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Mark Alburger's Cosmic Compositional Comedy

JEFF DUNN

In addition to his work as Founder and Music Director of the San Francisco Composers Chamber Orchestra, Mark Alburger is Music Director of Goat Hall Productions: San Francisco's Cabaret Opera Company, Instructor in Music Theory and Literature at Diablo Valley College, Music Critic for Commuter Times, and an author, musicologist, oboist, pianist, and recording artist. He studied composition and musicology for his undergraduate degree at Swarthmore College and holds a Ph.D. in Musicology from Claremont Graduate School.

Alburger's spirit is filled with boundless energy. His peppery conversation shifts from topic to topic without warning. True to his large-scale compositional acumen, however, he somehow keeps track of every conversational thread bringing each -- eventually -- home to conclusion. If there is anything that defines the man in person, it is his inimitable chuckle, which bursts forth in unexpected contexts, in our time together on February 26.

DUNN: It seems to me that you're the "bad boy" of Bay Area music, because you're like George Antheil -- you've lots of joie de vivre in your music. You're a teaser, aren't you?

ALBURGER: Well, sure! As a matter of fact, the first name for my publishing house was Happy Music -- the antidote to serious music. One of the reasons I eventually changed the name to New Music was that about half the composers in the company said, "Gee, Mark, we love being published by you -- but *lose* the name. It sounds like we're publishing children's music!" And I thought, what an indictment of Western Civilization, that happiness is primarily associated with childhood. Now we go to work. Now we get serious. Now, welcome to hell -- here's your accordion. No, I didn't say that!

I went to Swarthmore College. It was a small enough place that I could do pretty much whatever I wanted. They were so happy to have music majors! And that's one of the reasons I didn't go to Berkeley when I moved out here, because, at the time, I was under the impression that they were very serious (a perception that I'm sure was overdrawn). So I kept with small schools for my whole educational career, for better or worse, and in that way I could always have some freedom.

Obviously, I'm a great believer in fun and games in music, but at the same time, this is all a terrifically serious business. One of the reasons I liked "Happy Music" was the notion of publishing requiem masses under that moniker. It's nothing less than what Gustav Mahler would have advised: taking in the whole world -- the joy as well as the tragedy. To parallel the Firesign Theatre, all work and no play (or pay) makes no Jack at all!

DUNN: What kinds of provocative things have you done in your music to be a "bad boy"?

ALBURGER: I suppose it started right from my opus 1. Growing up, I was a good little church boy. Maybe I'm just a more heavy-set church boy now, though not exactly a traditional believer. I used a Biblical text (*Psalms 6*), but threw in unexpected things: chance and intuitive operations with respect to the words and notes. I probably thought that was amusing at the time. My opus 8 suite for piano, *The Twelve Fingers*, is an homage to Igor Stravinsky's *Five*. Some of my other titles are pretty Erik Satie quirky, too [*Nocturnes for Insomniacs*, *Another Cognitive Disorder*, *Symphony No. 6 ("Apathetic")*].

It seems like I've always stolen ideas, even way back then... I'm a terrible thief! *The Twelve Fingers* was stolen from Jonathan Kramer, formerly of Yale, but now at Columbia. At Swarthmore, our music student interviewing committee asked him one of our stock questions: "How do you get students to start writing pieces if they have writer's block?" He said, "One of the things I do is say, 'Write a piece with 12 sections, and in every section, introduce a new note.'"

I thought, "What a great idea!" So I upped the ante. The first movement of *Twelve* has one note (all F#s in various octaves) and 12 measures, and the last has all 12 notes and 144 measures. But just to tweak a little further, since this was the mid-70's and I would have been expected to write a 12-tone piece as the final section, I wrote the 11th piece that way instead -- "Eleven-Tone Music" -- with a masked C that pops in and out when the tone row is transposed. So it turns out that this is my only even halfway strict 12-tone piece, the one with 11 notes....

