and Jim Fox.

ALBURGER: Is there a connection between *Hunted by the Moon* and your email address *Deathlessmoon*?

FINK: The moon is some sort of poetical thing. Sometimes I get titles by misreading things! While "Deathless Moon" is a translation of an evocative Tibetan notion, there's no kind of deep symbolism. The original title of *Hunted* was *Remembrance*, so when I went back to the piece I wanted something less corny.

ALBURGER: So when you look back at your work, there seem to be oscillations in output, between these long and short pieces.

FINK: Yes -- they're different genres. As when you look at Debussy, and can trace related genres within his output. In my music, there are certainly the melodic pieces concerned with expressive structure and clarity, and then there are the more soundscape-type musics with slow development. Actually, the earliest version of *Temperament* is 1990. The earlier one was "dark ambient gothic," the new one is a bit more colorful and certainly vaster.

ALBURGER: How seriously should we take the title?

FINK: Not overmuch. The material on the tracks try to delineate interactive possibility of every kind of harmony. It's somewhat in the Krystof Penderecki and Gyorgy Ligeti vein.

ALBURGER: Yes! I can hear the influence. What about the recorded work of minimalists such as Terry Riley, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass?

FINK: Well, while I don't think I'm a maniac recording collector, I've listened to pretty much everything: World, Jazz, Country, Budd and Feldman and Ligeti -- *Lontano* is a very beautiful orchestral piece. I've written four concertos and orchestra music not recorded. They came about because of hearing Feldman's *Violin and Orchestra*. I realized you could write late 20th-century orchestra music. So he re-influenced me.

ALBURGER: Meanwhile, somewhere in all this you received another degree from Cal Arts.

FINK: I graduated the second time in '80 or '81, had a year off and then was offered part-time at Cal Arts and have been there ever since -- about 20 years. So I've been full time, actually, for about 20 years. I've been Assistant Dean, Coordinator for the Composition Department. Firmly ensconced! That's been a good thing -- being around people making music. There used to be a mule farm that I would drive by on the way to Cal Arts, and I'd think about what a good job I had. "I could be training mules!"

ALBURGER: You commute to Cal Arts from where?

FINK: The San Fernando Valley. I'm married, with two kids -- 18 and 14. My older son goes to Cal Arts as a turntablist-

percussionist. My younger son is in a magnet school for the arts in Van Nuys, right off of Woodman.

ALBURGER: I used to be in that area all the time. Do I ask for Michael Jon, or Michael, or Mike?

FINK: Well, there's another Michael Fink with BMI -- the "Jon" is really to distinguish me, so I get the correct check!

ALBURGER: John Browning / John Curtis Browning...

FINK: John Adams / John Luther Adams... John Lennon / John Michael Lennon! So it could be worse!

# Concert Reviews

## Death, Destruction, and San Francisco

MICHAEL MCDONAGH

San Francisco Opera presents the American premiere of György Ligeti's *Le Grand Macabre*. October 29, War Memorial Opera House, San Francisco, CA. Reviewed November 21 [Another review of this work may be found in the November 2004 issue of 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC].

The program annotators at San Francisco Opera must have been issued a directive. Make György Ligeti's one and only opera *Le Grand Macabre* (1974-77) seem as user-friendly as possible. Not heavy, but fun. Well, his sole essay in the most difficult form any composer can dream of mastering was fun. Sort of. But it didn't start that way. Indeed, the first scene made me fear that we were in for a standard-issue modernist opera with against the voice writing and scattered instrumental comment. Yet how, I wondered, as the action played out on a raked stage with angled views of buildings meant to evoke the Twin Towers, would the music sound on its own? Would it hold one's attention, or would it be a gray accompaniment to this burlesque of a well-made play? But neither the visual nor the musical aspects were, to put it mildly, mutually contributory, and things didn't get better as the show wore on.

