

21ST CENTURY MUSIC

JULY 2004

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Orchestra 2001's 1997 Trip to Russia and Denmark: Poverty and Plenty -- Triumph and Tragedy

JAMES FREEMAN

In February of 1997, when I accepted for Orchestra 2001 the invitation of Russian composer/pianist Alexander Radvilovich to give the concluding concert on November 23 of St. Petersburg's 10th International Festival of Contemporary Music, I had no idea where or how I would be able to find the funding to make such a trip possible. The program I said we would bring included music by George Crumb (a cultural hero in Eastern Europe) and David Finko, who fled St. Petersburg with his wife and son in 1979. Yes, I said, we would bring both composers and their wives and would even participate in a "Marathon Concert" involving several different international ensembles the day before our own concert. All this was very exciting to the Russians -- and to me, too. On Orchestra 2001's previous two trips to Russia (1993, when we were caught up in the October revolution, and 1994) we played only in Moscow. This would be our first appearance in St. Petersburg, and with the prospect of being the final event of a prestigious international festival and the additional excitement of bringing Crumb and émigré Finko with us, I simply couldn't turn the invitation down.

I knew the cost of making such a trip would be in the neighborhood of \$60,000, and I knew the Russians would be able to contribute nothing to these expenses -- we would have to pay for our own airfare and hotels, as well as all concert, rehearsal, and per diem fees for the musicians of Orchestra 2001 (One turned down a week of playing with the Philadelphia Orchestra -- very lucrative -- in order to do our trip). But with Orchestra 2001, I have always acted on the premise that if the project is exciting, imaginative, and far-reaching, somehow or other we will be able to find the money to make it happen.

Still, by July we had as yet found no funding for the trip, which was now only four months away and which in the meantime had been expanded to include a concert at the Moscow Conservatory, where we have a standing invitation, and two concerts in Denmark, the result of discussions with two Danish teachers during a festival of Crumb's music in late June at Ljubljana, Slovenia, where I was conducting.

It is truly difficult to describe my elation, joy, relief, when Walter Scheuer (Swarthmore class of '48, the producer of the Academy Award winning documentary of violinist Isaac Stern's trip to China, *Mao to Mozart*) responded to my plea in mid-July by saying his Four Oaks Foundation would sponsor the entire trip and send a camera crew to film it!

Now I could stop worrying and begin planning; and that planning -- involving 16 musicians coming from different parts of the United States, our boy soprano Derek Yale and his mother from Virginia, our stage manager Ali Momeni and the special problems caused by his Iranian passport, the Crumbs and Finkos, several of Orchestra 2001's board of directors, our three-person camera crew from New York, three musicians from Moscow's Bolshoi Theater who would join us for all our Russian concerts, and the prospect of transporting some of the vast array of percussion instruments needed for Crumb's music and locating the larger ones in Russia -- occupied most of the rest of the summer. Additional complications resulted from the fact that the week before we would leave for Russia, I would be in Taipei conducting the National Symphony of Taiwan in a program of new works by Taiwanese composers

Together with my wife, oboist Dorothy Freeman, and Orchestra 2001's board president Lionel Savadove and his wife Pat, I was treated like visiting royalty by the first-rate musicians of the National Symphony and the officials of the National Chiang Kai Shek Cultural Center. It would be easy to get used to having a chauffeur drive one to rehearsals each morning, to the constant question, "Maestro, is there anything you need?," to the five-star accommodations provided for us at Taipei's Lei Lei Sheraton. Three days later, it would be Russia that brought me back to reality!

On our arrival at the dimly-lit airport in St. Petersburg, two members of our film crew are immediately arrested for taking pictures within the airport, a national boundary. They are later released after paying a sizable fee, our first experience on this trip with Russia's thirst for U.S. dollars. Meanwhile, a number of our suitcases have not arrived, and it takes two hours to fill out the necessary forms for relocating them.

Our hotel, the Moscow, at the end of the Vevsky Prospect, looks out onto the icy Neva River where Rasputin was drowned. Our rooms on the 7th floor are reached by a quarter-mile traverse down dark corridors. We jokingly suggest that the hotel should provide golf carts or moving stairs to get us there. The rooms are dingy, lukewarm water seems to reach our faucets only with great difficulty, and the Crumbs have the terrifying experience of waking one morning to find they have been robbed while they were asleep (Our guide book had proclaimed, "This old Soviet-style hotel is a place to avoid!"). But the rates are inexpensive, the food quite decent, and we survive in good spirits.