Titles are definitely important. Paul Drescher has said something to the effect that a title is a first door into a piece, so you might as well make it a good one. Not surprisingly, I've appropriated those, too, like the world's longest one: "I'm a Cranky Old Yank in a Cranky Old Tank on the Streets of Yokohama with my Honolulu Mama Singing those Neat-o Beat-o Flat-on-my-Seat-o Hirohito Blues." And I suppose I have one of the longest nicknames or subtitles for *Symphony No. 1* ("It Wasn't Classical, It Was Symphonic. It Wasn't a Symphony, Because It Did Not Have a Sonata-Allegro"). This was also commandeered. As I was leaving the American premiere of the Henryk Górecki *Symphony No. 3* ("*Symphony of Sorrowful Songs*"), there was a woman holding forth to her friends with amazing bons mots, and this was one of them. So in the introduction to my sonata-allegro movement, there is a hopefully soulful string melody that is set to the first sentence. And the syncopated first theme sings out the rest.

DUNN: Those armed robbers who stole \$93 million last month in the U.K. weren't anywhere close to your level. Antheil only stole from Stravinsky, but you steal from everyone!

ALBURGER: Perhaps I can say this, but also stand at a distance. Appropriation is our legacy. As Stravinsky said, "The great composer does not borrow; the great composer steals." I pretty much teach this in music theory and history classes. Everyone steals from everyone else. Everyone appropriates. It's an act of homage, of rebellion. It's subversive, it's honorific.

I've had a bipartite compositional career. Initially, I was collaging, using the Charles Ives approach and taking little bits of this and that, and assembling. There were lots of quotes in my earlier music. Now I'm doing the reverse: I'm subsuming whole pieces. There are still quotes, occasionally, embedded on the surface, but the process is more thoroughgoing -- I consider what I'm doing troping / appropriating / transforming....

DUNN: How did the San Francisco Composers Chamber Orchestra get started?

ALBURGER: You know as well as I do that trying to get an orchestral work performed is a total crapshoot. Founding SFCCO was related to the idea in the movie *Field of Dreams*. The analogous phrase for this musical endeavor was, "If you schedule it, it will happen." And so I put out an e-mail to my huge "spam" list of composers for "the first performance of the San Francisco Composers Chamber Orchestra" at Goat Hall in San Francisco, with concert and rehearsal dates. I explained that we would have a specific instrumentation and that "Each participating composer-performer will donate their services at two concerts and six rehearsals, and in exchange will be guaranteed a performance of one of their works up to a duration of 15 minutes."

We also introduced the notion of "composer-endowers," who, rather than playing in the group, would contribute funds sufficient to hire a performer in their stead.

DUNN: Your upcoming concert has an intriguing lead on your press release: "Picture this. An orchestra comprised of composers creates compositions inspired by art and produces a program of premieres that delights both ear and eye. See and hear it for yourself as the world's only composer-run orchestra, the San Francisco Composers Chamber Orchestra, presents *Sound for Picture*, a program of new music by Bay Area composers inspired by visual art and artists."

ALBURGER: Yeah, I wrote that.

DUNN: And it says, "The program blasts off with *Suite (Sol[ar]) for Oboe, Piano, and Percussion* by Mark Alburger, a 12-movement wanderer-fantasy that explores the solar system." But where's the picture?

ALBURGER: The picture is in your mind! I hope you don't ask for your money back! We didn't actually have enough people with visuals to go with the pieces. Actually, we will have a couple of opera singers -- pretty faces to look at.

The fact is, we're just desperate for titles. These days, everyone wants a hook. Otherwise, people say, "Who cares?" I'm a great believer in bells and whistles.... My piece will hopefully be a kick! It's a spiritual thing, it's a cosmological thing. There are 12 heavenly bodies: nine planets plus the sun, asteroids, and comets. The deal is, you start from the sun, go out, and then hitch a ride back on the comets. I'm not sure the percussionist will be into the construct, but the piano is to be center, next to the oboe, around which are to be arrayed 11 percussion set-ups. The music spirals out from one to another, all the way out to Pluto, and then the comets do the instrumental array in retrograde -- all in one movement -- to return.