It's hard to say what went wrong, though the concept, which the annotators told us was terribly important -- we're in Brueghelland in a continuing apocalypse -- was also supposed to be hilarious, and perfect for American consumption, hence the jokey "dialog" and the balloons with words in them dropping from the flies. But this production, directed by Kasper Bech Holten, with sets and costumes by Steffen Aarfing, was a thoroughly European product. And Ligeti's school teacher score was steeped in erudition, and therefore, to quote "little Glory" in *Auntie Mame*, "top drawer." Hence the pulsed bleating car horn overture suggesting one of Monteverdi's, and the script, if you could call it that, by the composer and Michael Meschke from a 1934 Michel de Ghelderode play, was meant to be cutting edge absurdist, yet lacked the wit of anything by Beckett. Were the antics between soprano Susanne Meschke as Mescalina -- yes, Mescalina -- and bass Clive Bayley as Astramadors, in drag, no less, and with cone-shaped titties, really fall down funny? And was his look through his conservatory telescope -- with Ligeti's trademark cluster chords -- supposed to suggest a madcap Klingor? Who knows? Suffice it to say that this production was high on schtick and low on anything remotely real. Sure, opera is fantasy, and every composer from Haydn and Mozart to Glass has indulged in it. But theirs, whether you like them or not, are grounded in character, and projected through harmonies that take you somewhere. You don't just strike a pose and hope for the best.

Like sticking a passacaglia in because of its grand musical associations, which Ligeti did near the end of the second act, or having a chorus of poor oppressed citizens arrive from out of nowhere after 2 politicians -- John Duykers and Joshua Bloom -- espouse their all too topical "visions" at its beginning. And what were we to make of a danse macabre -- bacchanal which sounded a bit like Schoenberg's orgy in *Moses und Aron*? Did Ligeti think this would give his soufflé heft? I don't think so. Yet the performers gave the piece their all, and Alexander Rumpf, filling in for Michael Boder, led his orchestra in what sounded like a pitch perfect reading. But it's a bad sign when you don't feel any different leaving the theatre than when you came in. Which is what happened here, and didn't happen when your reporter sailed out onto the street after the San Francisco Opera's production of Monteverdi's *L'Incoronazione di Poppea* a few seasons ago. The music and the characters mattered, and Monteverdi's harmonies released the piece. And dare I suggest that Ligeti sneak a peek at Walter Salles's new film, *The Motorcycle Diaries*, with its wonderful Gustavo Santaolalla score, to see how much feeling and space his music added to a smart script? Start with a good one, and go from there.

## The Explosive Performance of the Marin Symphony

MARK ALBURGER

Marin Symphony in Kenji Bunch's *Symphony No. 1* ("*Lichtenstein Triptych*"). November 14, Veterans Auditorium, San Rafael, CA.

No instrumentalists were hurt, but there were certainly a lot of sonic explosions at the Marin Symphony on November 14 at Veterans Auditorium.

Alasdair Neale led his pyrotechnic crew in the local premiere of Kenji Bunch's *Symphony No. 1: Lichtenstein Triptych*, which starts out with a bang -- or bangs, rather -- in a first movement entitled "Varoom." And just in case we missed the comic book connection to the late/great Roy, the pop artist's three depicted works were thoughtfully projected on a giant screen behind the orchestra throughout the performance.

Perhaps the quintessential musical explosions are the ear-splitting ones in Krzysztof Penderecki's "Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima," and Charles Ives certainly checked in with a colorful firework or two over the years. Here the big bangs are more like Warner Brothers pratfalls, and Bunch makes no bones about his admiration for the animated cartoon composer Carl Stalling, acknowledging "Triptych" as a work that "refuses to take itself seriously." The sputterings herein are more akin to Gunther Schuller's wheezy "Twittering Machine" from *Seven Studies After Paul Klee* (an art connection yet again!), but arrayed cyclically and, well, comically. Connections to Schuller and also Leonard Bernstein are further made in the heavy "third-stream crossover" meldings with traditional jazz. Fun stuff.

The second movement, "We Rose Up Slowly," is considerably more lyrical and ramblingly melodic. The third, "In the Car," with a tempo marking of "Buckle Up," is a perpetual motion that is an John Adamsian "Short Ride in a Fast Machine," indeed: a three-minute drag race for skittering ants more than road hogs. While surface is celebrated, there's more to the Roy Lichtenstein originals than meets the eye. Such may be the case with the music as well.

The explosions of *Piano Concerto No. 5 ("Emperor")* are well known, and this is not the first time in even recent memory that Ludwig van Beethoven has out-sounded the competition in sheer volume despite the reduced instrumentation of late classical / early romantic practice (the last time was the composer's *Violin Concerto* up against the Adams's *Naive and Sentimental Music* last month at Davies). The legacy of the renowned Parisian theorist Nadia Boulanger, who took several generations of American composers through their paces, continues to make its mark.