At our rehearsal in the beautiful Glinka Hall, the hall's custodians keep watch over the four concert grand pianos on stage, and we are told "Nyet, nyet, nyet," in extremely unfriendly terms, when we begin to pluck the strings inside two of the pianos, a technique necessary for Crumb's music. There is a complete stand-off, with angry looks all around, until our pianist Marcantonio Barone (who has learned to speak surprisingly good Russian) says to the woman in charge, "This hall is the most beautiful one in the world. Every time I am in it, I come close to tears." She relents immediately, and we have a good rehearsal.

The "Marathon Concert" on November 22 concludes with our soprano Barbara Ann Martin and Marcantonio Barone playing in the elegant small hall of the Union of Composers: music by Gershwin, Crumb, Finko, Temple University's Jan Krzywicki, and Swarthmore College's Gerald Levinson. Barbara and Tony are brilliant. The audience keeps recalling them for more encores. Everyone is happy.

Just before our full concert the next evening, there is some controversy. Thinking it will be helpful to the audience if we tell them something about the program, I've asked Tony to write down a few paragraphs in Russian about the pieces (Crumb's *Music for a Summer Evening*, *Ancient Voices of Children*, and Finko's *Fromm Septet*) in preparation for a brief oral introduction to the concert. He has spent several hours on this project and has everything ready. We are set to begin when Alexander Radvilovich suddenly objects. The atmosphere of the Glinka Hall is too formal for pre-concert remarks such as these, he says. No, please do not talk. Feeling that it is his festival and we are there at his invitation, we give in reluctantly. As it turns out, he is absolutely right.

The concert is a spectacular success, one of those rare occasions when one feels the performers and the audience are really one. The 500-seat Glinka Hall is full, and the audience's enthusiasm is extraordinary and, for us, wonderfully moving. At a post-concert reception in the Union of Composers, sponsored by the U.S. Embassy, there is much toasting, and Russia's foremost music critic, Michael Byalyk, gives an impassioned speech praising Orchestra 2001 and the music we have brought. Hey, we all think, maybe this was worth coming for, after all.

Various other post-concert activities in St. Petersburg: A very moving trip to the Jewish cemetery on the outskirts of the city, where the Finkos visit the graves of their parents. Trips by everyone to the incomparable Hermitage Museum. Some of us visit the beautiful convent across the street from our hotel, where a tour and a sumptuous meal have been prepared for us. Others have dinner with the Radviloviches at their tiny apartment, followed immediately by another dinner at the apartment of old friends of the Finkos. Wonderful food and fellowship, again much toasting. Everyone's good cheer is slightly dampened when at the end of the evening Liz Crumb reaches down to pet the friendly but nervous family dog, which promptly bites her hand. At midnight we take the subway back to our hotel, a 45-minute trip. We feel not the slightest fear. The subway and the city are safe at night. How many American cities can make that claim?

As we board the 4pm train for Moscow the next day, snow is falling in St. Petersburg, and the city is covered in soft whiteness. Its ubiquitous classical architecture looks especially beautiful in this light, and we think we'd like to return here in another year.

We arrive in Moscow at 10pm, after a thoroughly joyous train ride through the dark Russian countryside. We are still celebrating the remarkable camaraderie that has developed within this diverse group of American musicians, professors, and filmmakers, as our host in Moscow, Conservatory professor Svetlana Sigida, meets us with several cars and vans. The musicians are taken to the Conservatory's spartan apartment building, a block from the school itself. The composers and board members go to Moscow's own Hotel Moscow, on the edge of Red Square. It is now close to midnight, but many of us want to make an immediate pilgrimage through Red Square, surely one of the most imposing man-made places on earth. It is still snowing, the huge cobblestone plaza is silent and immense, and we stand alone in awe of its beauty.

The next day some of us shop at G.U.M. and the old Arbat. Moscow has changed enormously in the three years since our last trip here. The city is filled with neon advertising -- very western -- and there is even a modern arcade of shops now just outside the Kremlin walls by the Alexander gardens. The feeling and architecture of this city are completely different from St. Petersburg's gray, elegant, and uniform classicism.