DUNN: When you talk to the average concertgoer about new music, they think that it's going to be 12-tone and they're not going to like it --

ALBURGER: -- which is crazy after all of these years!

DUNN: -- and next that it's written by obscure people in Europe. They don't realize that this is a thriving community of composers. I ask you, how many composers do you know in the Bay Area?

ALBURGER: Lots! I would say hundreds! And you know, I keep thinking we ought to band together more. Michael Cooke says we need a demonstration. We need to get out there in front of Davies Hall and chant, "Bay Area composers, unite!" What would be the critical mass of people needed to finally say, "We're tired of hearing has-been second-rate musicians from the 1960's as Muzak at Kinko's and the supermarket! We want to hear something new that's not always in 4/4 and doesn't use only a handful of the same chords and the same few instruments and the same rhythms."

DUNN: But can you really be a new-music composer today? The odds are minuscule that you could be as well known as John Adams.

ALBURGER: And still that name's better known as a President than as a composer! We're all pretty heavily self-deluded, let's face it. We think we're just the dog's nightshirt! We're each one tiny person among millions, but our reality is filtered. I know I'm totally self-deluded in thinking that anything I'm doing is anything deep at all, but maybe it doesn't matter, as long as we feel happy about what we're doing. Maybe this is an idiot-savant solipsism.

Erling Wold once asked me, "Which would you rather be, uproariously happy in your life, but you and your music will be totally forgotten; or famous, and have a miserable life?" I said that if I had really wanted to be famous, I would have moved to New York, where at least one can have a reasonable shot at exposure, etc. But, in the interests of happiness, I moved to California to get away from the rain and cold and gloomy weather (at least some of the time!), so that I could have my creativity nourished by mountains, oceans, and deserts.

But Erling said, "Come on, Mark, be serious!" So I considered further, and realized that if I truly know for certain that I will be totally forgotten, I actually won't be happy! I can't imagine having a happy life knowing absolutely for sure that I'll be totally forgotten. But this is an absurd thought, this idea that sometime five years after your death, somebody picks up your music and puts it on and says, "Well, that's kind of OK -- who was this clown?"

John Curtis Browning in graduate school once lamented -- after a few too many distilled beverages perhaps -- "You know, Mark, I'd be happy if I could just go down as a footnote!"

And I see my high-energy theory students who love music and want to make it as rappers or rockers, or jazz or classical people, or folkies. So a little bit of the showing off, the theatrics, is fine.

So my final answer to Erling was, "O.K., lay on the suffering!"

No matter what we do in life, we're a grain of sand. But I guess I'll try to contribute my grain of sand to this pile called music.

Concert Reviews

Kingdom of Heaven in the New Musical World

PHILLIP GEORGE

Marin Symphony, conducted by Alasdair Neale, in William Kraft's *Timpani Concerto No. 1* and music of Antonin Dvorak. January 22, Veterans Auditorium, San Rafael, CA.

Don't shoot me, I'm only the piano player.

In Ridley Scott's *Kingdom of Heaven*, the messenger is beheaded. In the more recent *New World*, John Smith is grudgingly spared.

Antonin Dvorak came to New York and advised Americans to base their sonic art on homegrown musics, but more than a hundred years later, we're mostly still applauding the messenger, rather than really take his advice to heart.

And the applause did ring out at Veterans Auditorium on January 22, as Alasdair Neale put the Marin Symphony through its paces in Dvorak's *Carnival Overture* and *Symphony No. 9 in E Minor ("From the New World")*, set against William Kraft's *Concerto No. 1 for Timpani and Orchestra*.

