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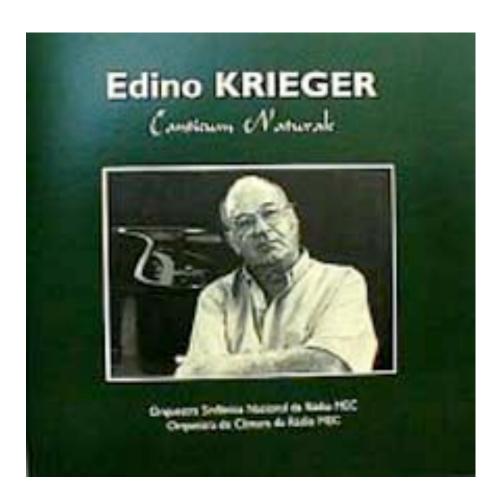
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# An Interview with Edino Krieger

#### TOM MOORE

Composer Edino Krieger, born in 1928 in Brusque in the state of Santa Catarina in southern Brazil, has been a benevolent presence and important influence on music and culture in Rio de Janeiro for many years, where he is beloved and respected by musicians in all parts of the sometimes fractious classical music scene. A number of discs with his work should be available to American listeners, including the Concerto for Two Guitars recorded by Sérgio and Odair Assad on the GHA label, as well as the survey of his works on the Soarmec label, which includes the Suite for Strings, Divertimento for Strings, the Ludus Symphonicus, Estro Armonico and Canticum Naturale. We talked at his residence in Flamengo, Rio de Janeiro, in August 2002.

MOORE: What was the musical environment like in your family when you were young?

KRIEGER: I was born into a family of musicians. My grandfather, whose parents were German, played viola. My Italian great-grandfather played wind instruments. My father was the oldest of the children in his family. He started making music early - at eight years old he was already playing bandoneon, he played in the cinema. Later he learned to play violin, clarinet, saxophone, guitar. He was the musical leader in the family. He taught his brothers various instruments, and his cousins as well, on the Italian side of the family. In 1929, when I was one year old, they organized the first jazz band in Santa Catarina, where I was born, which was called the Jazz Band America. They were all members of the same family five Kriegers (my father and his brothers), and five Diegolis, from the Italian side. Besides the jazz band, they also did the carnavals in the whole region, in my city, and in neighboring cities - Tijuca, Florianópolis. They did all the Carnaval balls, the parades, they rehearsed groups that were going to participate, chose their costumes and so on. The carnival rehearsals took place in the tailor shop of my grandfather, who was a tailor by trade, as were my father and all his brothers. So during Carnaval they turned the huge room of the tailor shop into a place to rehearse. Everybody went there, they chose the song for Carnaval so they could make the costumes - a gardener, Pierrot, toreadors from Madrid. The costumes were made to fit in with the music in those days. I grew up in this environment. My father also organized the choir for the Evangelical Church (my family on the German side were Lutherans), and so I heard the jazz band, music for Carnaval, and religious music. He was also director of the band, and so I also heard a lot of the repertoire for band – dobrados, marches, that sort of thing. And what's more, my father and his brothers put together groups to do serestas (serenades), which they played on the weekends, at night, under the windows of people's girlfriends, a repertoire which was very typically Brazilian, which was just getting started in this period, in the twenties and thirties, which was when you had Pixinguinha, Ernesto Nazareth, when this type of music was taking shape. I also heard the whole repertoire of waltzes, maxixes, choros, schottisches, which was the origin of urban Brazilian music.

That was my spontaneous musical training, even before starting to study music.

MOORE: What was the music like in Santa Catarina? Was there influence from Italian music? What part of Italy were your Italian relatives from?

KRIEGER: My Italian great-grandfather was from Southern Italy. My grandmother (my father's mother) was born in Italy, but farther north, in Bologna. My father's grandparents were from the north of Germany, from a little city near Hamburg. But what is interesting is that from my city, Brusque (40 km from Blumenau, which is better-known)...

MOORE: For its German culture...

KRIEGER: Even today Blumenau is very connected to its origins. The Oktoberfest is very well-known. It corresponds to the Brazilian Carnaval, since there is almost no Carnaval in Blumenau. In my city, certainly because of the influence of the activities which had been started by my father, there came to be a different sort of tradition, much more involved with the Brazilian cultural and musical traditions, like Carnaval, choro, serestas. Even the municipal band there had a different repertoire from the one in Blumenau, which until today has a more Germanic repertoire. But Brusque was more in tune with what was being done in Rio de Janeiro, in São Paulo, and which got there, in the days before radio, because my father would acquire scores and parts from the publishers in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo so he could keep up with what was being done there. I think this is interesting from the cultural point of view, because in spite of being a city with a very central European tradition, with many immigrants from Italy and Germany - my own family used to sing Italian and German music – it didn't just stop there, just cultivating its origins. It went through a kind of metamorphosis, a symbiosis, that is, with the music that was being made in other regions in

MOORE: You began by studying music in Brusque. At what point did you arrive in Rio de Janeiro?

KRIEGER: I began by studying violin with my father. He wanted me to be a virtuoso of the violin, a Jascha Heifetz -- it was his greatest dream. He was a rather good violinist himself. I started at seven, and by the age of 12 or 13 I was doing concerts throughout the various cities in the state. The governor of the state was present at one of these concerts, in Florianópolis, the capital, when I was fourteen. After the concert the governor came to the dressing room to give me his compliments, and to ask if I wouldn't like to continue studying the violin in Rio de Janeiro. Of course I said yes, and the next day he gave me a scholarship from the state government so that I could study violin at the Conservatório Brasileiro de Música in Rio de Janeiro. So I came here in 1943, when I was fifteen, and began to study violin.

And at the Conservatory I met Koellreutter, a German professor, who was very young at the time, twenty-something years old, and who was developing his work, beginning to have a formal group of students. I was interested, took a test, he accepted me as a student, and I began to study composition. Little by little I lost interest in the violin. My father was very sad about that, but he got used to it... instead of having a Jascha Heifetz he would have a...

MOORE: Mozart...

