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Remembering Sarah Caldwell

WILLIAM ROWLAND

Conductor Sarah Caldwell, who passed away on March 23, was truly one grand Lady. In fact, though she was not a titled person. I always thought of her as Lady or Dame Sarah -- First Lady of the Orchestra. I met her in Fort Lauderdale when she was the conductor of the Denver Symphony Orchestra in the 1970's and I guest conductor of the Fort Lauderdale Symphony.

Sarah, as usual when traveling, had brought her mother with her and they seemed inseparable. While she was markedly obese, Sarah's size was a trademark -- like Virgil Fox's ruby red slippers or Liberace's candelabra -- that made her stand out from the crowd. It also made her sensitive to the rampant discrimination and prejudice against minorities, and of hirings based on looks rather than talent. Sarah's look gave a hint that she was a hands-on person, not content to let others do the work for which she felt better suited. Indeed, her take-charge attitude was often pointedly criticized for what more business-minded folks seemed to see as poor management skills. But Business and the arts have rarely been good partners, and it is the rare manager who can deliver profits and quality.

Sarah affected so many people and helped launch numerous careers. A good builder for music, she removed glass ceilings and opened countless doors. Individuals with talent were given a hearing and a chance to do great things. Some of her people not only sang on stage but ran lights, worked the Box Office and whatever else needed to be done. The color of your skin, sexual orientation, country of origin, religion mattered not. She divorced me of my prejudices and the traditional idea that only men could be conductors -- a prejudice once held by some of the world's premier orchestras such as the Vienna Philharmonic.

Sarah also helped promote many of America's notable composers who might not otherwise be heard or become known since new music still does not receive its due in many places in the world

Concert Reviews

MS Weather Report

MARK ALBURGER

Marin Symphony, conducted by Alasdair Neale, in Ingram Marshall's *Bright Kingdom* and Dmitri Shostakovich's *Violin Concerto No. 1*. March 5, Marin Veterans Auditorium, San Rafael, CA.

It was a dark and stormy night. The sounds of children's voices rang out. It was Ingram Marshall's *Bright Kingdoms*, another of his fine works for orchestra and pre-recorded sounds, as expertly rendered by Alasdair Neale and the Marin Symphony on March 5 at Veterans Auditorium, in a program that included Dmitri Shostakovich.

Music for live and pre-recorded sound has come a long way since Mario Davidovsky's *Synchronisms*, an intriguing series of solo instruments and tape, that were decidedly part of the academic post-serial mix, c. 1962-1975. In Marshall's work, the novelty is still there and yet gone, and we are enveloped in some spiritually surreal world where meditation and unease can nevertheless harmoniously coexist. Marshall Stravinskianly limits himself to a circumscribed source palette ("The more restrictions I place upon myself, the freer I become") of children's choirs and a boy singing a hymn, but the sound-process manipulations do indeed result in all manner of sonic surprises. To all this, the orchestra responds in rapturous suspensions and cloudy shimmers, with a string canon on a hymn tune that has all the evocative power of related usages by his peers John Adams, Henryk Górecki, and Steve Reich.

After the sunny passages of *Bright Kingdoms*, more "seasonally affective" music was heard from the amazingly youthful Leila Josefowicz in Shostakovich's *Violin Concerto No. 1*. Here we are plunged back into the cold of Soviet Russia, purged of sunshine and hope, somehow reminded of Samuel Beckett: "I can't go on. I won't go on. I'll go on!" And go on they did -- Shostakovich, Josefowicz, Neale, and the orchestra -- through a lovely nocturne almost bereft of hope to one of the composer's blazing sardonic scherzi. Ironic is this guy's middle name, in this music which first evokes the "D. Sch." musical initials (in German notation D Eb C B, a "thumbing of the nose" of the everyman Shostakovich against Josef Stalin's oppressive society), that were later to become even more important in the later string quartets and *Symphony No. 10*. Shostakovich is as grimly colorful as bright birds and budding flowers in a late spring thaw, or a vibrant blue dress against a sea of black-and-white eveningwear, and if he goes on a bit in his passacaglias and cadenzas he redeems all in his anxious galloping rhythms gallumphing on to a stunning conclusion.

