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21ST CENTURY MUSIC

September 2002

Volume 9, Number 9

MARK ALBURGER	Flying High with Nancy Bloomer Deussen	1
KEITH POTTER	Earle Brown	6
MICHAEL MCDONAGH	Remembering Earle Brown	7
CONCERT REVIEWS	A Concerted Effort THOMAS GOSS	7
	I Can't Sing On, I'll Sing On DAVID CLEARY	8
	Pro Arte and Its Merryman DAVID CLEARY	8
	Eighth June NOW R. LEMKE	8
	Fresh Voices III MICHAEL MCDONAGH	9
RECORD REVIEW	Xenakis: The Hits CHRISTOPHER DE LAURENTIS	10
CHRONICLE	Of July 2002	11
COMMENT	By the Numbers	12

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ROLLINS COLLEGE
FLORIDA INTL U
HK BAPTIST U
POKFULAM U
Mark Francis
HUMANITIES INDEX
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OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
Rocco DiPietro
Burton Beerman
BOWLING GREEN U
OBERLIN COLLEGE
Michal George
MT UNION COLLEGE
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Flying High with Nancy Bloomer Deussen

MARK ALBURGER

Nancy Bloomer Deussen is a leader in tonally-oriented contemporary music. Her works have been performed throughout the United States and Canada.

I interviewed Nancy Bloomer Deussen at the offices of 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC on April 29, 2002.

ALBURGER: You've been able to get your work out all over the place!

DEUSSEN: I'm a pretty good promoter!

ALBURGER: Is that simply due to your own hard work?

DEUSSEN: Most of it is. I love promotion. I love business. That's probably not very common among composers.

ALBURGER: I find that if I have a choice between promoting a piece or writing a new piece, I (arguably) "waste" my time writing a new piece!

DEUSSEN: We never waste our time! In my case, I have a schedule. I write in the morning, and in the afternoon I work on promotion.

ALBURGER: Would you say it's 50/50?

DEUSSEN: When I'm working on a piece seriously, I would say it's 50/50. Then when I finish a piece, the promotion takes over for awhile. Right now, I have four commissions back to back.

ALBURGER: For your commissions, do you actively contact people, or does the work come to you?

DEUSSEN: These last four commissions came from individuals contacting me.

ALBURGER: Nice work!

DEUSSEN: Believe me, it's taken a long time! When I started writing music again in 1985, no one knew who I was. I had been playing cocktail music.

ALBURGER: That was your sole income?

DEUSSEN: I was also a piano tuner.

ALBURGER: Is that how you met your husband?

DEUSSEN: No, but Gary took over my piano tuning business. I was tired of tuning, and wanted more time to write.

ALBURGER: So pre-1985, for quite a while, you were a cocktail pianist and piano tuner.

DEUSSEN: 20 years.

ALBURGER: And giving lessons?

DEUSSEN: I did a stint in the 60's teaching. I tried teaching everything from K through 12, and decided I'd never want to do that again! Not any fun! I wanted to be an educator, and I wasn't in the right situations. I did feel I had something to give the kids.

ALBURGER: During the years that you didn't write, weren't you pining away or burning for composition?

DEUSSEN: No, but there's a book there! I'm just too busy to write a book, because I'm writing music! It was a combination of being married to two previous husbands who were not supportive of -- they were even punishing about -- my music; and being divorced; and raising children alone; and having to cope with all of that. Plus I was on a prescription drug. I never wrote a note, and didn't care.

ALBURGER: It wasn't Prozac.

DEUSSEN: It was Valium.

ALBURGER: Never take Valium unless you want to postpone a compositional career for 20 years!

DEUSSEN: I knew a painter in a similar situation who didn't paint a stroke for 17 years. There's an amnesia that goes along with it.

ALBURGER: You were taking Valium because...

DEUSSEN: ...I was married to a man who was building a flying saucer in his garage!

ALBURGER: Most people worry about flying saucers coming from the sky. Other people have to worry about them coming from their garages! No wonder they prescribed Valium: "Doctor! I'm seeing flying saucers in my garage!" "Take this Valium, and they will go away!" But, clearly, before that, there was this creative person...

DEUSSEN: I was, until 1965, an active composer, and I was beginning to have things performed, even though it was very difficult for women composers. When I graduated from Manhattan School of Music in 1953, there wasn't a single orchestra that would play anything that I had written.

ALBURGER: And, knowing you, you had tried.

DEUSSEN: Many of the packages would return unopened, because I never used a man's name. I always used my own name. Some orchestras never even turned the music down, because they had never even opened the scores. Even so, between 1953 and 1965, I was starting to get performed.

ALBURGER: And your name was Bloomer?

DEUSSEN: My name was Van Norman.

ALBURGER: Was Bloomer your name from your first marriage?

DEUSSEN: First marriage was to Webster

ALBURGER: That was the flying saucer marriage?

DEUSSEN: He was the second. Bloomer's the flying saucer man. He's still trying to build it.

ALBURGER: So you continue to preserve the name of a man who is building a flying saucer.

DEUSSEN: That is great! The reason is --

ALBURGER: -- you started to build your reputation as a composer

DEUSSEN: Not only that, but I had this piano tuning business under the Bloomer name.

ALBURGER: Your first compositions from '53 to '65 would have been promoted under the name of --

DEUSSEN: -- Webster. I've changed those manuscripts.

ALBURGER: Did you have pieces performed under the name Van Norman?

DEUSSEN: Not really. But I had written a lot of music. You know how it is. I've been writing music since I was six years old. I started to play the piano by ear when I was four. I'm a natural musician -- but the more education I have, the worse it gets! I just need to remain natural!

ALBURGER: Was there music in the household, and/or in the genes?

DEUSSEN: Well, my father was a musician.

ALBURGER: And then there's the possible Gershwin connection.

DEUSSEN: Oh yes, well, maybe one day I'll know about that. I can tell you that my mother and George were exceptionally close, and that there's a correspondence in the Library of Congress between my mother and George Gershwin, as part of the Gershwin Archives.

ALBURGER: Your mother's name?

DEUSSEN: Julia Van Norman. But, as far as I'm concerned, it's nothing that I ever want to try to promote myself in any way. I am who I am. The father that raised me was a wonderful father.

ALBURGER: He was musical as well. And your mother?

DEUSSEN: Played the piano, but more of a writer.

ALBURGER: That's why she wrote Gershwin, rather than sending scores.

DEUSSEN: That's how they became acquainted. She wrote to him first, and he was so impressed that he encouraged her to move to New York.

ALBURGER: She went to New York

DEUSSEN: She went to New York. She convinced my father that they had to move to New York.

ALBURGER: From where?

DEUSSEN: From Minneapolis.

ALBURGER: What were your parents' backgrounds?

DEUSSEN: I don't know too much about my mother. I didn't see much of her from age 5 on.

ALBURGER: So you were raised by your father.

DEUSSEN: Yes. When Gershwin died, my mother had a complete breakdown. She was in mental hospitals, so from that age on, I didn't see her.

ALBURGER: Well, genius and madness....

DEUSSEN: Very, very true. As far as I'm concerned, I feel like I'm a survivor from the streets of New York.

ALBURGER: What streets of New York?

DEUSSEN: The Bronx.

ALBURGER: Then Manhattan School of Music?

DEUSSEN: Two years at Juilliard. Two years at Manhattan School of Music. Then, when I got out to the West Coast, after I split with my first husband, Webster, I went back to USC and got another degree.

ALBURGER: Two years at Juilliard.