KRIEGER: A composer. I wouldn't end up being either a Mozart or a Villa-Lobos... but...So then in 1948 I was studying with Koellreutter when I got a scholarship for the Berkshire Music Center in Massachusetts, at Tanglewood. I did a sixweek course with Aaron Copland, and after the course, through Copland, I got a scholarship to Juilliard in New York. I spent the whole year there in 1948-1949, studying with Peter Mennin, another young composer, who later became the director of Juilliard.

MOORE: What was the culture of classical music like in Rio de Janeiro in the forties? What sort of interest was there in modernism? What was the difference between Koellreutter's pedagogy and the Brazilian professors?

KRIEGER: The teaching of music was very traditional. The School of Music of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, which was called the National School of Music at the time, trained virtually no prominent composers. At an earlier time there had been excellent professors of composition there, beginning with [Alberto] Nepomuceno, Henrique Oswald, who was a great composer, Francisco Braga, who was an excellent teacher. After the death of these great teachers, there was no continuity - the teachers who succeeded Braga used a very traditional pedagogy, which was academic in the worst sense of the word. The place was filled with retrograde academicism. I remember that the first time that there was talk of doing a piece by Schoenberg there was an incredible reaction – "this is not music, this is just madmen inventing a different system" - Schoenberg was taboo in this period. This was in Rio de Janeiro. The situation was less serious in São Paulo, because there was one composer, Camargo Guarnieri, who was fairly open-minded, even if he was strict in instruction in counterpoint, harmony and so forth. He was also an iron-willed defender of the nationalist aesthetic -he thought that all Brazilian music had to be based on musical elements of the popular culture of Brazil – folklore and so on. He was an excellent composer, and trained a number of generations of important composers. Some of them continued to work in the nationalist vein, and others didn't. Almeida Prado, for example, was a student of his who followed a different path. But when Koellreutter arrived here at the end of the thirties he began to show that there were other experiments that were going on then in Europe -- the Viennese school, with Schoenberg, Webern, etc., and this because some of his students, above all Claudio Santoro, began to get interested in this, to ask Koellreutter for information about it, and wanted to know, beyond traditional and nationalist music, what one could do, what the other paths were, the other possibilities, and they wanted to get up to date.

And so he began to teach about serialism, and a little group got started to study it, which provoked a very violent reaction on the part of the traditionalists, the academicists, here in Rio de Janeiro, and in São Paulo, on the part of the nationalists. And so there were battles on two fronts against this opening that Koellreutter was proposing. It was period of many fights on aesthetic matters. Camargo Guarnieri wrote an unfortunate article defending nationalist music, and accusing Koellreutter of leading young Brazilians down the wrong path. Really, it was terrible. This was in the fifties. Later it all blew over. Today these are just historical matters. Nobody worries about whether you write nationalist music or not, whether you write serial music, or clusters, or perfect triads in C major. Nobody is worried about defending their thesis, but rather about simply writing the best possible music.

MOORE: What were the models, the ideal composers for the traditionalists in Rio de Janeiro?

KRIEGER: I can only tell you about the training I had at the time. There was a professor at the School of Music called J. Otaviano. He was a composer who had had a training that was extremely traditional, to make music in the style of Schumann, Beethoven... Debussy was already very advanced for him. So how did he teach composition? He used to have the students take a Beethoven sonata. You take the first movement of the sonata, and make an analysis from the point of view of structure – how many measures does the first theme have, how many measures, and in what tonality, does the second theme have? Is it in the dominant? How many measures in the transitions, in the development, and so forth. Having done this you mark your music paper, and write what you found in the analysis. After you have everything planned out on paper, then you close your Beethoven, and sit down to compose, using the schema vou have written down. So it was a way of teaching music without any creativity, that is, a completely schematic approach – you copy the schema from Beethoven, rather than using your own creative fantasy. This was the dominant spirit in those days in Rio de Janeiro, which was the only place where composition was taught. So the parameters of this type of instruction were the sonatas of Beethoven, the music of Schumann – European music from the Romantic period. There was no Wagner, and Schoenberg was simply considered antimusic. This was the pattern. So when Koellreutter arrived and began to widen people's perspectives, to show people how to understand the harmonic structures of Hindemith, what was called acoustic harmony, to study the acoustic principles of harmony, and not simply the rules – not just to avoid parallel fifths and octaves in the harmony, but to understand why this way of teaching of Koellreutter's provoked a very great reaction.

MOORE: The contrast between music teaching in New York and Rio de Janeiro must have been rather great.

KRIEGER: I really didn't't notice such a great difference, because I went to New York after having been in Koellreutter's school, which was open-minded.

So for me, the music of Wallingford Riegger, whom I knew personally in New York, was not something strange, since it was already familiar from analysis and from the performance that we had promoted on the radio and in concerts, I already knew all this contemporary musical production. For me there was no shock. I suppose that a student who had learned to write sonatas according to Beethoven form and who arrived there would have noticed a big difference. But I had already left here with a different experience and a different vision of things. I had already begun to work with serial music. The pieces which I did in this period were all serial. When I went to study at Juilliard I asked Koellreutter if there was a composer there that he would recommend, and he knew a number of professors there, some composers that were serialists, including Wallinford Riegger, Roger Goeb, and he said to me, "Look, since you have already worked on serialism, you have already done a number of serial things, I recommend that you look for a teacher who is not a serialist, so that you can have another experience. There's no point in going there and doing exactly what you were doing here for the last three, four, five years." So I chose Peter Mennin, who had been student of Boulanger in Paris and came from a different school. And the things that I did at Juilliard were a different type of thing – not serial.

MOORE: It seems like nationalism in the United States was already played out by this point. For you and the other composers of your generation in Brazil was brasilidade an essential criterion for your music?