Sturm und Drang und SFCCO

JEFF KALISS

San Francisco Composers Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Mark Alburger and John Kendall Bailey, in *Sound for Picture: Harry Bernstein's Chamber Set; Alburger's Suite ("Sol[ar]") for Oboe, Piano, and Percussion; Philip Freihofner's Quartet, Lisa Scola Prosek's Leonardo's Notebooks, Alexis Alrich's Flute Concerto, and Loren Jones's Dancing on the Brink of the World.* March 10, Old First Presbyterian Church, San Francisco, CA.

The climate was a hard act to follow on the evening of March 10, when the skies over San Francisco thundered while the streets below were spread with an unaccustomed covering of tenacious hailstones. But delightful and somewhat unfamiliar discoveries also awaited those who made their careful way to the woody warmth of Old First Presbyterian Church. There, under the musical directorship of Mark Alburger, the San Francisco Composers Chamber Orchestra showcased the compositions of six of its members in a program titled *Sound for Picture* providing even more variety and surprises than the recent weather.

The opening *Chamber Set*, by Harry Bernstein, evoked some gentler aspects of nature, in the process of Bernstein's explorations of instrumental color. These pieces, all written within the past three years, served in part to showcase Bernstein's interest as a flautist in the rarely featured alto flute. The instrument was partnered in friendly manner in a Duo by its string cousin, the viola, and by two other altos in the lustrous tone clusters of a "Color Study." (As with others of the evening's featured artists, Bernstein functioned, on the latter composition, as instrumentalist as well as composer.) A "Duet for Zack," written for a Marin County middle school student, was set as a querulous, sometimes funny dialogue between oboe and soprano sax. "If All the World Was Apple Pie" was all strings, two violins and a viola, in a dreamy confection artfully performed.

In his familiar and infectious role of showman, Alburger provided in the program notes a daunting list of the influences, not all of them classical on his *Suite ("Sol[ar]") for Oboe, Piano, and Percussion*. Most obvious to the ear were minimalist narrow modalities and repeated figures, meant to convey the listener on a quick voyage from our sun through its planets. Our own "Earth" emerged as the most lucid portion of the system, while neighboring "Venus" appeared oddly troubled.

Philip Freihofner, who'd played oboe on Alburger's trip, stayed on in his own *Quartet* with clarinet, French horn, and bassoon, originally conceived as part of a score for a 1926 Russian silent film. An opening "Galop" proved a crowd-pleaser, the tight ensemble playing elevated by a Prokofievian levity. Freihofner cleaved closer to traditional compositional forms than had Bernstein or Alburger, but with endearing twists in a ticklish "Waltz," a triste "Fugue," and a folksy "March."

Lisa Scola Prosek presented a scene from her opera *Leonardo's Notebooks*, which will be premiered in its entirety by Harriet March Page's Goat Hall Productions at Thick House on May 18. Three fine vocalists sang in Italian about what Prosek pre-announced as a matter of Da Vinci's measurement of shadows and the Catholic Church's suspicions about his research. The setting was dramatic, though not particularly lyrically memorable, set against monumental recurring instrumental patterns. The result was variously evocative of Philip Glass's film score for *Koyaanisqatsi* and the theatrical declamations of Andrew Lloyd-Webber.

Alexis Alrich, who shared the evening's pianistic duties with Prosek, announced the featured selection from her own *Flute Concerto* as "a combination of sophistication and primitivism." Alrich's composition was commissioned by and in large part performed by virtuoso flautist Ilse Maier, partnered by Gabriel Sakakeeny's large drum. "Sophistication" was particularly evident in one of the evening's best and most attractive arrays of the colors of the chamber orchestra. Alburger helped elicit "primitivism" through his contributions on percussion, including hand-claps, and there was an appealingly ethnic effect to the arrangement, at times Latin, at times Asian.

Even closer to American folk and world music was Loren Jones's *Dancing on the Brink of the World*, four parts of what will ultimately be a 12-section musical diorama of four centuries of San Francisco history. The composer played an end-blown Native American flute for the lovely opening "Ohlone Song," homage to some of the original native inhabitants of the San Francisco Bay Area. The ensuing "Ave Maria Yerba Buena," marking the arrival of Spanish-speaking Catholic missionaries, was sweetly inspiring to both audience and chamber players, handsomely passing a memorable theme from strings to horns to harp and guitar. Alburger's characteristically kinetic and passionate approach to conducting was effectively applied here.

