

# 21ST CENTURY MUSIC

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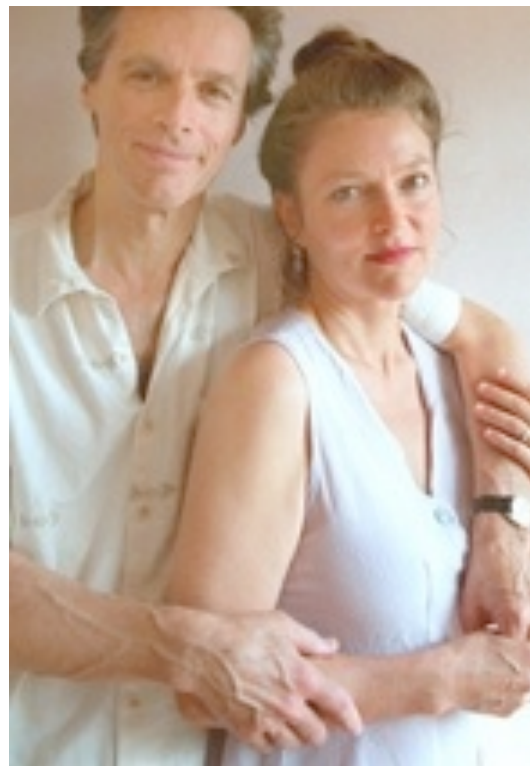
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# Peter and Lorraine Hunt Lieberson

PHILLIP GEORGE

American composer Peter Lieberson (b. October 25, 1946, New York, NY) is the son of ballerina and choreographer Vera Zorina (née Eva Brigitta Hartwig) and Goddard Lieberson, president of Columbia Records.

He studied composition with Milton Babbitt, Charles Wuorinen, Donald Martino, and Martin Boykan. After completing work at Columbia University, he left New York in 1976 for Boulder, Colorado, to continue his studies with Chogyam Trungpa, a Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhist master.

It was there he met and married Ellen Kearney, a fellow student of Trungpa. At the request of their teacher, the Liebersons moved from Boulder to Boston, Massachusetts, to co-direct Shambhala Training, a meditation and cultural program.

Lieberson attended Brandeis University, from which he received a Ph.D. From 1984-88 he taught at Harvard, and then became international director of Shambhala Training in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Since 1994, Lieberson has devoted his time entirely to composition. He met his second wife, mezzo-soprano Lorraine Hunt, in 1997 during the Santa Fe Opera production of Ashoka's Dream, marrying her in 1999 after his divorce. The composer wrote the Rilke and Neruda Songs for Hunt Lieberson, the latter work co-commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Boston Symphony, with the world premiere given on May 20, 2005, by the Los Angeles Philharmonic with Esa-Pekka Salonen.

## Works

Flute Variations (1971)

Concerto for Four Groups of Instruments (1972)

Concerto for Violoncello with Accompanying Trios (1974)

Accordance for 8 Instruments (1975)

Piano Fantasy (1975)

Tashi Quartet for clarinet, violin, cello and piano (1978)

Concerto for Piano (1980)

Three Songs for soprano and chamber ensemble (1981)

Lalita, Chamber Variations (1984)

Bagatelles for piano (1985)

Drala for orchestra (1986)

Feast Day for flute (also piccolo, alto flute), oboe, cello and harpsichord (or piano) (1985)

Ziji for clarinet, horn, violin, viola, cello and piano (1987)

The Gesar Legend for orchestra (1988)

Raising the Gaze for flute (also piccolo), clarinet (also bass clarinet), violin, viola, cello, piano and percussion (1988)

Fantasy Pieces for piano (1989)

Scherzo No. 1 for piano (1989)

Elegy for violin and piano (1990)

Wind Messengers for 3 flute, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets (also bass clarinets), 2 bassoons and 2 horns (1990)

King Gesar for narrator and chamber ensemble (1991)

A Little Fanfare for flute, trumpet, violin and harp (1991)

World's Turning for orchestra (1991)

Viola Concerto (1992)

A Little Fanfare (II) for clarinet, violin, viola, cello and piano (1993)

Variations for violin and piano (1993)

Garland for piano (1994)

Rhapsody for viola and orchestra (1994)

Rumble, Medley for viola, double bass and percussion (1994)

String Quartet (1994)

The Five Great Elements for orchestra (1995)

Processional for orchestra (1995)

Three Variations for cello and piano (1996)

Ashoka's Dream (1997)

The Ocean that Has No West and No East for piano (1997)

Free and Easy Wanderer for chamber orchestra (1998)

Horn Concerto (1998)

Tolling Piece for piano (1998)

Red Garuda for piano and orchestra (1999)

The Six Realms for cello and orchestra (2000)

C'mon Pigs of Western Civilization Eat More Grease for baritone and piano (2001)

Forgiveness for baritone and cello (2001)

Piano Quintet (2001)

Rilke Songs for mezzo-soprano and piano (2001)

Ah for orchestra (2002)

Piano Concerto No. 3 (2003)

Neruda Songs for mezzo-soprano and orchestra (2005)

Lorraine Hunt Lieberman (b. March 1, 1954) was formerly a professional violist, and did not shift her full-time focus to singing until she was in her 30's.