DEUSSEN: I didn't like it. When I was there, Juilliard it not a fun school. I can't say what it's like now, but when people are practicing five hours a day, and everybody is just driven, there's not much social life. I felt very out of place. I was not happy.

ALBURGER: Did you commute from the Bronx?

DEUSSEN: Yes. The composition faculty was doing Bartokian string quartets and atonal stuff. The faculty had initially turned me down. I decided that what I needed to do was find out what they were doing, and I would do it and survive. They had these weekly events called composer forums, which were open to the public. I found out what they were doing, and I went home and wrote a string quartet in 12-tone style. My only atonal work.

ALBURGER: Now that would be something else. Do you still have it?

DEUSSEN: That was one of my pieces that was lost in the flood at my house back in the 60's!

ALBURGER: The Flood! Not by Fire, but by Flood! How Biblical! An Auto-da-Flood! So, back then, you decided to talk the talk, walk the walk.

DEUSSEN: Just to get in. Then they gave me this teacher, and I went immediately back to writing what I wanted to write.

ALBURGER: And how did this teacher feel about that.

DEUSSEN: He wasn't pleased! So then they switched me over to Victorio Giannini, who was more to my liking, and we got along well. But I was very unhappy at that school. Finally, he said, "Look, I can see you're not happy here. You've told me that you're not happy, but I also teach at the Manhattan School of Music, so why don't you come over and you can study there. I think you'll like it there "

ALBURGER: So you did.

DEUSSEN: So I did.

ALBURGER: Overall the contact with Giannini was positive.

DEUSSEN: Oh, wonderful. He was a wonderful teacher. He didn't try to change me, but he tried to teach me to do the very best work that I could do from the place that I was.

ALBURGER: Which sounds like what any good teacher should do. Which sounds like teaching in a nutshell.

DEUSSEN: I think you're right. That's how I try to teach my composition students now. I have one who writes really quite atonal music, and I'm just trying to help him to write the best that he can.

ALBURGER: Coming to the West Coast, what was that all about?

DEUSSEN: Well, my First Husband, Webster -- Sounds like a saga! I guess it was! -- got a job a district manager for Encyclopedia Britannica. I was expecting my first child, Christopher, and we came out to Los Angeles.

ALBURGER: Webster was not a musician.

DEUSSEN: No. None of the husbands have been musicians. There are pros and cons to a musician marrying a musician, or not marrying a musician.

ALBURGER: Yes.

DEUSSEN: And, at the time, the idea was that women would stay at home -- cook, clean, have babies. This was before the feminist revolution, so I had a tough time, because I always knew I was a composer, from age 5. I told the first husband before we were married, "I'm a composer." He said, "That's no problem, I love music." As soon as we got married, that changed.

ALBURGER: Gets to be so you can't trust nobody!... So you got married, he shuts you down, takes you to the West Coast

DEUSSEN: We emigrated to Los Angeles (he was actually Canadian), and I immediately set about to find musical friends, because I'm a very friendly person.

ALBURGER: Yes, you are.

DEUSSEN: I'm outgoing.

ALBURGER: Yes

DEUSSEN: I went over to UCLA, and met Lucas Foss. I gave him some of my music to look at, and he invited me to his composition class, even though I wasn't registered at the University at all. I met all his musicians, and my husband was furious. He said, "What are you doing?" I even took my baby with me to some of these events. Husband said, "What are you doing during the day hanging out with those people? You should be at home taking care of the house."

ALBURGER: The beginning of the end. So it didn't last too long after that?

DEUSSEN: Five years total.

ALBURGER: As a friend would say when faking his way through interviews, "And then what happened?"

DEUSSEN: I decided that I needed to earn a living, and probably the easiest thing would be to become a music teacher. So I went to USC, which made the most sense given the degree I already had.

ALBURGER: Which was?

DEUSSEN: A Bachelor's in Composition from Manhattan School. At USC, I could get a Credential to teach in secondary schools in California. I was there for two years and two summers in a tough program. There's was money from the divorce settlement for just that interval.

ALBURGER: The sands of time were slipping away, and the Wicked Witch was at the door!

DEUSSEN: Yes! I really think that most of the musicians and especially the composers that I know struggle -- and struggle financially. Men and women! It's tough! Extremely difficult! So I did that, and that is when I formed my assessment of the Los Angeles School District. But even when this was going on, I was still writing music, whenever I could. I composed my first woodwind quintet, and a cantata, and some piano works. So later, when I didn't compose, it wasn't because my life was complicated, it was because I was on the drugs. Nobody was home upstairs.

ALBURGER: So here we are in Los Angeles. You're divorced, finished the program, teaching in junior highs, and deciding that you didn't want to do that any more.

DEUSSEN: I was just limping along. The kids loved me, nobody wanted me to leave. As soon as I passed the required probationary two-year period, they said, "You can be a permanent teacher."

ALBURGER: You said, "Thanks. No thanks."

DEUSSEN: I got a letter from Sacramento asking, "Why not?" So I told them!

ALBURGER: Ask and you shall receive!

DEUSSEN: To me, teaching in a public school is a deadly atmosphere for anyone who's creative. You really have to have a call.

ALBURGER: So what was your next move?

DEUSSEN: Ever since I was a teenager, I could play piano well enough to entertain. When I was a student at Juilliard and Manhattan, I used to play in clubs in New Jersey and New York. It's easy. I don't have to prepare! I don't have to do anything except just play! Meanwhile, I met Husband No. 2. I was introduced to him by a mutual friend -- who later apologized!

ALBURGER: Right!

DEUSSEN: I composed a woodwind quintet. Then we left Los Angeles, because he got a job at Lockheed. He was an aerospace engineer.

ALBURGER: Good money.

DEUSSEN: For a little while, there was money. Until he decided to build a flying saucer!

ALBURGER: And he was just the man to do it! Dirty job, but somebody's got to do it!

DEUSSEN: Different kind of interview!

ALBURGER: "Nancy Bloomer Deussen: Space Case" He got you up into this area, so that you and I could meet.

DEUSSEN: I came with two little girls, one newborn.

ALBURGER: Two Bloomers and one Webster.

DEUSSEN: Yes, and I'm still writing music, in '65.

ALBURGER: So you moved up here and stopped writing music.

DEUSSEN: He came home one day and said, "Well, I quit my job at Lockheed." I said, "Oh. You must have another one lined up." He said, "No." "What are you going to do?" "I'm going to build my flying saucer now."

ALBURGER: And was this to be marketed?

DEUSSEN: I guess so. Why does one build a flying saucer.?

ALBURGER: Maybe because "they told me to!"

DEUSSEN: No, he never said anything like that! He was an aerospace engineer, and was convinced that he could build a vertical takeoff and landing craft that would be shaped like a saucer. So he started building one in the garage.

ALBURGER: And he's building one to the present day.

DEUSSEN: Yes! Well, people looked at it. He took the designs to eminent scientists and so forth. There were problems with "attitude control."

ALBURGER: It wasn't that the scientists couldn't stop giggling.

DEUSSEN: No! That was the technical term for one of the problems. There were a lot of very good aspects to this.

ALBURGER: There was a lot of hard science behind it.

DEUSSEN: Absolutely. Bloomer is really a genius, although emotionally a child. Kentucky State Chess champion at age 12 -- very, very bright.

ALBURGER: A Beautiful Mind still around here?

DEUSSEN: He's in Portland, Oregon, and still has the saucer in the garage.

ALBURGER: The saucer took him that far!

DEUSSEN: But still doesn't fly.