A certain "American sound" (from Boulanger students Copland and Glass et. al.) -- ironically emphasizing French color and light against comparatively darker and heavy Germanic orchestral textures -- maintains a prominent position in composers as diverse as Adams and Bunch.

Difficult acts to follow. But the Edward Elgar *Enigma Variations* did not bomb, despite the bombast. This late-romantic Englishman has a bit of that German strudel in him, and the heavy artillery comes out in places. But much of the music is simply good fun, like the famous "fall off the boat and dogpaddle" section, and a good time was had by all.

# Chronicle

October 8

Death of Jacques Derrida (b. 7/15/30, El-Biar, Algeria), of pancreatic cancer, at 74. "Derrida was known as the father of deconstruction, the method of inquiry asserting that all writing was full of confusion and contradiction, and that the author's intent could not overcome the inherent contradictions of language itself, robbing texts -- whether literature, history, or philosophy -- of truthfulness, absolute meaning and permanence. . . . Derrida's credibility was . . . damaged by a 1987 scandal involving Paul de Man, a Yale professor who was the most acclaimed exponent of deconstruction in the United States. Four years after de Man's death, it was revealed that he had contributed numerous pro-Nazi, anti-Semitic articles to a newspaper in Belgium, where he was born, while it was under German occupation during World War II. In defending his dead colleague, Derrida, a Jew, was understood by some to be condoling de Man's anti-Semitism. . . . His father was a salesman. At age 12, he was expelled from his French school when the rector, adhering to the Vichy government's racial laws, ordered a drastic cut in Jewish enrollment" [Jonathan Kandell, *The New York Times*, 10/10/04].

October 13

Ensemble Intercontemporain in *Resonances*. Georg Friedrich Haas's "...*Einklang freier Wesen...*" and *Monodie*, Philippe Schoeller's *Ganesh*, and Michael Jarrell's *Droben schmettert ein greller*. IRCAM, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France. "This concert was more of the avant-garde 'establishment' compared to the Cairn (October 14) and Minguet (17) concerts. But there's no beating the Ensemble Intercontemporain for virtuosity and precision!" [Patti Deuter].

October 14

Ensemble Cairn in *Hands and Instruments*. Thierry De Mey's *Table Music*, Philippe Drogoz's *Prelude a la mise a mort*, Frederic Pattar's *Tresse*, Gerard Pesson's *La lumiere n'a pas de bras pour nous porter* and *Snow Bagatelle*, Elvio Cippolone's *The Wind, the Wind, the Heavenly Child*, Steve Reich's *Clapping Music*, and two different realizations of John Cage's *Living Room Music*. A l'Atelier du Plateau, Paris France. "A totally wonderful concert! The instruments (piano, cello, guitar, flute) were not once sounded in the 'normal' way -- but the entire concert was extremely musical, nonetheless. Very talented performers. The composer I liked best was Gerard Pesson -- and all of the Cage was done superbly seriously. In Thierry De Mey's *Table Music*, three performers played with hands on the flat surfaces of tables -- but almost never 'as expected'. Philippe Drogoz's *Prelude a la mise a mort* was scored for a guitar prepared with knitting needles. Gerard Pesson's *La lumiere n'a pas de bras pour nous porter* was all on keyboard (not strings, not case) but never a normal sound -- sliding and wiping and slapping, etc. -- a great piece, completely scored! In the first realization of John Cage's *Living Room*, 'whatever comes to hand,' took the form of mostly kitchen appliances. For the second performance the ensemble used a phone book (leafing rapidly, tearing out pages) and the guitarist played superbly with the zipper of her cardigan sweater" [Patti Deuter]

October 17

Minguet Quartet in Morton Feldman's *String Quartet II*. Musee d'Orsay, Paris, France. "A superb quartet, young players with lots of endurance, a few snacks at their feet, which they munched quickly, for there's almost never a pause for anyone. They played the piece with amazing sensitivity -- 5 1/2 hours of never more than mf (if that!). I loved it! People left before the end, but there must have been about 200 remaining at the end, totally transformed by the (not easy) experience" [Patti Deuter].

October 21

Philip Glass sues the organization that produced *Celsius 41.11*, a film billed as a conservative counterpunch to Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*, saying it had used his music in two advertisements without permission.

