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Tricks and Treats from Joan Jeanrenaud

MARK ALBURGER

Joan Jeanrenaud (b. 1956, Memphis, TN) began playing the cello at 11 and studied at the University of Indiana, and with Pierre Fournier in Geneva, Switzerland. At 22, she joined the Kronos Quartet and moved to San Francisco. For 20 years, she worked with hundreds of composers and musicians, including John Cage, Morton Feldman, Philip Glass, La Monte Young, and John Zorn. Jeanrenaud made more than 30 recordings with Kronos, mostly released on Nonesuch, before stepping down from the ensemble in 1999 to pursue new solo directions in composition, improvisation, performance, and recording.

As per appointment, I knocked on Joan Jeanrenaud's sunny Bernal Heights front door gate on October 26, 2006, five days before her 10th Annual Haunted House.

ALBURGER: What a beautiful garden.

JEANRENAUD: Thanks. It will be transformed into a haunted house in a couple of days. We'll have hundreds of kids come through, and we all play our traditional roles. I'm always a witch, and I play my electric cello. There's a graveyard on the hot tub, a pirate ship, someone in a coffin....

ALBURGER: How long have you lived in this place?

JEANRENAUD: 11 years.

ALBURGER: And what a beautiful studio, complete with electric cello [a sleek, black, solid-body, flat instrument, perched on an elevated stand, as a work of art]. Nice big-screen computer!

JEANRENAUD: I'm a lot more comfortable with it.

ALBURGER: Do you compose directly into the computer?

JEANRENAUD: Yes, with Pro Tools, mostly with acoustic and electric cello.

ALBURGER: What are you working on now?

JEANRENAUD: It's a dance piece for Cid Perlman, a choreographer based in Santa Cruz. I'm just finishing it. I've got to get it done today.

ALBURGER: So we won't make this an overlong interview!

JEANRENAUD: Oh, it's no problem. I'll be finishing it later, and then sending her the MP3 file over email.

ALBURGER: What resources do you use in this piece?

JEANRENAUD: It's all cello -- layers of cello. Golly, I can't remember how many layers. Well, I'll have to go and look. Typically I'll have four parts -- the string quartet orientation still with me!

ALBURGER: Perhaps it's also the years of four-part harmony study.

JEANRENAUD: Could be. In this piece, I think I often have six to eight parts. I'm also writing for an artist: Helen Chellin. A long time ago, Kronos did a concert called *Live Video*, and Helen was involved with a sculptural painting piece: not flat, kind of with things coming out of the canvas. Since then she has been using my music while painting. She's been working with volcanologists on the Big Island of Hawaii, recording volcanic activity on a seismograph.

ALBURGER: The Kilaua caldera!

JEANRENAUD: So, I'm using volcanic sounds for this piece -- I've been into using different sound sources for several years. I did a piece with bird and cricket sounds and cello (I always use cello!). Sounds give me inspiration. The volcano piece is about 14 minutes so far. The source material is often manipulated.

ALBURGER: How?

JEANRENAUD: Mostly by cut-and-paste in Pro Tools. I'll have a base sound source that lasts from about ten seconds to around a minute.

ALBURGER: So this would be somewhat in the spirit of a pop musician who lays down a drum track and then improvises above it?

JEANRENAUD: Yes.

ALBURGER: Does notation come to play a role?

JEANRENAUD: Sometimes I'll still use pencil and paper before computer recording.

ALBURGER: What about notation software?

JEANRENAUD: I use Sibelius, if anyone other than myself has to read the notation. I'm also writing a piece for two cellos and two violas da gamba (which could also be performed on by four cellos) called *Transition*. Using Sibelius in this capacity is great!

ALBURGER: Have you written any music without cello?

JEANRENAUD: No! [Laughs] I've written for cello and percussion (marimba / vibraphone), working extensively with Willy Winant at Mills College. We'll be performing that music along with pieces by Fred Frith and Alvin Curran at UC Santa Cruz on January 20. Down, Jack! [Her large puppy greets us].

ALBURGER: How old is he?

JEANRENAUD: About 5 1/2 months.

ALBURGER: What kind of dog?

JEANRENAUD: A mutt! I'm very happy to have him, but he is a bit over-enthusiastic at times....

ALBURGER: These days, what percentage of your time is given respectively to other composers and to your own works?

JEANRENAUD: I'd say about 50/50 -- I still perhaps play other people's music more. I'm performing less and less, but will be doing a concert with Paul Drescher Ensemble Electro-Acoustic Band on December 1 and 2. Paul has written a cello concerto for me in multiple movements, and while we've been premiering the sections sequentially, these performances will be the premiere of the complete concerto. The first parts were premiered in 2002 and 2003.

ALBURGER: How many movements, now that it's complete?

JEANRENAUD: Four. We'll be at Theatre Artaud.

ALBURGER: What's it like?

JEANRENAUD: It's tough! Virtuosoic! But it suites me well. It confirms for me that I relate well to a small ensemble like his, rather than with a full symphony orchestra -- possibly the Kronos influence again. I've played cello concertos with large groups -- really nice pieces -- but I'm more of a chamber music person.