Her parents were both involved with opera in the San Francisco Bay Area; mother, Marcia, was a contralto and music teacher and father, Randolph, taught music in high school and college.

Hunt Lieberman performed as a child in Engelbert Humperdinck's Hänsel and Gretel, as a gingerbread boy.

She began her musical career as a violist, and became principal with the San Jose Symphony. At age 26, she turned to studying voice seriously at the Boston Conservatory of Music.

After charity performance of the Humperdinck at a prison, this time taking Hänsel's role, she auditioned for the Met, at age 29.

Her professional career as a singer began in 1984, and in 1985 she made her operatic debut after meeting Peter Sellars and appearing in his 1985 production of Handel's Giulio Cesare. Hunt Lieberman began working with Craig Smith at Emmanuel Music as a violist, then sang in the chorus and began taking leading roles.

Her work with Emmanuel continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

While rehearsing in Peter Lieberman's opera Ashoka's Dream at Santa Fe in 1997, she met the composer and married him two years later.

Her debut performance at the Metropolitan Opera came during the 1999-2000 season, in eleven performances as Myrtle Wilson in the world premiere of John Harbison's The Great Gatsby (December 20). During this same season, she also appeared as Sesto in the New York City Opera's production of Mozart's La clemenza di Tito, as well playing La Perelin in Kaija Saariaho's Clemence at the Salzburg Festival.

Peter Lieberman flourished creatively in their relationship, composing for her Rilke Songs (2001) and Neruda Songs, both of which have been recorded.

# Concert Reviews

## San Francisco Gala Rehearsal

MARK ALBURGER

For the first time in my 14-odd years of reviewing the San Francisco Symphony, I was unable to cover the opening night gala, due to my own obligation to rehearse the San Francisco Composers Chamber Orchestra Gala (which occurs Friday, September 16, incidentally, at Old First Church on Van Ness Avenue, and features my outrageous setting of the Book of Ecclesiastes -- how's that for a shameless self-promotional plug?...). So the next best thing (and it was a poor second, let me tell you, devoid of champagne and fancy dresses, with not even a cup of coffee and cookie in sight) was to attend the SFS gala dress rehearsal on the morning of September 9. But we go to the symphony for the music, right?

Of course, right.

Gone are the years of Michael Tilson Thomas premiering a new work -- local or otherwise -- as a curtain raiser, but not my kvetching about the lack thereof. Instead, we had a glittering rendition of Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov's Capriccio Espagnol on this all-Russian program.

The main bill of fare was Dmitri Shostakovich's sardonic Cello Concerto No. 1, with the not-so-sardonic Yo-Yo Ma. Talk about playing against type. But Ma's consummate professionalism brings his ever-present musicality and energy to this terse work in such a way that one can really experience the Soviet angst. Not exactly your typical opening night bon-bon, but this work is a crowd-pleaser nonetheless, allowing woodwinds, horns, timpani, and strings to shine along with the soloist.

Throughout the rehearsal one was struck by the business-like atmosphere. While there were a few stops for attention to nuances (indeed Ma returned after the break just to perfect a few snippets), much of the time was given to partial or complete run-throughs, in music that has undoubtedly been performed by most of the individuals on many occasions. Hardly sleepwalking or autopilot, but again the focus was on the musics, not the theatrics, with Thomas rarely rising from the comfort of his rehearsal chair.

There was some new old music, however (that is, a bit of repertory never before played by this ensemble), that being Peter Tchaikovsky's own string orchestra setting of music from his String Quartet No. 1, here re-titled Andante Cantabile in B Major for Cello and Orchestra. This lovely, languorous composition seemed to capture the heart and soul of Ma and the strings, and was a delight to experience.

Also a delight was Thomas's stern and fiery reading of the same composer's March Slav, which features a grim modal-gypsy melody worthy of Mussorgsky, Mahler, or Shostakovich; Tchaikovsky's old-standby usage of a Russian national anthem; and general fireworks aplenty. A couple of late additions from his Swan Lake rounded out the program, and found Ma and concertmaster Alexander Barantschik in sonorous interplay.

This was a stimulating rehearsal that almost made up for missing the opening Gala that evening. And almost made up for the parking ticket I received for not remembering that there's nothing like the magic of the night, whether it be due to the chic party atmosphere or the fact that the police have more difficulty noticing that your automobiles wheels are turned the wrong way....

## Life Is Rough

MARK ALBURGER

You're cruising along, just having a good time, and then -- boom -- an accident, illness, 9/11, nuclear war.

Whatever. Life is unpredictable.