October 23

Death of baritone Robert Merrill (b. Moishe Miller, 6/4/17, New York, NY), while watching the first game of the World Series on television, at 87. "Merrill's parents, Abraham and Lotze Millstein, met and married in Warsaw and changed their name to Miller after they emigrated to the United States. . . . [A] new world opened to him while he was a teenager when a job pushing racks of clothing in Manhattan's garment district brought him past the old Metropolitan Opera House . . . He . . . sang at bar mitzvahs and weddings and at hotels in the Catskills. A first try at a Met audition, in 1941, was a failure. But during one of his hotel jobs, he met an agent, Moe Gale, who found him work at Radio City Music Hall and with the NBC Concert Orchestra, as well as an operatic debut . . . . [I]n . . . 1952 . . . he married the soprano Roberta Peters, who had made her debut with the [Met] two years earlier . . . . That union lasted only three months. . . . 'Vocally, there is no reason why you cannot sing for 30 or 40 years,' Mr. Merrill said in 1973. 'I'm going to go on as long as I'm enjoying it, as long as I'm having a ball'" [The New York Times, 10/26/04].

October 28

KSJO switches its format from hard rock to Latino music. San Jose, CA.

Pamela Z's *Voci*. The Kitchen, New York, NY. "The evening-length work . . . was called an opera, but in fact it was a series of set pieces and skits -- some abstract and beautiful, some very funny. . . . Ms. Z, a well-known figure on the international contemporary music circuit, is a wonderfully compelling performer with a lot of range" [Anne Midgette, The New York Times, 10/30/04].

October 29

San Francisco Opera presents the American premiere of György Ligeti's *Le Grand Macabre*. War Memorial Opera House, San Francisco, CA. "Instead of cowering and quaking in the face of the apocalypse . . . Ligeti . . . offers an appealing alternative: a loud, raucous raspberry" [Joshua Kosman, San Francisco Chronicle, 10/26/04].

October 31

Charles Wuorinen's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (Salman Rushdie). New York City Opera, New York, NY.

# Communication

To the Editor:

I read Nancy Bloomer Deussen's communication, appearing in the January 2003 issue of 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC, with interest and concern. In it, she makes some statements which I feel are ill-considered, poorly supported, or both. As certain of these assertions are targeted at me, I feel a detailed response is in order.

Ms. Bloomer Deussen's charge that I am "prejudiced against tonal, melodic music," harboring "an extremely biased viewpoint" against the approach, falls apart with minimal research. At the time my review of the *Ought-One Festival* had run in 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC, I had written favorable notices found in that issue and earlier ones of New Tonalist items by Michael Colgrass, Beth Denisch, Charles Fussell, Michael Gandolfi, Herschel Garfein, John Harbison, Thomas Oboe Lee, William Thomas McKinley, Ned Rorem, Marc W. Rossi, Elena Ruehr, Richard St. Clair, Adam B. Silverman, Donald Sur, Leonardo Velazquez, Julian J. Wachner, and Randall Woolf, among others. I've also penned several glowing reviews of rock music albums, containing selections as tonal and melodic as one could wish, which can be found in the book *All Music Guide to Rock* (2<sup>nd</sup> and later editions). I pride myself in being open to a broad range of music, "tonal, melodic music" being only one of many such types. But I am a discriminating listener, and much as I'd like to be able to praise everything I hear, I cannot do so for selections that don't merit it.

It is correct that I gave a wholly negative review to Ms. Bloomer Deussen's *Two Pieces for Violin and Piano*, presented at the Ought-One Festival. I did not like the composition and stand firmly behind my evaluation of it. It is not true, though, that I was "equally unenthusiastic about all the tonal works" heard at the concert containing her selection. Robert D. Polansky's *Imitations*, a piece in the same aesthetic, was written about very favorably, while Beth Anderson's *March Swale*, another New Tonalist item, drew a combination of positive and negative comments. To be fair, the write-up I gave to another event at the festival, a clutch of fiercely avant-garde items played by Ensemble WireWorks, saw negative evaluations of music by Vinko Globokar, Georg Hadju, and Dieter Schnebel, as well as a mixed critique of a work by Manfred Stahnke. Style is not the issue here. Nor do I see evidence for Ms. Bloomer Deussen's suggestion that my writing, here or elsewhere, is "spiteful and sarcastic."

Ms. Bloomer Deussen's implication that I have a personal vendetta against her and her music is ridiculous. So far, I have critiqued three selections of hers within the context of two reviews, the aforementioned *Two Pieces for Violin and Piano* and a pair of chamber works, *San Andreas Suite* and *One of Nature's Majesties*, which appeared on the North/South CD release *Postcards*. I fail to see how two unfavorable write-ups

constitute "several attacks upon...[her] music," as she contends.