ALBURGER: So you're still a chamber music person, but now you're one who has moved more "center stage" as soloist, as opposed to being a member of a "consortium of equals" in a string quartet. How does that feel?

JEANRENAUD: It's a big change. One of the biggest differences is that I don't have another three sets of ears. In a quartet such as the Kronos, you rely and trust the others thoroughly -- in a dynamic exchange of ideas. Now I have to rely on myself much more, so I record myself and listen. I play for Hank [Dutt, Kronos violist] if I can get him -- he's been a great help.

ALBURGER: Any regrets leaving the Kronos?

JEANRENAUD: It's been a great change for me. I loved being in Kronos, but I could no longer travel as extensively. Everyone understood, and was very kind when I had to step down.

ALBURGER: Now, after the departure of [cellist] Jennifer [Culp], Kronos is on cello no. 4.

JEANRENAUD: He's great! He's infused them with a bunch of new energy. Jennifer did a great job, but this is a better fit.

ALBURGER: Yes, but we no longer have the traditional pretty face for the cello spot.

JEANRENAUD: Well, Jeff is a cute face, too! He's half African-American and half Japanese for starts....

ALBURGER: Along with the electric cello and the computer, the most prominently displayed music in your studio here is a volume of the J.S. Bach cello suites -- a big contrast to the Kronos repertory. If your performance last Sunday night [with the Del Sol Quartet, in Franz Schubert's Quintet] was any indication, you're now playing music both old and new. Did you miss the old when you were in Kronos?

JEANRENAUD: Well, certainly the Bach suites are fundamental, but I can't say that I missed playing older music when I was with Kronos. After two years with the group, we realized that we weren't doing anything distinctive by playing older music, and that what we really were drawn to was 20th-century selections. So, for a while, our repertory was the modern classics: the late Shostakovich quartets, Bartók's six quartets, Berg's *Lyrical Suite*, the quartets of Debussy (almost 20th-century!) and Ravel. I grew up playing the traditional, older classics, so I had a strong background, but the newer music was what was calling us. And, back then, such music had been not particularly performed well. That's changed: new music is performed better now!

ALBURGER: Schoenberg said something along the lines of "My music is not modern; it's just performed badly!"

JEANRENAUD: That was often the case in the days back when I first joined Kronos. Now groups like Del Sol are playing wonderfully.

ALBURGER: Is it any coincidence that you appeared with Del Sol on a concert series [Music on the Hill] which is run by a woman [Ava Soifer] who lives down the street from you?

JEANRENAUD: I've known Ava very well for years. I was involved the first year on the [MotH] Board, and Ava and I have played together. She's a pianist who sometimes performs in the series.

ALBURGER: So, we should listen to your Pro Tools multi-track pieces!

JEANRENAUD: Cid's piece is called *Small Variations* -- this is the second time I'm working with her. She gave me the time parameters, and a "temp track" of pop music. My music mimics the time frame of the pre-existent sounds, with a driving, rhythmic beat.

ALBURGER: [Listening to the electric cello lines and pointing at a track on the computer screen] The wave form could almost be an electric guitar.

JEANRENAUD: Yes! Cid wanted it to be kept light and danceable, and she's had a working copy of my not-quite-completely finished music for a while. So I'm touching it up -- but I've been encouraged not to change it too much, because I know how attached dancers can get to the sounds once they've danced to them for a while! [Looking at the tracks on the screen] So this part looks like six independent tracks with some doubling.

ALBURGER: Beautiful. What about the seismically inspired piece?

JEANRENAUD: Here it is. [Playing a bit] Like the other one, it's a non-narrative work, an environment.

ALBURGER: Perfect for a dance.

JEANRENAUD: Could be. Although in this case, it's for the volcano book by the painter. The idea is that you open the book, and then you put on this CD while you look at the pictures.

ALBURGER: Contrary to expectations, the work is not "explosive." Rather than volcano sounds, those are the "ticks" of the seismograph.....

JEANRENAUD: Yes!

ALBURGER:and the cello playing is again beautiful and haunting [it's almost Halloween, after all].

JEANRENAUD: Well, the cello itself is always a beautiful sound. In fact, for me, it's harder to make the music with more of an edge!

ALBURGER: The way you use volcano, it kind of has a rhythmic groove.

JEANRENAUD: Yes! Partly because, as you can see [points to the tracks], I've cut and pasted so many of these little repetitive fragments.

ALBURGER: A percolating cafe volcano! Where did you pick up your computer recording chops?

JEANRENAUD: The first time I used Pro Tools was with Pamela Z. I didn't know much about electronics -- I knew a bit from working with Kronos, but I really had to learn a lot of basic stuff. Pamela taught a course at The Lab.

ALBURGER: Were the other students high-caliber like yourself?

JEANRENAUD: They really ran the gamut. I had done performances with Pamela (we had shared a bill), who was the one who said to me that I might be interested. Kronos had used Pro Tools for years but it was the engineer who had all the expertise. Then I continued to learn by simply doing! By now I have a lot of cool samples, including "The Big Bang Sound" [plays a high beep descending glissando].

ALBURGER: Your enthusiasm for found sound dates back at least to your years in the Kronos. You joined the group in....?

JEANRENAUD: The fall of 1978.