Dvorak, along with many great composers past and present, sets up arguments, discussions, and sagas through the comparison and contrast of varied musical materials. Ideas are worked out on a grand enough scale that the tales tell more than a three-minute pop song (now our current trade of musical discourse, thanks to the 99-cent download from iTunes) can tell. Sort of the difference between a haiku and an epic poem. Former exemplars may occasionally contain a world in a nutshell, but taken en masse they're still only a diet of seventeen syllables a pop. Perhaps the world needs more varied rhythms.

Varied indeed were the rhythms of Dvorak and Kraft, despite flouderings in the winds. In the latter, somewhat varied were the colors as well, as much as five kettledrums can manage, with the change of sticks and leather gloves (why not complete leathers for this show?!) and mucho fooling aroundo with the pedalso a la Béla Bartoko. Expert playing from principal timpanist Tyler Mack. Still it was only five drums, and one was thankful that this was not a concerto for bass drum. Written in 1984, it bore some of the aura of the august world of the 50's avant-garde, so in a way split the difference between Dvorak and more contemporary aesthetics. The second movement bought into the more mainstream Bartokian "night-music" of hushed glissandi and divided string choirs in the spirit of the Hungarian master's Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta.

Both the "New World" and the relatively new timpani concerto received standing ovations, so perhaps we really are starting to make connections among musics stylistically as far and wide as the Americas.

The Birth of the Modern

PHILLIP GEORGE

San Francisco Symphony, conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas, in Igor Stravinsky's *Petrushka*, Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov's *Dubnuska*, and music by Peter Tchaikovsky. January 25, Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

Will we ever know what really happened in those crucial years before World War I? In 1905, Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov musically enriched a nice Russian revolutionary tune in a charmingly totally non-revolutionary way. In 1911, Igor Stravinsky exploded musical consciousness by writing a ballet about a forlorn picaresque Pinocchoesque puppet come to life. In six years, Russian musical aesthetics were turned on end, and the musical world has never been the same.

Such thoughts came to mind when hearing these two pieces, along with Peter Tchaikovsky's grand *Symphony No. 4*, at Davies Hall with the San Francisco Symphony and Michael Tilson Thomas on January 25.

While "Dubnuska" is a serviceable little work in a textbook vibrant orchestration, Rimsky's pupil Stravinsky outdoes his master in virtually all regards in "Petrushka." Where does this music come from, as a bolt out of the blue?

Well, some evidently came from other sources, including five Russian folk songs, plus two waltzes by Joseph Lanner (a friend of Johann Strauss, Jr.) and one by Emile Spencer, "Elle avait un jame en bois," that turned out to be still in copyright (Spencer received royalties for years after). But, as is said in certain circles, it's not what you've got but how you use it, and Stravinsky's usages are totally original. Harsh bitonality, crazy scales and arpeggios, sparkling orchestration and animated rhythms at every turn -- this is a music that takes nothing for granted, and the San Francisco Symphony made the most of every moment.

If the Tchaikovsky symphony seemed tame by comparison, it was, although, in its day, the use of a recurring motive and various orchestrational nuances would have seemed fresh enough. Certainly the soloists in the Stravinsky and Tchaikovsky made every measure count, and a characteristic Russian wit and extravagance -- inherent in both scores -- was nicely brought out.

Particular commendations go out to pianist Robin Sutherland in the Stravinsky, and the string, woodwind, and brass sections in the third movement of the Tchaikovsky for crisp and intelligent musicality. On either side of a great stylistic divide there was musical excellence.

Calendar

April 2

Marin Symphony in music of Sergei Rachmaninoff and Maurice Ravel. Veterans Auditorium, San Rafael, CA.

Alexander Vereshagin leads the Russian Chamber Orchestra in Igor Stravinsky's *A Soldier's Tale*, with narrator Tom McEachern. United Methodist Church, Mill Valley, CA.