Maybe that's why Gustav Mahler's symphonies hold up so well after a hundred years or so. While the language is comprehensible (progressive yet intelligible), the narrative often is not. Mahler often simply doesn't take us where we expect to go. There are bumps and turns, starts and stops, cliffhangers and ennui. Just like life.

And master Mahler interpreter Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony captured that unpredictability (if unpredictability can ever be captured) with a blazing reading of the Symphony No. 5 in C# minor (1902) on September 30 at Davies Hall. Not that this was a perfect performance -- who could predict that? The signature brass writing had a few ink stains and there were questions of balance -- but the spirit was there in an organic work that grows from Mahler's previous writing, transforms in our hearing, and portents towards times ahead.

The five-movement work pairs initial and concluding movements around a rambling, rambunctious, ramshackle scherzo, where solo French horn shines in a way later recaptured in Dmitri Shostakovich's work. The opening two movements remain among the most compellingly passionate, solemn, and spiritual outpourings in the literature -- always an arresting and stimulating encounter. That the penultimate Adagietto has been perceived as the most "popular" section remains a mystery (a casual cross-section of listeners uniformly weighed in with comments favoring the aforementioned), but the music ends up in a happy place (for Mahler, at least, and uncharacteristically so) with a hearty and rousing finale that refuses to take itself too seriously.

Yet after all this, the great Austrian makes for difficult programming.

Several of the symphonies are really too long for a half a program and not quite lengthy enough for an evening's entertainment. The solution here was to balance it with a couple of miniatures in a miniature pre-intermission set, consisting of Carl Ruggles's "Angels" (1920) and Morton Feldman's "I Met Heine on the Rue Furstenberg" (1971), respectively for brass and a Pierrot-ensemble enriched by percussion and the talents of soprano Elza van den Heever.

These had all the makings of a San Francisco Contemporary Players concert -- but here as chamber music somewhat lost on the big stage and representing everything that the Mahler was not: small rather than large, short / long, pure / heterogeneous, subtle / overt, featuring a predominance of stasis over change.

This is all relative, of course; and is not to simplistically imply that there is no subtlety in Mahler and no change in Feldman. As Arnold Schoenberg said of Anton Webern, that there can be a world in a sigh, so do the fine points of Feldman stand out as marked departures from previously established norms.

And yet....

Both Ruggles and Feldman have a groove. In a way, you know where they are going, because they are already there. From a certain perspective, very Transcendental or Zen. Morty acknowledged once that, after he had chosen instruments for a work, the piece was in some sense already finished, and this seems again to be the case here. The instruments skate over an atonal-minimalist tissue of breaths and fits, the shreds of both classicism and romanticism. Meanwhile Ruggles takes his solemn muted brass over a dignified mildly dissonant chorale of cushiony sustains.

What few instrumentalists were on the stage in the first half were there for the set. First the brass played, and then the flute, clarinet, violin, cello, piano, percussion, and vocal music. But I wanted to hear both works simultaneously, as a yet-unimagined intermingling of sonic densities.

Now there's an unpredictable narrative.....



## Pieces of Perturbation

ELIZABETH AGNEW

Sometimes the music is so good, you feel like you are right "in the action," and that was the case when Peter Oundjian took the stage to conduct the San Francisco Symphony in Maurice Ravel's *Alborada del Gracioso* on October 19 at Davies Hall. The visceral excitement made one want to change careers and become a orchestra member for life.

Then again, maybe it was just the good seats -- five rows back, mid-center -- but it seemed more than this, a feeling confirmed by the powerful performance of Ralph Vaughan Williams's wartime *Symphony No. 6* (1947) that concluded. Oundjian made an excellent case from the podium that, despite the composer's thou-doth-protest-too-much, the work was indeed born out of world conflict (from a 75-year-old composer whose work, like certain individuals, became "crankier" with age). To make his point, the conductor prefaced the performance with the earlier Vaughan Williams setting of *Greensleeves*, before launching into the symphony's first movement, which shatters all bourgeois pretence. Wow! Angry chromatic lines and rushing scales set the mood for an exercise which, while not as complex as the corresponding music in the fourth symphony, is every bit as animated, with just enough thematic development and repetition to, as the composer put it, "show that this is a *Symphony*, not a *symphonic poem*."

But it is a kind of poem -- a sonic *Howl* (Allen Ginsberg's work was nine years later, in related yet decidedly different socio-political circumstances) -- and the second movement ratchets down and up in ominous triplet figures. The bombs drop in the scherzo, but unlike the nukes across the street at War [!] Memorial with John Adams's *Dr. Atomic*, these were "conventional" weapons of mass destruction delivered during the firestorm of London. There is even an homage to a jazz saxophonist killed in a collapsed nightclub, in the animated trio section, survived by the woodwinds at large.