ALBURGER: I remember hearing some of your early recordings, but I didn't get to hear you live until I moved to the San Francisco Bay Area in 1987. I remember I was staying with a former student and his parents while scouting out a local residence, and we took in a concert of yours at the Exploratorium where you had a moving score projected during the performance.

JEANRENAUD: Yes, that would have been the Penderecki. Hard piece! But easier, since we could look at the score and see where we were with respect to one another. I suppose we shouldn't have looked! But it made it easier.

ALBURGER: So not only a dramatic and pedagogical aid for the audience, but a choice that had a performative role for the players!

JEANRENAUD: Yes!

ALBURGER: Whatever works. But the concert, in addition to featuring wonderful music and performances, was also visually dramatic through and through -- right down to the low lighting and custom-draped chairs. So, how did a nice girl from Memphis, Tennessee, wind up here?

JEANRENAUD: I studied cello with Paul Spurbeck, and he encouraged me to go to the University of Indiana, his alma mater, where I took lessons from Fritz Magg. Then I went to study with Pierre Fournier in Geneva, Switzerland. After that, I thought, "I need to get a job!" Then Hank (who was a friend from Indiana) called me. He had joined Kronos the year before I went to Geneva, and they were looking for a cellist. They wanted someone who would have the right chemistry with the group.

ALBURGER: Right, I forgot that Kronos predated your association with them.

JEANRENAUD: Yes. [First Violinist] David [Harrington]'s the only original member. Initially the positions for Violin II and Viola changed a lot. Kronos was in Seattle and upstate New York (SUNY Purchase) before moving to San Francisco -- that's when Hank joined. So he said, "Come out and audition." The group was very concerned about the dynamic of the ensemble -- they had had some issues! Hank knew me, so that was a big plus. By then, they had chosen John [Sherba] to be second violinist. I joined and was with them for 20 years, before I got M.S., so it was a good thing that I left then.

ALBURGER: Wow. So you've been living with multiple sclerosis for years now. Aside from the toll it has taken on your leg [she now walks with effort], has the disease slowed you down?

JEANRENAUD: Definitely. I have my good days and my bad days.

ALBURGER: But you can clearly still play up a storm -- or a volcano!

JEANRENAUD: [Laughs] But as for touring and a very busy concert schedule, I felt I had done it, so it's been a good thing ultimately to leave Kronos -- I'm so into composition now. I studied comp and improv in college, but never had enough time to devote to it. The process now is improvisation, composition, notation -- and my ear has gotten better.

ALBURGER: Not that there was ever any doubt in those magic years with the Kronos, with the four of you playing and looking great. Speaking of which, who did your promotional photography during those years?

JEANRENAUD: That was Michele Clement. She was the one who took those early pictures. She did fashion photography and magazine spreads, and would encourage us to be at ease and fool around -- which explains the sunglasses photo, for instance, which we just did for fun at the end of a session.

ALBURGER: Kronos arguably began a certain hip new-music trend.

JEANRENAUD: We just wanted to play, and we realized what we were playing best was new music. That's often how groups are formed: we just wanted to add to the tradition. Groups like the Concord String Quartet, predating us, were doing great things for new music.

ALBURGER: Like recording the George Rochberg String Quartet No. 3. But they weren't quite doing it with the same "cool factor." Where would Alarm Will Sound and Dinosaur Annex be without you? One of the reasons for my founding 20TH-CENTURY MUSIC was hearing the four of you doing Ingram Marshall's Fog Tropes II at Stanford, along with having heard and performed in the 30th anniversary of [Terry Riley's] In C at Mills, and feeling that the concerts needed to be written up in a brand-new publication.

JEANRENAUD: It's a lot easier to see the influence after leaving Kronos. I'm proud of our legacy. And with them, and with me and you and so many people, the key is doing things that you believe in!

Concert Reviews

The Fountains and Pines of San Rafael

PHILLIP GEORGE

Marin Symphony performs Ottorino Respighi's *The Pines of Rome* and *Fountains of Rome*, and music of Grieg and Rossini. October 10, Veterans Memorial Auditorium, San Rafael, CA.

The blaze of glory that ended the Marin Symphony's reading of Ottorino Respighi's *Pines of Rome*, on October 10 at Veterans Auditorium, concluded a vibrant evening of music-making that signaled a very positive beginning to the 2006-2007 season. Featured on the program were not only the Respighi *Pines* and *Fountains* but also an impressive performance by pianist Orli Shaham of Edvard Grieg's *Piano Concerto in A Minor*, and a winning turn at the Gioacchino Rossini *Thieving Magpie Overture*.

The Pines is hard to argue against in any context, with its colorful orchestral pallet and alternately lovely, mysterious, corny, and exciting moments. Well, OK, the recorded birdsongs which the composer specified at the end of the third movement are a bit beyond, and, for some, the bombastic end is over the top. Come to think of it, perhaps there's a lot to argue against this music, with its potentially prescient suggestions of Fascism in evoking the grandeurs of ancient Rome. But on the other hand, from a pure sonic-entertainment point of view, the music is a delight from its dissonant-trumpet first movement through its serpentine English Horn and mass-brassed finale, as well argued here by Music Director Alasdair Neale and company. The brass locked in place, the percussion soothed and pounded, the woodwinds took their graceful solo spots, and the strings provided a lush support for all. In *The Fountains of Rome* the news was just as good. Both works are about nature, time, place and people -- beyond mere waterspouts and flora. Specific passages suggest Claude Debussy, Manuel da Falla, Richard Strauss, Igor Stravinsky, and even Edvard Grieg in the morning music "Fountain of the Giulia Valley."