April 14

San Francisco Symphony in Anton Webern's *Five Pieces for Orchestra*, Gustav Mahler's *Ruckert Songs*, and Charles Ives's *Holidays Symphony*. Davies Hall, San Francisco, CA.

April 22

Orchestra 2001 New Music Festival. Thomas Whitman's *Rossetti Songs* (orch Mark Alburger). Lang Concert Hall, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA.

April 28

New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. New Orleans, LA. Through May 7.

April 30

Marin Symphony in music of John Adams. Veterans Auditorium, San Rafael, CA.

Chronicle

February 3

Focus! Festival. Juilliard Symphony in Paul Schoenfeld's *Channah*, Jukka Tiensuu's *Spiriti*, and Zhou Long's *The Enlightened*. Peter J. Sharp Theater, Juilliard School, New York, NY. "The Enlightened . . . works for bigness, with series of thundering brass fanfares, rumbling timpani and great, roaring climaxes" [Bernard Holland, The New York Times, 2/6/06].

February 4

The Passion of Osvaldo Golijov. Lincoln Center, New York, NY.

February 8

Death of Akira Ifukube (b. 1914, Hokkaido Island, Japan), of multiple organ failure, at 91. Tokyo, Japan. "[He was] a former forestry officer who taught himself to be a prolific composer and wrote the score for . . . *Godzilla*. . . . [H]e was president [of the Tokyo College of Music] from 1976 to 1987. Mr. Ifukube is said to have composed about 300 to 400 works for film throughout his career. He was named a Person of Cultural Merit, one of Japan's highest honors, in 2003. . . . Ifukube taught himself to compose music as a teenager, even though his formal training was in the lumber industry. His work was heavily influenced by the culture of the Ainu, the indigenous people of Hokkaido. . . . Ifukube began to build an international reputation in 1935, when his *Japanese Rhapsody* won first prize in a contest promoted by . . . Alexander Nikolayevich Tcherepnin. . . . 27 more *Godzilla* movies [were] produced . . . with Mr. Ifukube's score occasionally reappearing. Mr. Ifukube left the forest after World War II to become a music instructor. His first stint was between 1946 and 1953 at the school that later became the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music" [The New York Times, 2/10/06].

February 14

Mariss Jansons conducts the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra in Dmitri Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 7*. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY.

February 15

Meredith Monk's *Impermanence*. Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA. "[T]he gentle insistence of Monk's art came through" [Joshua Kosman, San Francisco Chronicle, 2/17/06].

February 16

Richard Einhorn's *Voices of Light*. Winter Garden, New York, NY. "*Voices of Light* has been performed more than 100 times around the world over the last 10 years, providing a nice income source for Mr. Einhorn, who has also been a record producer" [Anthony Tommasini, The New York Times, 2/18/06].

February 17

Philip Glass's *Koyaanisqatsi*, *Powaqqatsi*, and *Noqoyqatsi* performed over a three-day run. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

Hicham Chami and the Chicago Classical Oriental Ensemble in the music of Sayyed Darweesh (d. 1923 at age 31), beginning a national tour. Symphony Space, New York, NY. "Darweesh, a furiously prolific Egyptian composer . . . is one of the most influential figures in modern Arab music. He earned a wide reputation as much for his short but eventful life as for his cosmopolitan, Western-influenced music. . . . He was a cocaine addict who died before achieving his goal of traveling to Italy to study opera. . . . He called himself Egypt's Verdi, and in his lyrics he tinkered with language, mixing in regional colloquialisms as well as bits of Greek and English. As played by the Chicago Classical Oriental Ensemble -- an eight-piece group that includes the zitherlike qanun (played by Mr. Chami), oud, tambourine and nay (flute), as well as cello and male and female vocals -- the music is delicate and sometimes dour, with arialike melodies blended in.

February 18

Electric Kulintang (Susie Ibarra and Roberto J. Rodriguez) in *7,000 Mysteries*. Joe's Pub, New York, NY.