KRIEGER: Look, I would say the following: Brazilian music is a very strong presence in the shaping of a Brazilian composer in a general way. In my case, I grew up hearing music for Carnaval, serestas, music for band, and all this makes up part of a repertoire that your memory stores away. It's part of you, part of your history, part of your auditory history. Even those who try to liberate themselves from a kind of academic nationalism retain this on an unconscious or subconscious level. I remember that in the period when we were working with serial music, with twelve-tone music, this topic would come up frequently for us. Is it possible with this type of language and technique to have some kind of presence of elements of Brazilian music, or if we use an advanced, free language, are we going to be confused with the composers from whatever part of the world who do this sort of thing? And some things came out of this type of discussion. For example Guerra-Peixe, a composer who had a training very much involved with Brazilian popular music, an arranger working for radio orchestra, but who was also very interested in these new directions, the possibilities opening up, of getting out of this vicious circle of academicism, wrote a string trio in this period with a second movement that had a lot to do with the seresta, but which was also twelve-tone. I wrote an experiment with a Choro for flute, which was strictly serial, but with rhythms from the Brazilian choro. This was something intentional, on purpose, a premeditated experiment. After a while this would come to be something spontaneous. Now, for example, I don't see any incompatibility between using a very advanced harmonic language, and using elements, whether melodic, or rhythmic, from the Brazilian musical tradition.

I think that Brazilian composers, more or less, have the same experience -- not using Brazilian music as something which is a duty, as it was in the school of Camargo Guarnieri. After a certain point composers felt free of the obligation to do this. They write Brazilian music if it's going to happen, they don't have to avoid Brazilian elements in order to avoid seeming reactionary or traditionalist. So this dualism in Brazil is passé. I think this is very positive, since it is a way for you to write music that is not just like the serial music that is written in the United States or Europe, there is a component, a contribution from a culture that, after all, is important, Brazilian musical culture. Brazil created the material for this musical culture, whether from folklore, popular music, the rhythms – it's very rich. In my concerto for two guitars, which is not serialist, is not an avant-garde work, not advanced in its language, but is free, in the second movement, for example, I used structures such as clusters, but at the same time, I use musical ideas and themes which come from the violeiros of the Northeast, melodic structures based on modes, and not on tonality, Mixolydian and Lydian modes, which are the modes used by the singers of the Northeast. This mixture of elements from tradition with aleatoric procedures, with contemporary procedures, is something which I think is interesting in Brazilian music today.

MOORE: In talking with a composer recently he suggested that thirty years ago, at least in the US, it was impossible for him to conceive of a life as a composer, but that he needed to work in the academy in order be able to support himself, in contrast to the situation today, where composers have a little more public presence. What is the relation in Brazil between classical music and the academic environment?

KRIEGER: In Brazil it is completely impossible to live as a composer, because compositional work in Brazil is something voluntary. It is rare for a composer to have a commission. I have had a fair amount – I have various works that were done on commission, but it is not normal. The majority of composers in Brazil really need to have some other means of supporting themselves, whether as teachers, often at universities and schools of music, which continue to be the main employers of the Brazilian composers, and which happily are still being created. When I began in the forties, there was really only one school of music which had a course in composition. Today there are various universities, and the School of Music itself is much more advanced in its pedagogy, and even has a department of electro-acoustic music. In addition, there are other universities which also have courses in composition - UniRio for example. In São Paulo, in the forties, there was only Camargo Guarnieri's school, which was private. Today there are a number of universities in São Paulo, USP, UNESP, UniCamp, which are important centers of musical creativity. In Minas Gerais, there is a center at UFMG, and also UFRS in Rio Grande do Sul. Instruction in composition today is much more wide-spread. But normally composers need to work teaching music, or in other activities, generally in public agencies, in order to survive and do their compositional work in parallel. In my case, I am not a professor, but have always worked in public agencies. I began my professional life working for the radio of the Ministry of Education, doing programs on music.

Later I directed various agencies, including the Foundation for Theaters in Rio de Janeiro, the National Foundation for the Arts (Funarte). I was director of the National Institute of Music, and this work guaranteed me enough to be able to survive, and in my free hours, which generally are always busy, to do music. This is the normal situation for all composers.

MOORE: Rio de Janeiro has a very busy musical life with many composers who have interesting works, and of course there is the Bienal. When did that get started?

KRIEGER: The Bienals of Contemporary Music began in 1975. They were really the continuation of two music festivals which I organized in 1969 and 1970, which were the Music Festivals of Guanabara. The festival in 1969 brought together for the first time fourteen works by young composers, for orchestra, or for chorus and orchestra, and this was something entirely new. Many critics said it was the most important thing since the Week of Modern Art in 1922 in São Paulo. And beginning with this festival, which had important prizes, that at the time were equivalent more or less to fifty thousand dollars, and with an international jury, which came to judge these national works at the Teatro Municipal, including Penderecki (Lutoslawski was invited, but couldn't come at the last minute), Roque Cordero from Panama, Heitor Tosar from Uruguay, you had the first display of contemporary Brazilian composition. The first prize from this festival went to Almeida Prado, who nobody knew at the time. With this prize he spent two years in Paris, where he could study with Boulanger, with Messiaen. The next year the second festival had an international scope, with participants from other countries in the areas of symphonic and chamber music, and then there was a lapse of five years, because the secretary of culture who had decided to organize these festivals died, and his successor had no interest in them. I had prepared a project for the festival to take place biennially, someone found the project (it was Myriam Dauelsberg, the director of the Sala Cecília Meireles), and decided to carry it out. So the Bienals were started, which are still going on today. It's interesting to note that the first Bienal had about thirty participating composers. The most recent Bienal had about a hundred and eighty. So these Bienals were an incentive, providing a new space where composers could hear their works performed, and many composers made their debuts with the inclusion of a work of theirs in a Bienal -- Ronaldo Miranda, various other composers of the younger generation.

MOORE: Can you tell us about your recent projects?

KRIEGER: In 2000 there was the Sinfonia dos 500 Anos. Last year I did a cantata to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, called The Age of Knowledge, about the importance of knowledge in people's lives. A wind quintet called Embalos, with movements based on the rhythmic structures of Brazilian music, in a rather free idiom. In the near future there will be the premiere of a piece called Passacaglia para Fred Schneiter, a Brazilian guitarist who died prematurely last year, and the Guitar Association is having a competition in his memory in Niterói, and they asked me to write a competition piece, which is going to have its debut now. I was recently in Karlsruhe for three months, and there I did some pieces for harpsichord called Momentos.

MOORE: Who will perform them?

