

21ST CENTURY MUSIC

MAY 2011



INFORMATION FOR SUBSCRIBERS

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

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

Typeset in Times New Roman. Copyright 2011 by 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC. This journal is printed on recycled paper. Copyright notice: Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use is granted by 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC.

INFORMATION FOR CONTRIBUTORS

21ST-CENTURY MUSIC invites pertinent contributions in analysis, composition, criticism, interdisciplinary studies, musicology, and performance practice; and welcomes reviews of books, concerts, music, recordings, and videos. The journal also seeks items of interest for its calendar, chronicle, comment, communications, opportunities, publications, recordings, and videos sections. Copy should be double-spaced on 8 1/2 x 11 -inch paper, with ample margins. Authors are encouraged to submit via e-mail.

Prospective contributors should consult *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), in addition to back issues of this journal. Copy should be sent to 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC, P.O. Box 2842, San Anselmo, CA 94960. e-mail: mus21stc@gmail.com. Materials for review may be sent to the same address.

INFORMATION FOR ADVERTISERS

Send inquiries to 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC, P.O. Box 2842, San Anselmo, CA 94960. e-mail: mus21stc@gmail.com.

21ST CENTURY MUSIC

May 2011

Volume 18, Number 5

MARK ALBURGER	An Uncommon Interview with Belinda Reynolds	1
REVIEW	Stooky Strikes Again with Marin Symphony PHILLIP GEORGE	3
CHRONICLE	Of March 2011	4
ILLUSTRATIONS	i, 12 Igor Stravinsky - The Nightingale iv Belinda Reynolds 2 Belinda Reynolds, Dan Becker 3 Nathaniel Stookey 12 James Macmillan - Violin Concerto	

Editorial Staff

Mark Alburger
EDITOR-PUBLISHER

Harriet March Page
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Patti Noel Deuter
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Erling Wold
WEBMASTER

Alexis Alrich
Adam Broner
Katherine Buono
Ken Bullock
A.J. Churchill
David Cleary
Jeff Dunn
Phillip George
Elliot Harmon
Brian Holmes
Jeff Kaliss
John Lane
Michael McDonagh
Tom Moore
William Rowland
Lisa Scola Prosek
Andrew Shapiro
CORRESPONDENTS



An Uncommon Interview with Belinda Reynolds

MARK ALBURGER

Belinda Reynolds is a Bay Area postminimalist composer who serves as Vice-President of the Common Sense Composers' Collective. I rendezvous'd with Belinda at her viewful San Francisco aerie, which she shares with her composer-husband Dan Becker and daughter, on January 19, 2011.

ALBURGER: (holding a copy of Reynolds's Custom Made Music: Twelve Pieces for Piano Duet) Is that something you're doing more of now?

REYNOLDS: It's always been....

ALBURGER: You've clearly found a market here.

REYNOLDS: Yes, well, that's part of it. It's something that has been around always in the background. While I've been writing as part of the Common Sense Composers' Collection for professional ensembles, I have been also been writing for young players since graduate school. It's just a fluke that started, and it's something that I'm really passionate about, because there's just very little music for amateurs or beginners or intermediate levels written by composers of our background.

ALBURGER: Right.

REYNOLDS: And how do we expect the next generation to play our music, but if they aren't exposed to it at a younger level, they're going to be inhibited by it, and it's going to be a tougher sell. So, if we really want things to happen, composers need to write. And most of us aren't trained to write for younger players.

ALBURGER: We're all shooting for the top end, so to speak.

REYNOLDS: Exactly. Exactly, but, you know, it was always part of our craft, from Bach to Bartok to Stravinsky. Everybody...

ALBURGER: Wrote for kids. Le Cinq Doigts and the Bartok Mikrokosmos and For Children.

REYNOLDS: Exactly. Exactly, but something, particularly in American music in the last 30 years, people just don't do it, really.

ALBURGER: It could be the last 50.

REYNOLDS: Or it's looked down on. Yes, 50.

ALBURGER; Or 60. It's those darn serialists...

REYNOLDS: Yes, modernism. Difficulty means better.

ALBURGER: That's right. And you want to get your academic accolades.

ALBURGER: That's right. And you want to get your academic grants -- perhaps there was a thought that there was no money in "the little sell." You've written children's music through your whole career.

REYNOLDS: In graduate school, like many of us, I was putting myself through by teaching at a local music school. The people there found out that I was a composer, and one of the teachers asked if I'd write for the fifth-grade choir, and I had no experience doing anything like that, but I used the process of collaboration. I worked with the students over a period of months. I found out their technical limitations, and also their openness. We all created little melodies, and from that I composed a set of choral pieces that worked wonderfully.

ALBURGER: So it was collaborative with the kids.

REYNOLDS: Yes.

ALBURGER: Very cool. What year was that?

REYNOLDS: '92. I found out a number of things. The kids loved doing it. The teacher loved it; in fact, she started a commissioning program with other composers. The parents loved it; they wanted to find out about more music outside the kid's realm. So, a new fan base, so to speak, of enthusiastic open minds. I was hooked. Since moving out here, I have continued to teach privately composition and piano, and I started writing duets for each of my students.

ALBURGER: What a side benefit! That's great!

REYNOLDS: Yes, and they were customized to each of their technical levels as well as their personalities. And I had played the teacher part.

ALBURGER: Whence... hence Custom Made Music.

REYNOLDS: The students loved them. Each of the pieces has a pedagogical role, and the set progresses from five-finger positions to late intermediate works. Not only did the kids love learning their own, but they wanted to learn the other duets, and they also wanted to learn other living composers' music.

ALBURGER: Yes!

REYNOLDS: So it really opened up a realm for them, and also a realm for me. And other teachers actually started wanting me to write for their students. So a little cottage industry began. And so over the years, along with my commissions getting bigger for professional ensembles, word got out that I liked writing for students, so I wound up getting commissions for those kind of pieces, too.

My first big one along those lines was for the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. They hired me to write for a string

ensemble that had only been playing for two months: fifth graders.

ALBURGER: Ho-ho. A challenge up to Benjamin Britten and Ralph Vaughan Williams....

REYNOLDS: Oh! It was something!

ALBURGER: It is quite an art.

REYNOLDS: It is an art. And I also worked with the young teachers, in helping the students learn the piece.

ALBURGER: All open strings.