ALBURGER: Took it in the trailer. But you stuck it out with him --

DEUSSEN: Almost 10 years. It was during that period that I started to fall apart over the flying saucer. My son Chris and I would go out and look for discarded bottles in the street, so that we could get some money to eat. Husband John had a credit card and we'd eat out. It was rough. It was during that time that I went to the doctor, and he said, "Oh, I have the perfect thing for you."

ALBURGER: How did the money equation get solved.

DEUSSEN: John and I divorced, and it was still rough. First I had a little teaching studio at home, and one of those students was Goat Hall Productions' Doug Mandell. Pretty soon we had an early music recorder ensemble, and I also taught piano. Then I went back to piano playing in restaurants, too. I walked in one evening to a piano bar, and someone was playing. I said, "Would you mind if I sat in?"

ALBURGER: Soon the guy was out of a job.

DEUSSEN: That's right!

ALBURGER: Don't give up your seat if you want to keep your job....

DEUSSEN: I was playing five days a week. On Valium!

ALBURGER: Well, for some people, listening to cocktail piano is the musical equivalent of Valium!

DEUSSEN: Not only was it background music, but I had people performing. I had all kinds of people singing, and I sang also. I used to call it, "Mumble along with Nancy!" I wasn't writing any music, but I became a pretty good jazz pianist. The chords are in my music. Liza Minelli came in one night. I invited her to sing something; I played everything she wanted. Finally she said, "You are the best accompanist I've heard in years. Would you like to go on tour with me? I'm leaving for Hawaii in a couple of days?" I said, "No." "Oh, why not?" "I have two young children."

ALBURGER: One of those paths not taken.

DEUSSEN: So I did the cocktail thing, but I had a hard time, because the smoking laws were not then what they are now.

ALBURGER: That's when the piano tuning came in.

DEUSSEN: I started the Bloomer Piano Service in 1975. At first, I didn't know how to tune, but I was convinced I could do it. I have perfect pitch, so I thought, if other people could tune, I could tune. So my poor musical friends -- people I knew, singers -- I'd say, "Do you mind if I practice tuning your piano?!"

ALBURGER: And that's how you learned.

DEUSSEN: And they'd get mad and say, "This is awful!" I'd go to these churches and make deals -- I'm very enterprising. Piano tuners that I got to know said, "You have to tune about 100 pianos before you're good at tuning."

ALBURGER: Is that true.

DEUSSEN: I think it is. You have to learn to set the pins.

ALBURGER: It's not just an ear skill it's a mechanical-technical one as well.

DEUSSEN: Yes. And at the time, as I had been all my life, I was alone again -- the only woman piano tuner that I knew at that time, just as I had been the only composition student that I had known. So I've been a trailblazer in many respects. Then, in 1983, I met my present husband, Gary. And soon after, I came off the pills. Major revolution in the house. Total upheaval.

ALBURGER: Because you were happy?

DEUSSEN: No, the doctor retired!

ALBURGER: Were it not for that, you could be on pills to the present day!

DEUSSEN: You'd never have heard a note of Bloomer Deussen.

ALBURGER: You talk of roads not taken -- Liza Minelli, yes. But suppose you had had a doctor that was significantly younger!

DEUSSEN: I said to myself, "I'm an addict. I have to get off. I don't care what it takes." I was in the hospital for three weeks, and a recovery home for six weeks. After about a year and a half, I was doing some mundane task, and I had a melody in my head. A melody. I was completely out of the classical music loop by this point. I didn't even know who Pavarotti was. I knew more about country-western! So I had a melody in my head, and I thought, "I wonder who that could be?"

ALBURGER: It turned out it was you. Starting with one melody.

DEUSSEN: The first piece was *Capriccio for Flute and Piano*. And nobody, by that point, knew what my background was. So I have a very spiritual, mystical view of my return to composition, and I really don't care what anyone thinks of the music I am composing, because I'm on a path. But the paradox is, a lot of people hear my music, and they seem to really like it. They are very moved by the music.

ALBURGER: I remember being impressed by your music the first time I heard it, at the Marin Symphony, when they read your *Reflections on the Hudson*. And that was an early work, so you've been on a path the whole time.

DEUSSEN: That was 1953.

ALBURGER: I remember writing of its Barber-like atmosphere. The piece worked then and it works now.

DEUSSEN: It's been played by at least 30 orchestras. As for the later works, I just feel like I have all this time to make up. By now, I've written about 50 pieces.

ALBURGER: What percentage since your "reawakening"?

DEUSSEN: About 90 percent

ALBURGER: So only about five pieces from the earlier days?

DEUSSEN: Yes, that are still played.

ALBURGER: Another manifestation of your practical side was the founding of the local chapter of the National Association of Composers.

DEUSSEN: I got this phone call from a man who was trying to found a local NACUSA chapter with him. I thought, "I'm open." I suppose he had heard of me through word of mouth. So we got together for dinner. He proceeded to down two or three bottles of wine non-stop. I thought, "Hmm."

ALBURGER: Why is it that everywhere we turn in this interview, we find mind-altering substances?

DEUSSEN: It was him, not me! I thought, "Maybe this thing isn't going to work out," but the basic idea appealed to me. So we planned two concerts: one in Berkeley and one in Palo Alto -- our backyards so to speak.

ALBURGER: Metaphorically.

DEUSSEN: They could have been in our literal backyards -- they were so sparsely attended! He had an interesting way of writing music. His music was extremely atonal. I'm very interested. I asked, "What is your process, John?" He said, "Oh, I write music with the TV on." "You mean you turn the sound down." "Oh, no, the sounds on." I felt like saying, "It sounds that way!" Anyway, we had just his music and my music -- that's all we had.

ALBURGER: Well, you were the founders!

DEUSSEN: We didn't have anyone else in the group yet! The first concert had seven people and the second had a few more. After that, he immediately moved away. He left and I suspect probably (and unfortunately) became an alcoholic!

ALBURGER: We should be looking in the Wine Country for him.

DEUSSEN: I think he moved to North Carolina.

ALBURGER: In the Moonshine Country.

DEUSSEN: So I was left with the notion that I had started to form this group. I checked with the national office, and they encouraged me to continue on my own.

ALBURGER: Amazing. Someone else's idea, but you picked it up

DEUSSEN: For nine years I was the President, Vice-President, and Secretary. Flana Cotton came in as Treasurer.

ALBURGER: And soon after, Molly Axtmann Schrag

DEUSSEN: She and Flana are excellent composers! I'm still very excited about NACUSA. I attend festivals all over the world, and what we have here is extraordinary.

ALBURGER: NACUSA, like several other entities in the Bay Area, has to survive by its appeal to audiences. Such groups are not funded by universities or major grants. The programs rise or fall on whether people think our music is enlightening, entertaining...

DEUSSEN: Entertaining! Mozart needed to entertain, Beethoven needed to entertain. Why do some contemporary composers think that they don't need to entertain?

ALBURGER: It's not a dirty word.

DEUSSEN: It's not a dirty word at all!

Writers

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Earle Brown

KEITH POTTER

The American composer Earle Brown was frequently associated with John Cage, to whom he was personally very close, particularly in the early 1950's. Yet the basic aesthetic thrust behind Brown's compositional output, which spreads over more than five decades, has almost nothing in common with the chance operations that made Cage famous.

Brown played jazz trumpet in his youth, but his early interests were as much scientific as musical. During 1944-45, he studied mathematics and engineering at Northeastern University in Boston, not far from his birthplace in Lunenburg, Massachusetts. Two years in the US Army Air Corps -- where he gained his pilot's license, of which he remained proud, as well as playing trumpet in the Air Corps Orchestra - were followed by a three-year period, between 1947 and 1950, of studies in composition, musical techniques and music history with the twelve-note composer, Roslyn Brogue Henning.