KRIEGER: For now they have not been premiered. There was a Brazilian harpsichordist that I met there, but who has lived there for a long time. His name is Wilke Lahmann -- a German name, but he is Brazilian. He will do the premiere. I did a transcription for violin and two guitars of Sonâncias for a trio in Belgium with a Swedish violinist and the Assad Brothers, which also has not yet been premiered. This year I wrote three songs on sonnets by Carlos Drummond de Andrade, whose centenary is being celebrated this year. They will be premiered in August by a Brazilian baritone and pianist who organized a program in homage to the two great Brazilian poets, Carlos Drummond de Andrade and Cecília Meireles.

MOORE: Have you seen increasing prominence for Brazilian classical music outside Brazil?

KRIEGER: Yes, I think so. In 2000, for example, in Karlsruhe, there was a program with ten days of Brazilian music in homage to the 500th anniversary of the discovery of Brazil. Ten Brazilian composers were present. In 1996 there was also a very important program of Brazilian music in New York, which was the occasion for the debut of the Concerto for Two Guitars by the Assads. At the time there were 20 Brazilian composers present, with concerts in Carnegie Hall and various other auditoriums.

## **Concert Review**

## **Delayed Atomic Reaction**

### MARK ALBURGER

Sometimes not attending opening night can be a good thing, especially in the case of a premiere. A "shake-down" cruise can be a shaky situation, and opening night can seem like a final dress rehearsal. By a week or so into a run, all the elements can be assembled for a demonstrative hit or miss.

OK, truth is, we didn't think we could score tickets to the first performance of John Adams's "Dr. Atomic," commissioned by San Francisco Opera, since critics were flying in from around the country and around the world. But that just allowed us the luxury of hearing how opinions were swirling about the work, before finally weighing in about a potential fat man or little boy of opera.

So, is it incandescent or a dud?

Well, it's not a blast, but it's not a fizzle, either. After a provocative electronic soundscape (a lesser-known arena for Adams), the tone is established immediately in the earnest choral overture "Matter can be neither created nor destroyed but only altered in form" (an intentionally outdated bit of science proved completely wrong by the course of events). The harsh lighting and massive weapons-of-mass-destruction scaffolding recall the design of Adams's previous "Death of Klinghoffer." Reminiscent as well was the use of a committed -- or even partisan -- Greek chorus; but unlike in the earlier opera, here the music is more in the manner of mass recitative. Paradoxically on the page, the music looks lyrical, as the phrases have repeating contours, but with the meticulous text setting and the sustained bass harmonies, we are clearly in a realm where the words at least as important as the music.

Well, isn't that the conundrum? Historically, since at least the birth of opera in the early 1600s, and indeed earlier going back to various religious traditions use of music, this has been among the great questions -- the relative importance of words/ideas vs. music/aesthetics (would they not be such a dichotomy, yet there it remains). And the solution that Claudio Monteverdi seemed to hit upon in "Orfeo" was one that Adams eerily replicated in "Klinghoffer": choruses in an "antique" style (for Monteverdi it was old-style renaissance madrigal, for Adams it was minimalism), and for solo singers it was a newer "reciting" style.

In "Dr. Atomic," Adams has clearly gone over to a mostly recitative realm, even in the choruses. As with Richard Wagner, Adams is a brilliant orchestrator and symphonic melodist. The singers seem to be along for the ride, sometimes connecting up with the overall musical-instrumental argument, but often left in their own tangle of words.

And there are a lot of them, in an engaging found-text libretto assembled by director and long-time Adams collaborator Peter Sellars -- government documents, reminiscences of project physicists, poetry by John Dunne, Hindu and Tewa writings. If it didn't add up all of the time, it was a noble effort, along with the flying pipes and overhead lights. Stimulating work was nevertheless heard from Richard Paul Fink, Gerald Finley, and Thomas Glenn, respectively as the forthright Edward Teller, pragmatic yet conscience-wracked J. Robert Oppenheimer (the titular comic-book inspired Dr. Atomic), and the idealistic Robert Wilson (not to be confused with liked-named stage director).

The "slow-movement / feminine" scenes (Act I, Scene ii, and Act II. Scene i) were perhaps the least successful moments. despite lovely efforts on the part of Kristine Jepson (Kitty Oppenheimer) and Beth Clayton (the Oppenheimer's Native-American nanny, Pasqualita). If J. Robert's fixation on the former's hair, however, became a bit of protracted stage business, By contrast the first Act's concluding Scene iii was incandescent. As a thunderstorm lit up the night sky with concerns that the test bomb might be prematurely detonated by a stray bolt of lightning, Adams provided the sturm-und-drang to match. There was even a visual homage to another nuclearera opera in the slow progression of one of the bombs across the desert floor near Alamogordo -- a tip of the scenic hat to the Philip Glass / Wilson "Einstein on the Beach" slow-train procession. And the concluding Oppenheimer aria was as powerful as advertised, with hints of a Henry Purcell passacaglia (variations on a repeated bass line) in the repeated chromatic droopings setting Donne's "Batter my heart, three person'd God" -- whence the name of the Trinity test site.

Jepson delivered some winning vocalise in the beginning of Act II, while the bomb hung ominously sword-of-Damoclesesque over her infant's crib (the baby doll could have been a tad more realistic and the older child perhaps deserved more than a mere walk-on). While the poignantly-tense ensuing scene played out back in the desert with Glenn and Adams-interpreter-par-excellence James Maddalena (here as the meteorologist Jack Hubbard, who also created the title character in "Nixon in China" and the Captain-protagonist in "The Death of Klinghoffer"), that crib still loomed large under the bomb. Mercifully, it was finally moved before the final explosion.

Eric Owens was in fine form for comic relief as General Leslie Groves, ordering weathermen to give him a better report and confessing to his dietary foibles (the large chocolate bar seemed gratuitous -- and would that we have been given an aria for his calorie-counting, rather than yet another recitative).

Even Adams has admitted, "It's hard to set English --especially just plain flat-out prose like 'He said that I should go over and tell that to Oppenheimer' or something like that. I notice that when I'm composing I can get distracted and lose track of the necessity to make good vocal lines."

Well, yeah.