The "Gold Rush" made clever use of banjo and guitar, though not with as impressive a range of motion as in the previous section. Similarly, the "Dragon Gate" represented the mid-19th-century presence of Chinese immigrants by integrating an erhu fiddle and the plucked pipa into the chamber orchestra, but the effect was rather more charming, in a filmic soundtrack sense, than orchestrally impressive.

Alburger and his talented cohorts succeeded admirably in warming their audience to the underrealized potential of what's referred to as New Music.

As the year moves on, we eagerly await the completion of those works-in-progress which were introduced at Old First and more such marvelous variety shows.

Shostakovich Soldiers On

MARK ALBURGER

Shostakovich 100. San Francisco Symphony, conducted by Mstislav Rostropovich, in Dmitri Shostakovich's *Festive Overture*, *Piano Concerto No. 1*, and *Symphony No. 5*. March 22, Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

Beyond the celebration of that vastly overplayed 250-year-old Viennese composer, this is also the centenary year of two artists whose radically different yet similar miens bear examination: Samuel Beckett and Dmitri Shostakovich. The latter was feted in a mini-festival from the San Francisco Symphony, with one of the offerings given on March 22 at Davies Hall, under the baton of Mstislav Rostropovich.

Even the mugs of these thugs merit comparison. One would be hard pressed to find better examples of 20th-Century angst -- Beckett the grizzled, lined dramatic existentialist; Shostakovich the anguished, put-upon Soviet fall guy. If the Irish author-playwright is ultimately the more dour, he had the freedom to be so. But in Shostakovich's case, scratch the forced cheerfulness at the surface and the screams emerge. As the composer supposedly related to Solomon Volkov, "I think it is clear to everyone what happens in [my] Fifth [Symphony]. The rejoicing is forced, created under threat, as in [Mussorgsky's] *Boris Godunov*. It's as if someone were beating you with a stick and saying, 'Your business is rejoicing, your business is rejoicing,' and you rise, shaky, and go marching off, muttering, 'our business is rejoicing, our business is rejoicing.' What kind of apotheosis is that? You have to be a complete oaf not to hear that."

Rostropovich unquestionably emphasized the bludgeoned-into-bliss aspects of the Finale to the Symphony No. 5 in one of the slowest tempos on record, in an age that has pulled back from the exciting, but admittedly overfast era of Eugene Ormandy's recording in the 1960's. The scherzo movement was also labored, where the conductor almost dispensed with the rest on beat two of the first measure, in preference of the fullest possible bow strokes from cellos and basses, and rubatoed his way through transitions in manners not marked in the score. It is possible, however, that all these decisions were informed ones, as Rostropovich had a personal association with Shostakovich that may make these readings authoritative. Few quibbles with the first movement, however, which remains one of the greatest sonata-allegro statements of the last hundred years.

Yefim Bronfman was superb Beckettian clown prince in the *Piano Concerto No. 1*, put-upon and pugnacious against an often absurd and sardonic world of strings and trumpet (the excellent Glenn Fischthal). In such a well-crafted yet ultimately meaningless environment, what can a pianist do but crank out mock sentimentality, cheap vaudeville tunes, and a fanfare or two? Nothing to be done. I'm going. As if.

That Shostakovich could wear the happy face convincingly far more than Beckett (*Godot's* tramps and *Engame's* Nell hold up the adage "Nothing is funnier than unhappiness, I grant you that"), was shown by a shining performance of that 1954 bon-bon, *Festive Overture*. If the *Symphony No. 5* was a bit labored, this was blazingly over the top, in a roustabout tempo that shook the house, abetted by embedded brass in the balconies. At that point, we were all being beaten with sonic sticks, and was lovin' it. The house roared. So much for pathos!

Gospel Harmony

MARK ALBURGER

Premiere of Scott King's *The Passion and Death of Jesus Christ According to the Gospels*, by the Choir and Orchestra of St. Gregory of Nyssa, conducted by Sanford Dole. March 24, Los Altos, CA. Through March 26, San Francisco. Reviewed March 25, St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Berkeley.