REYNOLDS: It was open strings, and the only thing they knew how to play was Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star. So I used the first five notes of Twinkle, Twinkle, and open strings, and made a post-minimalist piece out of it, with patterns and layering over it.

ALBURGER: Do I love that idea! I have "Mary Had a Little Lamb" Variations, but not Twinkle, Twinkle... I have to check this out!

REYNOLDS: It was really easy for the kids to learn, because it was in patterns. They didn't have to be reading music...

ALBURGER: They weren't reading at two months?

REYNOLDS: They were just beginning to learn. This was public school -- weekly lessons -- in the projects.

ALBURGER: This was an outgrowth of the Conservatory, but these were not Conservatory students.

REYNOLDS: It was an outreach program. SFCM had gotten a huge grant from Texaco to do this. From that, I started getting other commissions for youth orchestras. Working with the Marin Youth Orchestra, I wrote a late-intermediate-level piece. I did a big Meet-the-Composer Residency with the Denver Young Artists Orchestra, which is on the technical level of the San Francisco Youth Symphony. That was a wonderful year-long project, in which I went out there five times, and not only wrote them a piece -- in which we did workshopping (just like we do with Common Sense: I brought things in process, and got their feedback; the students loved that) -- but, in addition, I had a composition group. Twelve of the kids wanted to learn how to compose. So, over the process of that year, we started with each of the students writing eight to sixteen bars of a melody.

ALBURGER: Monophonic.

REYNOLDS: Exactly. And learning how to make their beginnings into a polyphonic string quartet. It was a wonderful process of each playing each other's melodies, and giving suggestions -- learning about augmentation, canons, and so forth...

ALBURGER: Harmony as well as counterpoint, I assume...

REYNOLDS: Oh, yes, all of that. Through a very creative, organic process, in which they had ownership. By the end of that process, we came up with a dozen five-to-eight-minute string quartets that really were of the collegiate level. Twelve to sixteen-year-old kids. So I love teaching. I've done those things, but, at the same time, have had larger commissions happening with other ensembles. The most recent coming up is with Paul Drescher.

ALBURGER: Congratulations.

REYNOLDS: Thanks. But as this has continued, I've just realized, there's just not music out there...

ALBURGER: ...for the young. And it's true. In my youth, kids were coming up the ranks being familiar with popular music and only older classical music....

REYNOLDS: Right.

ALBURGER: So you're changing that for the better!



Stookey Strikes Again with Marin Symphony

PHILLIP GEORGE

Nathaniel Stookey is the composer of the hour. With a growing list of compositions that includes *The Composer Is Dead with Lemony Snicket*, *Junkestra* for found percussion, and incidental music to Bertolt Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* -- Stookey has struck it rich again with a brilliant *Zipperz*, characterized as a "soaPOpera." Dan Harder's "zipper" poems provide the libretto, presenting a love story simultaneously from the perspectives of both lovers, in interlocking lines that yield third meanings when combined. This is perfectly reflected in Stookey's contemporary counterpoint, engagingly realized by the versatile vocalists Robin Coomer and Manoel Felciano, with the Marin Symphony on March 15 at Veterans Auditorium. Stookey again writes colorfully and naturally for the orchestra and voices, finding humor, power, and poignancy in a tale that was splayed on each side of the intermission (Act I: 1. Meeting, 2. Waiting, 3. Waiting; Act II: Coming Together / Coming Apart). If there were hints of minimalism and Frederick Rzewski (the Coming Together synchronicity), it was probably through the common coin of the vernacular.

The freshest program that this ensemble has produced in recent years, one can only hope for more progressive concerts from conductor Alasdair Neale and the gang to come along similar lines.

The presentation was rounded out by Leonard Bernstein's always shining *Symphonic Dances* from "West Side Story" and a roster of six choruses from various 19th-century operas: in order, Richard Wagner's "Procession and Chorale" from *Die Meistersinger*, Giuseppe Verdi's Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves and "Anvil Chorus" respectively from *Nabucco* and *Il Trovatore*, Ruggero Leoncavallo's "Bell Chorus" from *Pagliacci*, the lovely Wagner "Bridal Chorus" from *Lohengrin*, and a rousing "Polovtsian Dances" from *Prince Igor*. The Marin Symphony Chorus was in full voice against the lushness of the orchestra, and a good time was had by all.



Chronicle

March 1

Philadelphia Orchestra, conducted by Charles Dutoit, with Vadim Repin, in James MacMillan's Violin Concerto. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY. "In Britain and Europe Mr. MacMillan is a figure of considerable prominence. In the United States, though, his reputation still rests largely on two relatively early pieces: The Confession of Isobel Gowdie, a turbulent symphonic saga, and Veni, Veni, Emmanuel, an ingenious percussion concerto. Recent works have been slow to arrive and resistant to taking root. . . . MacMillan's new Violin Concerto . . . a 25-minute work in three movements, adheres loosely to historical conventions of form: a crackling opening movement (Dance) is followed with a more lyrical section (Song) and a finale filled with exuberant display (Song and Dance). The solo part's torrential flurries and sweetly spun melodies are custom fitted to a virtuoso like Mr. Repin, to whom the work is dedicated. Mr. MacMillan's estimable mastery of orchestral timbre and effect is evident throughout. Composed in memory of Mr. MacMillan's mother, who died in 2008, the concerto derives its considerable emotive impact from graceful and grotesque elements juxtaposed with a dreamy illogic. A bubbly Scottish reel breaks out at the first movement's climax. In the second, the winsome solo lines flutter over elegiac oboe, guttural brass and dreamy, tuned percussion; a tender passage for piccolo and piano conjures an Irish folk song. . . . Repin's unshakable bravura and the orchestra's magnificent playing made a compelling case for it. Audience response was rousing and sustained" [Steve Smith, The New York Times, 3/3/11].

The Canadian Opera Company performs Stravinsky's The Nightingale and Other Short Fables. Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York, NY. "The training regimens for aspiring opera singers typically include acting classes, movement workshops, dance lessons, sometimes even tips on fencing. But I wonder if the committed young singers who took part in the director Robert Lepage's enchanting production of Stravinsky's one-act opera The Nightingale . . . ever anticipated that one day they would be asked to perform demanding vocal parts, in Russian, while sloshing around in 12,000 gallons of water as they deftly manipulated puppet versions of the characters they were portraying. At 50 minutes, this seldom-produced Stravinsky piece was the longest segment of The Nightingale and Other Short Fables, Mr. Lepage's acclaimed staging of diverse Stravinsky dramatic works, choruses and songs, all involving stories about animals.