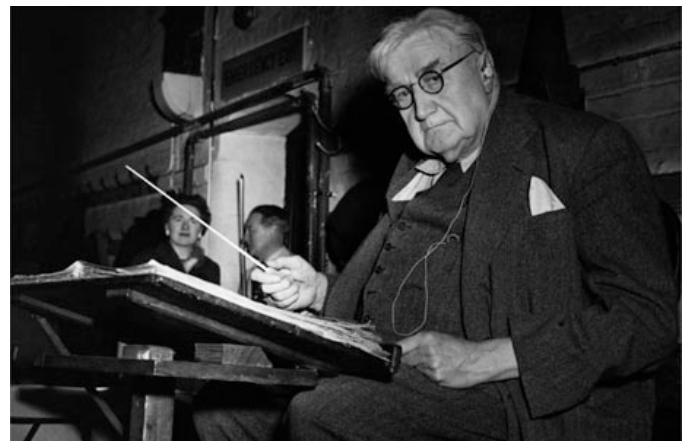
The conclusion, right down to the eerie alternations of Eb major and E minor chords (they share a G, so some players hold that note, while others queasily meander back and forth between the above half-steps -- we don't know whether to be hopeful or devastated -- and devastated pretty much wins), came off as well related in Vaughan Williams's comments recorded on an old Adrian Boult album where "indeed, in some places your playing was so clear that all of my faults came to the surface -- I hope a few virtues as well. ... [It was a] wonderful performance of the *Finale Epilogue* . . . . It was a wonderful feat of endurance to play an absolute *pianissimo* . . . on end. And mind you, it was not of merely not playing loud. It was a positive, sensitive *pianissimo*, full of meaning and tension."

Some things endure.

"And when I say 'gentlemen,' I include the lady harpist."

And some things, mercifully, change.

Endurance and change came to mind in the interior action-packed George Gershwin *Piano Concerto* in F that was energetically performed by the animated Jean-Yves Thibaudet, who stomped his way through in fully memorized form. It was a testament to the high quality of this concert that this music somehow became the "slow movement," bookended by the equally demonstrative readings of Ravel and Vaughan Williams. The action simply never stopped.



## Selling Out by Selling Out

MARK ALBURGER

Sergei Prokofiev did it. Aaron Copland did it. Kurt Weill did it. Dmitri Shostakovich did it. Roger Waters and Pink Floyd did it. Philip Glass did it.

Selling out -- or so they were accused.

But simplifying or making more accessible one's style -- for whatever reason -- can not only lead to greater box office success. Sometimes it can lead to, heretically enough, creativity as good as or even better than that which proceeded.

Selling out by selling out.

That was the case again with the ever-controversial and popular *Carmina Burana* (Songs of Bueren -- original settings of sweets-of-sin texts by Medieval monks) given a blazingly inspiring reading by the San Francisco Symphony and Chorus, conducted by the energetic David Robertson, on November 9 at Davies. Carl Orff's Nazi-era masterwork was an immediate hit at its premiere and continues to be so, whether featured in television and movie spots, parsed in music literature classes, or performed with such enthusiasm and verve by present forces including the San Francisco Girls Chorus and Pacific Boychoir.

From the thunderous downbeat of the opening "O Fortuna" ("O Fortune") this was a performance that touched on old traditions and added new surprises. Baritone Christopher Maltman found the poignancy as well as the passion in his many solo turns, while tenor Richard Troxell made the most of his moment in "Olim lacus coleram" ("The Song of the Roasted Swan") complete with a flapping of wings and a turning on the spit. The lovely soprano Patricia Petibon negotiated her high notes with delicacy and found the right balance of sacred and profane. Indeed the assembled forces caught that holy eroticism that seems to pulsate through the work.

Yeah, yeah. No counterpoint and lots of percussion. But for those of us who like both Gregorian chant and rock 'n' roll -- what's not to like here, in what is arguably the most famous oratorio of the 20th-century? The San Francisco Symphony and Robertson made the most of every beautiful, colorful, and rhythmically urgent moment.

And what's not to like as well in Silvestre Revueltas's *La Noche de los Mayas* (The Night of the Mayas), a visceral film score arranged by Jose Ives Limantour (should he get a program credit along the lines of Maurice Ravel in the *Modest Mussorgsky Pictures at an Exhibition*)? This is a work that can stand up to the winds of *Carmina* with its one-two punch of sonorous strings and indigenous percussion. There are times at concerts when one wonders about certain programming choices -- but not here. This was a perfect companion to Orff, through Mexican-inspired motifs, capped by a wild theme-and-variations that was a dance at the jungle gym -- a fever that somehow reflected Revueltas's own short life bedeviled by alcoholism, absent at 40.

Movie music sell-out? Hardly. Yet sure, why not? Being true to both oneself and the larger world can mean that the art reaches its true potential and public, even if you're a suspected Nazi or drunk.



## Chickens and Eggs

CAROLYN JEAN

Composers and performers. Or should that be "Performers and Composers"?