Sung versions of the Passions (the crucifixion of Jesus Christ) according to one of the New Testament Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John) date back more than a thousand years; while texturally freer Passion *historias*, generally based on all four accounts, have been written in the past few centuries.

Scott King's *The Passion and Death of Jesus Christ According to the Gospels* is apparently a new sub-genre, being the simultaneous telling of the stories, with not one, but four Evangelists -- plus a Narrator and Epistle-writer Paul to boot, for a total of six narrative, antiphonal, contrapuntal, and harmonic voices. To this is added choral and solo interpolations of non-Biblical texts by the composer and Christopher St. John, somewhat in the tradition of Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem* and Leonard Bernstein's *Mass*.

Clocking in at close to two hours, this very ambitious undertaking was heard at St. Mark's Episcopal Church (Berkeley, CA), from the Choir and Orchestra of St. Gregory of Nyssa, under the direction of Sanford Dole, with SATBB soloists Diana Landau (John), Ruthann Lovetang (Luke), Kevin Gibbs (Mark), Jay Moorhead (Matthew), Ken Grant (Paul), and additional British sprechtmish narration by Lizzie Calogero.

This is a grand liturgical setting, rather than a dramatic oratorio or concert work, specific to particular conventions of worship. The six narrative voices portray all the characters in the story -- Christ, the Apostles, priests, officials, and crowd -- the chorus specifically charged with poetic meditation. Structure is a series of solo/duo/trio/quartet recitatives, alternating with arias and choral hymns.

1. Overture
2. Recitative "You will not always have me"
Hymn (HUMBLE HEART)
3. Alto Aria
4. Recitative "You too should wash each other's feet"
Three Responsorial Hymns
(AYLESBURY / MEAR / MEAR)
5. Bass Aria
6. Recitative: "One of you will betray me"
Hymn (HEAVEN)
7. Soprano Aria
8. Recitative: "Love one another"
Hymn (HYFRYDOL)
9. Recitative: "This is my blood"
Hymn (GENADENDAL / BATH)
10. Recitative: "Before the cock crows . . ."
Hymn (HEAVEN)
11. Recitative: "Pray that you are not put to the test"
Hymn (CIRCADIA)
12. Tenor Aria
13. Recitative: "He cut off the high priest's servant's ear"
Hymn (KENTUCKY)
14. Recitative: "Peter followed Jesus . . ."
Hymn (CHICAGO / CANTERBURY)
15. Recitative: "Peter denied it . . ."
Hymn (SOUTHWELL)
16. Quartet
17. Recitative: The trial
Hymn (HERZLICH - Hassler)
18. Recitative: "They crucified Jesus with two others"
Hymn (MORNING)
19. Hymn (PUTNEY)

Stylistic touchstones are the Reformed tradition of hymnody from mid-Renaissance to the mid-20th-Century, relying prominently on parody, pastiche, and trope, where music of William Billings, W.A. Mozart, and Ralph Vaughan Williams can rise to the surface in unaltered or altered forms. The composer's contribution can be as gentle as a simple orchestration or as violent as a reharmonization and metrical transformation. A sympathy with Early Music and Early American Music may be noted, and sometimes the hymnic effect is not unlike that of Alan Hovhaness in one of his gentler moods. At the same time certain acerbic, atonal qualities are utilized, as appropriate, and the whole work is said to have had its initial inspiration in the chanting of sustained diminished sevenths among the four Evangelists.

The four main vocalists carried the roles of Wagnerian endurance admirably, with fine diction and projection, and good tone. The challenging choral and orchestral components mostly came off well, though there were some questions of range and scoring.

Chronicle

March 1

New York Public Library announces that it has purchased the William Burroughs archive for its Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature. New York, NY. "The acquisition will make the Berg Collection, which also includes Kerouac's literary and personal archive, perhaps the premier institution for the study of the Beats" [Edward Wyatt, The New York Times, 3/10/06].

March 4

Diablo Valley College Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Owen Lee, in Mark Alburger's *Pied Piper Suite: Concertino for Orchestra*. Diablo Valley College Theatre, Pleasant Hill, CA.