Percussionists Bill Kerrigan and Ken Miller and I spend most of the day searching the Conservatory's secret closets and alcoves, hoping to find some of the percussion that has been promised us. During our search we stop to hear a Russian orchestra rehearsing in the Conservatory's magnificent Great Hall, with its paintings of composers lining the walls and spectacular acoustics. We stand in silent awe, much as we did the night before in the middle of Red Square. At last we find a few instruments, but not enough to make the concert possible. The others must be brought in from outside the city. We are asked to pay a fee of \$100 for this service, but I refuse, and the Conservatory eventually decides it will cover this expense. Tony Barone and Ali Momeni have meanwhile spent the afternoon grocery shopping in order to prepare a deluxe breakfast the next morning for all the musicians. In the evening, some of us go to the performance at the Bolshoi; others attend a remarkable recital by the students of our Russian clarinetist, Rafael Bagdasarian. Each of them plays from memory -- perfectly, musically, confidently, and with stunning technical aplomb. A 10-year-old boy plays Rimsky-Korsakov's *Flight of the Bumblebee* with astonishing elegance and panache.

The conclusion of our concert the next evening in the Rachmaninoff Hall (November 27) is disturbed by a Russian cameraman who, in his efforts to film close-ups of the musicians, completely disrupts the magical, poignant final moments of *Ancient Voices of Children*. After the applause, we repeat the last measures of the piece, as much for ourselves as for the audience. But the magic of the ending depends, of course, on what has come before it, and despite the fact that we are sure our performance was superb, each of us feels somewhat dispirited. The concert is followed by a celebratory dinner at a nearby restaurant. We begin to regain some of our lost jubilation, as our 70-year-old Russian bassist, Leopold Andreyev, scrambles nimbly under the table to reach his place and tells countless off-color jokes in German, and our violinist, Michael Tsinman, tells us with tears in his eyes that these concerts have been among the most wonderful and artistically satisfying events of his life. It is such moments as these that make us realize these trips are tremendously important.

Denmark. We find ourselves in a totally different world: A brightly lit airport, many smiles, immediate friendliness. Russia remains a country of darkness and suspicion, and the sudden contrast here in Denmark is very striking. Arriving in Copenhagen, we find we have missed our connecting flight to the west coast of the Jutland peninsula where our first concert will be, and SAS puts us on another flight to a different city. Meanwhile, our Danish hosts have already reacted to our dilemma. When we step off the plane, a private bus is waiting to take us on the two-hour ride to our quarters in Tvind. We arrive at midnight and stare up at the floodlit second largest windmill in the world that dominates the rural setting of this remarkable International School. Food is waiting for us. Everything is taken care of and will be for the next week. I had e-mailed Denmark several times in recent weeks to be absolutely sure that all 30 of us would be housed and fed at the School's expense, as I had been told. Each time the answer was, "Of course." But did they really understand my question? We discover that it is all true. We are fed magnificently every two hours, hungry or not, and each of us has Danish assistants -- some of them teachers at the school, some students -- at our beck and call to help wherever and whenever needed.

During some free time we go to the wonderfully uninhabited stretches of dunes and beach at the North Sea. The ruins of black German bunkers from World War II line the shore for as far as one can see. The wind, the fresh air, the waves, the solitude, the openness are invigorating and tremendously refreshing. Once again we feel we are now a very long way from Russia's gloom.

We are only just a part of an enormous, all-day Yule concert (November 30) that takes place in a 1000-seat gymnasium. Participating with us are a Polish orchestra, a Russian chorus, a Russian pianist, an Indian sitar virtuoso, a Danish percussionist, German, Chinese, and Norwegian singers, our own Barbara Ann Martin and Tony Barone performing a medley of songs and arias from American musicals, as well as a number of teacher-artists from the school itself. The concert is emceed by its organizers Sune Joergensen and Grete Anderson. It begins at 10am and goes on until 10pm, with delicious meals and snacks provided for performers and audience every two hours. It is followed by a dance with everyone joining in -- a truly international celebration.

Just after the concert I make an international call to my 88-year-old parents in North Andover, Massachusetts, and learn that my father has been taken to the hospital. He has been fighting prostate cancer for several years, and the disease -- under control for so long -- has suddenly brought him close to death. I reach him at the hospital and realize immediately that he is in great pain and that the situation is very grave. I tell him I'll be there as soon as I can and make arrangements to leave for Boston at five the next morning.