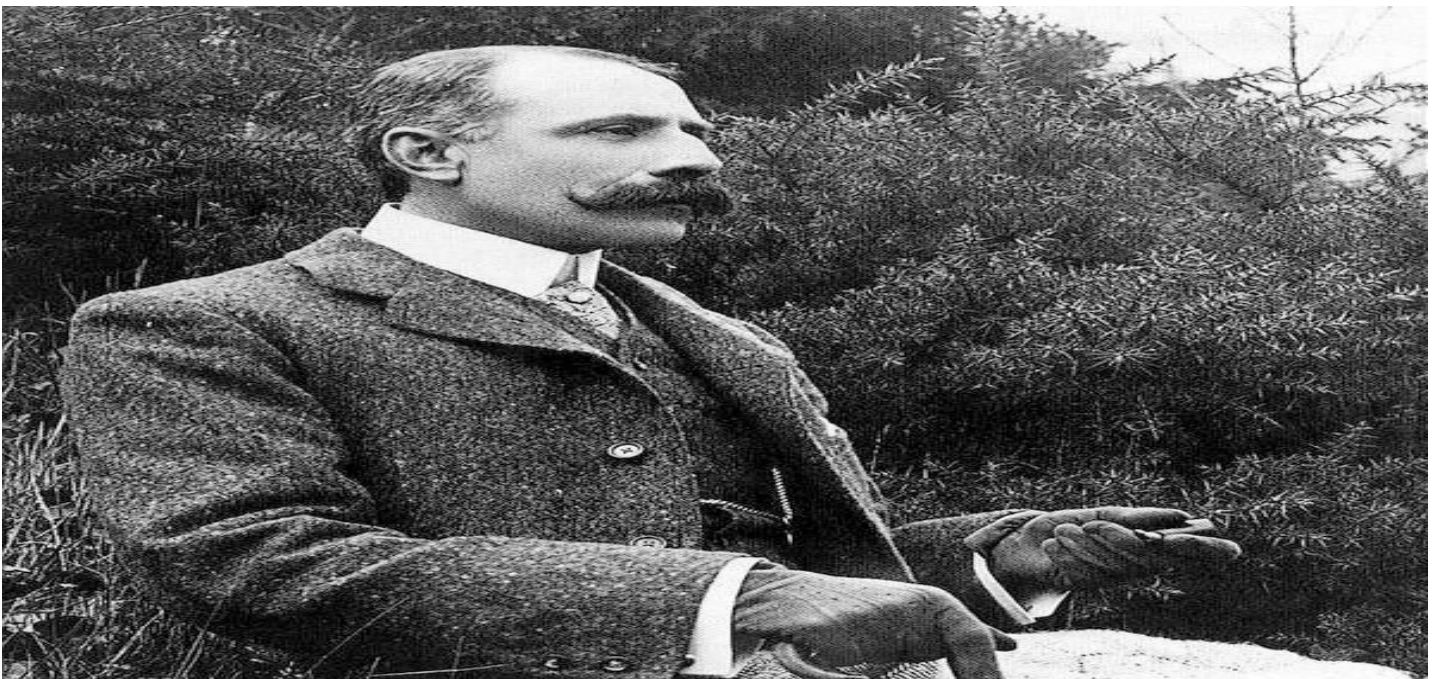
On the one hand, there was nothing on the Marin Symphony program that couldn't have been performed a hundred years ago. On the other, youthful Axel Strauss put his own spin on the Johannes Brahms Violin Concerto, so there was the novelty. And it seems that this was fine by most people, although this was certainly not the largest crowd to turn out for a concert at Veterans Auditorium (November 13).

Music Director Alasdair Neale put the strings through their paces in a delightful Introduction and Allegro by Edward Elgar, which proved to be a mini-concerto for string quartet and company. Ensemble playing was tight through the compelling fugal writing, but flexible enough to allow the performers to soar.

Next up was W.A. Mozart's Symphony No. 38 ("Prague"), in a reading which emphasized the delicacy over the demonstrative energy that runs part and parcel with any attempt to reflect performance practice considerations. Certainly their was grace and virtuosity amongst the winds, and lithe lines from pairs of flutes, oboes (no clarinets -- as Mozart was almost pathologically reluctant to use all four woodwinds at once), bassoons, and horns. Even late in his short life, the composer was a paradox of perfection and experimentation, and this symphony, lacking a minuet movement, contains three relentless sonata-allegro selections in a row -- a form Mozart on other occasions limits.

But the main bill of fare was the Brahms, through three dense, earnest, gravitas movements that proclaim Classical Romanticism in all its strengths and weaknesses. The composer once said, "You have no idea how the likes of us feel when we hear the tramp of a giant like him behind us," meaning Ludwig van Beethoven. Well, sure we do. We've now been hearing the tramps of Brahms and the like for a century or more. But some can still turn the tramps to dance as Axel Strauss and the Marin Symphony.

Still, isn't it time for a new dance?