March 5

Marin Symphony, conducted by Alasdair Neale, in Ingram Marshall's *Bright Kingdom* and Dmitri Shostakovich's *Violin Concerto No. 1*. Marin Veterans Auditorium, San Rafael, CA.

March 6

Allen Shawn's *The Music Teacher* (libretto by Wallace Shawn). Minetta Lane Theater, New York, NY. "[I]ts official designation as a 'Play/opera,' is somewhat misleading. It's neither, really. Wallace Shawn has never been a naturally fluid dramatist. He is most at ease with the monologue form, and *The Music Teacher* is essentially a pair of interlocking monologues surrounding a little parody of an opera. A couple of haunting, modestly lyrical songs decorate the narrative, but the emotional crisis at the heart of the show is not depicted in its music. . . . Smith, played with genial gravity by Mark Blum, is a college music professor fading to gray in his 50's, reflecting on a dangerous passage in his youth that has remained at the center of his consciousness. When he was in his 20's he taught music at a boarding school, and his tormenting erotic attraction to the 'sensuality and passion' swirling around him in the form of his students is the focus of his recollections. . . . [Former student] Jane is also looking back from a distance of many years, recalling the opera they composed together and the peculiar spell it cast. . . . A quasi-classical tragedy set in ancient Greece in which Smith and Jane play adulterous lovers killed by her husband (played by [former student] Jim), it satirizes operatic conventions, with jagged, dramatic vocal lines accompanying discussion of the morning coffee: 'You've dropped your spoon!' It is moderately amusing, and composed by Allen Shawn as a clever blend of the academic and the amateurish" [Liesel Schillinger, The New York Times, 2/19/06].

March 10

San Francisco Composers Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Mark Alburger and John Kendall Bailey, in Harry Bernstein's *Color Study*; Alburger's *Suite ("Sol[ar]") for Oboe, Piano, and Percussion*; Philip Freihofner's *Quartet*, Lisa Scola Prosek's *Leonardo's Notebooks*, Alexis Alrich's *Flute Concerto*, and Loren Jones's *Dancing on the Brink of the World*. Old First Presbyterian Church, San Francisco, CA.

March 19

Orchestra 2001 in *Rhapsody Romaniana*. George Enescu's *Chamber Symphony*, Liviu Marinescu's *Ostinato*, Béla Bartók's *Romanian Folk Dances*, Brian Kershner's *Pastorale and Scherzino*, and Jon Deak's *Lucy and the Count*. Lang Concert Hall, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA.

March 21

Mark Adamo's *Lystistrata, or the Nude Goddess*. New York City Opera, New York, NY. "In choosing classic works of literature as subjects for operas, many composers have been too deferential to their sources. Mark Adamo does not make that mistake" [Anthony Tommasini, The New York Times, 3/23/06].

Music from Central Asia, a triple bill of ensembles from Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Miller Theatre, Columbia University, New York, NY. "There were no microphones between musicians and audience, but the music was gently amplified to bring out sonic nuances: the eerie harmonics of a Kyrgyz jew's harp, the sympathetic strings of an Afghan rubab (plucked lute), the percussive strumming of a two-stringed Tajik dutar. . . . Traditional nomad music tends to be for soloists, but the most striking piece was one composed by [Kyrgyz ensemble] Tengir-Too's founder and director, Nurlanbek Nyshanov, for a trio of jew's harps. Their twangy drone was the backdrop for three different timbres of overtones, interwoven in European-style counterpoint. . . . One slow-building piece was a raga in Afghan style, using the darker sonority and Persian-tinged inflections on the rubab. The other was the vigorous Kataghani from northern Afghanistan: rubab and tabla in a high-speed chase. Academy of Maqam, from Tajikistan, is a conservatory dedicated to Tajik traditions, including the classical style called shashmaqam: suites of songs rooted in modal melodies, Persian poetry and Sufi spirituality" [Jon Pareles, The New York Times, 3/23/06].

New York Youth Symphony in Takuma Itoh's *Concerto for String Quartet and Orchestra* and Gustav Mahler's *Symphony No. 6*. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY.