Grieg was particularly appropriate, since we had just heard such a convincing rendition of his *Concerto in A Minor*, from that unforgettable opening descending "minor-major" 7th (Do, Do-Ti-Sol, Sol-Me-Do), through tender melodic moments to its pulse-quickening conclusion. Orli, not to be confused with her duetting partner Gil, Shaham clearly had the music well in hand, and won musicians and audience alike with her musicality, personality, and physicality in addressing the work.

The program opened with a Rossini bon-bon, but one that must have been a bombshell in its day. Rossini's 20th opera (he was only 25 when he wrote it!) was based on a real-life false accusation, which resulted in the death of a servant girl (turns out the thieving magpie done it). In the staged version, however, a last-minute happy end was provided, and in this performance, as with the rest of the show, there was never any doubt of the outcome.

Santa Rosa / San Francisco Compare and Contrast

MARK ALBURGER

Santa Rosa Symphony in Dmitri Shostakovich's *Festive Overture*, Sergei Prokofiev's *Piano Concerto No 2*, and music of Tchaikovsky. October 16, Santa Rosa, CA.

And Nathaniel said unto him, "Can there any good thing come out of the Santa Rosa Symphony?" Philip saith unto him, "Come and see." (St. John 1:46, Revised Musical Version).

So behold, we drove uppeh the freeway, and rather a lot of good things we found at the Santa Rosa Symphony on October 16.

Mind you, Toto, there was a distinct feeling that this wasn't San Francisco anymore. The concert hall -- formerly The Luther Burbank Center for the Arts, corporately rechristened as the Wells Fargo Center (what next? *The Starbucks Coffee Cantata? The Titan Missile Symphony? Einstein on South Beach?*) -- is visible from the freeway, but not obvious from side streets. And there is the question of signage: Punky's Pumpkin Patch, adjacent to the venue, is more prominently identified, and the "Thanks to our corporate sponsors" list takes precedence over the building's name at the side entrance.

Within, one finds an intriguing concert space (evidently formerly a very large auditorium-style church), with a playing area so cramped that Symphony musicians and even newly-appointed Music Director Bruno Ferrandis must enter from the audience and ascend stairsteps to the stage. This no doubt will be changing soon, however, as word was recently announced that the SRS, in collaboration with Sonoma State University, has broken ground for a new performing home in the Cotati / Rohnert Park (shades of Oakland Raiders' relocating to Fremont?) area. One hopes that the new hallpark will be as alive as the present one.

Monday's opening night concert was viscerally exciting, with a sonic presence that certainly rivaled what one hears at Marin Symphony, San Francisco Opera, Dominican University, San Francisco Composers Chamber Orchestra, the Erling Wold Ensembles, and the Del Mar Players -- which made sense, since members of the Santa Rosa Symphony may also be found in the aforementioned. From a certain perspective, perhaps there is only one large Bay Area Music Organization, constantly mutating as commuting musicians crop up again and again in various combinations. But the combination that is the Santa Rosa Symphony is a strong one, and all indications suggest that Algerian/French Ferrandis will make a telling mark on the local music scene.

The program led off with a dynamic reading of the Dmitri Shostakovich "Festive Overture" (1954). This bon-bon, written in the year after the death of the composer's (and so many others') nemesis, Josef Stalin, can barely contain its celebratory mirth, in marked contrast to many other works by the same creator. The brass were brilliant, the strings crisp, with dizzying woodwind solos that made the head spin.

The spin on Shostakovich, yarned in Steven Ledbetter's SRS program notes as "the greatest Russian composer of the 20th century," has the composer on the ascendant. In former years, the three biggies of 20th-century Ruskies were Igor Stravinsky, Sergei Prokofiev, and our man Dmitri -- in that order, chronologically and reputationally. While probably a majority would still keep IS at the head of the table, there's no question that the middle composer's star has faded a bit.

This was even the case with Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 2 (1923), although perhaps not a fair fight, putting up this considerably more serious work against the Shostakovichian fireworks. Nevertheless, after a lyrical opening, Prokofiev eventually provides some sardonic pyrotechnics of his own, here in the expert hands of Joyce Yang's impassioned playing. Yang breathed, emoted, caressed and pounded her way, as appropriate, through this paradoxical work, all in perfect consort with the attentive care of Ferrandis and the orchestra. This atypical concerto (four, rather than the usual three movements), one of six in the Prokofiev canon, delighted gently and quixotically from beginning to end.

Even more fireworks were offered in a splendid performance of the Peter Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 4 (1878), where listeners felt a fresh touch that made this tried-and-true work come alive as if a first hearing. One could hear the angst-ridden chromaticism as a harbinger of 20th- (and now 21st-) century neuroses, and understand why Stravinsky held the older composer in such high regard. Tchaikovsky has been held up as a less-progressive, more central-European collaborationist, against the more forward-looking "Mighty Handful" or "Russian Five" (Balakirev, Borodin, Cui, Mussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov), but there is nothing less than contemporary in this composer's handling of melody and structure. All is clear and immediate, yet at the same time darkly woven and ever surprising. That craftsmanship and inspiration can walk in such close collaboration is ever inspiring.