At the same time, he also took courses at the Schillinger School of Music in Boston (now the Berklee School of Music, which offers studies in jazz and popular music), which introduced him to Joseph Schillinger's rigorous attempts to use mathematical procedures in musical composition. Brown became so enamoured of these ideas that in 1950 he and his first wife, Carolyn, moved to Denver, Colorado so that he could disseminate Schillinger's methods there as an authorized teacher. Though these were soon to be challenged by his first encounter with Cage, Schillinger's imaginative integration of music and mathematics remained an important influence on Brown throughout his life.

While the Browns were in Denver, Cage and his lifelong personal as well as artistic companion, the choreographer and dancer Merce Cunningham, came to the city on tour. The Browns' first meeting with them determined their future, and they soon moved to New York, where Cage and Cunningham were based. Here, both Earle and Carolyn quickly became part of the artistic circles in which Cage moved, which included the composers Morton Feldman and Christian Wolff, the pianist David Tudor and, outside the inner Cage circle, the more senior composer Edgard Varèse. Many of the famous artists of the so-called New York School of the time, including Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock and, later, Jasper Johns, were then also part of this lively downtown Manhattan scene. Earle worked with Cage on the Project for Music for Magnetic Tape, an heroically pioneering scheme for making electronic music. Carolyn, an uncommonly intelligent as well as beautiful dancer, soon became the Merce Cunningham Dance Company's female lead.

Ideas and methods then new in the art world had a crucial effect on the development of Brown's innovative methods of musical composition in the 1950s. *December 1952* -- still perhaps his most famous composition, with its Mondrian-like, slim black rectangles floating on a single page of white space -- is the first musical score to use graphic notation in a conceptual way entirely disconnected from any specific instructions about pitch, rhythm, dynamics or timbre.

Twenty-Five Pages (1953), for between one and twenty-five pianos, is among the earliest works to employ what Brown himself called "time notation" -- or, as it subsequently became known, "proportional notation" - in which time is suggested by spacing on the page rather than by conventional rhythmic means.

Twenty-Five Pages also has what the composer called an "open form", meaning that the order in which the pages are to be played, and in this case the choice of which clef to use and even which way up the pages themselves are to be read, are up to the performer(s). The flexible deployment of musical material at the moment of performance - even if this material is, as is usually the case in Brown's subsequent output, itself quite precisely defined -- remained fundamental to his approach.

All these techniques seem rooted in the immediacy and spontaneity that are crucial ingredients of jazz, and in a natural joy in giving his performers the opportunity to make subjective choices, as well as the vividly imaginative attitudes to color and form that Brown found among his artist friends. These techniques are also especially close to the artistic attitudes of Robert Rauschenberg, with whom the composer was particularly friendly and whom he considered a genius, and those of Alexander Calder, whose sculptural mobiles were an important influence on the composer's concept of open form; *Calder Piece* (1963-6) was written for four percussionists playing on a mobile sculpture that Alexander Calder created especially for this composition.

In the early 1960's, Brown began to experiment with the spontaneous direction of larger numbers of musicians by one, or sometimes more than one, conductor. The notations and techniques that he developed for *Available Forms I* (1961) and *Available Forms II* (1962) led, over the next four decades, to a varied collection of works exploring different kinds and degrees of balance between flexibility and control.

Already regarded as highly significant in late 1950s Europe, where he was championed by Pierre Boulez and Bruno Maderna, Brown now became an important influence on a whole generation of European as well as American composers impatient with serialism and concerned to find more malleable approaches towards the manipulation of sonic materials in performance. He lectured at the Darmstadt Summer School for New Music in 1964 and 1965. "I think he's been ripped off more than any of us, in an overt way" was Feldman's verdict on Brown's influence. Brown himself put it differently: "I love Stockhausen," he said, "but he's always waking up in the morning and inventing the light bulb."

In Brown's later output, the overall shape of each work is generally fixed, with some sections remaining freer than others; the attractively colorful and energetic sextet, *Tracking Pierrot* (1992), is a good example. If from the late 1970's there was something of a falling-off both in the composer's own productivity and in the esteem in which Brown was held in some quarters, recent years have witnessed a renewal of enthusiasm, especially among a younger generation of musicians who value the creative collaboration that his scores offer. It would seem that his legacy is now in the process of re-evaluation.

Between 1955 and 1960, Brown was an editor and recording engineer for Capitol Records; and after that, until 1973, he acted as director of artists and repertoire, and producer for Mainstream-Time Records' "Contemporary Sound" series, a collection of recorded modern music still prized today. In the 1960's and 70's, in particular, he amassed a string of appointments, both in Europe and the USA, as composer-in-residence, visiting professor and guest conductor, and a variety of awards and honors, including a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1965-6.

Brown's long and very happy marriage to his second wife, the art curator Susan Sollins, helped to maintain his links with the art world, while his love of life continued to express itself in myriad ways, from his wicked sense of humor to his penchant for fast cars, for playing (or at least watching) tennis, and his enjoyment of the couple's lovely lakeside retreat not far from New York City. He had been suffering from cancer for many years; though extremely ill in the mid-1990s, sheer determination had helped keep him in rather better health until very recently. A retrospective of Brown's music had already been mounted in New York two years' ago; a memorial concert is planned there for the autumn.

Earle Appleton Brown, composer; born December 26, 1926, Lunenburg, MA; W. Alton Jones Chair of Composition and Composer-in-Residence, Peabody Conservatory, Baltimore 1968-73; Visiting Composer, California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA 1973-83; Director of the Fromm Music Foundation, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA and Programming Director of the Fromm Weeks of New Music at Aspen, Colorado 1985-90; died July 2, Rye, NY.

Remembering Earle Brown

MICHAEL MCDONAGH

The other day I wandered onto the Los Angeles Times site to read pieces by Daniel Cariaga, and found archived ones by their principal classical music critic Mark Swed, including his obit on Earle Brown. I knew Earle suffered from a skin condition -- he was going to see a specialist in Manhattan when I was there last July -- and we had hoped to meet for dinner. But I didn't know he would leave us so soon, even though he'd discreetly mention times when bad health had plagued him. So I was shocked to find him gone, and still am. And now we have only one member of the New York School left -- Brown's dear friend Christian Wolff.

Earle's music had a visceral, mind-opening impact. I first experienced his *Available Forms II* (1962), in a performance conducted by his friend Bruno Maderna, on an RCA LP, and later encountered his 1965 String Quartet. And so when I found out that his big orchestral piece, *Cross Sections and Color Fields* (1972-75) was being played by Michael Tilson Thomas's New World Symphony as part of his *American Mavericks Festival* (2000), I was ecstatic. The San Francisco Symphony press office kindly set up a phone interview, and we had a cheerful series of calls in which Earle was always positive, brilliant, and very funny. Then he arrived in town and invited me to come to a morning rehearsal of his piece. I knew what he looked like from pictures, and introduced myself. He was immediately charming, as was his wife art curator and filmmaker Susan Sollins. Earle sat in the aisle in front of me with his score, and followed its unfolding onstage with quick interest. The subsequent live performance was exciting, mysterious, and touching.

Though noted for his use of "open form" -- a concept he invented -- which somehow always seems to imply chaos, Brown's works actually tend to sound like rationally ordered events, with surprising moments of violence, and sometimes profound lyricism. The French philosopher Henri Bergson, whom he quoted in a big interview we did, said it better -- "Disorder is merely the order you're not expecting." Earle's order was always supremely artful, and supremely surprising, too.