# Chronicle

November 2

Premiere of Philip Glass's Symphony No. 8, plus his Symphony No. 6, by the Bruckner Orchestra Linz, directed by Denis Russell Davies. Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York, NY. "Glass's most glamorous projects these last 25 years have been operas, which he has composed plentifully and on virtually every conceivable subject, from historical figures to science fiction. But Mr. Glass has been building up his symphonic catalog as well, largely through the encouragement of Dennis Russell Davies, a conductor who has championed Mr. Glass's music since the early 1980's. It wasn't until 1992 that Mr. Glass wrote a work he called a symphony, and that was a tentative step: he based that first effort on themes from David Bowie and Brian Eno's *Low*. But as anyone who knows Mr. Glass's work will attest, once he cottons onto something, he keeps at it. . . . To fill out the program, Mr. Davies and company, as well as the soprano Lauren Flanigan, offered Mr. Glass's Symphony No. 6, a work that Mr. Davies and Ms. Flanigan introduced at an American Composers Orchestra concert at Carnegie Hall in 2002. Symphony No. 8 shows the distance Mr. Glass has traveled since his early 'additive process' works. In those scores, winding lines would be literally repeated many times, then gradually transformed through the addition of single notes or short phrases. The three-movement Symphony No. 8, though, is about virtually continuous change. Its basic materials are pure Glass: the rhythmically repeated minor chords, the arpeggiation and other signature moves are all there. But the chromaticism that has crept into Mr. Glass's music since *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982) is now more extreme, and more fluid, as well. And once a theme is stated, it immediately morphs into something else, with barely a single repetition. Changes in texture are constant as well. Indeed, the great attraction of this work is the unpredictable orchestration. Every section has a moment (or a few) in the spotlight; there is even a lovely flute and harp variation in the melancholy second movement. Symphony No. 6, a setting of Allen Ginsberg's 1978 poem *Plutonian Ode*, comes from a different universe.

A symphony though it may be, this is Mr. Glass at his most operatic. Ginsberg's angry, searing text being what it is -- an excoriation of the war industry, mainly -- Mr. Glass set it to intensely dramatic and overtly virtuosic music, much of it in soaring, fortissimo soprano lines that leap around the voice and spend plenty of time in the highest reaches. There were moments when its demands clearly taxed Ms. Flanigan. But she brought to the score something more than perfect pitch: an electricity that made her gripping, emotional reading impossible to resist. Mr. Davies created an electricity of his own, drawing a warm, rounded sound from the orchestra's strings and winds, and ample energy from the brass players and percussionists, whom Mr. Glass keeps busy in both scores" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 11/4/05].

November 16

Benjamin Britten's *Midsummer Night's Dream* given by Juilliard Opera Center. Peter Jay Sharp Theater, New York, NY. "[The production] achieves . . . balance through the richness of the performance and the inventiveness of the staging. Moreover, seeing the opera performed by a young and eager cast works wonders, especially in the story line involving the two Athenian couples who are so muddled in their passions even before Oberon, the king of the fairies, interferes with his herbal potion. The emotional torment these characters go through seems volatile and impulsive when the roles are sung, as they are here, by intense, gifted and attractive student singers. . . . Britten's powers of evocation are strongest in this alluring score. Oberon, a countertenor (here Randall Scotting, an impressive guest artist) and Tytania, a coloratura soprano (the agile and bright-toned Erin Morley), sing in grandiloquent lines that recall English Baroque opera, but with wayward chromatic turns and spiky modern harmonies. When the rustics present their bungled version of the tragedy of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, Britten deftly parodies *bel canto* opera, complete with a mini-mad scene for the heroine. To conduct, Juilliard brought in David Atherton, an acclaimed Britten interpreter.

. . . Atherton draws some lithe and colorful playing from the orchestra, and the chorus of fairies sounds ethereal" [Anthony Tommasini, The New York, 11/18/05].

November 18

Sound Insights: Seeing Debussy, Hearing Monet, with David Robertson and the St. Louis Symphony. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY. "[T]he program was an attempt to uncover the parallels between the music of Debussy, here the Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun and *Jeux*, and the paintings of Monet, here the artist's Morning on the Seine series and his later Water Lilies . . . . The obvious approach when comparing Impressionism in painting and music would have been to focus on the big picture, in a sense, and to point out that both Monet and Debussy employed hazy textures, blurry colorings and impressionistic imagery. Mr. Robertson chose instead to focus on specifics. For example, he discussed the concept of reflection in the work of both creators. He described Monet's series depicting the same bend in the Seine, painted at different times of day in different atmospheres, to a theme and variations form in music, and showed how the same clump of trees gets reflected in the water in wondrously different ways in the different paintings. He compared this effect to the opening theme for solo flute in *Afternoon of a Faun*, which seductively squiggles between a C sharp and a lower G.

With the aid of the orchestra, he showed how in a series of crucial moments when that C sharp is sustained, Debussy reflects it in the watery pool of the orchestra with precise and exactly different harmonies. Mr. Robertson had people all over the hall nodding in comprehension as he shifted between projected images of the paintings, orchestral examples and, finally, riveting performances of both Debussy works. He is a brilliant lecturer who spoke at length without notes, but also a delightfully quirky character with deadpan comic timing" [Anthony Tommasini, The New York Times, 11/21/05].