The music was alive, and Ferrandis and the Santa Rosa Symphony made it so. In upcoming concerts, it looks like this group (ably conducted for years by the talented Jeffrey Kahane) will continue to delight, and will be worth the drive.

But, hey, if you can't make it, you'll continue to hear some of SRS's players in some of the other finest ensembles around the Bay Area. Verily.

Misery Loves Artistry

PHILLIP GEORGE

San Francisco Symphony in Dmitri Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 10*, Osvaldo Golijov's *Last Round*, and music of Saint-Saens. October 20, Davies Hall, San Francisco, CA.

Dynastic upheavals in Ancient China, warring Italian Renaissance city-states, purges in Soviet Russia -- the worst of times can paradoxically be the best of times for creativity in philosophy, art, music, and life.

At least the best of times for those of us who don't have to live in those periods, but can simply look back and admire.

Dmitri Shostakovich did not have this luxury, however. He had to live the life of an artist-of-fortune, whose uncertain future was at the mercy of the vagaries of Soviet politics, specifically those of the ruthless Josef Stalin, who ran the U.S.S.R. with an iron hand from 1922 to 1953.

But after the dictator's death in the spring of his last ruling year, the composer could look back, as we do now more than 50 years later, and see what art had been wrought during those troubled years.

Such was the case on October 20, when the San Francisco Symphony, mostly marvelously directed by Semyon Bychkov, brought Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 10* to Davies Hall, and gave us both the tragedy and the joy that can unexpectedly spring from the worst of times.

The Shostakovich Tenth, like the artist's *Festive Overture* (serendipitously given last week at Santa Rosa Symphony), came to life within a year of the death of Stalin (and Shostakovich's ill-fated rival Sergei Prokofiev, who had the misfortune to die the same day as the Party Chairman, and thus have his obit buried on page 117 of the official journal "Sovietskaya Muzyka"). The two pieces offer up an ecstatic, manic joy, as Russian peasants punch-drunk on vodka, singing at the top of their lungs, breaking furniture, collapsing in their "business of rejoicing." Crying for joy and hardship; tears to the point of delirium and madness.

But the Tenth Symphony offers much more brooding, introspective material as well. Shostakovich is not only arguably the greatest symphonist of the 20th century (perhaps only Ralph Vaughan Williams comes close in terms of scope and structure), but one of the greatest of all times. Symphony No. 10, on the short list of his greatest efforts in the form -- rivaled by the First, Fifth, and maybe 6, 9, 11, 15 (come to think of it, they're all pretty great!) -- offers up a heroic, always clearly-articulated first movement, on a formal par with anything by Ludwig Beethoven or Franz Schubert, for instance.

If W.A. Mozart was mostly about melody to the expense of development, Shostakovich takes off from Joseph Haydn and Beethoven, as being very much about the exploration of material, and like his Finnish near-contemporary Jan Sibelius, often links his motives up into larger forms. A great exposition will lead to a masterful, mind-boggling, sartori-inspiring mid-section, with a recapitulation as more of a gratuitous super-coda.

The second movement as played here was a blistering vendetta against dictatorship, frightening and satanic. The third, while a bit under tempo, still captured the quirky and capricious and mysteriously elevating -- but that tambourine needed to be louder and more committed -- this should be a round dance from Hades, after all. By the finale, Bychkov and the ensemble had us all trapped in that sonic bar, drinks being poured down gullets whether we wanted them or not, whimsical phrases turning downright menacing, just as the composer had no doubt intended. Marvelous! The crowd was at its feet.

Most also jumped up at the end of a dynamic reading by Jean-Yves Thibaudet and company for the Camille Saint-Saens *Piano Concerto No. 2*. Thibaudet brings an athletic and graceful presence to his endeavors, and his dexterous touch -- light and firm, as variously necessary -- informed the proceedings.

Osvaldo Golijov's *Last Round* began the concert with taproom suggestions (this time in homage to his great Argentinean countryman Astor Piazzolla) of torrid tango. This double string ensemble work requires the musicians to stand, New Century style (a practice seen on more occasions, including two nights later at a Del Sol String Quartet concert for music of Marc Blitzstein), and the stand-up-and-be-counted energy was very apparent.

Tango was born of tragedy (there's even a Piazzolla piece with such a title), so, once again, misery loves artistry.

Guest Artists with Del Sol

MARK ALBURGER

Del Sol String Quartet in Marc Blitzstein's *Quartet for Strings* ("The Italian"), Hyo-shin Na's *Song of the Beggars*, and music of Schubert (with Joan Jeanrenaud). October 22, St. Kevin's Church, San Francisco, CA.

Not one but two -- actually four -- guest artists were featured with the Del Sol String Quartet this past Sunday, October 22, at St. Kevin's Church on Cortland Street in San Francisco. The guest-in-residence was the renowned Joan Jeanrenaud, founding cellist with the Kronos Quartet, but the other collaborators (two of which have passed on, this being the Halloween season) were Franz Schubert (1797-1828), Marc Blitzstein (1905-1964), and Hyo-shin Na. (b. 1959).