"I came to the conclusion that if the avant-garde goes out there and nobody follows them, you don't have an avant-garde, and if they don't discover a damn thing, and nobody follows you're not avant-garde, you're just eccentric," he said in the same interview. Fortunately Earle's ideas about how musicians should actively engage themselves when performing his work, were seminal, even prophetic. He gave them choices, a quite uncommon notion in classical music. And by giving choices, you make the entire thing more lively, and interesting for all concerned. People love being in the moment. Which was an almost unbearable notion when he wrote *December 1952*, but isn't so now. So maybe history catches up with what scouts like Earle were doing. He made something both beautiful *and* useful too. I miss him very much.

Concert Reviews

A Concerted Effort

THOMAS GOSS

Santa Rosa Orchestra. May 4, Santa Rosa, CA.

Any decent orchestra worthy of its rosin and cork-grease must necessarily contain musicians who are not only first-rate team players but who are also ready to take up the lead in a concerto or two. Santa Rosa Symphony is that orchestra, from bridge to scroll. A glance down their roster reveals names that keep recurring across the panorama of the West Coast music scene, from symphony to chamber to the most eclectic of experimentation: Candice Guirao, Robin Bonnell, Wanda Warkentin, Linda Ghidossi-DeLuca, Laura Chrisp, Kathleen Lane Reynolds, to name a very few.

On May 4 the Symphony presented a program of concertos that showed these performers at their best, almost making the tradition of the visiting soloist seem unnecessary, at least for this group.

The *Trombone Concerto* of Danish Composer Launy Grondahl found the perfect advocate in trombonist Bruce Chrisp. Chrisp captured the meaning and lyricism in this small-scale, surprisingly-quiet showcase, in the proclamations of the first movement, the passion of the second, and the grooving of the third. He had a full, generous sound with a lot of color and well-controlled brassiness in loud passages. But for sheer chops, it took clarinetist Roy Zajac to blow out the doors with his energetic performance of Debussy's *Première rapsodie*, which closed the set.

The careful ministrations of conductor Jeffrey Kahane brought such life to the score that it was hard to imagine it had been orchestrated from a piano part. Zajac's approach was naturally virtuosic, with unearthly precision in the treacherous middle section, though his tone lacked warmth at times in more-lyric passages.

The precociousness of the above was balanced by sheer opulence in the second, a no-holds-barred performance of the Bartók *Concerto for Orchestra*. This was both a statement of the excellence of the players and a testament to the care and skill of conductor Kahane. The orchestra followed each change of mood, each trick of tempo, with exacting alertness. The moments one tends to notice less were much more prominent while the set pieces were less overblown. The overall effect was a continuous stream of fascination, pulling this listener ever closer to the arcane yet humanistic vision of the composer.

Kahane's approach seemed counter-intuitive in many places. Moments of mystery, such as the opening of the first movement, were all the more mysterious for being simply presented. The madcap cartoony parodies of the notorious intermezzo were deadpanned, with a resultant wit that came across all the more deadily.

The strings were in fine fettle with particular excellence in the violas and cellos as they emoted their sectional arias. The percussion shone in tattoo, boom and snipet, while the brasses were properly rich and outrageous once they warmed up. The standouts of the evening were the winds, in both bravura passages and subtle connecting lines. The "Game of Pairs" seemed more an ensemble effort than a series of clever duos as the weaving parallel lines moved across the section with integrated intention and outlook. The bassoon playing was particularly remarkable. Principal bassoonist Carla Wilson played with insistence, agility and intuition, underpinning the winds and string with apparent grace. It brought home the derivation of that word, concerto: to agree upon and act in harmony with. Amen.

I Can't Sing On, I'll Sing On

DAVID CLEARY

Samuel Beckett, with the Auros Group for New Music. May 17, Pickman Hall, Longy School of Music, Cambridge, MA.

The Auros Group's season finale trained the spotlight on one of this past century's most celebrated and inimitable writers, Samuel Beckett. The concert featured not only an operatic setting of one of this author's plays, but also his dabblings in other media. In addition to a screening of the infrequently seen *Film* (1964), a silent, modest length, black-and-white star vehicle for an aged Buster Keaton, the audience was treated to a presentation of Beckett's *Quad* (1982), a conceptual work employing music and dance. This latter consists of a quartet of hooded, cloaked dancers marching about the stage in intricate pattern combinations, underscored by a foursome of percussionists who extemporize accompaniments in support.

It's all quite Cage-like in its way, though imbued with the somber existential desperation of postwar French literature rather than the life affirming friendliness found in the collaborations of Cage and Merce Cunningham. Acton School of Ballet members Jessica Berkwitz, Mimi Calkins, Nora Lawrence, and Emily Normand expertly traced Chip Morris's staging of Beckett's interlocking geometric grids, while percussionists Matt Bogdanow, Maddie Child, Nathan Davis, and Robert Schulz improvised a sturdily capable sonic platform.

Embers (1984), a chamber opera by Peter Child based on a radio play by Beckett and given here in a semi-staged presentation, is effective both as musical and stage entity. It allows the author's writings sufficiently free reign while bringing many enhancements to them; the sense of drama is subtle, but clearly present. Scored for Pierrot ensemble plus percussion, the ensemble backing is highly eclectic, containing material suggestive of everything from Chopin to Messiaen, Schoenberg to Earle Brown. When put in service to an extroverted male vocal part (as is often the case), the sum total hearkens back to such Peter Maxwell Davies fare as *Eight Songs for a Mad King*. But there's no sense of style toadying here; Child's music expertly goes beyond any influences heard. And the vocal writing is first rate, a highly convincing melange of singing, speaking, and *Sprechstimme* that puts the text across clearly.

Baritone David Ripley and mezzo-soprano Janna Baty were splendid; Ripley's voice showed terrific flexibility and range of characterization as well as substantial sound and fine diction while Baty's well controlled mezzo instrument contained significant power (especially in high registers) and excellent enunciation.

David Hoose's fine conducting demonstrated significant grasp of the score's intricacies and a sensitive feel for stage pacing, while the pit band of Susan Gall (flute), Gary Gorczyca (clarinet), Sarah Thornblade (violin), Jennifer Lucht (cello), Nina Ferrigno (piano), and Schulz played handsomely.

The evening commenced with a new curtain raiser by John Heiss, *Fanfare for Auros' Tenth Anniversary* (2002). It's brief but effectual, an imaginatively constructed and genially festive selection that convinces with charm and craft rather than flashy strength. Scored for Pierrot quintet, the sound world is dissonant though grounded in scalar pitch collections. The aforementioned opera instrumentalists (minus Schulz) gave it well.

Huzzahs go out to this talented group -- still going strong after ten seasons -- for an enjoyable concert that kept its audience waiting neither for Godot nor quality music making. Very well done.

Pro Arte and Its Merryman

DAVID CLEARY

Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra. May 19, Sanders Theatre, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

The Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra's season ender saw the premiere of a fine new piece by Marjorie Merryman. Her *Windhover Fantasy*, begun not long after September 11, is plaintive yet intense, questioning yet powerful in feel -- to this critic's ear, the most eloquent musical response heard yet to the terrorist outrages of that date. It explores the nebulously triadic world of polytonality with great confidence; despite brief snatches of music that obliquely suggest Ravel, Honegger, Sibelius, Shostakovich, and film scores, this is a selection that projects a highly distinctive sonic universe akin to no other composer current or past. Structurally, the work traces a sonata-like outline, complete with an unambiguous recapitulation of the opening oboe melody, without slavishly articulating this older format. In brief, it's a very special listen—a commission the Pro Arte can be proud to call its own. Conductor Isaiah Jackson directed the confident sounding ensemble with all the passion and sensitivity one could ask for. Special mention should be made of oboist James Bulger and clarinetist Julie Vaverka, whose playing in solo passages shone brightly.