The bomb detonation had been billed as a whimper, or a sonic view from a distance, but, while it was not the aural cataclysm the Paul Dresher Ensemble provided in the Zellerbach premiere of Adams's "I Was Looking at the Ceiling and Then I Saw the Sky" (the earthquake was subsequently cut from the recording, however), it as pretty impressive nonetheless, building up initially to another Trinitarian vision, this one Eastern, in an evocation of Vishnu: "At the Sight of your Shape stupendous, full of mouths and eyes." Here as elsewhere, Lucinda Childs (also a veteran from "Einstein") provided active and imaginative choreography -- excellently realized by the dancers and gamely attempted by most of the

singers (who were consistently, attractively plus-sized to the dancers -- alas one older gentleman almost center stage, should have been removed to the sidelines as he simply could not get with the program).

The COUNTDOWN conclusion, while building inexorably in tension, was -- as was no doubt the reality -- a bit overlong. Harkening back to Olivier Messiaen's "St. Francis of Assisi," where the dear saint just lingered on for far too long and I found myself heretically thinking "Die already!" here the heinous thought was "explode the gadget, dammit!" It finally did, and somewhere around there was a demi-chorus of Cloud Flower Blossoms and Pasqualita getting to do an interpretive dance with tree branches.

It was a lot to pack into one evening, a brave-new-world game subject to tackle, and I am glad to have been there.

Rather than at the test site. Or worse.



## Chronicle

#### October 1

Premiere of John Adams's Doctor Atomic (libretto by Peter Sellars). War Memorial Opera House, San Francisco, CA. 'As part of her initiative called The Faust Project, [Pamela] Rosenberg had approached [John] Adams with the idea of writing an opera on a 20th-century American Faust: J. Robert Oppenheimer, the physicist who presided over the Manhattan Project, which built the first atomic bombs. Though initially hesitant, Mr. Adams, who thinks big, could not resist. Nor could his longtime collaborator, the director Peter Sellars. In a risky stroke Mr. Sellars assembled a libretto from interviews with the project participants, history books, conversation transcripts, declassified documents and poetry. His cut-andpaste job has produced a libretto of heightened emotional resonance and surprising dramatic continuity. With Mr. Adams's haunting score, what results is a complex, searching and painfully honest if somewhat problematic opera. Doctor Atomic is the ultimate waiting game. It begins in June 1945 as the physicists, scientists and military personnel who are working at Los Alamos, N.M., are poised to test the first atomic bomb. The rest of the two-and-a-half-hour opera takes place on the night before and the morning of July 16, the day the first bomb was tested at the site that Oppenheimer, inspired by a John Donne poem, called Trinity. In a sense, not much happens: only that Oppenheimer and the other participants grapple with their consciences as the countdown to detonation, quite literally, commences. The Oppenheimer of Doctor Atomic is a true Faustian figure, a questing, cultured, brilliant and arrogant man, vividly portrayed by the charismatic Canadian baritone Gerald Finley, who sings with burnished tone and makes every word count. As Mr. Sellars explained in a pre-performance talk, Oppenheimer understood that by pushing science to new limits he would unleash barely imaginable forces in the world and even more fearsome forces within mankind. But he willed himself to turn off the part of his brain that processes ethical qualms about his work. The 'best people' in Washington will make these decisions for us scientists, he argues. In his talk, Mr. Sellars bemoaned today's culture, in which the government and the news media simplify everything with 'ridiculous crudeness.' Welcome to opera, he said, where we do not shy from ambiguity and complexity. Still, it takes great music to achieve this. Doctor Atomic, Mr. Adams's third full-fledged opera, may be his most inventive and emotional score to date, and the conductor Donald Runnicles drew a keen, compelling and assured performance from the orchestra. In his days as a fledgling composer, Mr. Adams rejected the academic atonality he was steeped in as a student and embraced minimalism, jazz, electronics, and experimental styles. But once over his rebellion, he increasingly allowed himself to incorporate elements of the more complex techniques he had been exposed to. In Doctor Atomic, Mr. Adams, 58, breaks new ground in that sphere. Whole spans of the orchestral and choral music tremble with textural density. Stacked-up clusters and polytonal harmonies have stunning bite and pungency. Skittish instrumental lines come close to sounding like riffs from a serialist score.

The vocal writing is wondrously varied, sometimes jittery and naturalistic, sometimes melismatic and elegiac. You hear evocations of sci-fi film scores and bursts of Varèsian frenzy. When he needs to propel the music forward, Mr. Adams, true to form, creates a din of pummeling rhythms, fractured meters and jolting repeated figures: call it atomic minimalism. Yet tension runs even through the long, ruminative, wistful episodes, like the poignant bedtime scene between Oppenheimer and his wife, Kitty. A sensitive and longsuffering alcoholic, Kitty was portrayed with touching vulnerability by the mezzo-soprano Kristine Jepson, though her diction was frustratingly mushy. Like Wagner's Erda, Kitty sees all too well the implications of the work that consumes her dazzling but remote husband. It seems right that the couple sometimes converse in a private language of quotations from sensual Baudelaire poems, for they cannot face each other with unblinking honesty. There are Wagnerian touches to the music beyond its orchestral lushness and bigness, in, for example, Mr. Adams's way of using the orchestra to comment on the story and the characters. One telling instance comes in a short scene with Gen. Leslie Groves, the blustery Army commander on the project. For a moment Groves forgets the mission and is drawn by Oppenheimer into a conversation about his weight problem. Dynamically portraved by the husky bass Eric Owens, Groves shows Oppenheimer his calorie counter and talks about his diet regimen, which is not going well. Groves's chatter is enshrouded in luminous harmonies and pleading melodic lines, as if the orchestra sees the one person with the power to postpone the test in a fleeting moment of human frailty and tries to talk sense to him. Act I closes with a transfixing scene for Oppenheimer, when he recites that Donne sonnet, Batter my heart, three-person'd God, an abject surrender to God. Mr. Adams's setting is like some contemporary evocation of an intricately contrapuntal Renaissance song with a tortured melodic line and unstable modal harmonies. Other standouts in the cast include the baritone Richard Paul Fink, who uses his stentorian singing to mask the manipulative ways of the physicist Edward Teller, who would become Oppenheimer's nemesis during the McCarthy years. The elegant baritone James Maddalena (who created the title role in Mr. Adams's "Nixon in China") portrays the meteorologist Jack Hubbard, who must suffer the tirades of General Groves. The mezzosoprano Beth Clayton made an impact in two mysterious scenes as the Oppenheimers' maid, who sings totemic songs to the couple's children. The tenor Thomas Glenn brought his sweet voice and bovish innocence to the role of Robert Wilson, a young idealistic physicist plagued with guilt about the test. Alas, the musical performance was troubled by balance problems, which were not helped by the use of amplification. Electronic elements have long been part of the Adams style. Since the large orchestra was electronically enhanced, the solo singers had to wear wireless microphones. Introducing amplification into opera is Mr. Adams's prerogative. But if you are going to abandon 400 years of tradition and amplify singers to get the balances right, then get the balances right. All other aspects of Mr. Sellars's production are remarkable.