This performance of Blitzstein's *Quartet for Strings* ("The Italian") (1930) was an historic occasion, according to composer and Other Minds presenter Charles Amirkhanian, being perhaps the first professional presentation of the work, which received readings in 1938 and 2005, the latter by graduate students at the University of Southern California. What Amirkhanian and we heard was a missing piece of music history, one of those quixotic relics in that "mysterious period" of American music (c. 1920-1940) when voices such as George Antheil, Aaron Copland, Henry Cowell, and Edgar Varèse were working their various alchemies in juxtaposition with overseas voices such as Béla Bartók, Arnold Schoenberg, and Igor Stravinsky.

Humor and irony are oft apparent in this Blitzstein work, which pre-dates the composer's better-known political-populist endeavors of later in the same decade (somehow there's a parallel with Kurt Weill's music theatre after the astringencies of earlier concert compositions). The four-movement Quartet takes off from received forms with three quick-tempo movements in a row before a final closing Lento chorale. There is great confidence here compositionally, as there was in this masterful performance by the committed Del Sol Quartet members (violinists Kate Stenberg and Rick Shinozaki, violist Charleton Lee, and cellist Hannah Addario-Berry).

Dissonant counterpoint, eerie harmonies, and modular construction manifest themselves in various guises, including that of a weird waltz. The second movement's dotted-rhythm pseudo-swing cakewalky scherzo collides with more stentorian gestures, and the third's "Presto possibile," as in other movements, does not lead in the expected directions, at times seeming to leap off of compositional cliffs. The hair stood on end, and a good time was had by all, including the performers, who stood New-Century-style through the duration.

Hyo-shin Na's *Song of the Beggars* (1998) was a more modest undertaking. A short, single-movement, which was explained to be a representation of the spirit of Korean mendicants, who howl their wheedling wails best when totally ashamed of their plight. What was heard after an initial solemn sustain was a muscular, refreshing, surprising caterwauling worthy of a George Crumb or Elliot Carter, at times with an every-person-for-themselves attitude as a later-day Charles Ives. Alas in no case were program notes provided during the concert to further enlighten with respect to these fine works.

The second half of the program was given over to the massive *String Quintet in C Major* (1828) of Schubert, where Jeanrenaud joined the quartet as the foundation of the music as the lower cellist. Often the composer handles this second player almost as a seated string-bassist, with the upper voices bowed and the lowest pizzicato, or at least in a decidedly different music (for the time, anyway). Occasionally first violin is in consort with this voice, with the three remaining as an interior harmonic sandwich.

In gestures all delightful, Schubert finds a maximum of textural and structural variety within received practices and occasionally seems to go beyond the norms of his day, in this opus posthumous effort. Indeed there were some intriguing parallels to be made with the Blitzstein, of all works, with the Hyo-shin Na as the divider. Schubert, like Richard Wagner (this in reference to "Tristan" heard mid-last week) several decades later, takes his time, but of course is vastly clearer. "They don't make pieces like this anymore," said one. Well, at least they don't make them very often.

A c. 50-minute monster, the Quintet ever engages and never lets the listener down. The Quartet and Jeanrenaud were in perfect consort, and it was particularly intriguing to hear the former-Kronos member in such a traditional context. The traditional even shot beyond to the almost archaic, with a stirring rendition of renaissance master Josquin des Pres as an encore.

Chronicle

October 1

Chicago Sinfonietta in the premiere of David N. Baker's *Concertino for Cellular Phones and Symphony Orchestra*. River Forest, IL. "Paul Freeman, the group's music director, told the audience beforehand, 'This is a great moment in history, when we can say to you, 'Ladies and gentlemen, turn on your cellphones..' A device similar to a traffic light signaled the audience members to activate their rings -- red for the balcony, green for the orchestra seats -- at various points in the piece. An assistant conductor, Terrance Gray, followed the score and activated the lights. Four amplified mobile phones were onstage. One, operated by a teaching assistant at Indiana, Aaron Vandermeer, was programmed with Mr. Baker's main tune and well-known classical themes like the *William Tell* gallop and a motif from the last movement of Brahms's *Symphony No. 4*. The other three cellphonists onstage played random rings, sometimes timed to destroy a pastoral melody here or there. Mr. Freeman held a brief practice session before the downbeat. 'You may use as much imagination or as little as you like, he said. 'We want to be very disciplined about this,' he added. 'You are really not to perform until you see your light.' The rehearsal was sloppy: many rings continued past the light. . . . The score was filled with classical tunes suggested by a ring-tone Web site, including fragments from Strauss's *Don Juan*, Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra*, a Brahms symphony and a snippet of *Scheherazade* by Rimsky-Korsakov. At one point, Mr. Baker tuned the tables. Oboes and flutes imitated a cell ring. The tuba groaned with irritation. . . Freeman put the work in the context of music with random elements, like John Cage's *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* for 12 radios, and pieces by Charles Ives that have unrelated passages running simultaneously. Mr. Freeman said he had gotten the idea for the composition while sitting in an airport in Prague, where he is chief conductor of the Czech National Symphony Orchestra (which is expected to perform the piece in December). About 100 people were there, most of them talking on cellphones. 'I thought, 'Darn, if you can't beat them, join them,'" Mr. Freeman said. He approached several composers, including Mr. Baker, 74, who is also director of the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra 'My first inclination was to ask him what he was smoking,' Mr. Baker said. . . 'If you call me and ask me to do something with flushed toilets, count me out'" [Daniel J. Wakin, The New York Times, 10/3/06].