I am too late. Reaching Boston in the evening, I learn that my father has died four hours earlier. It seems impossible, and I am overwhelmed. I wish I had had just five minutes to say some of the things I wanted to say. My mother does not yet know. I tell her with tears streaming down my cheeks, and she bears the news with greater strength than I have.

My father was a great musician and a tremendously important figure in my life. He taught me many things. I think the most important were: to be forever faithful to one's family, to love the outdoors, to dare to be true, to worship music and the great composers, to persevere against difficult odds, to have confidence in one's own abilities, to take joy in doing one's absolute best always, and finally how to die with dignity.

Orchestra 2001's final concert in Denmark is still two days away, and it cannot take place without me. With a feeling of great emptiness, I fly back to Copenhagen and rejoin the ensemble. It is comforting to be with my colleagues.

The second concert (December 6) is a repeat of the first, this time in Nebbegard, an hour north of Copenhagen. On our free days we visit nearby Elsinore with its imposing castle (Hamlet's home), shop, and sightsee in Copenhagen. In an antique shop Mary Lou Gessel finds a real curiosity: a frog doorstep that looks innocuous until you turn it over and discover that it has perfect human female anatomical features. We urge her to buy it, and she does.

It is time for us to leave for home. The Danes seem to have been surprised that we American musicians are friendly people, as eager to reach out to them as they are to us. We have made many friends. As we leave we are assured there will always be accommodations for us in Denmark, and we assure them we will be waiting for them to come to America so we can show them the same kind of hospitality they have shown us. Everyone hugs everyone. We are convinced that the U.S. State Department would be very wise to send us on concert tours all over the world. International relations would benefit enormously!

As we board the plane for Philadelphia, I joke with our harpist Sophie Labiner: I understand there is a harp opening in the Moscow Philharmonic -- is she interested? No way, says Sophie, who loves Denmark but isn't so sure about Russia. Others in the group have very strong positive feelings about Russia. People there have so little and must work so hard just to survive. And art remains as important as food to so many Russians. There is much to admire in both countries. Still, we are happy to be going home and to begin again our American lives.

Now we all await the movie about our trip. Editing and refining it will take months, and in the meantime we have many concerts, recordings, and even a CD-ROM of *Ancient Voices of Children* to prepare. Still another project involves our recording the complete concertos of David Finko with the collaboration of our friends from the Bolshoi. We all feel strongly that this is a composer whose music must reach the rest of the world. But the movie is foremost in our minds. There is some thought that it will be geared to presentation on public television, an ideal medium for it, we think. In any case, we expect it to win an Academy Award! My father, always tremendously proud of Orchestra 2001's accomplishments, would have given anything to be able to witness such an event.

New England Conservatory Mourns Death of Jazz Great Steve Lacy

ELLEN PFEIFER

Steve Lacy, one of the greatest soprano saxophonists of all time and a New England Conservatory faculty member since fall 2002, died on July 4 at New England Baptist Hospital. The jazz master who once defined his profession as "combination orator, singer, dancer, diplomat, poet, dialectician, mathematician, athlete, entertainer, educator, student, comedian, artist, seducer and general all around good fellow" was 69. He leaves his wife and collaborator, the Swiss singer Irene Aebi.

Born Steven Morman Lackritz in New York City, Lacy was the first avant-garde jazz musician to make a specialty of the soprano saxophone -- an instrument that had become almost completely neglected during the bop era. Indeed, he is credited with single-handedly bringing the instrument back from obscurity into modern music of all types. He regularly received awards from *DownBeat* as the premier soprano saxophonist and in 1992 received a MacArthur Foundation "genius" grant. In 2002, he was made a Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French government. A prolific recording artist, Lacy is represented on many labels including Universal, Senators, RCA, Verve, Label Bleu, Greats of Jazz, EMI, CBS/Columbia, and Denon.

Throughout his career, Lacy was widely admired for the beauty and purity of his tone, for his incisive melodic sense, for keeping his music uncompromising and fresh, and for his eagerness to play with a wide variety of musicians while retaining long-term musical relationships. For example, since 1998, he performed often with Panamanian pianist and NEC faculty member Danilo Perez, but he also played regularly with Mal Waldron, a pianist he had worked with since the fifties. He was esteemed for his productivity, and for the consistently high quality of his art. As a teacher, a role he took on in the last two years of his life, he was revered for his intense focus and generosity.