Adrianne Lobel's striking sets use movable columns and sliding lab tables filled with plutonium cores and other gadgets, set against a silhouette of New Mexico mountains. The costume designer Dunya Ramicova dresses the chorus as 1940's scientists, technicians and workers, who remind us that the Manhattan Project employed thousands of workers. The choreographer Lucinda Childs uses dancers to "physicalize the anxiety of waiting," in Mr. Sellars's words, and lend a quality of abstraction to the affecting and graceful staging. The waiting, of course, culminates in the detonation. Before he composed a note Mr. Adams knew that any attempt to depict an atomic explosion in music would be clichéd on arrival. His solution is ingenious. As the moment approaches and the battering-ram orchestra seems to be sounding inside your head, suddenly all goes quiet and we experience the detonation as if we were 200 miles away in Los Alamos. The music is delicate, strange, melodically dispersed, harmonically tentative. You sense the atmosphere crackling, the world changing. The calm voice of a Japanese woman is heard. We know what comes next. But that is for a sequel. Maybe Ms. Rosenberg is already on the case" [Anthony Tommasini, The New York Times, 10/3/05].

#### October 11

Juilliard Orchestra, led by Dennis Russell Davies, in The Juilliard School presents its 100th Anniversary Concert. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY. "And that was it for hoopla. There were no speeches, ceremonies, awards, potted-history films -- just a concert, with a newly commissioned work as its centerpiece, and scores by Webern and Schubert at either end. Some listeners may have wanted a greater sense of occasion, but simply showing what the school's young musicians can do made tremendous sense. The piece commissioned for the concert was the Manhattan Trilogy by Einojuhani Rautavaara, the patriarch of contemporary Finnish composers. Mr. Rautavaara is much loved internationally these days, and for good reason. But it would be unnatural not to wonder why this quintessentially American conservatory didn't program a new American work as the main draw of its anniversary concert -or even as one of the outlying scores. Perhaps the presence on the podium of Mr. Davies, a particularly eloquent interpreter of American music, made the absence of any all the more puzzling. Maybe it's a silly question. There are new American scores elsewhere in the season, and at this point, American composers are doing well enough in the world not to need a boost at every local celebration. There is, in any case, a Juilliard connection here: Mr. Rautavaara was a student there in the 1950's, and his three-movement, 20-minute work is a reminiscence of the hopes and anxieties of his student years. It is a wistful, conservative work. The outer movements, Daydreams and Dawn, are cast in consonant but freely modulating chord progressions, with achingly beautiful solo lines darting through the thick textures. Even the central Nightmares movement, though darker and more freely dissonant, often has a lush quality. If Mr. Rautavaara is remembering tensions and uncertainties here, as the program notes suggest, he is doing it from a comfortable distance.

Mr. Davies let his musicians revel in Mr. Rautavaara's rich textures, and they played it as if they had lived with it for years. It sounded, in any case, like the most thoroughly rehearsed of the three scores on the program, although the performances of Webern's Six Pieces for Orchestra (Op. 6) and the Schubert Ninth Symphony offered little reason for complaint. There were, for example, fleetingly tentative moments in the brass during the outer movements of the Webern, but the salient feature of the performance was the fluidity and seamlessness with which these young players moved through the constantly changing textures" [Allan Kozinn, The New York Times, 10/13/05].

#### October 20

Pierre-Laurent Aimard. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY. "Can Pierre Boulez ever have imagined that four short piano pieces from his steely, rigorously dodecaphonic and antiestablishment "Notations" would be played as an encore during a recital at Carnegie Hall? And who would have thought that this radical early Boulez work would sound so right coming after an exhilarating performance of Schumann's crowd-pleasing Carnaval? But this is what Pierre-Laurent Aimard pulled off in his stunning . . . recital . . . . As those tuned in to contemporary-music circles know, in 1977 Mr. Aimard, then just 19, became a founding member of Mr. Boulez's avant-garde Ensemble InterContemporain in Paris, remaining with the group for 18 years. But since then, Mr. Aimard has been branching into standard repertory, winning wide acclaim for his extraordinary pianism without losing his identity as a musician immersed in his own time. Mr. Aimard enjoys playing old and new works together in provocative contexts. He opened this fascinating program with four of Debussy's Préludes, Book I. Seated at the piano, he waited for well over a minute, until stragglers in the audience arrived and the house was quiet, so he could start the mysterious and searching Delphic Dancers, which begins in a whisper. In this haunting performance, with harmonically unhinged chords voiced so tellingly and textures boldly blurred, Debussy's alluring prelude sounded like the radical work it was and, in a sense, still is. The Wind on the Plain followed, sounding here like an onrushing intimation of a Ligeti étude. Mr. Aimard then began the hushed Sounds and Perfumes Swirl in the Evening Air, but stopped just moments into it because something else was swirling in air at Carnegie Hall: coughing. He begged the audience's pardon and reminded everyone that coughing is "the enemy of music." With the house now utterly quiet, he continued, then ended the set with a jocular vet curiously unsettling account of Puck's Dance. Having presented Debussy as a modernist, he played Mr. Boulez's staggeringly difficult Piano Sonata No. 1, written in 1946 when the composer was in his early 20's and instigating an assault on the musical status quo in Paris. Even those who find Mr. Boulez's serial works baffling had to have responded to the subtlety, color, rhythmic bite and rhapsodic sweep of Mr. Aimard's arresting performance. He then gave a coolly beautiful and commanding account of Ravel's formidable Gaspard de la Nuit, played without a hint of sentimentality, never milking this inventive score for virtuosic flash. The Schumann was not what you might have expected.