February 20

Osvaldo Golijov's *La Passion Segun San Marcos*. Rose Theater, New York, NY.

February 21

Hong Kong's government retreats from plans to build one of the world's largest cultural centers after real estate developers refused to participate. Hong Kong, China.

February 23

San Francisco Symphony conducted by Alan Gilbert, in Henri Dutilleux's *Mystere de l'Instant*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA. The ten short movements [of the Dutilleux] are in the 90-year-old composer's quixotic post-serial world of brevity and delicacy" [Mark Alburger, *Commuter Times*, 3/1/06].

February 24

Kurt Weill's *Threepenny Opera* (libretto by Bertolt Brecht). Monart School of the Arts, Alameda, CA. Through March 18.

Premiere of Ned Rorem's *Our Town* (libretto by J.D. McClatchy, after Thornton Wilder. Indiana University Opera Theater, Bloomington, IN. "Aaron Copland wanted to make it an opera. So did Leonard Bernstein. But Thornton Wilder, the author of *Our Town*, turned both composers down. . . . Rorem . . . [has written] an intimate chamber opera to match the play's spareness" [Anne Midgette, *The New York Times*, 2/27/05].

Death of timpanist Roland Kohloff, of cancer, at 71. Calvary Hospital, New York, NY. "Kohloff entered orchestra lore one night in 1978. He had a concert at Lincoln Center with the Philharmonic at 7:30. A half-hour later at Carnegie Hall, the Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy was to play a program including the large-scale *Final Alice*, composed two years earlier by David Del Tredici. But just before the Philadelphia Orchestra came to New York, the father of its timpanist died, and the timpanist could not make it. Mr. Kohloff had played the piece the year before with the Philharmonic, so he was asked to fill in. Because *Final Alice* was on the second half of the Philadelphians Carnegie program, Mr. Kohloff was able to race down to 57th Street and make it in time. . . . His father was a letter carrier. He attended the Juilliard School, where he later taught many timpanists who now play in major orchestras, and he studied there with the legendary timpanist Saul Goodman. 'One day Goodman said to me, 'Someday you will be better than me,' ' Mr. Kohloff said in a Philharmonic biographical sketch. He went on to become principal timpanist in the San Francisco Symphony for 16 years before joining the Philharmonic -- succeeding Mr. Goodman" [Daniel J. Wakin, *The New York Times*, 3/3/06]. "Kohloff joined the San Francisco Symphony in 1956, as a 21-year-old virtuoso fresh from the Juilliard School. . . . Kohloff was the soloist in a vividly theatrical performance of Darius Milhaud's *Concerto for Percussion and Small Orchestra*. In subsequent seasons he appeared in works by . . . Lukas Foss and George Crumb . . . It was during his tenure in San Francisco that he met his wife, the former Janet Unger, who was a member of the San Francisco Opera Chorus. They raised their two children on a ranch in Novato where they pursued their interests in horseback riding and yoga. Mr. Kohloff was prone to bouts of severe depression, and spoke openly about the benefit he derived from electroshock therapy" [Joshua Kosman, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 3/5/06].

February 25

Composer Bash and Birthday Party. Steven Clark's *Eye Eye Sailor*; Allan Crossman's *The Border*; Mark Alburger's *Sylvia Dreyer, Overture ("Rats!")* from *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, and *Death Catch*; Serafine Trio in Alexis Alrich's *Pick Me Up*, Lisa Scola Prosek's *Navi Blue* from *Leonardo's Notebooks*, and Katie Wreede's *Foreign Lands*, and a Weill Offering from the Weill Women (and a Few Good Men). Goat Hall, San Francisco, CA. A second *Composer Bash* on February 26.