During the latter part of his career, Lacy made his home in Paris for 33 years, but returned to the United States in 2002 to begin his first teaching job at NEC. He was prominently featured in the concerts celebrating the centennial of NEC's Jordan Hall in October 2003, kicking off the festivities in a Best of Jazz performance that featured other Conservatory jazz greats like Ran Blake, George Russell, Bob Brookmeyer, and alumnus Cecil Taylor.

Lacy got his start as a sideman in the early 50's playing in Manhattan's Dixieland revival scene. He also worked with some Duke Ellington players including cornetist Rex Stewart, who christened him "Lacy." Although he initially doubled on clarinet and soprano sax, he soon dropped the former instrument and found his distinctive voice with the saxophone. It was the NEC-trained Cecil Taylor who set Lacy on a new course and introduced him to Thelonious Monk -- who, along with Duke Ellington, would remain the most important influence in his life.

"Playing with Cecil Taylor immediately put me into the offensive mode" (of music-making), Lacy recalled in his book *Findings: My Experience with the Soprano Saxophone*. "This was the avant-tout garde; we were an attack quartet (sometimes quintet or trio), playing original, dangerously threatening music that most people were offended by...."

Lacy recorded with Gil Evans in 1957 and continued to work with him intermittently up through the 1980s. In 1958, he and pianist Waldron recorded *Reflections: Steve Lacy Plays the Music of Thelonious Monk*, which led to an invitation to join Monk's quintet for four months in 1960. After that immersion experience, he created a quartet with trombonist Roswell Rudd that dedicated itself exclusively to Monk's music. He was still playing Monk as recently as last winter when he introduced a new quintet at Manhattan's Iridium. Monksieland, comprised of trumpeter Dave Douglas, Rudd, and Lacy's longtime Paris rhythm section, bassist Jean-Jacques Avenel and drummer John Betsch, played Monk with the freedom and contrapuntal interplay of Dixieland jazz.

In 1965, Lacy began performing in Europe where he found particularly appreciative audiences in Italy and France. He met his wife in Rome in 1966 and, by the late 60's, they had settled down in Paris. During the enormously fertile decades that followed, he created a quintet that could expand or contract from a duo or trio on up to a big band. He began collaborations with dancers (Merce Cunningham in particular), artists and actors. He also started working with poets like Brion Gysin, composing musical settings of their poems.

Irene Aebi exerted a profound influence on Lacy's artistry. For the woman he called "his muse," he wrote his first composition, *The Way* (1967), based on the words of Chinese philosopher Lao-Tzu. He continued to be inspired by his wife's voice and wrote works for her based on poetry by Anna Akhmatova, Mary Frazee, Anne Waldman, and Judith Malina. He wrote an opera, *The Cry*, with Bengali poet Taslima Nasreen. And, over a period of many years, he composed *The Beat Suite*, a jazz song cycle based on poetry by Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Robert Creeley, and other beat poets. That work had its official world premiere in 2003 and has been recorded on a Universal CD. As recently as this spring, Lacy and his wife were performing his settings of Robert Creeley poems and excerpts from *The Beat Suite* at MIT and Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art.

At NEC, 36 students, both graduate and undergraduate, worked directly with Lacy and he affected many others through his active participation in the musical community. In his teaching, he was concerned with helping students become complete artists. For example, he might say of a young player: "He's got imagination, but he needs to develop his taste a lot more -- opera and poetry and literature and dance. He really needs to broaden his base." At NEC, he felt students could get that broadening. "That's what I like about this school," he said in an interview last year. "Anybody could study improvisation or Indian music or symphonic construction or whatever..."

About Lacy, NEC President Daniel Steiner said: "He was an extraordinary artist, the kind of person who appears only a few times in each generation of musicians. His presence at the Conservatory affected not simply the jazz program but the overall musical life of NEC."

Remarks by Ran Blake, head of NEC's Contemporary Improvisation Department: "With the exception of Sidney Bechet and John Coltrane, no other musician has brought such a personal sound to the soprano saxophone and few other musicians have tapped into the unexplored repertoire of Thelonious Monk."