Mr. Aimard played with plenty of Romantic impetuosity and even a judicious use of rubato. Yet this was also a bracing and vigorous take on Schumann's suite of dances, evocations and portraits. In introducing the Boulez encore, Mr. Aimard explained that, like the Schumann work, Notations is also a suite of short character pieces, all derived from a few basic motifs. The audience must have gotten the connection, for on this night, Boulez won as many bravos as Schumann, thanks to Mr. Aimard's ingenious artistry" [Anthony Tommasini, The New York Times, 10/22/05].

#### October 29

Christopher Taylor plays Gyorgy Ligeti's Etudes. Miller Theatre, New York, NY. "Do not make assumptions about the American pianist Christopher Taylor from his bookish, gangly and endearingly nerdy appearance. Beneath that professorial persona is a demonically intense artist with a stunning technique and searching intellect. In recent seasons Mr. Taylor, who teaches at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, has been finding the Miller Theater at Columbia University an ideal place to try out programs that most mainstream concert presenters would never go for. In the process he has attracted a following, which explains why a capacity crowd was drawn to . . . hear his recital devoted to the complete études for piano by Gyorgy Ligeti. Surely, most of this noticeably young audience could not have been familiar with these cutting-edge works by this Hungarian master composer. Just knowing that Mr. Taylor was up to something again was apparently enough to fill the hall. At the Miller in 2001 Mr. Taylor gave an exhilarating performance of Messiaen's complete Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus, some of the most visionary and challenging music ever written for the piano.

Last year he returned for a program of contemporary études. 27 demanding works by George Perle, William Bolcom, Derek Bermel and Mr. Ligeti (Book 1, the first six, of the études, composed in 1985, though the composer, who is 82, has spoken of writing more). While Mr. Ligeti has written about being frustrated with his own limited piano technique, Mr. Taylor, in his program note, writes that producing marvels like these études requires "complete mastery of the instrument's potential as well as flawless intuition concerning the hand's abilities." Mr. Ligeti points to unusual sources of inspiration for these works, including the polyrhythmic music of sub-Saharan Africa, the jazz composers Thelonious Monk and Bill Evans, the mechanistic piano pieces of Conlon Nancarrow, and even the fractal geometry of Mandelbrot and Peitgen, which particularly interests Mr. Taylor, who graduated summa cum laude in mathematics from Harvard in 1992. There are surprisingly serene episodes in several of the études, like the wistful opening section of White on White, with its churchly harmonies, and the brittle, gently clanking passages in Fém, which suggests music made by breezes blowing through a pagoda. Some études have less overt challenges, like Vertige, in which the pianist must execute twisting strands of bizarre, hard-to-finger chromatic runs. But most of the études are vehemently intense and ferociously difficult, like the crazed À bout de souffle, with its pummeling chords and arm-blurring repetitions, or The Devil's Staircase, which makes Liszt's Mephisto Waltz seem like a jolly little Hungarian dance. Mr. Taylor played them all with incisive rhythm, lucid textures and, where the music allowed, alluring colors. Still, the sheer effort involved in playing these works was something to behold" [Anthony Tommasini, The New York Times, 10/31/06].



# Recording

Roger Waters. Ca Ira. Sony Classical. "With Ça Ira, his new opera about the French Revolution, just released on a Sony Classical recording, Roger Waters joins a parade of rock stars who apparently harbor dreams of tuxedos and podiums. Sir Paul McCartney has written a handful of orchestral and choral works, large and small. Stewart Copeland, of the Police, beat Mr. Waters to the punch with his own opera, Holy Blood and Crescent Moon. Billy Joel has recorded an album's worth of piano pieces, and Elvis Costello, with a ballet behind him, has written an opera as well. It seems to be a part of the human condition that having established a specialty, we hanker to do something else. And far be it from me to say that we shouldn't. But speaking as a classical music critic who also listens to lots of rock -- and who wishes that more rock fans found classical music exciting as well -- I must confess that I find many of these crossover incursions dispiriting. For one thing, rock stars who become interested in classical music are bizarrely conservative. They may play the most electrifying, guitarthrashing, edge-of-the-seat stuff with their own bands, but when they decide to write classical music, or what they think of as classical music, they reach for a quill instead of a pen. With the notable exception of Frank Zappa, whose reams of classical music reflect his fascination with Edgard Varèse and other modernists, rock musicians seem to think that the conventions of the 19th century are classical music's current language. Mr. Waters ought to have escaped that conservatism. His former band, Pink Floyd, was known for its almost symphonic experiments in timbre, structure and controlled dissonance. Its quasi-operatic magnum opus, The Wall, was thoroughly Mr. Waters's baby. Yet the overture to Ça Ira (So It Will Be) is couched in Brahmsian moves and sonorities, and the work rarely lurches forward. A listener soon bumps into orchestral effects that have their roots in Beethoven's Egmont or, in more adventurous passages, Puccini's Tosca or the Battle on the Ice from Prokofiev's Alexander Nevsky. Maybe Mr. Waters is mistaken to call this an opera. Yes, there are operatic things about it. The vocal writing is lyrical and often attractive, even if there is little in the way of full-fledged aria writing. There is a hefty amount of choral music, and it is supported by a rich orchestral score (Mr. Waters had some help in the orchestration from Rick Wentworth, who conducts the recording). And there are recognizably operatic voices: the baritone Bryn Terfel, the tenor Paul Groves and the soprano Ying Huang each sing several roles. But if you were to walk into a room in which the CD happened to be playing, you would be far less likely to say, 'Hey, it's an opera' than 'Hey, it's one of those overblown musicals that have taken over Broadway' -- or words to that effect. . . . From a purely theatrical point of view, Ça Ira has a few nice touches: not least, the idea of presenting the early stages of the French Revolution as a three-ring circus, with the Ringmaster (one of Mr. Terfel's roles) as a kind of singing history book and commentator. And it deals artfully with serious issues like tyranny, power, liberty and the difficulty of preventing revolutionary passions from being transformed into a form of terror that threatens to negate what has been gained.