Eighth June NOW

R. LEMKE

Eighth Annual June *NOW Music Festival*. June 21, Goat Hall, San Francisco, CA.

In the spirit of "de gustibus non-disputandum est," or there's no point to a dispute about musical taste, it is worth to note the particular character of the NOW music festival that distinguishes it from other new music festivals that were held in San Francisco on the same evening. The vast majority of performers and composers at Goat Hall plunked down a piece of notated, scored music, and played it, as written.

Some pieces were only provisionally rehearsed, others had been thoroughly rehearsed with ensembles of three or four instrumentalists, but the majority of presenters that evening deemed their compositions worthy of notation. Inexplicably, this made the length of the music marathon much easier to endure, and in fact, the festival was a pleasure.

Hour one opened with music by Molly Axtman performed by Patti Deuter. It consisted of a simple and agreeable prelude followed by a more demanding finale of sweeps up and down the keyboard in major and minor scales. Ms. Deuter performed the work musically and with very convincing effort.

Lisa Scola Prosek's "The Civil War" from her opera *Satyricon* featured baritone Micah Epps, with the composer at the piano. Epps did a wonderful job of performing this compelling and dramatic song, and was greeted with warm applause.

Nancy Bloomer Deussen's *The Pegasus Suite*, performed by Harry Bernstein and Melissa Smith, is perfect example of where one might discuss musical taste rather than appreciate the craft of the composer and the excellent performance. Bloomer Deussen has a pleasant, Hollywood style of composition that is actually seeing a revival, as in the recent re-encounters with Erich Korngold.

A classic improvisation, *Indoctrination*, by Josh Allen and Garth Powell, was performed on tubular bells, gong, saxophone, and culminated in a cluster of duck calls. This was much more "hip" than the preceding but suffered from all the inherent clichés to which improvisation lends itself. The fine tone of the saxophone held our interest while the duet reached its musical climax far too early and sustained for too long.

Laurie Amat's solo vocal improvisation, *Ligeia*, was again under the auspices of "hip" where one often finds a dearth of musical ideas. The piece seemed to express personal suffering, an Edvard Munch episode for soprano. But after a few minutes Amat lost her audience, and the experience became somewhat self-indulgent.

The hour concluded with *Incursion* for solo trombone, by Brian Bice and performed by Richard Lee. The work was a series of tonal themes, each of which could have been developed, but were not.

Hour 2 opened with something more interesting, *21* by D'Arcy Reynolds, performed at the piano by the composer. The ostinato "walking" bass accompanied a series of chords in the right hand, which established a rhythmic tension and a sinuous line.

A *Rondo Giocoso* trio followed, with composer Gary Friedman on oboe. The performance was a pleasure, and -- despite a certain insistence on a triplet figure -- the composition as well.

Thomas Busse presented a song setting by Hans Werner Henze of Auden's *Lay your sleeping head, my love*, with the immediately intriguing and excellent pianist Mei Fang Lin.. While Busse rendered the songs competently, he was somewhat overshadowed by Lin's musicianship. The song, long on mood, had the peculiar habit of landing the tenor on the identical notes for each culmination of a crescendo.

Two selections from *The Wind God*, music by Mark Alburger and text by Harriet March Page followed, with the composer at the piano and the librettist as vocalist. Immediately the mood in the hall was transformed by this disarming, charming music, so well performed. Particularly melodic and humorous, this listener was also pleased by the comic aspects in some of the modulations, as on the word "Las Vegas."

Next came Married Couple -- playing trombone, soprano sax, amplified bass and drums -- in two pieces, the more interesting being a very amusing arrangement of the Allegretto from *String Quartet No.8* by Dmitri Shostakovich. The trombonist used a plunger mute, which made this arrangement by Jason Levis even more bizarre but somehow still Russian.

Thomas Goss followed with *Bloogie Woogie*, intermediate piano pieces composed for his students. The first develops some interesting chords within the context of a very conventional form, and the second, *French Pop* was humorous in its references. The third lacked subtlety of any kind however so the listener was left thinking this was not one of Goss's best efforts. Then came two piano pieces performed by Dave Hatt, one by Barney Childs and the other Jim Fox's *Two fisters for B.C.*, with clusters of chords played in a severe style.

The woodwind trio of Bruce Salvisberg, Mark Alburger, and Steve Bergman performed *Idyll* by Stan McDaniel, a work with repeated triplet figures that was a pleasant musical meander. Alexis Alrich's trio for amplified mandolin, marimba and piano seemed rich with possibilities and would welcome a second listening.

Mei Fang Lin returned with her own *Disintegration*, the evening's showstopper. She came to life, plucking the strings of the piano in an effective introduction. She then lit on fire in a passionate and impressive performance of these somewhat scholastic vignettes of different moods. Everyone was moved to great applause.

Tom Heasley's *Sanctuary* for electronics and a long tube had deep complex bass notes. Quite professional as a live performance, the overall effect was trance-inducing. Pianist-composer Ric Louchard played *Waltz*, which consisted of melodic lines split between two octaves.

Brenda Schuman Post's microtonal improvisation for oboe, was inspired by composer Johnny Reinhard. We have by now seen so many demonstrations of what "the instrument can do" that we wish these long improvised demonstrations also held some musical ideas that were developed into an artwork. Techniques become interesting when part of a musical idea.

Matt Small's *Piano Trio*, ably performed, had wide variety in its thematic material and was somewhat scholastic in this aspect -- a little waltz, a little Gershwin -- but altogether a good effort. Vicki Trimbach's duets began well and developed into an effective finale. Not everyone can write obvious tonal melodic material well, but Trimbach did.

Fresh Voices III

MICHAEL MCDONAGH

Fresh Voices III, works by J.J. Hollingsworth, Mark Alburger, Douglas Mandell, Nancy Bloomer Deussen, Warner Jepson, Lori Griswold, Lisa Scola Prosek. July 26, Goat Hall, San Francisco, CA.

All music is inherently theatrical or dramatic, but how one goes about it separates the men from the boys. San Francisco's Goat Hall Productions specializes in works for the musical theater, and presents them in a casual, audience-friendly environment. This year's Fresh Voices III, which showcased mostly recent pieces in that genre, as well as song cycles, was, as always, comprised of two programs. We caught both last year, but scheduling conflicts this July limited us to only one -- Program B. Fortunately all the pieces were strong, and it was fun to see how each composer solved the problems of composing for the theater.

Goat Hall music director Mark Alburger's *The Wind God* (2001) was previously presented at this venue last fall as part of a Red Cross benefit for the victims of the World Trade Center attacks. It had a certain sad urgency then. But now, with everything back to "normal," it seems to inhabit a different world. Alburger's work is always dramatic, and his music made Harriet March Page's 1997 monologue even more intense and funny. Though billed as a monodrama, it's not cut from the same cloth Schoenberg's over-the-top *Ewartung* (1909), where everything seems on the verge of harmonic collapse. Alburger's musical language here -- he played the piano-only part -- was distinctive, though approachable, with obvious, entirely intended and perfectly apt steals from composers ranging from Satie to John Williams. It certainly was a pleasure hearing the former's *Gnosienne No. 4*, with its perfectly seductive arpeggiated figure, "quoted" first. And, like any good film score, *The Wind God* showed how the verbal or visual image can be enhanced by music. The words, which tell the story of the author's boat trip from Sausalito to Cabo San Lucas, were therefore heightened, given new meaning. Two standouts were "We're in a lull," which got its affect from widely spaced Stravinskian chords, and a barroom blues-ballad full of clusters and heavy pedaling, which recalled Virgil Thomson's instructions on how to play one of his piano etudes -- "bang the hell out of it!" -- or Henry Cowell on a musical bender. Page, clad in a mariner's cap and jacket, sang everything with enthusiasm and sensitivity.