Remarks by Danilo Perez, NEC Faculty, Jazz Pianist, and Lacy collaborator: "Steve Lacy showed us that being a jazz musician is the work of a lifetime. His compositions and improvisations are full of wisdom and life. He taught us the power of words through his music. Hearing his soprano playing was a life changing experience, because he approached his sound, improvisation and technique as if he believed it was a test of man's sincerity. As a friend he was a very encouraging, caring and generous man with a great sense of humor. As a teacher he was a great educator who inspired all of us inside and outside the classroom, with the genius of his musical phrasing and his brilliant remarks.

"Last year while playing a duo concert in New York, he took me to an exhibition of a great Chinese painter. His detailed comments about the paintings offered a great lesson in color subtlety and form. I found myself contemplating his words of wisdom all afternoon. That night, after the very inspired concert we played, he said; 'Danilo, we were painting tonight.'

"He was very kind to me and to many people who knew him. As he would say, the music and the artist become one as we get older. Steve, thanks for inspiring and sharing your gifts with the world. Your great musical legacy will live in our hearts and minds forever. God bless Steve and his dear Irene."

Remarks by Ken Schaphorst, Chair, Jazz Studies and Improvisation: "The NEC community is devastated by this great loss. I can't think of another musician who has been involved in so many different chapters in the history of jazz, from Dixieland to Free Jazz, and everything in between. Steve has brought his unique combination of open-mindedness, humor, intelligence, rigor and artistry to his teaching at NEC over the last two years, and everyone who has come into contact with him has been transformed by his wisdom and musicianship. We will miss him."

Concert Reviews

Mountain Play "Fair" Excellent

MARK ALBURGER

Frederick Lerner's *My Fair Lady* (book by Frederick Loewe) given by The Mountain Play. May 23, Stanley Cushing Theater, Mt. Tamalpais, CA.

Once again the Mountain Play demonstrates that strong leads can make or break a show, and "make" they do, with Susan Zelinsky and Kenneth Rowland as Eliza Doolittle and Henry Higgins, in *My Fair Lady*, which opened on May 23 at the Mt. Tamalpais Amphitheatre. These signature roles, perhaps best known from 20th-Century Fox's 1964 film with Audrey Hepburn and Rex Harrison, come to life once more. But, unlike their movie counterparts, Zelinsky and Rowland have substantial singing voices to go along with their first-class acting chops. This Ms. Doolittle not only "ows" and howls but has a beautiful tone, flexible range, and powerful delivery to rival Marnie Nixon, Hepburn's ghost vocalist in the soundtrack. And Rowland gives us that delicate balance of bluster with just a smidge of sentiment that keeps us rooting for the bore as we occasionally boo him.

The rest of the cast rose to Tam heights as well, with Ian Swift's Colonel Pickering, Norman A. Hall's Alfred P. Doolittle, and Jessica Powell's Mrs. Higgins particularly strong, rivaling the leads in robust readings and all-around good humor. The cast was rounded out by supportive work from Tyler McKenna as Freddy Eynsford-Hill, Gloria Wood as Mrs. Pearce, and Kathryn McGeorge as Mrs. Eynsford-Hill. The chorus was energetic and solid in both singing and dancing

The immaculate sets were by Henry Higgins 'imself -- Ken Rowland has been designing them for lo these many years (beat that, Rex Harrison!) -- with excellence as well from the rest of the usual suspects: Director James Dunn, Music Director Paul Smith, Choreographer Rick Wallace, and Costume Designer Pat Polen. This crew has worked together for ages, yet always find ways to keep classic musicals fresh (I've been around for ages covering them -- hope I'm doing as well!)

Amplification was a little over the top and the orchestra got off to a rugged start, but once the sonic standards set in it was a jolly good ride, almost enough to make one yearn for the foggy streets of London over the sunny slopes of Mt. Tam.

Almost.

From me flows what you call a Review

MARK ALBURGER

San Francisco Symphony performs Toru Takemitsu's *From me flows what you call Time* and Gustav Holst's *The Planets* June 10, Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

The June 10 San Francisco Symphony program could have been billed *Mysticism East and West*, and what a difference a continent makes.