No doubt there are some in classical music circles who see a sterling opportunity here, and a decade ago, I would have been one of them. In theory, rock stars who write classical works are telling their audiences that they see something special in this music, something inspiring in the old forms and in the idea of writing for orchestra and unamplified voices. And it isn't unreasonable to expect that a new audience might be enlisted from fans who want to understand what drives their heroes, and who want to like what their heroes like. When rock fans in the United States bought the first albums by the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and the Kinks, they encountered cover versions of American rhythm-and-blues hits that white American listeners had ignored, and they quickly sought out the originals. Linda Ronstadt's excursions into the worlds of Gilbert and Sullivan and cabaret standards in the 1980's had a similar effect. But rock fans barely tolerate classical music adventures by the musicians they admire. Sir Paul's fans snapped up his Liverpool Oratorio, Standing Stone, and Working Classical albums out of curiosity or because they were completists, but you suspect that few who weren't already interested in classical music actually play those discs. When Sir Paul presided over a program of his orchestral music at Carnegie Hall in 1997, the place was packed with people who sought a glimpse of him but who nodded off during the performances. These crossovers tend not to do well from the other direction, either. Classical listeners find Billy Joel's piano tinkling embarrassing and have been brutally critical of other musicians' efforts as well. They may find it offensive that these musicians can get their baby steps recorded by major labels while trained, experienced, eloquent composers who don't have rock affiliations have to pass the hat. So here's where rock stars enamored of classical music can make a difference. When they make their first classical albums, they might consider devoting their royalties -- a pittance, compared with those generated by their other work -- to a fund that would support recordings by actual classical composers. 'Yeah, right,' you say, but there is a precedent of sorts. In 1989, Elliott Carter received a telephone call from Phil Lesh, the bassist for the Grateful Dead. Mr. Carter had no idea what the Grateful Dead was, but when he and Mr. Lesh met, the following May, Mr. Lesh brought a stack of Mr. Carter's music, which he knew intimately. Mr. Lesh, it turned out, wanted to underwrite a recording of Mr. Carter's music through the Grateful Dead's Rex Foundation, which has quietly given grants to other composers as well. Now that's doing something useful. If Mr. Lesh wrote and recorded an opera, I'd happily give it a spin" [Allan Kozinn, The New York Times, 9/28/05].

## Writers

MARK ALBURGER began playing the oboe and composing in association with Dorothy and James Freeman, George Crumb, and Richard Wernick. He studied with Karl Kohn at Pomona College; Joan Panetti and Gerald Levinson at Swarthmore College (B.A.); Jules Langert at Dominican University (M.A.); Roland Jackson at Claremont Graduate University (Ph.D.); and Terry Riley. An ASCAP composer, Alburger writes for Commuter Times, teaches at Diablo Valley College, and is published by New Music. He is Editor-Publisher of 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC, and has interviewed numerous composers, including Charles Amirkhanian, Henry Brant, Earle Brown, Philip Glass, Lou Harrison, Alan Hovhaness, Meredith Monk, Pauline Oliveros, Steve Reich, and Frederick Rzewski.

PATTI DEUTER is Assistant Editor of 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC and a Bay Area pianist.

HARRIET MARCH PAGE is Artistic Director of San Francisco Cabaret Opera, as well as soprano, librettist, monologist, and Associate Editor of 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC.

TOM MOORE is Music/Media Librarian at The College of New Jersey. He plays contemporary music in the Ronai/Moore Duo with fellow flautist Laura Ronai of the University of Rio de Janeiro; they have premiered works by Korenchendler, Oliveira, Ripper, Hagerty, White, Rubin and others. He also performs with baroque ensemble Le Triomphe de L'Amour. Moore studied flute with Sandra Miller and Christopher Krueger.

ERLING WOLD (b. January 30, 1958) is a San Francisco based composer of opera and contemporary classical music. He is best known for his later chamber operas, especially A Little Girl Dreams of Taking the Veil and his early experiments as a microtonalist. Although he rejected religion in his teens, he returned many times to religious themes in his works, including many of his operatic works, and his Mass named for Notker the Stammerer commissioned by the Cathedral of St Gall. His earliest music was atonal and arrhythmic, but the influences of just intonation and the music of the minimalists led to the bulk of his music being composed in a variety of tonal genres. He was attracted by the theater and much of his music is either directly dramatic or is based on dramatic rather than purely musical structures. Wold is an eclectic composer who has also been called "the Eric Satie of Berkeley surrealist/minimalist electro-art rock" by the Village Voice. He composed the soundtracks for a number of films by the independent film director Jon Jost.



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### Review

## **PROGRAM**

## Mark Alburger and John Kendall Bailey conducting

Harry Bernstein	Chamber Set Duo for Alto Flute and Viola (2006) Duet for Zack (2005) If All the World Was Apple Pie (2003) Color Study (2006)
Mark Alburger	Suite ("SOL[AR]") (1975 / 2005), Op. 2  for Oboe, Piano, and Percussion  I. Sun (January) [MDP]  II. Mercury (February) [HMP]  III. Venus (March) [GCA]  IV Earth / Moon (April) [MGA]
Philip Freihofner	Quartet for Oboe, Clarinet, French Horn and Bassoon  I. Galop 40 II. Waltz 40 III. Fugue 40 IV. March 40 V. Coda 40
	intermission
Lisa Scola Prose	Causa-Effetto from Leonardo's Notebooks 40  Maria Mikheyenko, Soprano Aurelio Viscarra, tenor Micah Epps, bass baritone
Alexis Alrich	Flute Concerto  I. Flute and Drum 40  Ilse Maier, flute
Loren Jones	Dancing On the Brink of the World San Francisco - 1600 to The Present

I. Ohlone Song 49

III. Gold Rush 40 VI. Dragon Gate 40

II. Ave Maria Yerba Buena 40