The first half of the program employs nimble acrobats and the most affecting and intricate puppetry I have ever seen. This production, introduced at the Canadian Opera Company in Toronto in 2009, is co-produced by the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, Opéra National de Lyon and the Netherlands Opera (in collaboration with Ex Machina in Quebec). The Canadian Opera Company's orchestra and chorus were vibrantly conducted by its accomplished young music director, Johannes Debus. The centerpiece . . . which Stravinsky called a 'conte lyrique,' a lyrical tale, with a libretto by the composer and Stepan Mitussov adapted from the Hans Christian Andersen story. For its 1914 premiere at the Paris Opera, in a production by Diaghilev, the singers performed from the orchestra pit and actors mimed the characters onstage. Mr. Lepage's production was inspired, he has said, by the 1,000-year-old art of Vietnamese water puppetry. His ingenious collaborator here is Michael Curry, the production designer who created the puppets with the director Julie Taymor for The Lion King on Broadway and Mozart's Magic Flute at the Metropolitan Opera. The scale of The Nightingale, however, is much smaller, which only makes the magic of the water puppetry more poignant. By installing a rectangular pool in the academy's orchestra pit, Mr. Lepage and his team have fashioned an inky lake, turned luminescent by the lighting of Etienne Boucher. There are platforms on either side of the pit. As the orchestra, placed toward the back of the stage, plays the wistful music that opens the work, we see a hand puppet of an old Chinese fisherman on his boat, returning at night from a long day of work. In between stroking the water with his oar, he stops to push back his hat and wipe his brow. . . . In a gripping final scene, charged by Stravinsky's piercing, ominous music, we see the despairing emperor dying. An aquatic roster of acrobats in wet suits transforms the emperor's canopied bed into a skeleton with long bony limbs. The lake is covered by a shimmering midnight-blue sheet through which goblin-like creatures try to protrude and claim the emperor's weakening body. . . . The first half of the program was equally amazing. Mr. Debus set the mood by conducting Stravinsky's Ragtime for orchestra. The clarinetist Todd Palmer, dressed like a Cossack, played Stravinsky's rhapsodic Three Pieces for Solo Clarinet as interludes between the dramatic works. In Pribaoutki, four nonsense Russian rhymes for voice (Wallis Giunta) and chamber ensemble, and in Four Russian Peasant Songs for small female chorus and four horns, the costumed singers performed onstage while a troupe of puppeteers created intricate images of cats, old men, a woodcock, a partridge and even a fidgeting, crying baby.

The first half ended with *The Fox* [Renard] a moralizing burlesque for four male singers (Adam Luther, Peter Barrett, Mr. Bannik and Mr. Odinius) . . . Here acrobats enact the tale behind a scrim, so that we see their bodies, decked with animal headdresses and tails, silhouetted in black" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 3/2/11].

March 14

Jordi Savall's *Folias Criollas*. Alice Tully Hall, New York, NY. "Leading two of his ensembles -- Hesperion XXI, his period-instrument band, and *La Capella Reial de Catalunya*, his choir -- as well as a Mexican group, *Tembembe Ensemble Continuo*, Mr. Savall showed how Spanish music was transformed by indigenous Mexican forms and other imports, most notably African and Afro-Cuban music. The program drew heavily on *El Nuevo Mundo*, Mr. Savall's recent recording with the same combination of forces (on *Alia Vox*)" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 3/15/11].

March 15

Marin Symphony, conducted by Alasdair Neale, performs Leonard Bernstein's *Symphonic Dances* from *West Side Story* and Nathaniel Stookey's *Zipperz*. Veterans' Auditorium, San Rafael, CA.

Boston Symphony Orchestra Bela Bartok's *Violin Concerto No. 2* and the New York premiere of Harrison Birtwistle's *Violin Concerto*. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY. "This unusual and fascinating program offered three works for violin and orchestra, including . . . Harrison Birtwistle's new *Violin Concerto*, featuring the brilliant German violinist Christian Tetzlaff. Taking [James] Levine's place was Marcelo Lehninger, 31, a Brazilian-born assistant conductor at the Boston Symphony, who had led the same program this month in Boston. He was terrific, conducting all three works with impressive technique, musical insight and youthful energy. The orchestra sounded great. And Mr. Tetzlaff had a triumphant night. . . . He concluded the evening with Bartok's *Violin Concerto No. 2*, offering a dazzling yet probing performance of this difficult piece. Mr. Birtwistle, 76, is a towering figure in British music. His language, though complex and modernistic, is distinctive and exhilarating. In his 40s, he wrote a great deal of incidental music. He is also a significant opera composer. So even his thorny pieces have dramatic sweep and flair. Most of his instrumental works bear descriptive titles, many drawn from Greek drama.

But not this concerto, which is written in one continuous episodic movement of nearly 30 minutes. Many composers draw on the David and Goliath potential of the concerto genre to generate conflict between soloist and orchestra. Yet there is little sense of conflict in Mr. Birtwistle's concerto. Rather, this moody, shifting piece comes across like an involved, intense, sometimes tortured but always respectful conversation. During five stretches of the work, the violin engages in sort of sub-talks with a series of solo instruments: flute, piccolo, oboe, cello and bassoon. But the concerto does not begin like a conversation. The orchestra emits a murky mass of soft, tremulous sounds, like some primordial stew, from which the violin emerges, posing the first thoughts, the first questions. Soon the orchestra breaks into spurts, echoing the rhythmically restless violin lines, as if reframing or rebutting the statements. Throughout the piece the violin plays a stream of jagged chords, gnarly intervals and twisted thematic flights. Then something will happen in the orchestra -- a pungent harmony, a twitch of somber counterpoint -- and the violin responds with a wafting melodic line in its shimmering high range. You know that this elusive yet organic concerto is coming to an end when the music breaks into circular riffs and then spins itself out, settling into a piercing, pensive final episode. The violin cannot stop fidgeting but finally does, ending the conversation, for now, with a few plucked clusters. After the Birtwistle, I thought the Bartok was going to sound like a folk music concerto. Not in this riveting performance. The first movement came across as a lyrical joy ride with lyrical spans and bumpy patches, the second movement, a theme and variations, never seemed so moody. Even the chirpy finale, which keeps getting interrupted by virtuosic excursions and a ruminative, radiant timeout, was wonderfully fresh. Mr. Tetzlaff and Mr. Lehninger emphasized the work's wildness and fractured character" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 3/16/11].