As far as I'm concerned, Ms. Bloomer Deussen is just one of many composers out there -- and if I hear something of hers I like, I'll gladly praise it. I'd like nothing better, in fact; composing is a tough business and those of us in the field need all the help we can muster. Being on the other end of write-ups of all degrees of enthusiasm, I'm well aware of the value of favorable critiques. As a reviewer, though, it's important that I be honest in my evaluations -- and if I dislike a piece, performance, or CD parameter such as sound or editing, it's my duty to say so. My credibility as a critic demands it. No one is obligated to agree with me, of course.

Ms. Bloomer Deussen's characterization of my "*Bilbies*" (*sic* -- the title is *Bilbies IV*) as "hee haw" music left me quite amused. While many listeners enjoy my works, a few don't, and like everyone else, Ms. Bloomer Deussen is entitled to her opinion. However, her definition of "hee haw" music seems curious at best. If I read her letter correctly, it would appear that flute trilling and double tonguing are among the traits of this apparently non-accessible, undesirable aesthetic. If so, one might wonder if she considers Mozart's Flute Concerto K. 313, which has a number of passages employing these techniques (see the first 14 bars of the solo part, for example), to be "hee haw" music.

One final aspect of Ms. Bloomer Deussen's correspondence is troubling. Her chiding of reviewers, including myself, to in essence wake up to what's really happening in cutting edge concert music (perhaps not surprisingly, she feels the kind of pieces she writes are indicative of that cutting edge) not only suggests that she has received unenthusiastic write-ups from other critics besides myself but also smacks of the style agenda pushing she erroneously accuses me of. Like it or not:

- today's most important trends and composers will be decided by music historians, likely long after we're all dead.
- composers will write music that pleases them, regardless of fashion.
- decisions about what music is played will be made by musicians, not some hypothetical "audience" of Ms. Bloomer Deussen's or anyone else's definition.
- music critics will decide what they like and don't like heedless of pressure from ambitious or thin-skinned composers.

The music scene of the past several years in fact strikes me as highly diverse, with no clearly dominant aesthetic tendency. Myself, I'm happy to see an environment where Babbitts and Bloomer Deussens alike can get their work heard.

David Cleary  
Cambridge, MA

# Publications

Greg Keeler. *Waltzing With the Captain: Remembering Richard Brautigan*. Liberlost Press.

Nadine Hubbs. *The Queer Composition of America's Sound. Gay Modernists, American Music and National Identity*. University of California Press. "It tries to prove that what has come to be considered the distinctive American sound in mid-20th-century American music -- that Coplandesque tableau of widely spaced harmonies and melancholic tunes run through with elements of elegiac folk music and spiked with jerky American dance rhythms -- was essentially invented by a group of Manhattan-based gay composers: Copland, of course, and Virgil Thomson, Paul Bowles, David Diamond, Marc Blitzstein, Leonard Bernstein, Samuel Barger and Ned Rorem" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 10/24/04].

Deborah Jowitz. *Jerome Robbins: His Life, His Theater, His Dance*. Simon & Schuster. "When Jerry Rabinowitz was 16 years old, he got an A+ for an essay, 'My Selves,' written for English class in Weehawken, N.J. . . . Robbins wore masks because he was not comfortable with his real self -- his religion even more than his sexuality: 'I didn't want to be a Jew. I didn't want to be like my father, the Jew -- or any of his friends, those Jews.' Even when he was working for the Yiddish theater as a young man, his stage names included Robin Gerald, Gerald Robbins, Gerald Robins and Jerry Robyns. . . . In 1958, after seeing *West Side Story*, which Robbins directed and choreographed in the same period as he was working with City Ballet, the astute English critic Kenneth Tynan observed that Robbins 'projects the show as a rampaging ballet, with bodies flying from the air as if shot from guns, leaping, shrieking and somersaulting.' . . . In 1939, when Robbins worked with Danny Kaye, Carol Channing and Imogene Coca at Tamiment, a resort in the Poconos, he invented a ballet based on the Spanish Civil War; in 1940, he created *Harlem Incident*. . . . In 1942, the 23-year-old Robbins danced to Stravinsky's lively music in Mikhail Fokine's *Petrouchka*. Robert Lawrence of *The New York Herald Tribune* wrote, "The drooping limbs, frustrated mask, the lighting motility that alternated with his shambling gait made this an overwhelming portrayal. . . . Simultaneously with his mastery of ballet, Robbins emerged as a dancer on Broadway in 1943-44, playing a hip-swinging sailor in *Fancy Free*, which he choreographed to music by Leonard Bernstein. . . . His successes of the next few years would include *On the Town*, which also had Bernstein's music . . . Between 1943 and 1947 he was a member of the Communist Party . . . Robbins went to the F.B.I. to clear his name; the tactic failed and Ed Sullivan publicly urged the House Un-American Activities Committee to subpoena Robbins, who fled to Paris. . . . He was engaged to his longtime girlfriend, Nora Kaye, but in France he had an affair with a young male dancer, Buzz Miller. This was followed by 'a three-week fling with composer Ned Rorem' . . .