March 22

Shostakovich 100. San Francisco Symphony conducted by Mstislav Rostropovich, in Dmitri Shostakovich's *Festive Overture, Piano Concerto No. 1*, and *Symphony No. 5*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

Lisa Bielawa's *The Lay of the Love and Death*, and excerpts of Philip Glass's *Musical Portrait of Chuck Close, Hydrogen Jukebox, Orphee*, and *Einstein on the Beach*, and Olivier Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*. Alice Tully Hall, New York, NY.

Lorin Maazel and the New York Philharmonic in Arnold Schoenberg's *Variations for Orchestra*, Sergei Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, and Ravel's *La Valse*. Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY. Lorin Maazel showed again how he can be an alternately confounding and astounding conductor. . . . Maazel led an electrifying account of Schoenberg's *Variations for Orchestra, Op. 31*. Though only 20 minutes long, this is a colossal and, for many listeners, forbidding 12-tone work. Mr. Maazel's program invited you to put all preconceived notions about tone rows out of your mind and just listen to Schoenberg's viscerally affecting music. The score's formal layout -- a theme with nine intricate variations and a rhapsodic finale -- was lucidly presented. Yet it was possible to let yourself be swept away by the emotional impact of the music: the sudden shifts from gnarly turbulence to delicate tenderness, the nervous contrapuntal scurrying, the wistful humor of the waltzing fourth variation. With Mr. Maazel's assured conducting to rely on, the musicians were emboldened to play this challenging score with an arresting blend of accuracy and spontaneity The idea of following the Schoenberg after intermission with a Rachmaninoff warhorse . . . seemed rather strange. But Mr. Maazel was up to something. Both works, after all, are sets of variations from the same period: 1928 for the Schoenberg, 1934 for the Rachmaninoff. Mr. Maazel seemed intent on emphasizing the modernist elements of Rachmaninoff's music, its wayward harmonic language and its bouts of piercing dissonance. . . . The concert ended with a glittering performance of *La Valse*, For me, the playing was aggressively brilliant. But who cares? I'd go back to hear the Schoenberg and the Rachmaninoff" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 3/24/06].

March 23

A.R. Rahman et al's *Lord of the Rings*. Princess of Wales Theater, Toronto, Canada.

David Meckler's *Scientists Say*. Flex Theater, Redwood City, CA. Through April 1.

Death of Sarah Caldwell, of heart failure, at 82. Maine Medical Center, Portland, ME. "[She was] one of America's best-known and most adventurous conductors and opera directors and the founding director of the Opera Company of Boston . . . [and] also the first woman to conduct at the Metropolitan Opera In 1990, 32 years after its founding, facing debt and disarray, the Opera Company of Boston went out of business. . . . Her productions included the American premiers of Prokofiev's *War and Peace*, Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron*, Roger Sessions's *Montezuma*, Peter Maxwell Davies's *Taverner*, and Rodion Shchedrin's *Dead Souls*, as well as the world premieres of Gunther Schuller's *Fisherman and his Wife* and Robert Di Domenico's *Balcony*. . . . Only 5 feet 3 and, for most of her life, overweight, she was an indomitable but chaotic force. Rehearsal periods were typically fraught with crisis. Ms. Caldwell, sleepless and disheveled, would keep stage crews working all night and fight off creditors all day. Stories abounded of staff members finding their boss napping in a stairwell or atop of a pile of costumes backstage. Ms. Caldwell never gave up hope that she could raise funds and restart her company. It was not to be. But for a while, as the British critic Andrew Porter wrote in the *New Yorker* magazine, she was 'the single best thing about opera in America'" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 3/25/06].

March 24

Premiere of Scott King's *The Passion and Death of Jesus Christ According to the Gospels*, by the Choir and Orchestra of St. Gregory of Nyssa, conducted by Sanford Dole. Los Altos, CA. Through March 26, San Francisco. Reviewed March 25, St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Berkeley.

Kronos Quartet in Alexandra du Bois's *Night Songs*, Michael Gordon's *Sad Park*, and Henryk Górecki's *String Quartet No. 3* ("...songs are sung"). Zankel Hall, New York, NY. "The Kronos does not guarantee profundity. It just likes to keep the conversation going. . . . Górecki's Third Quartet . . . acted as an exercise in slow-motion repetitions. Not that much happens over 52 minutes, but Mr. Górecki keeps his message of mournfulness steady, simple and easy to digest. The gloom goes down as smooth as ice cream. Someone more cynical than I might call '...songs are sung' *Tragedy for Dummies*" [Bernard Holland, *The New York Times*, 3/27/06].