November 19

David Robertson conducts St. Louis Symphony in Morton Feldman's *Coptic Light* and Gustav Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*. Carnegie Hall. "David Robertson, who recently began his tenure as the conductor of the St. Louis Symphony, demonstrated his skills at a whole range of things a music director must be able to do if American orchestras are to thrive at a time of daunting challenges. . . . [H]e showed his technical and interpretive mastery at conducting both a cutting-edge contemporary score, Morton Feldman's cryptic *Coptic Light*, and a touchstone of the repertory, Mahler's *Lied von der Erde*. He gave evidence aplenty of his skills as an orchestra-builder, for the musicians of the St. Louis Symphony seemed more engaged and inspired than I have ever heard them, and the orchestra sounded just great. Finally, Mr. Robertson proved himself a natural teacher, someone who can explain and illustrate complex musical matters in ways that general audiences can get . . . [with] some helpful spoken comments before performing *Coptic Light* (1986), a mesmerizing Feldman score inspired by the composer's encounter with Egyptian tapestries. In this 30-minute work, the music evolves in calm, slow, inalterably quiet spans of quixotic harmonies and motivic fragments. If not much seems to happen on the surface of this piece at first, as played here you soon detected a multitude of minute variations of sounds and mini-events. Mr. Robertson aptly praised the score for its curious mix of 'lush sound and austerity.' The evening ended with a bracing, lucid and unsentimental account of *Das Lied von der Erde*. The tenor Stuart Skelton brought youthful determination to his singing, though vocally he was not fully up to this taxing music. The golden-haired, golden-voiced mezzo Michelle DeYoung sang with affecting beauty and floods of sound throughout. So far, it seems that things could not be going better for Mr. Robertson and the St. Louis Symphony" [Anthony Tommasini, The New York Times, 11/21/05].

November 25

Lorraine Hunt Lieberson sings Peter Lieberson's *Neruda Songs*, on a program with Gustav Mahler's *Symphony No. 4*, with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, conducted by James Levine. Symphony Hall, Boston, MA. Through November 28, New York, NY. 'With great relief I can report that Ms. Hunt Lieberson performed . . . looking radiant and sounding wonderful. Though she had to pull out of some high-profile events this past year, including the premiere in San Francisco of John Adams's opera *Doctor Atomic*, she made a point of singing *Neruda Songs*, a co-commission of the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Boston Symphony, at its premiere in Los Angeles in May. How could she not? Every phrase of Mr. Lieberson's new work seems to have been crafted with his wife's beautifully earthy voice and keen expressive instincts in mind. . . . Lieberson's 30-minute score, a setting of five sonnets by the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, deals with, to paraphrase the composer, different faces of love: the pure appreciation of love; its joy and mystery; the anguish of separation; the volatile back and forth between passion and contentment; the inevitability of parting through death. Perhaps because of the subject matter, Mr. Lieberson's richly chromatic harmonic language, despite arresting swatches of atonality and pungent dissonance, is grounded, almost tonal, and deeply melancholic. Though the colorings are lush, the textures are lucid. Ms. Hunt Lieberson, who speaks Spanish, provided her husband essential advice about setting the Spanish text with idiomatic naturalness. The work evolves in long-spun lines of ruminative lyricism. For the most part, the orchestra alternately cushions, empowers, consoles and agitates the vocal lines. For example, in the first song, as the soloist sings of being alive with love, the orchestra envelops the melodic writing with sultry shimmerings and a wistful tune for a lazy clarinet. For me, the only misstep in this haunting work comes in the first half of the fourth song, when the passion of love is evoked and bossa nova maracas gently rattle in the orchestra.

It seems too explicit, too obvious a touch. But the fifth song, on the inevitability of death, provides an overwhelming conclusion, with an aching yet ennobled melodic line and astringent yet beautiful harmonies sustained by tremulous strings and reedy winds. . . . One moment she would send a phrase

soaring with plaintive intensity and dusky sound, and the next she would plead with her lover not to leave, sounding pale-toned, breathy and painfully human. When the final song ended in a whisper, she held the spell and did not break character. It seemed like half a minute before the audience intruded upon the silence and began a prolonged standing ovation for the performers and the composer. . . . In the Mahler, Mr. Levine revealed inner details and intricacies you seldom hear, while never hindering the symphony's bucolic spirits and overall shape. In the final movement, the soprano Heidi Grant Murphy, substituting for Dorothea Röschmann, who was ill, brought her angelic voice to Mahler's disarmingly innocent portrait of heavenly life" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 11/26/05].