Late great Japanese concert and film composer Toru Takemitsu offered his "From me flows what you call Time," featuring the percussion quintet NEXUS, which collaborated with the Boston Symphony in the work's commissioning in 1990. Fourteen years later, these bang-on-just-about-everything boys (Bob Becker, Bill Cahn, Robin Engelman, Russell Hartenberger, and Garry Kvistad) are still in top form, though a little grayer. The score calls for the ensemble to be decked out in five colors (white, blue, yellow, red, and green - - the number and hues having significance in Tibetan Buddhism), covering a world music festival of instruments including steel drum, crotales, glockenspiel, vibraphone, Pakistan Noah bells, Thai gongs, Japanese temple bowls, Chinese winter gongs, Indonesian angklung, darabuka (Turkish drum), wind chimes, almglocken, log drums, tom-toms, rain stick, marimba, tam-tams, suspended cymbals, and suspended Chinese cymbals. Whew!

But the overall atmosphere is not one of "party down"; rather instead that of a hushed dream world, punctuated with ritual and silence. Takemitsu's command of orchestral resources here and elsewhere is always refined, sensitive, and highly original, with fitful bursts of drama that surprise out of nowhere. He takes some cues from John Cage, Claude Debussy, Olivier Messiaen, and Maurice Ravel (all Westerners with Eastern leanings) -- reclaiming territory, related to the way that 20th-century Spanish and American composers, such as Manuel de Falla and Aaron Copland outdid Europeans (such as the Georges Bizet of *Carmen* and the Antonin Dvorak of the *"New World" Symphony*).

Among the most memorable moments of the Takemitsu were the solemn procession of NEXUS members down the Davies Hall aisles while occasionally striking crotales, and the ringing of large sets of wind chimes via five-color ribbons stretched from the stage to the loge. If there is a characteristic sound to the work, it is perhaps that of the brilliantly shiny steel drums, placed center stage with celesta, flanked by two harps, engulfed in other spangly metallics. In only one section did a possible jam develop -- where the darabuka and tom-toms found a bit of groove -- but this was quickly abandoned.

By contrast, the Western mysticism was all "What ho! Cheerio!" from Gustav Holst in his signature work. *The Planets* is just about everything that Takemitsu is not: catchy, demonstrative, forthright, tuneful -- yet the works do share excellence and top-flight orchestral sensibilities. Both are top-flight compositions, too. But the groove is immediate in that sinister 5/4 pulsation that opens and relentlessly makes its way in the opening Mars movement. Guest conductor Andrew Davis played the music for all it was worth, and that's a lot. The fortissimos were mind-blowing and the sounds constantly engaged, after the meditative meanderings and malaise of the previous. This was a conducting tour-de-force, from the sensitive intonings of Venus, through the filigree of Mercury, and the coronation of Jupiter. Saturn's loneliness, Uranus's boisterousness, and Neptune's emptiness were all in good form (there is no "Pluto," because it hadn't been discovered yet in the years of the music's creation -- 1914-16). If there was an organ in the mix, it was difficult to see and hear, and the offstage women's chorus in the final movement was certainly soft enough. Otherwise this was a commanding reading of a commanding work.

Dr. Faust, I Presume

MICHAEL MCDONAGH

Ferruccio Busoni's *Doktor Faust* given by San Francisco Opera. June 20, War Memorial Opera House, San Francisco, CA.

Ferruccio Dante Michelangelo Benvenuto Busoni (1866-1924) is hardly a household name here. Composer-performers, or performers who also compose, have gotten a bad rap since at least the time of Bach. And composers who didn't perform, like Schoenberg, Webern (though he did conduct), and Berg, have made things worse. Who, for example, could ever take Liszt seriously? Wasn't this the pianist who wowed the continent with flagrant showmanship and sex appeal? And isn't it true that the world was better off when he renounced the stage and got religion? Well, Busoni's career parallels Liszt's -- he was a virtuoso pianist who wrote big orchestral pieces too. And his reputation, like the fiery Hungarian's, has suffered because he performed and wrote.

Busoni pursued the composing track even when he was a sought-after soloist. Yet his bread-and-butter job seems to have enriched his sense of what music can do, and he was as erudite as Brahms. *Doktor Faust* (1914-1924) is his third and last opera, and it's intensely aware of this art form's history. The composer also expected his listeners to bring their experience of other Faust treatments to his. Yet he's after something entirely different -- he wants to present soul states, or "the invisible and inaudible, the spiritual processes of the personages portrayed," which sounds awfully highfalutin', even anti-dramatic. But Busoni doesn't eschew drama -- far from it. Would that this production were as imaginative, and yes, as sensuous, as the music.