Her production of substantial excerpts from *San Francisco's Burning* was a revival of Warner Jepson's 1961 "ballad opera" on texts by Helen and Pat Adam. It's an obvious choice for the City by the Bay, and was a huge success when first performed. Though it doesn't sound like any of Weill's operas done with Brecht, the fact that it's a "number opera," and has shady characters, makes it seem like a bit of an extension of the tradition, despite the fact that Jepson doesn't indulge in social criticism or use his piece as a didactic tool to raise the audience's consciousness. Jepson's aims are far more modest, and he achieves them easily with music that's tuneful, expressive, and very well-written, and his 12-member cast performed their parts with precision and wit. Page's costumes effectively conjured 1906 San Francisco, and the director, with lighting designer Dorothy Klapp, created some lovely *Threepenny* tableaux. The composer played the piano with obvious warmth and affection, and the sentimental value of the piece was insured by the presence in the house of several members of the original production.

The Act II excerpt from Lisa Scola Prosek's 2000-02 opera on *The Satyricon* of Petronius Arbiter was in many ways the most substantial course on the menu. It was more through-composed than any of the other pieces, and full of evocative, though not antique Roman-sounding writing, for a sextet consisting of piano -- which the composer played -- flute, clarinet, trumpet (frequently muted), violin, and cello. It opened with a snappy march which effectively set up the comic action on the boat -- the high and low-born characters are going to Tarentum -- and Page kept her all girl chorus of five moving, and sometimes had them striking poses in their soldier uniforms. Prosek's writing for her small ensemble was vivid, and the instrumentation was well-blended and had punch.

But this premiere performance, though obviously thoroughly rehearsed, suffered from Alburger's well-nigh manic tempos, which had the effect of rushing the action so that the comic moments seemed to gang up on the lyric moments. This may be partially attributable to Petronius' text -- the composer used William Arrowsmith's version of it -- which is fragmentary, and has a hyper real, or surreal quality, and obviously it's this chopped-up character -- with ellipses everywhere -- which makes it seem modern. Still one couldn't help but feel that the piece's projection was hampered by over-playing and over-singing which didn't let it breathe on its own. Despite these drawbacks the 5-member cast performed ably, with bass Micah Epps (Eumolpus) and lyric soprano Tisha C. Page (Tryphaena), making the strongest impressions, especially in the former's air "The Civil War" -- "See the shame, the unspeakable shame of Rome..." and the latter's "Without him I perish." This was charming, rhythmically dynamic music, and we wonder how the rest of it sounds.

All of the other songs and song cycles were strong, and some, like the opener, *In the Morning of Our Lives*, by J.J. Hollingsworth -- with Tisha Page and Alburger at the piano -- were deeply affecting. This was a highly varied, and effective presentation of good theater music well-performed. And it showed how many ways there are to skin that musical cat.

Record Review

Xenakis: The Hits

CHRISTOPHER DELAURENTI

Iannis Xenakis. *Eonta*. Ensemble Instrumental de Musique Contemporaine de Paris, conducted by Konstantin Simonovic (*Eonta*); Orchestre National de l' O.R.T.F., conducted by Maurice Le Roux (*Metastasis* and *Pithoprakta*). Chant du Monde LDC 278368

Those wanting to investigate the startling sonic galaxies of Iannis Xenakis must navigate a constellation of releases on dozens of small and smaller labels. Where, then to begin? Here. Chant du Monde has reissued a superb out-of-print recording of Xenakis's early chamber and orchestral music -- *Eonta*, *Pithoprakta* and his breakthrough piece of 1955, *Metastasis*, conducted by its dedicatee, Maurice Le Roux. These three works are essential Xenakis: the terrifying banshee brass of *Eonta* (with longtime Xenakis champion Yuji Takahashi on piano), the layered strings (each of the 61 string players have their own part) of *Metastasis*, and *Pithoprakta*, whose ferocious eruptions can still -- after 47 years -- teach the rockers a thing or two. Along with the indispensable *Electronic Music* on EMF, this disc is the place to start with Xenakis. One reservation: given the CD's short (39 minutes) running time, this should have been a mid- not full-price reissue, but it's worth it nonetheless. Recorded in 1965, there is some hiss, but overall the sound is fine.

Chronicle

July 2

Death of jazz bassist Ray[mond Matthews] Brown (b. 10/12/26, Pittsburgh, PA), at 75. Indianapolis, IN. "Brown, whose playing was featured on more than 2,000 recordings, played with Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker and the others who invented bebop in the 1940's; was a long-standing member of the renowned Oscar Peterson Trio; and was part of the original lineup of the Modern Jazz Quartet. He accompanied singers from Frank Sinatra to Linda Ronstadt. He also accompanied Ella Fitzgerald, to whom he was married from 1947 to 1952, and he continued as her musical director after their divorce" [The New York Times, 7/4/02].

Death of Earle [Appleton] Brown (b. 12/26/26, Lunenburg, MA, at 75. Rye, NY. "[He was] an innovative experimental composer who allowed performers considerable interpretive freedom. . . . [His] vision of sound as an almost concrete object is often expressed in a form of graphic notation that conveys the importance of time and space. . . . Brown began his musical life as a jazz trumpeter, and in his student years he studied mathematics and engineering with the idea of a career in aeronautics. But he was also strongly drawn to contemporary painting, sculpture, poetry, dance and music, and after service in the Army Air Corps during World War II he devoted himself to more formal musical studies at the Schillinger School of Music in Boston. He moved to Denver in 1950, where he began painting as well as composing and teaching music. An encounter there with the composer John Cage in 1951 proved decisive: Cage invited Mr. Brown to New York to contribute to his *Project for Music for Magnetic Tape*. Mr. Brown's contribution to Cage's project was *Octet I* for eight loudspeakers (153), a tactile work in which isolated tones, fragments of speech and singing, snippets or orchestral recordings and bursts of noise swirl around a listener for nearly three and a half minutes. Mr. Brown quickly became an influential member of the New York School, in which the other prominent composers were Cage, Morton Feldman, Christian Wolff and David Tudor. . . . One of Mr. Brown's best-known works in [indeterminacy] . . . *December 1952*, invites performers to interpret a visually elegant score that consists of rectangles of different sizes and thicknesses, some horizontal, some vertical. The score for *December 1952* has been likened to a painting by Mondrian, but Mr. Brown has said that his graphic scores were more directly inspired by the mobiles of Alexander Calder. The score for his *Available Forms I* (1961), also inspired by Calder, consists of six unbound pages, each of which includes four or five distinct musical events. . . . His works in . . . [the] pre-Cage years were largely in the 12-tone style, as were some of his early New York works. When Mr. Brown moved to New York to join the Cage circle, his first wife, Carolyn Brown, a dancer, joined Merce Cunningham's company. Their marriage ended in divorce. In 1972, Mr. Brown married Susan Sollins, who survives him, as does a sister, Mariyn Krysil, of Lunenburg, MA. . . . He later described *December 1952* as 'an activity rather than a piece by me, because of the content being supplied by the musicians. . . . In his later works -- the best-known is *Tracking Pierrot* (1992) -- he continued to modify the balance between fixed notation and open forms. . . . Brown[s] music was extremely influential in Europe during the 1950's and 60's, when composers like Krzysztof Penderecki, György Ligeti, Karlheinz Stockhausen and Franco Donatoni adopted elements of his style. (Donatoni also dedicated two orchestral works to Mr. Brown, *To Earl I*, in 1970 and *To Earle II*, in 1972). As a teacher, Mr. Brown held the W. Alton Jones chair of composition at the Peabody Conservatory . . . from 1968 to 1973. He also taught at SUNY Buffalo, Yale University and the Tanglewood and Aspen Music Festivals.