Godspeed You! Black Emperor. Brooklyn Masonic Temple, New York, NY. "First, a confession: *Godspeed You! Black Emperor* is the only band I have ever abandoned midconcert because of physical exhaustion, during a 2000 show at the Knitting Factory. Few bands ask more of the body than this thunderous Montreal collective. Few bands weave their way into the sinew more. Few bands punish it as thoroughly. Ears are useful at a show like this, but stamina helps way more. In the case of the band's alternately transfixing and taxing rumble . . . [on March 15] two and a half hours worth of stamina, to be specific, which was essentially tantamount to tilting forward in a wind tunnel, lying on an airport runway and standing on railroad tracks while remaining still as a train barrels toward you -- all at once. And yet, so many people were keen to be abused.

This band has been on hiatus, after a fruitful run in the late 1990s and early 2000s during which it released several albums, including two excellent ones: *F#A#∞*, from 1997, and *Lift Your Skinny Fists Like Antennas to Heaven*, from 2000, both on Constellation. During that time, it explored the connective tissue between post-rock's reconsideration of song structure and the rise of heavy metal as an aesthete's music, and its consequent explorations of texture. . . . [The show] was promoted by the Blackened Music Series, which in recent years has specialized in giving the many stripes of heavy music a touch of high-brow curatorial attention. That made for the sort of crowd that shushed the bartender who was noisily tossing beer bottles into a trash can -- this, before the band even took the stage -- and then shushed one another once it seemed the band was ready to play. Band members ambled onstage one by one, as the night opened with *Hope Drone*: the guitarists Michael Moya, Efrim Menuck and David Bryant; the percussionists Aidan Girt and Bruce Cawdron; the bassists Mauro Pezzente and Thierry Amar; and the violinist Sophie Trudeau. They played in the dark, illuminated only by a series of films projected onto a screen above them, time-lapse videos of flowers, bodies of water, factories spewing spooky-looking emissions into the sky. All the while, this instrumental band swelled and receded, swelled and receded, achieving gale force via the sludgy, dense layering of guitars atop strings atop percussion, all fighting for attention and achieving harmony along the way. There were moments that recalled Metallica or Megadeth at their most roaring, and also flecks of desolate country and trancelike Middle Eastern music. But mostly the music suggested states of feeling more than song: ambition, horror, anxiety, ecstasy. Ms. Trudeau's violin occasionally cut through the thickness like an air horn, and any time Mr. Cawdron or Mr. Girt emerged from the haze to lead with clanging percussion, he was quickly subsumed by the wall of guitars. Over the course of the night, it became tempting to think of extramusical uses for these sounds: enema, asbestos removal, labor induction, any number of covert military intelligence-extracting operations. (Not that this politically minded band would approve of those brown sound applications: a table in the back of the hall was filled with books on anarchism and other radical topics and catalogs for the activist publisher-distributor AK Press.) Or maybe fitness? You had to either give your body over to the sound or use it to flee. Either way, it was a workout" [Jon Carramanca, *The New York Times*, 3/16/11].

March 18

The Tully Scope Festival: Heiner Goebbels. Lincoln Center, New York, NY. "Tully Scope, which offered 14 concerts over nearly a month, ended . . . with a program of two works by the German composer, music director and theater artist Heiner Goebbels performed by musicians from the London Sinfonietta, a top-notch contemporary-music group, and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, a leading period-instrument ensemble also from London. They were led by the brilliant young Estonian conductor Anu Tali. . . . [A]ny festival that brings Mr. Goebbels to New York is fine with me. And to judge from the audience reaction, I was not alone. Mr. Goebbels, 58, is known for works that boldly mix styles: old and modern classical music, jazz, avant-garde rock and more. He has written for the theater and incorporated texts into his multimedia pieces, along with unconventional, invented instruments, as in his gripping work *Stifters Dinge*, a highlight of the Lincoln Center Festival in 2009, presented at the Park Avenue Armory. The first part of [this] program offered the *Sampler Suite From 'Surrogate Cities.'* This 30-minute piece comprises 10 instrumental excerpts from the 90-minute *Surrogate Cities*, completed in 1994, a work for large orchestra, mezzo-soprano and digital sounds that grappled with the phenomenon of the city. The excerpts amount to a modernist homage to a Baroque dance suite, with movements called *Courante*, *Gavotte* and such. But the music is no pastiche. In his fresh, strange way Mr. Goebbels evokes the rhythmic swing and contrapuntal intricacy of Baroque dances. There are toccatalike bursts of spiraling solo lines; pungently harmonic woodwind and string chorales; a frenetic *Gigue*; and most haunting, a *Chaconne* that uses fragments of Jewish liturgical chant heard on purposely scratchy old recordings, in which the vocal lines are harmonically enshrouded by the orchestra. Ms. Tali conducted grippingly. After intermission came the 60-minute *Songs of Wars I Have Seen*. The title is adapted from Gertrude Stein's book about life during wartime, published in 1945. A longtime resident of Paris, she was living in a village near Lyon under the collaborating Vichy regime. Her comments focus on the daily rituals of trying to continue a domestic routine amid the disruption, danger and deprivation. Stein's matter-of-fact observations on the difficulty of obtaining certain staples like sugar could be taken as callous except for the vulnerability and fear that come through in her curiously soothing words, alternately perceptive and daffy. The tone of her thoughts is given added poignancy and depth by Mr. Goebbels's remarkable music. The texts were recited by female musicians in the orchestra when they were not playing.

The music is a haunting combination of modernist harmonies, jazzy bursts and actual quotations of melancholic dances by the 17th-century English composer Matthew Locke. Digital sounds evoke rustling winds, rattling machines and cosmic atmospherics" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 3/20/11].

March 21

JapanNYC: NHK Symphony Orchestra. Stern Auditorium, Carnegie Hall, New York, NY. "The orchestra [was] led by its principal guest conductor, André Previn . . . [Kiri] Te Kanawa, 67, . . . made her entrance to sing [Richard] Strauss's Four Last Songs . . . [T]he orchestra . . . performed quite beautifully, especially at the end of the last song, *Im Abendrot* (At Sunset), in Strauss's fleeting reference to his tone poem *Death and Transfiguration*. Mr. Previn . . . steered the ensemble effectively through Toru Takemitsu's brief orchestral study *Green* and Prokofiev's *Symphony No. 5* . . . The Takemitsu piece, from 1967, more static in its glassy harmonies and its flirtations with polytonality, seemed to suit Mr. Previn just fine. Through it all, the orchestra played well. And as you would expect from the nation that produced the influential string pedagogues Hideo Saito and Shinichi Suzuki, the string sound was often glorious" [James R. Oestreich, *The New York Times*, 3/22/11].

March 23

Midori, with Charles Abramovic. Zankel Hall, New York, NY. "As the world's most prominent Japanese violinist and a frequent visitor to Carnegie Hall, Midori undoubtedly had a guaranteed berth in Carnegie's JapanNYC festival. The question was what she would do with it. She could have assembled a program of Japanese music, something not in tremendous supply in this festival's high-profile classical music offerings, which are skewed mainly toward Japanese performers' interpretations of the Western canon. Given that, she could also have played a standard recital and not seemed out of step. Neither of those prospects appealed to her, apparently. Instead she offered an installment in her continuing series of new-music programs, with one work by a Japanese composer -- Toshio Hosokawa's *Vertical Time Study III* -- nestled among scores by Huw Watkins (from England), Brett Dean (from Australia), James MacMillan (from Scotland) and John Adams (from the United States). Charles Abramovic was her deferential but solid pianist.

The program began, after a moment of silence for the victims of the earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan on March 11, with Mr. Watkins's *Coruscation and Reflection* (1998), a two-movement exploration of the common ground between virtuosity and introspection, counterintuitive as that may seem. Much of the *Coruscation* movement demands sizzling, high-energy playing, and *Reflection* is, as you might guess, quieter and more overtly lyrical. But different as the sections are, they share a brooding intensity that deepens gradually. Mr. Dean's *Berlin Music* (2010) shares several qualities with the Watkins -- its dark, subtly shifting mood, for starters, and its complex if accessible language. But its five-movement design and greater length allow for a more expansive meditation, and a greater opportunity for dialogue between the piano and violin lines, which often mirror each other and take turns pushing the dialogue in new directions. Mr. Dean extended the fiddle's range slightly by having Midori tune its bottom string to F instead of G, and he has Mr. Abramovic switch between a standard concert grand and, in the perpetual-motion third movement, a muted upright. Mr. Dean's more vigorous writing -- like that in Mr. Watkins's piece -- pushed Midori to play against type, giving up the sweetly focused tone that has always been her specialty in favor of a grittier, more acerbic sound. Mr. Hosokawa's *Vertical Time Study III* called for a more subtle change of approach. In a program note he characterized the piece as akin to Japanese calligraphy, 'with the violin acting as the brush that spreads its ink over the canvas created by the piano.' You could hear what he meant: Midori shaped her line with a variety of bow strokes, some bold, some wispy, others supple, with clashing double stops and eerie quiet passages keeping the work surprising. . . . Midori closed the program with an agitated rendering of Mr. MacMillan's *After the Tryst* (1994), a slight study for a larger work, and a lively, bright-hued account of Mr. Adams's *Road Movies* (1995), a score that is edging toward repertory status for young violinists" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 3/24/11].

March 24

Hungarian Echoes. Esa-Pekka Salonen conducts the New York Philharmonic in Gyorgy Ligeti's *Clocks and Clouds*, and Bela Bartok's *Piano Concerto No. 1*, "The Miraculous Mandarin" Suite, and *Old Hungarian Tune*. New York, NY. "[This was] spectacular account of the *Piano Concerto No. 1* . . . all coiled intensity and electric release, with athleticism and finesse from the soloist, Olli Mustonen, and superb if slightly restrained work by the orchestra, whose low brasses sound more ferocious and imposing all the time.

Mr. Mustonen, recalled over and over for ovations, showed a gentler side of Bartok with the folksy strum of Old Hungarian Tune (from For Children . . .), offered as an encore. Later, when Mr. Salonen and the orchestra closed the concert with a blazing rendition of Bartok's 'Miraculous Mandarin' Suite, the rude and sinuous music (and again, the barbarous low brasses) elicited ballpark whoops amid thunderous, extended applause. . . . Ligeti's Clocks and Clouds [is] a billowing expanse of gaseous stasis from 1972, partly inspired by early Minimalism. The violins were replaced by women from the New York Choral Artists, who sang in wobbly microtonal quivers and chattered nonsense syllables to hallucinatory effect. But here, too, the response was, on the whole, strongly enthusiastic" [Steve Smith, The New York Times, 3/25/11].

March 25

New York City Opera presents Monodramas, a triple bill of one-act works that are not operas in any traditional sense. David H. Koch Theater, New York, NY. "[T]he curtain had to be delayed more than 20 minutes to accommodate [ticket buyers]. As presented here, in a surreal and visually beautiful production by Michael Counts, these strange and strikingly diverse monodramas, each a monologue for soprano and orchestra, made for an engrossing evening of musical drama. Under its general manager and artistic director, George Steel, City Opera has done a good job of building interest in this adventurous presentation. In approaching Monodramas it is best to switch off the part of your brain that needs to know what an opera is about. The program begins with John Zorn's volatile 10-minute *Machine de l'Être* (*Machine of Being*, 2000), textless as well as plotless. The longest work, at nearly 60 minutes, comes last: Morton Feldman's gurgling, murky and haunting *Neither* (1976-77), his musical rendering of an elusive 87-word text by Beckett. Compared with those two works, Schoenberg's 30-minute *Erwartung* (*Waiting*, 1909), with a text by Marie Pappenheim, may at first seem a cogent story. A woman prowls a forest on a warm evening searching for her lover and finds him dead. But with its nightmarish music and harrowing text, is *Erwartung* a dream? Has anything the woman describes actually happened? Mr. Zorn has long been a hero of the downtown contemporary-music scene, a rebel who willfully combines, tweaks and otherwise appropriates into his brash, audacious pieces whatever kind of music suits him. In a recent interview with The New York Times he expressed surprise at finding himself, at 57, courted by an uptown company at Lincoln Center.

But *La Machine de l'Être* comes across here as an uptown score, pulsing with fits of astringent atonality, fidgety contrapuntal writing and boisterous percussion, over which the soprano must sing all manner of 'ah' sounds, flitting from melodic fragments to orgasmic outbursts. The excellent Finnish soprano Anu Komsu threw herself into the music. The conductor George Manahan led a colorful and bruising performance. But what is going on? Mr. Counts, a visual artist as well as a stage director, provides some guidance in the surreal production he has created with the choreographer Ken Roht and the costume designer Jessica Jahn -- like Mr. Counts, making their City Opera debuts -- and the lighting designer Robert Wierzel. Before the curtain goes up a young man and young woman, both in tuxedos, stare with sometimes vacant, sometimes glowering looks at the audience. When the piece begins, the pair become like severe masters of ceremony, wandering between rows of silent people wearing full-body robes like the traditional garb of Muslim women. But as the hosts remove garments from some of the robed people, you learn of their secret lives, in a sense. There is a woman in a short slip, who could pass for Alban Berg's *Lulu*; a man in a red suit, who is soon lifted off the ground on wires; and an assortment of other motley types. In a playful touch, huge flat set pieces pop up, looking like speech balloons in cartoons. Yet no words appear: just Miró-like images. Through the abstraction onstage comes the intense performance of Ms. Komsu, who was riveting To set its mood *Erwartung* begins with the recorded sound of crickets, birds and brooks. But when Schoenberg's softly simmering orchestral music starts, the forest is quickly established as a mysterious and dangerous place. Leaves fall on the protagonist, who, wearing a creamy summer dress, says that she is searching for her lover. What has happened to him? From the first phrases sung by Kara Shay Thomson, a compelling American soprano with a plush, vibrant, powerful voice, you do not know whether to pity or fear her. Silent sisterly characters follow the woman and tend to her as she tells of tripping on a dead body that turns out to be a fallen tree and confides details of her husband's supposed infidelity. All through the piece the body of a man in a gray suit with a knife in his chest is sprawled onstage. When the horrified woman discovers this body and recognizes her lover, the man rises, as if to dance with her. So did he wander off and get killed? Did the crazed woman kill him in vengeance? Did any of this happen? You hear all possibilities in Schoenberg's ambiguous, anguished and lyrically rapturous atonal music. Mr. Manahan conducted with visceral sweep; Ms. Thomson was marvelous. The second line of the *Neither* libretto -- "from impenetrable self to impenetrable unself by way of neither" -- conveys the mix of what seems to be acute observation and complete uncertainty in Beckett's phrases.

Yet Feldman savors every word of this text in his elemental and obsessively repetitive music. The soprano must deliver the words in syllabic utterances, often on high sustained notes that hover above the staff, making it almost impossible for the text to be clear. The soprano Cyndia Sieden was dazzling here, singing with uncanny focus, impressive stamina and ethereal beauty. The orchestral music in the first part of the work gurgles at an almost timeless pace: a primordial pool of heaving chords and twisted strands of notes. At one point the soprano becomes fixated on a rhythmically steady nine-note melodic line, a phrase the orchestra picks up and churns out, over and over. To stage this piece Mr. Counts and his team have created a room that looks like a cosmic disco hall with glittering walls and rotating mirrored cubes dangling on wires, illuminated with a riot of colored lights. Silent characters people the stage, including a man who flies up into the wings. Mr. Manahan and the orchestra gave a mesmerizing account of this fiercely original music. Ms. Sieden was a wonder" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 3/27/11].

March 26

Peter Oundjian conducts the Toronto Symphony Orchestra in Benjamin Britten's *Four Sea Interludes* from Peter Grimes, Ralph Vaughan Williams's *Symphony No. 4*, and John Estacio's *Frenergy*. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY. "The orchestra sounded bright and confident [in] . . . Britten's 'Four Sea Interludes' from 'Peter Grimes' The transitions of mood between sections were seamless; there was ominous urgency even in quiet passages. . . . [The] five-minute work from 1998 by the Canadian composer John Estacio . . . had the . . . vigor of an action-film score. . . . Oundjian chose Ralph Vaughan Williams's *Fourth*, composed in the early 1930s and, in its crushing grimness, sounding very much about the rise of Fascism (though Vaughan Williams denied it). The symphony's brassy bursts had shine and authority . . . [A]ll the works could be described as 'intensely lyrical when not intensely furious.' . . . But the program didn't show off the harsh power of the Vaughan Williams symphony. That work had the most to say to the dissonances and tortured rhythms of the Britten [Zachary Woolfe, *The New York Times*, 3/27/11].

March 27

Concert to Benefit Japan Earthquake Relief, with John Zorn, Yoko Ono, and Sonic Youth. Miller Theater, Columbia University, New York, NY.

"It was organized by the saxophonist and composer John Zorn, who has lived and performed in Japan and for decades has collaborated with, promoted and released albums by Japanese musicians. The program, headlined by Yoko Ono and Sonic Youth, reaffirmed longstanding ties between what were (in the 1970s and '80s) known as New York's downtown improvisers and their Japanese counterparts and co-conspirators. Sold out in two hours, the concert was also broadcast on Japanese television and to Columbia students. It raised \$34,000 for Japan Society's Earthquake Relief Fund. The musicians have stationed themselves where genres blur: noise, jazz, rock, funk, electronics. The program juxtaposed straightforward songs with open-ended improvisations. And, from Sonic Youth, an amalgam of both, as terse, punky verses dissolved into scrabbling, squalling, ringing guitar passages, cataclysmic and monumental. The bands overlapped: Ms. Ono's Plastic Ono Band shared its musicians, including Sean Lennon on guitar, with *Cibo Matto*, the noisy, lighthearted New York band that sings most often about food. Ms. Ono, who flashed peace signs as she entered and exited, channeled loss and trauma into primal vocal sounds: shrieks, sobs, cackles and ululations over her band's enveloping stomps and drones. Seemingly fragile at first, she was anything but as she strutted across the stage and turned into an electronically looped banshee. On this occasion she was commemorating not personal sorrows but public ones. *Cibo Matto* brought whimsy and noise. Yuka Honda, on keyboard, unleashed a deep electronic crunch . . . Mephista -- Sylvie Courvoisier on piano, Susie Ibarra on drums and Ikue Mori on laptop -- played the concert's most abstract set. Their intent improvisations had Ms. Courvoisier plucking inside the piano when she wasn't riffing impressionistic chords and ostinatos against the whistles, clanks, rustles and crackles from Ms. Ibarra and Ms. Mori. Their pieces had a moment-by-moment suspense; each plunk counted. Mr. Zorn, unexpectedly, gave one of the concert's least noisy performances. His *Aleph Trio* -- with Trevor Dunn on bass and Kenny Wollesen on drums -- delivered a Latin-flavored, two-chord vamp as Mr. Zorn revealed his melodic side: bluesy, agile, genial, dramatic and thoroughly swinging. Mike Patton, the lead singer of *Faith No More* and an eclectic improviser on his own, was backed by the redoubtable pianist Uri Caine in old Italian pop tunes — sung with tongue-in-cheek melodrama . . . through kaleidoscopic transformations, from ragtime to free-jazz clusters" [Jon Pareles, *The New York Times*, 3/28/11].

March 28

Cutting Edge Concerts. Leonard Nimoy Thalia, Symphony Space, New York, NY.

"Laurie Anderson, at work on a project in Brazil, was unable to get back to New York for the performance. Actually, Ms. Anderson's work, to which the second half of the program was devoted, was not a performance as such but a screening of *Hidden Inside Mountains*, a 25-minute film she made for Expo 2005, in Aichi, Japan. The score, an affecting electronic work for Ms. Anderson's electric violin, percussion, keyboards, bass, voices and effects, is accompanied by beautiful but mystifying imagery and short bursts of text ('Sometimes I think I can smell light') in Ms. Anderson's quirky, aphoristic style. Accessibility appears to have been the key to this opening concert; dissonance was used only in the most painterly way, and references to folk and popular music were plentiful. Peter Schickele's *Music for Orcas Island*, an easygoing piano quartet, begins with an invitingly folksy evocation of a spring day, and later uses pizzicato effects to evoke rain, and thick-textured, quickly morphing harmonies to suggest billowing clouds. The musicians -- Renee Jolles, violinist; Daniel Panner, violist; Maxine Neuman, cellist; and Kathleen Supové, pianist -- played the music with an appealing suppleness. The program began with Hannah Lash's *Folksongs: I, II, III, IV*, an appealing set of short, sweetly melodic pieces for piccolo, harp and exotic, light-textured percussion, performed by Maya, a trio with that unusual constitution. The folk melodies were imagined rather than quoted, and most of the action was in the piccolo line, which Sato Moughalian shaped gracefully, with subtle touches in both Bridget Kibbey's rendering of the harp line and John Hadfield's tactile percussion playing. Ms. Moughalian switched to flute and was joined by Ms. Supové in Jon Deak's *Bye-Bye!*, which required both players -- but mostly Ms. Moughalian, between descriptively chirping flute lines -- to narrate the story of a bird and a turtle traveling from Haiti to New York, and Randall Woolf's *Righteous Babe*, in which Ms. Moughalian and Ms. Supové mined the energy in an expanding series of blues riffs" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 3/29/11].

March 29

Leon Botstein conducts the American Symphony in music of Walter Piston. "Even at a time when adventure is on the rise at our major orchestras we are confronted season after season with a ceaseless tide of the well-worn and the safe. . . . Whose music is most egregious in its absence? Fill in the blank; any neglected composer will do. But Americans from the first half of the 20th century seem to have it especially rough. Even among their company, Walter Piston . . . is a special case. Few composers have fallen from widespread prominence into a void so nearly total.

You invariably encounter terms like 'craftsmanship' and 'elegance' in any description of Piston's work, and rightly so: few composers have shown his seemingly effortless knack for making instruments -- solely and in any combination -- sound exactly right. But with the rise of various avant-gardisms and neo-Romantic correctives, Piston's suave, airtight neo-Classical creations fell into an undeserved oblivion. Addressing such inexplicable oversights is a specialty of the conductor Leon Botstein. Here he offered two of Piston's symphonies, his Second and Fourth, and two of his most appealing works with soloists, the *Concertino for Piano and Chamber Orchestra* and the *Violin Concerto No. 1*. In each Piston's consummate skill came through in impeccably judged architecture, but also in a steady supply of arresting details: bluesy bent notes, brassy fanfares and other stylistic turns of phrase that caught the ear and stuck. The rightness of practically every gesture inspired a certain awe; at no point did the music seem motivated by any agenda but sheer delight in sound. The pianist Blair McMillen was a confident, compelling advocate for Piston's *Concertino*, a single-movement span of Gallic suavity and jazzy verve. The violinist Miranda Cuckson was agile and incisive in the concerto's frisky outer movements and soulful in its lyrical *Andantino*. Throughout the concert Mr. Botstein drew stylish, committed work from the orchestra, moments of rhythmic laxity in the concerto notwithstanding. In their many, varied spotlight turns, principal players consistently rose to the occasion" [Steve Smith, 3/30/11, *The New York Times*].

JapanNYC Festival. Alice Tully Hall, New York, NY. has offered samples of each style. "The program included five scores calling for three to nine players, with Daniel Druckman, the associate principal percussionist of the New York Philharmonic, on the podium for the larger works. The program seemed built to explore the breadth of timbres and textures the percussion world offers a composer. Masakazu Natsuda's *Wooden Music* (2008), the curtain raiser, was inspired by the primeval power of the forest, and used only wooden items -- mostly blocks, sticks and flat surfaces that were both rubbed and struck. Silences, sudden bursts, increasingly dense but irregular rhythmic patterns and a distant, rolling thunder created an atmosphere of naturalistic fluidity. The instruments Mr. Natsuda called for were technically unpitched, though one passage in the piece had the players striking blocks of different sizes to create a slowly rising scale. Toru Takemitsu's *Rain Tree* (1981), by contrast, is scored for marimbas, vibraphone and small bells. But pitch and texture are put at the service of painterly evocation rather than conventional melody and harmony.

Takemitsu's subject is water, and he used both individual and combined timbres to suggest the delicacy of rain, the unpredictability of rivulets and currents and a more general spirit of changeability. Hiroya Miura's *Mitate* (2010) explores a more complex approach to tone painting. In his program note Mr. Miura explained the Japanese concept of *mitate* -- a 'type of layered viewing of an object through projecting another seemingly unrelated object' -- by quoting a 15th-century poem that describes a snowstorm, with falling blossoms substituted for snowflakes. In his piece a clocklike ticking is the equivalent of the snow, with changing juxtapositions of timbres, attacks and strands of rhythmic complexity pulling the listener's imagination away from the clock imagery toward a more abstract conception. Two works drew, in very different ways, on sounds and moves from Indonesian gamelan music. Akira Nishimura's *Ketiak* (1979) == the program's most memorable work -- is scored for four players who periodically chant (well, shout, really) rhythmic figures that mirror and accent what they are playing on maracas, claves and hand-drums, as well as for a timpanist and a sixth musician who plays chimes. Given the instrumentation, the textures are quite unlike those of a gamelan orchestra (the chimes and chanting come closest), but the kinship was clear, and the young musicians played the piece with an infectious energy. Jo Kondo's *Under the Umbrella* (1976) edged closer to the sound and spirit of the gamelan. Scored for 25 cowbells of different sizes, shapes and pitches, the work is at its most compelling in the first two of its four movements, which thrive on repeated patterns offset by phrases that emulate the rhythms of speech. A static, slow-moving third movement seemed interminable, but Mr. Kondo closed the score with a concise, melodic finale" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 3/30/11].

March 31

Luciano Berio's reconstruction of Mozart's *Zaide*. Zankel Hall, New York, NY. "Berio, the Italian modernist composer who died in 2003, was exuberantly curious about all kinds of music. Madrigals, symphonies, opera, pop -- you never knew what would hook him. He was particularly drawn to unfinished works by masters. Among those was Mozart's incomplete singspiel *Zaide*. When the European Mozart Foundation asked Berio to compose a reconstruction, he leapt at the chance. Yet the work he wrote in 1995, *Vor, während, nach Zaide* (Before, During, After *Zaide*), was more of a mesmerizing orchestral commentary on the comic opera.

Thanks to the adventurous conductor David Robertson, who brought the St. Louis Symphony to Carnegie Hall in March, and the impressive, game musicians of Ensemble ACJW, the performing arm of the training academy run by Carnegie Hall, the Weill Music Institute and the Juilliard School, this Berio piece received its New York premiere In this stylish, vibrant performance, the Berio movements were interspersed among the existing arias and ensembles from *Zaide*, sung by a winning roster of young singers. As with the challenging program Simon Rattle conducted with Ensemble ACJW in December, the ranks of players were boosted to the size of a small orchestra with academy alumni. Mozart composed what there is of "*Zaide*" in 1779-80, hoping to win favor with Emperor Joseph II, who was planning a new German opera company for Vienna. The story centers on two young exiles, the lovely *Zaide* and the stalwart *Gomatz*, who are enslaved in a Turkish seraglio. They fall in love and try to escape, assisted by the captain of the sultan's guard, *Allazim*, a sympathetic convert to Islam. Thursday's program opened with the "*Vor Zaide*" movement of Berio's score. You had to listen hard to detect strands of Mozart in this atmospheric, harmonically murky and riveting music. Rather than setting a new libretto, Berio, who wanted to preserve a distance between Mozart's music and his own, asked the critic and librettist Lorenzo Arruga to write a poetic text that could be read by the audience while the music was performed. To enhance the drama, this performance followed the instructions in the score by having three people write Mr. Arruga's words on blackboards placed behind the orchestra and in one of the balconies during the Berio movements. The music from *Zaide* began with a small male chorus of slaves trying to be brave and hearty. Then came *Gomatz*'s opening melodrama, in which the captive young man, here the fine tenor Paul Appleby, berates his fate in an extended spoken monologue accompanied by the stormy orchestra. The soprano Deanna Breiwick brought a bright, high voice and charm to the role of *Zaide*. The baritone Kelly Markgraf was a robust and earnest *Allazim*. Jeffrey Hill, a lyric tenor with a sizable sound, was a suitably flustered sultan. The sturdy bass-baritone Shenyang had a comic turn as the keeper of the harem. In the original story from which Mozart drew *Zaide*, the young couple discover that they are brother and sister and the children of *Allazim*. The sultan relents and frees them all. But Mozart never wrote the third act. What we have of the score ends in a dramatic standoff quartet: the sultan vows to punish the two, who seem headed for execution. The *Nach Zaide* concluding section of the Berio work has the most discernible strands of Mozart running through it, enshrouded by Berio's multilayered, fitful music.

This musical commentary on Zaide is more engrossing than any respectful completion could ever be" [Anthony Tommasini, The New York Times, 4/1/11].

New York premiere of Sofia Gubaidulina's *In Tempus Praesens* ("In the Present Time"), performed by Anne-Sophie Mutter, the violinist for whom it was written, with and the New York Philharmonic. Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY. "Mutter . . . has taken the concerto around the world since introducing it at the Lucerne Festival in 2007. That event, with Simon Rattle and the Berlin Philharmonic, is the subject of *Sophia: Biography of a Violin Concerto*, a documentary film newly issued on DVD. Ms. Mutter also recorded the concerto for a CD with Valery Gergiev and the London Symphony Orchestra. Like *Offertorium*, Ms. Gubaidulina's first violin concerto, *In Tempus Praesens* unfolds in a continuous stream just over a half-hour long, permeated with somber silences and prone to unpredictable shifts from fragility to eruptive violence without warning. But the second concerto seems more overtly eventful than its predecessor; arranged in five unbroken episodes, the work pits its protagonist against what feel like challenges and even torments of the spirit. Even by her own intense standard, Ms. Mutter seemed unusually concentrated during *In Tempus Praesens*, the centerpiece of an all-Russian program. She dispatched flitting trills with sobriety and care, and played earnest melodic lines with powerful, sweeping strokes. Around her, an orchestra darkened by the absence of its violin sections murmured and roiled, its sound colored with itchy harpsichord, twinkling celesta and harps, burnished Wagner tubas and an enormous, roaring tam-tam. Mr. Thomas, who conducted the concerto's North American premiere with Ms. Mutter and the San Francisco Symphony in 2009, showed a firm command of its intricate workings, eliciting a potent, assured account. Idiosyncratic instrumentation was also a factor in Prokofiev's *American Overture*, a jaunty, episodic curtain raiser for 17 players with strings limited to a cello and two basses" [Steve Smith, The New York Times, 4/1/11].