February 26

Michael Christie conducts the Brooklyn Philharmonic in Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*, a curtain raiser from John Corigliano, Igor Stravinsky's *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* and Philip Glass's "Hymn to Aten" from *Akhnaten*. Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York, NY. "Corigliano . . . had the inspired idea of writing a short, rhythmically and contrapuntally lively fanfare for a kazoo ensemble placed in the balconies and along the aisles downstairs, with occasional punctuation from brass and percussion on the stage" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 2/27/06].

The one-night-stand Winged Harmony Ensemble, conducted by David Robertson in Olivier Messiaen's *Sept Haikai* and *Oiseaux Exotiques*, and Edgar Varèse's *Deserts*. Zankel Hall, New York, NY.

February 28

The Juilliard School announces that it has received one of the largest private collections of manuscripts and editions ever donated -- 139 works, including those by J.S. Bach, W.A. Mozart, Ludwig van Beethoven, Franz Schubert, Robert Schuman, Frederic Chopin, Franz Liszt, Maurice Ravel, Igor Stravinsky, and Aaron Copland. New York, NY.

Comment

Items

Child's Opera According to Sendak . . . The set of Maurice Sendak and Tony Kushner's opera *Brundibar* . . .

The New York Times, 2/10/06

[Neither Sendak's nor Kushner's opera, Bohuslav Martinu's *Brundibar* was offered in a translation of the libretto by Tony Kushner, with set design by Maurice Sendak - [Ed.]

[In 1977] a movie called *Mohammad, Messenger of God* [with music by Maurice Jarre] opened and was promptly panned by critics. "Achingly clumsy," wrote Richard Eder in The Times. It was so bad, he added, that it was "of itself a convincing justification for the traditional Islamic hostility to pictorial representation."

The three-hour film which was made by a Syrian-born Muslim director, Moustapha Akkad, and financed with money from Kuwait, Libya and Morocco, tried to get around the problem of depicting Muhammad by not having him played by an actor, but essentially viewing the events through his eyes.

But that did not placate anyone. In Washington, a Muslim group seized several buildings, killing a reporter, wounding 13 others and taking scores of hostages. Among their demands was that the movie's Washington premiere be canceled. It was.

In the New York area, the movie was canceled after theaters showing it received threats. Nationwide distribution was halted.

At its first showing at the Rivoli Theater in Midtown Manhattan, Muhammad had left Mecca and was on his way to Medina when the screen went black. The 425 patrons were hustled outside, according to an account in The Times. ("It is a good educational film -- they should close some of the bad films around here," said Henry Hank, a former middleweight boxer then working for the Brooklyn Jewish Hospital who had been enjoying the film with his wife, Thelma.)

John Kifner
The New York Times, 2/17/06

With Apologies to C.F. Ramuz

PHILLIP GEORGE

To Mt. Tamalpais United Methodist Church,
down a cool and rain-slicked road,
Tramps the Russian Chamber Orchestra
with a Stravinskian motherlode,
At 5pm April 2, Music Director Alexander Vereshagin
invites us to spend
A "great time" in performance of *A Soldier's Tale*,
a musical fable without end.

With marching tunes,
and narration by Tom Mceachean all the way
This Faustian tale of a soldier's fiddle
and the devil will make your day.
A World-War I era piece, written
when Stravinsky was in a tight economic spot,
It's scored for clarinet, bassoon, trumpet, trombone,
percussion, violin, and bass -- not a lot.

Previously with Stravinsky's *Petrushka*
the RCO they've us blessed
And rarely, if ever, have up with them a note messed.
Vereshagin notes that this "special piece" still a wallop packs
As people still sell short their dreams
and the devil takes their backs.

Songs, tangos, waltzes, and ragtimes lead the music on
To where the soldier finds his princess, only to have her gone
As the devil triumphs and the couple's happiness is missed --
Surely this is a story in which all want to enlist!

So march right down to 410 Sycamore Avenue --
roughly in the middle
To hear the Russian Chamber Orchestra perform
this mighty work with a fiddle.

Writers

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