October 3

Inaugural concert of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music in its new performance space at 50 Oak Street, including David Conte's *Invocation to the Muses*, Lou Harrison's *Scenes From Nek Chand*, William Bolcom's *Graceful Ghost Rag*, and Ernst Toch's *Five Pieces for Wind Instruments and Percussion*. San Francisco Conservatory, San Francisco, CA.

Festival of New Trumpet Music. Makor, New York, NY.

70th Birthday of Steve Reich. *Next Wave: Steve Reich @ 70. Piano Phase, Come Out, Violin Phase, Clapping Music, and Variations for Vibes, Piano and Strings*. Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York, NY. "Reich's music . . . was so compelling and original in its day that it still threatens to distract attention from whatever movements a choreographer may have devised" [John Rockwell, The New York Times, 10/5/06].

October 4

San Francisco Symphony receives a \$10,000,000 challenge grant from Richard Goldman. San Francisco, CA.

October 10

Marin Symphony performs Ottorino Respighi's *The Pines of Rome*, and music of Grieg and Rossini. October 10, Veterans Memorial Auditorium, San Rafael, CA.

Merce Cunningham Dance Company dances to Mikel Rouse's *eyeSpace*, plus Conlon Nancarrow's *Studies for Player Piano* [not further specified], and music of David Behrman and Takehisa Kosugi "[A] Mikel Rouse score set to shuffle mode on individual iPods, was the novelty, and an appealing one. . . . Rouse's score blends rock and folk-rockish vocals with electronic instrumentals and an urban soundscape. . . . 'All the audience members have their own secret, their own special version,' Mr. Rouse was quoted as saying in *Time Out New York*. It was the purest realization of Mr. Cunningham's chance aesthetic, the ultimate in intimacy. But my reservation is this: Mr. Rouse and Stephan Moore, seated at keyboards by the stage, chose to add a general sonic racket through loudspeakers (city noises, subway announcements) that was audible through the earphones. Maybe for some this further juxtaposition of public and private was interesting" [John Rockwell, The New York Times, 10/12/06].

Death of Edgar [Ed] E. Summerlin [b. Marianna, FL], of pneumonia associated with cancer treatments, at 78. Rhinebeck, NY. Summerlin . . . wrote some of the first jazz . . . for church services. . . . [He] . . . founded the jazz program at the City College of New York and . . . composed *Requiem for Mary Jo*, considered one of the earliest examples of liturgical jazz, in 1959. . . . Summerlin was a graduate of Central Missouri State University and received a master's degree from the Eastman School of Music in Rochester. He taught at North Texas State College, then at City College from 1971 to 1989. Active in the avant-garde scene of the 1960's, he performed with leading jazz figures, including Eric Dolphy and Ron Carter" [Stuart Lavietes, The New York Times, 10/24/06].

October 12

Death of Joseph Primavera, of lung cancer, at 80. Upper Darby, PA. "[He was] music director of the Philadelphia Youth Orchestra for 51 years" [Gayle Ronan Sims, The Philadelphia Inquirer, 10/17/06].

October 13

Four-hour Steve Reich marathon, including *Pendulum Music*, *Proverb*, *Marimba Phase*, *Clapping Music*, *Eight Lines*, *Vermont Counterpoint*, *New York Counterpoint*, plus Michael Gordon's *Yo Shakespeare* and Caleb Burhan's *Amidst Neptune*. "[F]or some composers it is Mr. Reich, more than Arnold Schoenberg, who has pointed the way to the music of the future" Anne Midgette, The New York Times, 10/17/06].

October 14

San Francisco Composers Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Mark Alburger and John Kendall Bailey, in Alburger's *Suite ("Sol[ar]")*, David Graves's *Yearnings of a Middle Aged Composer About to Be Drowned*, Martha Stoddard's *Parodies*, Beeri Moalem's *Avninu*, Allan Crossman's *Flyer*, and Philip Freihofner music for baritone and oboe. October 14, Old First Church, San Francisco, CA.

October 16

Valery Gergiev conducts the Kirov Orchestra in Dmitri Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 11*. Zellerbach Hall, Berkeley, CA. "[T]he Shostakovich was marked by a full range of cinematic moods and colors. . . . Gergiev charted the symphony's hour-long dramatic course with unerring directness" [Joshua Kosman, San Francisco Chronicle, 10/18/06].

Santa Rosa Symphony in Dmitri Shostakovich's *Festive Overture*, Sergei Prokofiev's *Piano Concerto No 2*, and music of Tchaikovsky. Santa Rosa, CA.