The dramaturgical duties fell into the all-too-German hands of Jossi Wiener and Sergio Morabito (who's Swiss), with production design by Anna Viebrock. They had the unhappy idea of turning Faust (baritone Rodney Gilfry) into a conceptual artist. And with an idea that lame and dated, the piece had nowhere to go.

But then Busoni hasn't made it easy on directors or musicians. The text, which he wrote himself, is part of that problem and challenge. Berg's for *Wozzeck* (1917-1922) had the structure of Buchner's play to draw from. And though somewhat loose, it's far firmer than Busoni's, which has a sketchy quality, like a film script. Meaning that the material accretes from moment to moment, with emotional info added from advancing angles. All the elements in Busoni's script are here. But these need to be realized so we can see the music.

The only really good things in this production were the transformation of tenor Chris Merritt as Mephistopheles from a distracted homeless person into an elegant gentleman who plays the organ, and the wedding of the Duke of Parma (tenor Jay Hunter Morris) at the beginning of Part II, where the guests, in evening dress, glided as if they were at an opening at Tiffany's. But then the ugly, didactic production, with David Finn's bilious lighting, returned, and everyone, even soprano Hope Briggs, in her spectacular company debut as the Duchess of Parma, seemed subsumed in it. Plus she had to endure Faust's ripping her dress with shears several times, which symbolized, no doubt, the pure artist's contempt for bourgeois society. But this came off as merely willful, and certainly expensive, given what these gowns must cost. It was as if Pamela Rosenberg's company, with the co-operation of her former one, the Stuttgarter Staatsoper, thought that making a piece look important meant making it ugly, too. And -- that rubbing our faces in the unpleasantness of it all was the first, last, and only truth in life. Or, when in doubt, get a hairshirt. Which is a pity because Busoni's score is truly alchemical in lines, colors and harmonies, and it's not written against the voice, as Berg's often seems to be. The writing is also utterly transparent, with keen mixtures of viola with harp at one point and double bass with brass at another, plus it's charming, too. Busoni's harmonic language, which blends 5ths, tritones and learned counterpoint with naturally evolving chromaticism, is entirely apt.

Donald Runnicles was alive to every shift in the music, and looked proud to be conducting a neglected masterpiece. What he got from his orchestra was well-nigh miraculous -- perfect rhythm, perfect intonation, and perfect ensemble, where every note made sense. Too bad the staging didn't. Yet Gilfry, despite being presented as a sexless schlub (he even mooned the audience at one point), came out smelling like a rose, with every vocal part intact. As did Chris Merritt, whose part -- it's one of his specialties -- has greater range and heft. And Ian Robertson's chorus went a long way towards righting this production's wrongs. Olive drab it wasn't.

Chronicle

May 14

West Coast premiere of Philip Glass's *Akhnaten*. Oakland Metro, Oakland, CA. "Taking her cue from Glass's epilogue, which fast-forwards to the modern-day ruins of Akhnaten's palace, [Ellen Sebastian] Chang stages the whole piece in an engaging midpoint between royal past and tourist-ridden present. The illusion begins even before the audience enters the theater, with a speech by a tour guide that suddenly casts everyone as visitors to Akhnaten's tomb. This conceit turns out to be interestingly far-reaching (don't assume that everyone in the line with you is in fact a fellow audience member)" [Joshua Kosman, San Francisco Chronicle, 5/19/04].

May 15

Cellist Matt Haimovitz at a legendary punk club. CBGB, New York, NY.

Writers

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JAMES FREEMAN is the Music Director of Orchestra 2001. He recently retired from Swarthmore College, where he taught for 37 years in the Music Department, serving as Music Chair for 13 years.

MICHAEL MCDONAGH is a San Francisco-based poet and writer on the arts who has done two poem/picture books with artist Gary Bukovnik, *Before I Forget* (1991) and *Once* (1997), the former being in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, The Berkeley Art Museum, and the New York Public Library. He has also published poems in journals including *Mirage*, and written two theatre pieces -- *Touch and Go*, for three performers, which was staged at Venue 9 in 1998; and *Sight Unseen*, for solo performer.

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