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Volume 10, Number 8

SERGEI ZAGNY Translated by ANTON ROVNER	Imitation: Traditional and Non-Traditional Transformations of Melodies	1
CONCERT REVIEW	Terry Riley: In Maqaam? KC	12
CHRONICLE	Of June 2003	12
WRITERS		12
ILLUSTRATION	Sergei Zagny - <i>13. Some permutations differ from traditional ones</i>	

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FLORIDA INTL U
HK BAPTIST U
POKFULAM U
Mark Francis
HUMANITIES INDEX
BEREA COLLEGE
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Burton Beerman
BOWLING GREEN U
OBERLIN COLLEGE
Michal George
MT UNION COLLEGE
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Imitation: Traditional and Non-Traditional Transformations of Melodies

SERGEI ZAGNY

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Concert Review

Terry Riley - In Maqaam?

KC

Edge Fest: Terry Riley. June 6, Hertz Hall, University of California, Berkeley, CA.

Was it me, or did it feel inappropriate the way Terry Riley was borrowing heavily from North Indian influences (with a smidge of "I dream of Jeannie" snake charmer idiom) in his "Baghdad Highway" at the Edge Fest on June 6?

This is a piece that was supposed to be Riley's gift to the Iraqi people. Knowing nada about Middle Eastern music but a little bit about how the civilization that grew up around the Tigris and Euphrates 3000 years ago contrasts with the Indus civilization, I felt like it was utterly inauthentic. I love the North Indian stuff and Riley's take on it. And as a statement about Yankee imperialism, bringing a sardonic touch of Hollywood, the piece worked fabulously well. But in this context, borrowing from the qawwal created a faux Iraqi feel (Plus, don't make it a "gift" to the Iraqis if you're going to play it to a Berkeley audience so they can feel good and then cut the CD in order to buy more multimedia equipment to create tie-dye backdrops!).

Riley is so authentically Bay Area by now that he is almost a medium through which northern California culture expresses itself. But his borrowings are reminiscent of the debates that go on about California's role in the world. California is so innovative because it has found a way to cross categories: Silicon Valley is not a technologically innovative place per se, but a culture in which technological and business models are inextricably mixed (E-Bay!). Categories blur here because we are open to diversity and tend to see connections rather than discontinuity between cultures and epochs.

So when Riley borrows from sufi music he is Californian. If he had taken the time to study Iraqi music, the piece would have been even more Californian. But is that how he presented the work and the audience experienced it? Or do we continue to see California as a model to instruct and save the world? It is hard to see ourselves as one small, synthetic, recent subculture in a globe of tremendous cultural richness. The white man's burden and progressive do-goodism die hard. Can we celebrate California and educate ourselves without trying to offer the world a righteous model of tolerance and diversity?

Chronicle

June 1

In a surprising cultural merger, the New York Philharmonic agrees to move to Carnegie Hall, leaving Lincoln Center. New York, NY. "The move back to Carnegie Hall, where the orchestra had historically resided on West 57th Street, could come as soon as 2006, more than 40 years after it left and became an anchor of Lincoln Center" [Ralph Blumenthal and Robin Pogrebin, *The New York Times*, 6/2/03].

June 5

Edge Fest. Hertz Hall, University of California, Berkeley, CA.

June 6

Music From Here III. Del Mar Chamber Music Players in Lou Harrison's *Varied Trio*, Mark Alburger's *Apathetic March*, and music of Ruth Crawford Seeger, Melissa Hui, Peter Vincent Marlotti, D'Arcy Reynolds, and Brian Wilson. First Congregational United Church of Christ, Santa Rosa, CA. Repeated June 7, Ives Hall, Sonoma State University, Cotati.

June 8

NACUSA Concert. Lorie Griswold's *Spring May*, Carolyn Hawley's *Quintet No. 2 ("500")*, Dale Victorine's *Sonata*, John Beeman's *Retablo 2: Elodia Vasquez*, Warner Jepson's *Ode to Blanche*, Ilana Cotton's *Flame*, Tyler Mazika's *Notturmo Amoroso*, Michael Chan's *Prelude*, Robert Stein's *Summer Sound*, Rosemary Barrett Byers's *Scenes from Mother Goose*, Owen Lee's *Duo*, Brian Holmes's *Higgins Is Gone*, and Steve Ettinger's *Adventures*. Art Center, Palo Alto, CA.

June 15

San Francisco Contemporary Music Players in Steve Reich's *Nagoya Marimbas* and *Clapping Music*, plus music of Lou Harrison, Robert Dick, Stuart Saunders Smith, and Carlos Salzedo. Hidden Villa, Los Altos Hills, CA.

Writers

KC is a Bay Area writer on music.

SERGEI ZAGNEY is a Moscow composer, theorist, and writer.