Composer Portraits: Magnus Lindberg, including his *Linea d'ombra*, *Clarinet Quintet*, *Related Rocks*, and *Duo Concertante*. Miller Theater, Columbia University, New York, NY. "*Linea d'ombra* (1981) [is] a playfully caustic snarl of a piece that Mr. Lindberg, in comments from the stage, described as a 'Here I am' work written just after he completed his studies at the Sibelius Academy. Clearly, Mr. Lindberg was eager to escape from the giant shadow cast by the namesake of his conservatory, and accordingly the piece opens with a primal yawp shouted by the players onstage and ends with whispered nonsense syllables and metal chains being dragged on a table top. In between the work grabs the ears with its happy chaos of jumpy conversation among percussion, flute, clarinet and guitar. . . . *Related Rocks* (1997) . . . is a voraciously eclectic piece, pooling two pianists, two percussionist and electronics, and revealing Mr. Lindberg's ear for minimalist gesture and rock-style rhythmic energy" [Jeremy Eichler, *The New York Times*, 3/27/06].

March 25

Death of Buck [Alvis E.] Owens (b. 8/12/29, Sherman, TX) -- in his sleep, hours after finishing a performance at this concert hall and restaurant, Buck Owens's Crystal Palace -- at 76. Bakersfield, CA. "Owens pioneered a shift in country music toward the 'Bakersfield sound,' a raw, electrified take on traditional country that served as an alternative to the lush, string-heavy sound that dominated Nashville in the 1960's. His influence can be heard in the music of artists from Gram Parsons to Brad Paisley. After releasing a string of No.1 singles in the 1960's, Mr. Owens agreed to be a co-host of *Hee Haw*, stepping into the persona of a country rube, a role that he would later say destroyed his album sales. During the show's long run, Mr. Owens also devoted himself to his private empire, which included radio stations in Bakersfield and Phoenix, and developed a reputation as a savvy entrepreneur. He re-emerged in the 1980's as a mentor of sorts to new traditionalists like Dwight Yoakam. . . . He took up the guitar, eventually moved to the San Joaquin Valley in California, and settled in Bakersfield . . . in 1951. . . . His first wife, Bonnie, performed with him on occasion and continued her musical career after their divorce in the 1950's. She later married his main rival at the forefront of California's country scene, Merle Haggard 'Buck and I are from the same town. We've been in many battles together, always on the same side,' Haggard said Saturday after learning of Mr. Owens's death The Beatles recorded a version of 'Act Naturally and Ray Charles recorded 'Cryin' Time.' Mr. Owens achieved a different sort of mainstream success when he agreed to co-host with Roy Clark the newly created show *Hee Haw*, which would go on to be one of the longest-running series on television. But the singer eventually found that the role that increased his exposure seemed to damage his identity. 'Early on, I was doing three songs in an hour, and at that time all my songs were hits It slowly gravitated to the point where I did a hell of a lot of comedy and hardly any music. . . . Weekly TV, that's death for recording artists. It's too much exposure. There's no longer any mystery'. . . . Owens . . . rerecorded 'Act Naturally' with Ringo Starr" [Patrick Hoge, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 3/26/06].

Kronos Quartet in *Alternative Radio -- Music in a Time of War*. Scott Johnson's *How It Happens*, Walter Kitundu's *Cerulean Sweet II*. Zankel Hall, New York, NY.

March 26

Sarah Cahill and Joseph Kubera. Holy Names University, Oakland, CA.

March 27

Death of Scottish poet and conceptual artist Ian Hamilton Finlay, of cancer, at 80. Edinburgh, UK. "[He was] known for his neo-Classical-style sculptures inscribed with poetic texts as well as for his home and garden, an imaginative echo of ancient Rome in the Pentland Hills of Lanarkshire" [Ken Johnson, *The New York Times*, 3/31/06].