As president of the Fromm Music Foundation from 1984 to 1989 he organized new Music concerts at the Aspen Music Festival and commissioned works by many composers, among them Henry Brant, Ornette Coleman, Todd Machover, Steven Mackey, Steve Reich, James Tenney, and Joan Tower. He was also the repertory director of an important series of new-music recordings on the Time-Mainstream label. Between 1960 and 1973, he oversaw the label's recordings of works by 49 composers from 16 countries, among them Ives, Cage, Nono, Maderna, Stockhausen, Luciano Berio and Iannis Xenakis" [Allan Kozinn, The New York Times, 7/8/02].

July 4

San Francisco Symphony in Williams's *E.T.* and *Harry Potter*. Mountain View, CA.

July 7

91st birthday of Gian Carlo Menotti.

SF Symphony in Gershwin's *Cuban Overture* and Bernstein's *Symphonic Dances from "West Side Story."* San Francisco, CA.

July 8

102nd anniversary of the birth of George Antheil.

July 9

87th birthday of David Diamond.

July 10

Death of composer and cellist Alan Shulman, at 86. Hudson, NY. After graduating from Juilliard in 1937, he studied privately with . . . Paul Hindemith. . . . Shulman taught at Sarah Lawrence College, the Juilliard School, the State University of New York at Purchase, Johnson State College . . . and the University of Maine in Orono. . . . A collection of Mr. Shulman's orchestral works is to be released by Bridge Records this month" [The New York Times, 7/13/02].

July 13

51st anniversary of the death of Arnold Schoenberg.

San Francisco Symphony in Tan Dun's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. Sonoma, CA.

Steve Reich's *Clapping Music*. Presbyterian Church, Hortonville, NY.

July 15

87th birthday of Jack Beeson.

July 19

Death of Alan Lomax (b. 1915, Austin, TX), at 87. Sarasota / Safety Harbor, FL. "[He was the] collector of folk music who was the first to record . . . figures like Leadbelly [Huddie Ledbetter], Muddy Waters [McKinley Morganfield] and Woody Guthrie. . . . Lomax started his work as a teenager, lugging a 500-pound recording machine through the South and West with his father, the pioneering folklorist John A. Lomax. . . . Lomax recorded hours of interviews with . . . Jelly Roll Morton in the 1930's, an early oral-history project that resulted in both a classic 12-volume set of recordings and a 1950 book, *Mister Jelly Roll* . . . In 1997, Rounder Records began issuing its Alan Lomax Collection, a series of more than 100 CD's of music recorded by Mr. Lomax in the deep South, the Bahamas, the Caribbean, the British Isles, Spain and Italy. A recording Mr. Lomax made in Mississippi in 1959 of a prisoner, James Carter, singing the work song *Po' Lazarus*, opens the multi-million-selling, Grammy Award-winning soundtrack of *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* . . . He attended Choate and spent a year at Harvard. But in 1933, he left to enroll at the University of Texas, where he graduated in 1936 with a degree in philosophy. Later, he did graduate work in anthropology at Columbia University. . . . The Lomaxes' book *American Ballads and Folk Songs* was published in 1934, followed by *Negro Folk Songs as Sung by Leadbelly* (1936), *Cowboy Songs* (1937), *Our Singing Country* (1938) and *Folk Songs: USA* (1946). John A Lomax became the curator of the Archive of Folk Song at the Library of Congress; his son joined him there as assistant director in 1937. By the end of the 1930's, John and Alan Lomax had recorded more than 3,000 songs on 78-rpm disks. Generations have grown up with these Library of Congress Recordings He compiled an archive of British folk songs and created programs for English radio and television. The sound of rural American music was a major factor in the British skiffle craze that yielded groups like the Quarry Men, John Lennon's first band. . . . Lomax became a research associate in Columbia University's department of anthropology and Center for the Social Sciences in 1962 He was associated with Columbia until 1989, when he moved his work to Hunter College. Mr. Lomax was displeased by the advent of folk-rock in the mid-960's., considering it inauthentic. . . . He also denounced [Bob] Dylan's move from protest songs to rock" [New York Times, 7/20/02].

July 18

Bernstein's *Candide* performed by the San Francisco Symphony and Chorus. San Francisco, CA.

July 19

Fresh Voices III. Mark Alburger's *The Bald Soprano*, D.C. Meckler's *Apollo 14*, Hugh Livingston's *Underground Garden*, Sondra Clark's *Dalmatia and Dalmatio*. Goat Hall, SF, CA. Through July 21.

July 23

Death of Clark Gesner (b. Augusta, ME) -- composer and lyricist of *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown* -- of a heart attack, at 64. The Princeton Club, New York, NY.

July 24

Merce Cunningham's *How to Pass, Kick, Fall and Run*, to music of Christian Wolff, with trombonist Julie Josephson, vocalist Takehisa Kosugi, and the composer at the piano. Lincoln Center Festival 2002, New York, NY.

July 26

Fresh Voices III. Mark Alburger's *The Wind God* (Libretto by Harriet March Page), Nancy Bloomer Deussen's *Two American Songs*, Warner Jepson's *San Francisco's Burning*, Lori Griswold's *Time*, JJ Hollingsworth's *In the Morning of our Lives*, Douglas Mandell's *The Voice of My Love*, and Lisa Scola Prosek's *Satyricon*. Goat Hall, San Francisco, CA. Through July 28.

July 28

Death of composer Glen Glasow (b. 1924, Pine City, MN), of complications related to a heart attack, at 78. Kaiser Hospital, Oakland, CA. "[He] translated . . . Takemitsu's *Confronting Silence*. . . . From 1959 to 1961 Dr. Glasow was music director of KPFA, airing interviews with such composers as John Cage, Roger Sessions and Terry Riley . . . He studied with . . . Ernst Krenek at Hamline University in St. Paul" [San Francisco Chronicle, 8/1/02].

July 31

Lyric Opera Cleveland presents the second American production of John Adams's *I Was Looking at the Ceiling and Then I Saw the Sky* (libretto by June Jordan). Drury Theatre, Cleveland, OH.

Comment

By the Numbers

The top 10 performed composers in orchestra concerts (2001-2002) (The American Symphony Orchestra League)

Beethoven (556)
Mozart (540)
Brahms (394)
Tchaikovsky (321)
Richard Strauss (262)
Mahler (227)
Ravel (204)
Haydn (203)
Shostakovich (187)
Prokofiev (183)

The top 10 performed "U.S. or Canadian" composers (2001-2002) (The American Symphony Orchestra League)

Barber (133)
Bernstein (101)
Copland (66)
Adams (52)
Gershwin (47)
Hindemith (43)
Rouse (42)
Walton (34)
Schwantner (33)
Rautavaara (32) [!]