November 27

Earl Wild plays his own compositions, three days after his 90th birthday. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY. "Earl Wild [is a] a former staff pianist for NBC television, who composed, arranged and played music for Sid Caesar's *Caesar's Hour* in the mid-1950's and wrote crowd-pleasing novelty pieces, like *Variations on an American Theme* ('Doo-Dah'). . . . In certain elitist quarters, Mr. Wild has never been forgiven for his early work in radio and television, his nonintellectual approach to music and his refreshingly nonchalant virtuosity. During his stint on the piano faculty at the Juilliard School in the late 1970's and early 80's, he must have chuckled over some of the fledgling virtuosos who wore the blood-and-sweat effort of playing the piano like a badge of honor. Everything about his technique and music-making is relaxed, free and easy. . . . His discography contains more than 70 recordings, with 35 concertos by, among others, Menotti and Xaver Scharwenka, and the 'Spellbound' Concerto by Miklos Rozsa, best known as a film composer. His recording 20th- and 21st-Century Piano Sonatas, released in 2000, offers meticulous and surprisingly insightful accounts of sonatas by Barber, Stravinsky and Hindemith as well as his own harmonically crunchy Neo-Classical Sonata, composed in that year. Read through Mr. Wild's résumé and you come across unusual facts. He was the first pianist to give a recital on television, on NBC in 1939. In 1960, he



conducted Puccini's comedy Gianni Schicchi at the Santa Fe Opera on a double bill with Stravinsky, no less, who conducted his severe one-act opera[-atorio] Oedipus Rex. Mr. Wild is particularly proud of his 1965 recordings of Rachmaninoff's four piano concertos and the Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by the dynamic Jascha Horenstein. He had an instantaneous rapport with Horenstein, as he recounted in an interview in New York shortly after his July recital. 'We recorded those five works in five days, one per day,' he said.

'We had a single rehearsal of each piece, then we recorded it, playing it right through. It was a joy.' Mr. Wild has no apologies for making cuts in the Rachmaninoff Third, which he deems too long for its own good. The current penchant for restoring cuts 'gets to be a pain,' he said, adding, 'It's very easy to blab things.' Rachmaninoff, he noted, typically took those cuts when he performed the work. 'You have to remember that if the composer decides to take a cut, he's right,' he said. 'Even if he's wrong, he's right.' Besides, he added, 'a piece should say what it has to say and then get off the stage'" [Anthony Tommasini, 11/27/05].



## Recording

Frederic Rzewski. Fred. Eighth Blackbird. Cedille. "Composers, no matter how evident their stylistic allegiances may be, almost invariably prefer to regard themselves as unclassifiable. Frederic Rzewski is harder to classify than most. His overtly political pieces receive a lot of attention, but he writes plenty of works free of extramusical agendas, and they are no less striking. Stylistically, he is everywhere, from Minimalism to 12-tone and densely pounded clusters that sidestep debates about tonality entirely. Mr. Rzewski's music has no lack of champions, but the six musicians of Eighth Blackbird, though relative newcomers, seem particularly well suited to it. They have, for one thing, quickly identified the thread that runs through Mr. Rzewski's work: an almost organic current of narrative tension that makes this music pure drama. Politics or style may catch the listener's ear first, but virtually everything Mr. Rzewski writes, even his settings of workers' anthems, is packed with vivid interplay. Drama is Eighth Blackbird's thing as well. Several works the group has commissioned involve light staging, and even its habit of playing difficult contemporary music without scores -- moving around the stage to make the most of that freedom -- is a bit theatrical. And theatricality is a component of all three works the band plays on "Fred" from Cedille Records. The newest, Pocket Symphony (2000), was written for Eighth Blackbird, and if it thrives on interplay of different kinds - among the musicians, between sound and silence, between portentousness and light-spirited playfulness - it also leaves room for improvisation in the cadenzas for each player.

The cadenzas, oddly, become the work's anchors, rather than decorative pauses: on repeated hearings, you find yourself waiting for Matt Albert's amalgam of country fiddling and Bachian counterpoint; Nicholas Photinos's pizzicato cello line; Lisa Kaplan's Bartokian piano solo; Matthew L. Duvall's graceful marimba and thundering bass drums; and the thoughtful, shapely flute and clarinet meditations by Molly Alicia Barth and Michael J. Maccaferri. Two oldies catch Mr. Rzewski in his Minimalist period. The skeleton of *Les Moutons de Panurge* (1969) is a single 65-note melody. The work borrows moves from Philip Glass, Steve Reich and John Cage. The melody is built gradually by adding notes on each repetition (Mr. Glass's additive process), but Mr. Rzewski counted on at least one musician to make a mistake (a Cagean chance element), so that the unison line would move out of sync (Mr. Reich's phase technique), creating a web of intricate counterpoint. In *Coming Together* (1971), the musical backdrop is a brisk ostinato, heard first in the piano line, then traveling through different combinations of the group's roster. But the spotlight is on the narration, drawn from a letter of Sam Melville, a prisoner at Attica who was killed in the 1971 uprising there. Only a handful of phrases are quoted, but as repeated with different inflections -- and in this version, by both individual and massed voices -- their emotional pitch and meaning change radically, from calm and reasoned to urgent and eventually almost deranged with pain and terror. Eighth Blackbird plays superbly here, and does a brilliant acting job as well" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 11/13/05].