March 28

Formerly Known As Classical presents *Since We Were Born (Music Written After 1988)*, with music of John Adams, David Conte, Osvaldo Golijov, Terry Riley, Preben Antonsen, and Matthew Cmiel. Temple United Methodist Church, San Francisco, CA.

Tero Saarinen Company dances to Gavin Bryars's *Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet* mixed with Moondog and Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. Joyce Theater, New York, NY.

Orpheus Chamber Orchestra in Peter Maxwell Davies's *Orkney Wedding With Sunrise* and James MacMillan's *Veni, Veni Emmanuel*, with Evelyn Glennie. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY. "Glennie whacking percussion instruments in inventive ways . . . [She] is a theatrical presence and a deeply earnest one. Considering the number of mallet percussion instruments, gongs, drums and cymbals stretched across this big stage, she had to be as fleet of foot as she was strong of arm" [Bernard Holland, *The New York Times*, 3/30/06].

The Magic Numbers. Webster Hall, New York, NY.

Concertante in Dmitri Shostakovich's *Piano Quintet*. Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY. "The Shostakovich . . . was played with the kind of passion that made it leap off the stage. No doubt Shostakovich's proximity and the darkness of his time and place keep musicians from slipping into superficial sweetness, although his penchant for steely melodies and bitter harmonic twists largely preclude that in any case. Adam Neiman's reading of the piano line was couched in cold fire that is the thumbprint of Shostakovich's chamber scores" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 3/30/06].

March 30

Shostakovich 100. San Francisco Symphony conducted by Mstislav Rostropovich, in Dmitri Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 13 ("Baba Yar")*, *Violin Concerto No. 2*, and *Suite No. 1 for Jazz Orchestra*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA. "[The] concert . . . was not a thing of joy -- which is a fairly rare commodity anywhere in Shostakovich land -- but it packed a prodigious expressive punch. . . . The performances were longer on moral authority than on technical rigor -- Rostropovich's conducting tends to be blurry around the edges -- but there was no mistaking the gritty urgency of both scores. By the mid-1960's, when [Symphony No. 13 and Violin Concerto No. 2] were written, Stalin was dead, but the unfathomable damage he had wreaked lived on. Shostakovich had seemingly internalized the circumspection and evasiveness necessary for survival during the darkest years of Soviet tyranny; the language of these late works is both expressive and relentlessly, almost reflexively ambiguous. . . . Rostropovich's involvement with the Thirteenth Symphony goes back nearly to the beginning. It was he who spirited a copy of the score out of the Soviet Union, enabling Eugene Ormandy to lead the first U.S. performance of the symphony in 1970, eight years after its Moscow premiere. . . . The Second Concerto, written in 1967, is an even more cryptic creation, with a buttoned-down expressive vein that wells up unstoppably in the violin cadenzas that crown each of the three movements. . . . Written in 1934, before the official denunciation of his opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* changed Shostakovich's life forever, [*Suite No. 1 for Jazz Orchestra*] is an engagingly zesty bauble for 13 players (including a Hawaiian guitar that makes a delicious appearance late in the game). The ensemble delivered it with the requisite acid wit" [Joshua Kosman, San Francisco Chronicle, 4/1/06].

March 31

Helicon Opera Moscow in Aram Khachaturian's *Sword Dance*, Giacomo Puccini's "Lauretta's Aria" from *Gianni Schicchi*, Agustin Lara's *Granada*, and Luigi Denza's *Funiculi Funicula*. Mondavi Center, University of California, Davis, CA. "That Helikon Opera Moscow sang their way through Aram Khachaturian's *Sword Dance* . . . was the clearest indication that this was not exactly your typical night at the opera. . . . Ekaterina Oblezova . . . had her moment to shine as Lauretta, in the Giacomo Puccini *Gianni Schicchi*, with a performance that brought tears to the eyes in the sheer loveliness of scoring and sound. . . . Dmitriy Ponomarev found a lighter delivery . . . that really came to fruition in a hilarious rendition of Agustin Lara's *Granada*, with the tenor transformed into a song-and-dance man. With light-hearted tenor-compatriot Mikhail Serychev, he delivered the goods as well in Luigi Denza's *Funiculi Funicula* (billed as "On the Swing" in the playlist)" [Mark Alburger, San Francisco Classical Voice, 4/4/06].

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