Robbins then mustered the courage to return to New York, where in 1951 he choreographed, for City Ballet, *The Pied Piper*, to Aaron Copland's clarinet concerto; on Broadway, he crated the dances for *The King and I*. . . . [n 1953] he choreographed the exquisite *Afternoon of a Faun*, a new version of Nijinsky's 1912 ballet set to Debussy's music, and, also at City Ballet, *Fanfare*, set to Benjamin Britten's *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*. . . . Robbins named the person who had recruited him into the Communist Party, and also gave the names of various actors, playwrights and critics who were party members. . . . Years after giving those names, Robbins wrote: 'It was my homosexuality I was afraid would be exposed I thought . . . I panicked & crumbled & returned to that primitive state of terror -- the facade of Jerry Robbins would be cracked open, and behind everyone would finally see Jerome Wilson Rabinowitz'. . . . He subsequently choreographed and often directed an amazing series of Broadway shows -- *Peter Pan* (1954), *Bells Are Ringing* (1956), *West Side Story* (1957), *Gypsy* (1959), *Funny Girl* and *Fiddler on the Roof* (both 1964). And his collaboration with George Balanchine, Lincoln Kirstein and the New York City Ballet proved that Robbins could straddle two artistic worlds and excel in both"[Nicholas Fox Weber, *The New York Times*, 8/1/04].

James Harley. *Xenakis: His Life in Music*. Routledge. "Embedded in this essentially scholarly tome is the story of 20th century Renaissance man Iannis Xenakis: mathematician, architect, avant-garde composer and revolutionary. . . . a work-by-work guide . . . . A Greek who grew up in Romania and became multilingual, Xenakis cultivated an almost romantic idealization of Hellenic culture. At the same time, enforced periods of exile turned him into a cosmopolitan artist. He set to music the words of writers such as Homer and Shakespeare. His favorites included percussion instruments and the organ, but he is famous for generating music via tape and computer. Upon his initial return to Greece, Xenakis obtained a degree in civil engineering; but the presence of Fascist and Nazi forces spurred him to join the Greek Communist resistance. . . . Settling in Paris, he collaborated briefly with the architect Le Corbusier while teaching himself musical composition" [Alexandra Yurkovsky, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 7/25/04].

Andy Warhol. *I'll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews, 1962-1987*, ed. Kenneth Goldsmith. Carroll & Graff.

# 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, conductor, oboist, pianist, vocalist, recording artist, musicologist, author, and music critic. He has recently embarked on a project to record his complete works (128 opus numbers) over the next 11 years.

DAVID CLEARY's music has been played throughout the U.S. and abroad, including performances at Tanglewood and by Alea II and Dinosaur Annex. A member of Composers in Red Sneaker, he has won many awards and grants, including the Harvey Gaul Contest, an Ella Lyman Cabot Trust Grant, and a MacDowell residence. He is a staff critic for The New Music Connoisseur and 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC. His article on composing careers is published by Gale Research and he has contributed CD reviews to the latest *All Music Guide to Rock*. His music appears on the Centaur and Vienna Modern Masters labels, and his bio may be found in many *Who's Who* books.

PATTI DEUTER is an Associate Editor of 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC and a Bay Area pianist.

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/gualtie3](http://www.msu.edu/user/gualtie3) -- which has also been translated into Russian and appears in Intellectual Forum.

HARRIET MARCH PAGE is Artistic Director of Goat Hall Productions: San Francisco's Cabaret Opera Company, as well as soprano, librettist, monologist, and an Associate Editor of 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC.