

21ST CENTURY MUSIC

OCTOBER 2012



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

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

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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.

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October 2012

Volume 19, Number 10

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A Quarter-Century of Bang on a Can

PHILLIP GEORGE

Bang on a Can was founded in 1987 by three American composers who remain its artistic directors: David Lang, Michael Gordon, and Julia Wolfe, David Lang, and Michael Gordon.

Its is perhaps best known for its Marathon Concerts during which an eclectic mix of pieces are performed in succession over the course of many hours while audience members are welcome to come and go as they please. For the twentieth anniversary of their Marathon Concerts, Bang on a Can presented twenty-six hours of uninterrupted music at the World Financial Center Winter Garden Atrium in New York City.

Among the many Bang on a Can events were performances by John Cage, premieres of Glenn Branca's epic symphonies for massed electric guitars, and fully staged operas of Harry Partch, featuring the composer's original instruments.

The three artistic directors occasionally collaborate by jointly composing a large work, often without revealing which sections each contributed. Examples include:

The Carbon Copy Building - a "comic book opera" with words and drawings by MacArthur Grant recipient Ben Katchor. It was the winner of the 2000 Obie Award for Best New American Work.

Lost Objects - a contemporary oratorio, with a libretto by Deborah Artman. It is a fusion of baroque music and modern soundscapes, rendered in performance by the original instruments ensemble Concerto Köln with four electronic instruments, three solo vocalists, a choir, and a live remix generated by DJ Spooky.

The New Yorkers - a staged multimedia concert with additional contributions by filmmakers and visual artists including: Ben Katchor, Bill Morrison, Doug Aitken, and William Wegman.

Shelter - a multimedia work that in the words of librettist Deborah Artman, "evokes the power and threat of nature, the soaring frontier promise contained in the framing of a new house, the pure aesthetic beauty of blueprints, the sweet architecture of sound and the uneasy vulnerability that underlies even the safety of our sleep."

Bang on a Can has commissioned and premiered pieces by John Adams, Iva Bittová, Roberto Carnevale, Ornette Coleman, Donnacha Dennehy, Bun-Ching Lam, Michael Nyman, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, and Somei Satoh. In 1998 the organization began the People's Commissioning Fund which supports the creation of new musical compositions by pooling contributions from numerous member-commissioners. The fund has commissioned:

1998 Virgil Moorefield, Dan Plonsey, Pamela Z

2000 Miya Masaoka, Marc Mellits, Edward Ruchalski, Toby Twining

2001 Jeffrey Brooks, Susan Deyhim, James Fei, Keeril Makan

2002 Eve Beglarian, John King, Matthew Shipp

2003 Annea Lockwood, Ingram Marshall, Thurston Moore

2005 Cynthia Hopkins, Carla Kihlstedt, J.G. Thirlwell

2006 Yoav Gal, Annie Gosfield, John Hollenbeck

2007 Lukas Ligeti, Joshua Penman, Stefan Weisman

2008 Erdem Helvacioğlu, Tristan Perich, Ken Thomson

2009 David Longstreth, Kate Moore, Lee Ranaldo, Lok Yin Tang

Bang on a Can is associated with the SPIT Orchestra and Bang on a Can All-Stars -- the latter consisting of clarinetist/saxophonist Evan Ziporyn, electric guitarist Mark Stewart, keyboardist Vicky Chow, percussionist David Cossin, cellist Ashley Bathgate, double bassist Robert Black.

Bang on a Can has released recordings on Composers Recordings Inc, Sony Classical, Point Music, Nonesuch, and its own Cantaloupe Music label. In addition to releasing works by Lang, Gordon, and Wolfe, and Lang -- the label has released music of Alarm Will Sound, Don Byron, R. Luke DuBois, Ethel, Gutbucket, Icebreaker, Phil Kline, and Evan Ziporyn.

Chronicle

August 7

Grand Band. Le Poisson Rouge, New York, NY. "[T]he new ensemble Grand Band is a piano sextet in the purest sense: six pianos, and only six pianos. It is an audacious, irresistible idea to have that many pianos onstage at one time. So it's just icing on the cake when the musicians are as individually accomplished as Vicky Chow, David Friend, Paul Kerekes, Blair McMillen, Lisa Moore and Isabelle O'Connell, who formed Grand Band a few months ago and performed for the first time as a group in June as part of the Bang on a Can Marathon. . . . There was a public apology at the group's second performance on . . . [August 7] that the concert would not feature real pianos, arranged in an interlocking array as at the . . . Marathon, but rather a circle of keyboards. This lowered the spectacle quotient somewhat, and along with the aggressive Poisson Rouge amplification system, it made the program of Minimalist and post-Minimalist works by Philip Glass, Kate Moore, Steve Reich, and Julia Wolfe sound powerful but also relentless. Ms. Wolfe began to write *My Lips From Speaking* (1993) one afternoon after listening to Aretha Franklin's recording of *Think*. It begins with strong, saturated chords before moving on to fragmented versions -- some unison, some not -- of syncopated soul riffs that are like abstractions of the song. . . . Closing, the final movement of Mr. Glass's *Glassworks* (1981), was more elegiac. It was instructive to see the different layers of his music physically separated among the different instruments. Some of the pianos played the slow, glacial figures that underlie his work, while others had the arpeggios that flow on top. Mr. Friend handled an insistent high-note phrase with subtle gradations of volume and touch. The tremble with which Ms. Moore's *Sensitive Spot* (2007) begins soon yields to dense, violent poundings before the piece ends with twinkling in the piano's upper reaches. And the group closed with Mr. Reich's *Six Pianos* (1973), a classic phase piece from which little rhythmic gestures rise out of the bustling, changeable texture. The group played it, like the rest of the pieces in this interesting if unremitting concert, with relaxed but focused poise" [Zachary Woolfe, *The New York Times*, 8/8/12].

August 9

Festival of Contemporary Music. Seiji Ozawa Hall, Tanglewood, Lenox, MA. "The director this year is the British composer Oliver Knussen, who turned 60 in June and has a long history here.

He came to Tanglewood as a student of Gunther Schuller in 1970 and directed the festival for several summers, from 1987 to 1993. Mr. Knussen's program is devoted mostly to British and American composers. . . . The opening installment balanced the old guard -- Harrison Birtwistle, Mr. Carter and [Niccolo] Castiglioni -- against two relative newcomers, Luke Bedford (born in 1978) and Sean Shepherd (born in 1979). This is a diverse bunch, but their works share a fluid style that has eluded the labels that classical music listeners use as a handy descriptive shorthand. It is easiest to say what their music is not. It is neither serialist (though it tends toward atonality) nor neo-Romantic (though it has lyrical currents and sometimes Romantic heft). It largely ignores Minimalism (though it occasionally, if briefly, uses repetition as a driving force) and it is certainly not indie classical (its eclecticism notwithstanding). Maybe these composers should be called Texturalists, because in every case these works were most striking for the lively play of contrasting colors, tempos and dynamics that gave them a tactile sense of dimension. Sure, there is more to the music than appealing surfaces. Castiglioni's *Quickly: Theme and Variations for 23 Instruments* (1994) uses a time-honored form in brilliant, original ways. Its angular solo violin theme is deconstructed and reconfigured in 23 short elaborations for a continually morphing stream of instrumental combinations: harp and harpsichord, for example, give way to celesta and glockenspiel; violins and wind chimes give way to woodwinds and bells. You can see the textural appeal. Mr. Birtwistle's *Cantus Iambeus* (2005) is packed with arcane techniques: as its title suggests, its themes use the short-long alternations of iambic pentameter. It also uses hocketing, a medieval technique in which melodies are split between voices in interlocking figures. But the score's immediate charm lies in its flighty pointillism, and the fleetness with which a shimmering harp and percussion figure is offset by the growl of the bass or the strained lyricism of the horn line. Medievalism was on Mr. Bedford's mind too. Or *Voit Tout en Aventure* (2006) weaves three medieval poems, all touching on debates about the state of music in the 14th century, into a seamless cycle. Its vocal line, sung with suave clarity by YoonGeong Lee, a soprano, hints at the texts' medieval roots, but the orchestral accompaniment, alternately a distant haze and a rich tapestry of timbres (including an accordion) is thoroughly up to date.

Mr. Carter's Double Trio (2011) -- like its earlier counterpart, the Triple Duo (1983) -- takes its energy from the interplay of competing groups (two trios) within the larger ensemble, though tempo and dynamic contrasts are everywhere, even within the distinct trios. And though Mr. Shepard's work *These Particular Circumstances* (2009), written for the New York Philharmonic's Contact! series, uses a broader palette and a looser approach to style, its energy and changeability made it seem linked to the Carter in spirit" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 8/10/12]. Birtwistle has not strayed quite as far as [David] Del Tredici [into neotonicity], but you would hardly guess from his [Cantus Iambeus] . . . that he was once considered a hard-edged atonalist" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 8/12/12].

August 10

Festival of Contemporary Music. Seiji Ozawa Hall, Tanglewood, Lenox, MA. "[Harrison] Birtwistle's *Betty Freeman: Her Tango* (2001), a playful, angular piece with an Argentine accent, opened Gloria Cheng's wonderful recital of piano works written for her Esa-Pekka Salonen's *Dichotomie* (2000) [is] a forceful evocation of the distinction between the mechanistic (in the vigorous first movement) and the organic (in the equally dense but more texturally supple finale). Mr. Knussen's wistful, gently chromatic *Ophelia's Last Dance* (2010) also proved irresistible. And the aphoristic movements of John Harbison's *Leonard Stein Anagrams* (2009) are packed with character, their brevity notwithstanding. . . . The finale of Mr. Harbison's work . . . briefly channeled Debussy's harmonic language, an influence also evident in the opening of George Benjamin's otherwise outgoing *Shadowlines* (2001) and in the first of Bernard Rands's *Preludes* (2007)" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 8/12/12].

August 11

International Contemporary Ensemble. Alice Tully Hall, New York, NY. "[One of Olivier] Messiaen[s] 'little sketches of birds' *Le Merle Noir* (Blackbird), from 1951, [was heard] in an amazingly varied performance by the flutist Claire Chase, who is also the ensemble's founder and director. *Le Merle Noir* is no idyllic or whimsical vision; in Messiaen's music, birds are violent and changeable, beautiful and free, but always with an undercurrent of threat, and Ms. Chase, alert to the music's quicksilver changes, kept the mood ominous.

It was followed by Jonathan Harvey's *Bird Concerto With Pianosong* (2001) in its North American premiere, conducted by Jayce Ogren and featuring a daring performance by the pianist Joanna MacGregor, who handled not just a busy piano part but also a bird-sound sample machine. The concerto is about extremes -- low winds under the piano's high twinkle, shimmering percussion and the heave of William Scheme's accordion -- and its big surges have Messiaen-esque muscularity. The birdsong often comes close to sounding like feedback; the natural and technological worlds feel on the verge of collapsing into each other" [Zachary Woolfe, 8/13/12].

August 12

Festival of Contemporary Music, programmed by Oliver Knussen. Seiji Ozawa Hall, Tanglewood, Lenox, MA. "Niccolò Castiglioni, an Italian composer who died in 1996 and is said to be a favorite of [Oliver] Knussen's. . . . [Castiglioni's] otherworldly *Inverno In-Ver* (1978) shared the bill with Mr. Knussen's second opera, *Higglety Pigglety Pop!* (1985) Both are essays in changeable textures, sparkling, treble-heavy percussion and keyboard writing, and string scoring that hovers microtonally between notes. They leave questions of tonality aside in search of a smoothly flowing magical shimmer. The less seductive *Tropi* (1959) . . . is a 12-tone work presented as a series of harsh bursts and silences. David Del Tredici, like Castiglioni, began his career by writing music steeped in dissonance. But in the mid-1970s he left pointed harshness behind in favor of full-throttle Neo-Romanticism, expressed at the time through a series of pieces based on Lewis Carroll's Alice stories. . . . Del Tredici[s] *Soliloquy* (1958), for solo piano, was given a virtuosic performance by Alexander Bernstein. . . . Perhaps the wisdom of hindsight pushes us to hear *Soliloquy* differently now. It proceeds from a series of chords built on minor seconds, and Mr. Bernstein could not be accused of trying to prettify them. But its fast section sounds almost Brahmsian, with only a veneer of modernist acidity. . . . [In] *Dinah and Nick's Love Song* (1970), composed for a friend's wedding [Harrison] Birtwistle provides sublimely lyrical themes for three unspecified melody instruments (oboes here) and harp. But he offers an avant-garde twist: the players must use chance techniques to determine the order and combinations in which those themes are played. . . . Mr. Knussen's *Higglety Pigglety Pop!* was unquestionably a hit. Like its predecessor, *Where the Wild Things Are*, presented here in 2010, it has a libretto by Maurice Sendak based on his own children's book. . . . Knussen's vocal writing is clear, shapely and strikingly direct. His orchestral music is colorful and painterly, and is essentially the oil that keeps the machine running. . . .

[Among the] gems . . . [were] Helen Grime's evocative, texturally vivid *Seven Pierrot Miniatures* (2010) and Sean Shepherd's melody-rich, structurally inviting *Quartet for Oboe and Strings* (2011). Marti Epstein's *Hidden Flowers* (2012), with its quiet, glassy string timbres, was a harder sell, though it had a concentrated, Feldman-esque appeal" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 8/14/12].

International Contemporary Ensemble presents *For the Birds*. Park Avenue Armory, New York, NY. "Tombeau de Messiaen (1994) . . . [is a tight, tense] work by [Jonathan] Harvey for solo piano and recorded sounds that the pianist Cory Smythe played. . . . [These] performances played with spatial arrangements; for the premiere of Marcos Balter's sprightly *Passará*, many of the instrumentalists stood behind the seated audience, and for Suzanne Farrin's new *Serenade*, the audience stood on the floor while most of the players performed from a balcony that wrapped around the room. . . . The score, alternately hushed and crashing, combines Renaissance harmonies and a very contemporary controlled chaos. The singer, here the vibrantly theatrical countertenor Anthony Roth Costanzo, sometimes echoes, sometimes ululates and sometimes disintegrates into a pained, nearly silent scream. In John Cage's *Telephones and Birds* (1977) the ensemble served up . . . the cluck of chickens and the squawk of sea gulls — alongside the chatter of phone messages. The sounds, in classic Cage style, were ordered by chance, just as in George Lewis's *Artificial Life 2007* (2007), which exists as a set of undefined directions for the players to interpret. [Claire] Chase closed the residency with yet another extraordinarily alive performance in Kaija Saariaho's *Terrestre* (2002), a condensed version of her flute concerto *L'Aile du Songe* [Zachary Woolfe, 8/13/12].

August 13

Festival of Contemporary Music, programmed by Oliver Knussen. Seiji Ozawa Hall, Tanglewood, Lenox, MA. "Stefan Asbury conducted the Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra in [David del Tredici's] *Happy Voices* (Child Alice Part III) (1980) . . . an unabashed orchestral showpiece, is decidedly Wagnerian, both in heft and in spirit. Energetic, driven and filled with broad strokes in bright hues, it carries the suggestion of a narrative undercurrent, although Mr. Del Tredici has offered no specifics. . . . Harrison Birtwistle's] short *Sonance Severance 2000* (1999) . . . [is] fundamentally consonant and command[s] attention with [its] subtly shifting coloration and wry humor. . .

[Helen] Grime was heard . . . in *Everybody Sang* (2010), an orchestral score in which contrasting layers -- sober string and woodwind writing alongside glittering percussion and brass -- evoked a moment inspired by a Siegfried Sassoon poem, in which soldiers momentarily escape the tensions of war by singing. [This] festival-closing orchestra concert also included Luke Bedford's *Outblaze the Sky*, an imaginative study in coloristic morphing, as well as [George] Benjamin's *Duet* (2008), an anticoncerto in which a solo piano line (played deftly by Peter Serkin) keeps its distance from the orchestra, though both have similar material. The program's centerpiece was Gunther Schuller's *Dreamscape* (2012), a three-movement score that, Mr. Schuller wrote, came to him whole in a dream. Mr. Schuller, who founded this festival in 1964, is 86, and he looked thin and frail But *Dreamscape* is a vital, magnificently detailed work, with hints of Ivesian humor in its opening movement and incendiary brass writing in its finale" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 8/14/12].

August 17

Boston Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Bramwell Tovey, in Samuel Barber's *Violin Concerto* and Aaron Copland's *Appalachian Spring*. Tanglewood, Lenox, MA.

August 18

John Williams 90th-Birthday Celebration Concert, with the Boston Pops Orchestra. Tanglewood, Lenox, MA. "Williams conducted the Boston Pops from 1980 to 1993, shining both his talent and fame on it, and Tanglewood gave him the luxury treatment a treasured friend deserves: not just a birthday concert, but a weekend that resonated with his own music. . . . The main theme from *Star Wars* accompanied a rousing montage of clips from the films, but other excerpts -- including those from *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* and *Schindler's List* -- were performed as pure concert works. Played in their entirety, rather than as snippets of underscoring and without the benefit of the films they accompany, Mr. Williams's themes can ramble, their structures slack. Taken simply as music, they can even embarrass. . . . And given how many films Mr. Williams has scored, it's no surprise that they can blend into one another. I have never seen *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, but when the orchestra played the raucous, whimsical *Hedwig's Theme*, I couldn't help but see in my mind *Home Alone*

His concert music -- Boston Symphony players were the soloists in movements from his concertos for oboe, horn and tuba . . . -- suffers from the same problems: not a lack of surface detail but a persistent vagueness, a structure that is assured and tight in the big moments but loose elsewhere. Yet it is no crime to be brilliant in the big moments, particularly in a culture that loves them. Mr. Williams was hardly the first great film composer, but he was the first master of that great American genre: the summer blockbuster. . . . He has created a language of confidence, seriousness and achievement that has stayed reassuringly the same even as so much else has changed. He is a genius of the short theme" [Zachary Woolfe, *The New York Times*, 8/19/12].

August 19

Death of Donal Henahan (b. 2/28/21, Cleveland, OH), at 91. New York, NY. "[He was] a Pulitzer Prize-winning music critic who wrote, often provocatively, for *The New York Times* for nearly a quarter of a century. Mr. Henahan, an accomplished pianist and classical guitarist, reviewed operas, concerts and recitals for the daily newspaper and wrote longer-form essays on a wide range of cultural subjects for *The Times* on Sundays from 1967 to 1991, when he retired after 11 years as chief music critic. He won the Pulitzer for distinguished criticism in 1986. Mr. Henahan, who also wrote for *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Esquire*, *Saturday Review*, *Holiday*, *High Fidelity*, *Harper's Bazaar* and other magazines, was the music critic of *The Chicago Daily News* early in his career. He wrote authoritative evaluations of singers, orchestras, operas and chamber groups, usually placing them in the context of comparable performances and the perspective of music history. . . . Henahan's first review in *The Times*, on Sept. 14, 1967, captured the spirit of an era. It began: "The American subculture of buttons and beards, poster art and pot, sandals and oddly shaped spectacles met the rather more ancient culture of India last evening at Philharmonic Hall. The occasion was the first of six concerts there this season by Ravi Shankar, the sitar virtuoso, whose instrument traces back about 700 years and whose chosen art form, the raga, is said to be 2,000 years old." Mr. Henahan's essays for the Sunday Arts and Leisure section often drew barrages of letters from readers hailing or huffing over his commentaries -- on the flawed acoustics of the New York State Theater at Lincoln Center, or Schubert's sexuality, or Tchaikovsky's purported suicide or the introduction of English-language supertitles in opera productions, which he called 'help for the befuddled.'

And he often challenged the world of music and art with pointed questions about the shortcomings of government, business and private philanthropy in providing support; about the underrepresentation of black musicians in symphony orchestras; or about what he called a poisonous 'cultural apartheid' that was 'not being discussed candidly and openly by those who lead our major cultural institutions.' In a lighter vein, he wrote a 1982 Sunday piece about the misuse of words from his own reviews in advertisements. Once, for example, he called a high-budget production 'a staggering disappointment,' only to find an ad attributing a gush of adulation to him: 'Staggering!' . . . Henahan . . . studied at Kent State University and Ohio University before enlisting in the Army Air Corps in 1942. After the war, he earned a bachelor's degree at Northwestern University and did graduate work at the University of Chicago and the Chicago School of Music. In 1947, while still at Northwestern, he joined *The Chicago Daily News*. He became the newspaper's chief music critic in 1957. Days after arriving at *The Times* in 1967, he broke the news that the Metropolitan Opera's 60-foot stage turntable, on which sets revolved between scenes, had been broken down for a year. It was built to carry 10,000 pounds, but 250 Egyptian soldiers and a Sphinx proved to be too much in a rehearsal for Antony and Cleopatra. In 1980, he succeeded Harold C. Schonberg as *The Times's* chief music critic" [Robert D. McFadden, *The New York Times*, 8/20/12].

August 21

Pauline Oliveros, with percussionist Susie Ibarra and pianist Thollem McDonas. Stone, New York, NY.

August 24

Lisa Scola Prosek's *Daughter of the Red Tsar*. Thick House Theatre, San Francisco, CA. Through September 2.

Francis Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites* presented by the Dell'Arte Opera company, directed by Victoria Crutchfield. East 13th Street Theater, New York, NY. "Poulenc's solemn, shattering 1957 opera . . . is an ambitious project: long, intense and trying. Though deceptively straightforward in its vocal lines and steady in its orchestral accompaniment, it requires great strength and purity of tone as well as the ability to convey nuance through the text. (Poulenc's intention was for the work to be performed in the language of the singers and audience, but Dell'Arte did it in French, as will the Metropolitan Opera when it revives John Dexter's classic production in May) . . .

The ensemble was fully prepared for the great final scene, as the nuns face the guillotine, and their chorus is inexorably reduced, one by one, during Poulenc's granitic setting of the Salve Regina prayer" [Zachary Woolfe, *The New York Times*, 8/26/12].

August 25

Charlie Parker Jazz Festival. Marcus Garvey Park, New York, NY.

August 29

Here and Now Labor Day Festival. Bargemusic, Fulton Ferry Landing, New York, NY. Through September 2. "[A] motley but spirited new-music celebration that brings together composers of all stripes and draws some of the biggest crowds the barge gets all season. Listeners don't always know what they are in for. Though an overall schedule is published on the barge's Web site, on each of the festival's four nights . . . the performers and works are juggled anew for each program. That said, all the announced players were on hand for the first concert . . . a program that began with the pianist Steven Beck's clear-textured stroll through Peter Heller's *Two Nantucket Songs* and ended just over three hours later with Trillo -- a clarinet, accordion and bass trio -- playing a Sephardic melody that morphed into a klezmer dance. Mr. Beck, a Bargemusic regular, found a delicate balance between ragtime form and mildly spiky melodic turns in Mr. Heller's two pieces. He followed those with Fred Lerdahl's invitingly contrapuntal *Three Concert Studies*, the first of which is a delightfully pointillistic, pedal-free fantasy. Philip Edward Fisher, another pianist, drew from the same well as Mr. Beck in his solo set: John Musto's *Concert Rags* pull free from ragtime traditions more fully than Mr. Heller's pieces: the first two, *Recollections* and *Emma's Waltz*, draw heavily on Impressionistic nebulosity, though the last, the rollicking *In Stride*, takes a page or two from Fats Waller's playbook. Mr. Fisher also accompanied Lauren Goldsmith, a soprano with a supple tone and a subtle but expressive style, in Libby Larsen's bittersweet *Songs From Letters* -- a cycle based on Calamity Jane's letters to her daughter, Janey, mostly about Janey's father, Wild Bill Hickok -- and William Bolcom's brighter, salon-style *Briefly It Enters*, and *Briefly Speaks*. Rob Schwimmer presented a more up-to-date look at keyboard music by way of two recent works of his own, scored for electronic instruments -- a *Haken Continuum* (a flat, touch-sensitive surface played like a keyboard but capable of smooth portamento) and a theremin . . . and recorded sound.

The more expansive work, *Gauntlet*, is a piano concerto of sorts: Mr. Schwimmer played a recording of his dense-textured Chopinesque piano line, and used the *Continuum* to cloak it in a fascinating orchestration that included string sounds, buzzing electronic tones and tactile, plucked timbres. Jeremiah Andrew Campbell, a cellist, and Meral Guneyman, a pianist, gave an electrifying . . . account of *Due per Due*, a beautiful, fast-moving dazzler by Justin Dello Joio. Several ensembles shared the bill as well. A sextet from the *Knights* (usually a chamber orchestra) performed lively, folkish improvisations from a work they jointly composed to accompany an exhibition at the Wolfsonian Museum in Miami Beach. The *Declassified* -- a clarinet, horn, bassoon and oboe quartet -- played intricate scores by Ted Hearne and Ken Thomson. But they were at their best on Caleb Burhans's *In the Dark of the Night*, a score built on hat tips to Philip Glass. And Trillo closed the concert with an upbeat, cross-cultural set that included klezmer-tinged arrangements of Satie and Bartok, and two imaginative, painterly scores by its bassist, Remy Yulzari" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 8/30/12].

August 30

Janacek's *Jenufa* presented by Opera Slavica. Bohemian National Hall, New York, NY. "*Jenufa* . . . [recently] presented in a wrenching performance . . . has always struck me as a thoroughly wintry work. That may be because of its almost ceaseless grimness, or because its final act includes the discovery of a murdered baby, buried in ice. But then, much of the music that Opera Slavica specializes in -- the Russian and Czech repertory -- is set in dark, chilly landscapes. So a challenge that faces the company's young singers, along with bringing the music and characters to life, is evoking a suitably icy spirit for an audience that has just wandered in from the summer heat. Opera Slavica is a hybrid opera troupe and training program, founded in 2009 by the conductor and pianist William Hobbs with the idea of schooling singers in the works that must be sung in Slavic languages. Each class spends a few months working on a specific opera and presents a staged production at the end of the summer. *Jenufa*, based on Gabriela Preissova's novel *Her Stepdaughter*, peers in on a tangled set of relationships in a Moravian village. . . . [U]ntil the curtain falls, tension remains at peak levels, as much because of Janacek's scoring -- sharp-edged harmonies, a wrenching balance of lyricism and angularity in the vocal lines, and driven, pointed orchestrations -- as because of the narrative details. Even the reduced orchestration of [William] Hobbs's arrangement for a 16-piece ensemble conveyed that energy fully.

The production was directed by Kara-Lynn Vaeni, with simple but imaginative sets by Nick Francone that used framed photographs to create a psychological backdrop rather than a sense of place.

That quality was supplied by Liam O'Brien's colorful costumes, which suggested both the Moravian setting and a measure of class stratification" [Allan Kozinn, The New York Times, 9/5/12].



Recording

Pauline Oliveros. Reverberations: Tape and Electronic Music, 1961-1970. Important Records, 2012. "Oliveros is well served by . . . [this] retrospective of her unreleased earlier work, coinciding with her 80th birthday celebrations being held throughout 2012. Unlike many of her contemporaries, Oliveros approached electronic music composing as an improviser. Her tape pieces for Buchla synthesizer, and sometimes tape delay, sound in-the-moment, being realized in real-time by someone whose acute sensitivity to the qualities in sound allowed her to paint intricate pictures with sine tones and filters on the fly.

Denser, her work at the University of Toronto's electronic music studio came from her immersion with its 12-tone generator system, which was cutting edge for its time" [Glenn Hall, exclaim.ca, 5/23/12]. "[A] new 12-CD box . . . provides an overview of the rigorous works she created during the [San Francisco Tape Music Center]'s heyday. Many still sound startlingly current" [Steve Smith, *The New York Times*, 8/10/12].

PAULINE OLIVEROS

REVERBERATIONS: TAPE & ELECTRONIC MUSIC
1961-1970