October 17

Harold Pinter performs friend and fellow Nobel laureate Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*. Royal Court Theater, London, UK. "Pinter is now 76, and has battled cancer of the esophagus. He said last year that he would not write any more plays" [Alan Cowell, The New York Times, 20/21/06].

Death of Winifred Baker, at 92. Dalbeattie, UK. "Baker . . . taught at Dominican University in San Rafael for 50 years . . . founded the Winifred Baker Chorale in 1958 and conducted the San Francisco Civic Chorale for more than 30 years" [Carolyn Jones, San Francisco Chronicle, 10/30/06].

October 18

Death of Anna Russell, at 94. Bateman's Bay, Australia. "[She was] the prima donna of operatic parody" [Edward Rothstein, The New York Times, 10/20/06].

Jon Gibson's *Violet Fire*. Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York, NY. "Ana Zorana Brajovic and a dozen accomplished local freelance musicians made the most of Mr. Gibson's simple, colorful melodies, with playing that was unfailingly secure and attractive" [Steve Smith, The New York Times, 10/20/06].

October 19

Diamanda Galas's *Defixiones: Orders from the Dead*, an 80-minute memorial tribute to the Armenian, Greek, and Assyrian victims of the Turkish genocide. Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA. "Galas has been a pitiless virtuoso of two emotinal realms: rage and grief. Given the stage of things, she doesn't look ready to run out of material anytime soon. . . . [Her] work . . . was at once new and wrenchingly familiar . . . deploy[ing] all the darkly expressionistic musical resources in her considerable arsenal -- from operatic shrieks to guttural growls, with stops in between for lullabies, ululations and simple (and not so simple) recitation. . . . Galas used these techniques as she always has, to craft a dark and theatrically potent howl of defiance and despair. Her work is not for the faint of heart. But it's not necessarily for the uninitiated, either" [Joshua Kosman, San Francisco Chronicle, 10/21/06].

Leon Fleisher in excerpts from Claude Debussy's *Preludes* and Igor Stravinsky's *Serenade in A*. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY.

Prokofiev's *Alexander Nevsky* performed to the movie by the New York Philharmonic. Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY.

October 20

San Francisco Symphony in Dmitri Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 10*, Osvaldo Golijov's *Last Round*, and music of Saint-Saens. October 20, Davies Hall, San Francisco, CA.

October 21

Deborah Voigt, with a "svelte new figure" sings in Lyric Opera of Chicago's production of Richard Strauss's *Salome*. Chicago, IL. Voigt used to joke that . . . the 'Dance of the Seven Veils' would have to be tuned into the 'Dance of the Seventy-Seven Veils'" [Anthony Tommasini, The New York Times, 10/23/06].

Steve Reich's *Electric Counterpoint, Music for 18 Musicians, Different Trains*, and *Daniel Variations*, with Pat Metheny, Kronos Quartet, Steve Reich and Musicians, and Synergy Vocals. Carnegie Hall, New York. "Kronos Quartet . . . gave a searing account of *Different Trains*. . . . The tensions and painful juxtapositions in *Different Trains* are mirrored and amplified in Mr. Reich's latest score, *Daniel Variations* (2006), a memorial to Daniel Pearl, the Wall Street Journal reporter who was murdered by jihadists in Pakistan in 2002. Mr. Reich uses ominous texts from the biblical Book of Daniel, and brief quotations from Mr. Pearl, who is also characterized more abstractly in the soaring violin writing (he was a violinist) in the second and fourth movements. The work is scored for a huge ensemble: six percussionists form Mr. Reich's group, as well as Synergy Vocals (four voices), four pianists, a string quartet and two clarinets., with Brad Lubman conducting. The first and third movements, which quote the biblical texts, are Mr. Reich at his darkest: the piano chords clash in ways he has always avoided in his overwhelmingly consonant music. His trademark rhythmic figuration is plentiful, but is the backdrop rather than the surface. The movements based on Mr. Pearl's words strive to be brighter, mainly through the sting writing. But Mr. Reich is clearly wary of facile optimism: the finale, in which the keyboard clashes of the opening movement return, has a nightmarish quality, and ends abruptly" [Allan Kozinn, The New York Times, 10/24/06].

October 22

Alice and Ravi Coltrane. New Jersey Performing Arts Center, NJ. "In 1983 . . . Coltrane, the widow of John Coltrane, established the Sai Anantam ashram in Agoura, CA, where she is known as Swamini A.C. Turiyasangitananda. The Vedic scriptures of ancient India are studied there, as well as scriptures from the Bible, and Buddhist and Islamic texts . . . Coltrane has performed a few times in recent years with her son, the saxophonist Ravi Coltrane" [Ben Ratliff, The New York Times, 10/24/06].

Steve Reich's *Drumming Cello Counterpoint*, and *Piano Phase*. Zankel Hall, New York, NY. "Few of his works have slipped as fully into the mainstream as this 1971 percussion score . . . but I have never heard an account as powerful and hard-driven as the one Steve Reich and Musicians gave here" [Allan Kozinn, The New York Times, 10/22/06].

Leon Botstein conducts the American Symphony Orchestra and the Concert Chorale of New York in Alexander Zemlinsky's *Psalm 23*. Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY.

October 23

Vladimir Ashkenazy conducts the NHK Symphony Orchestra in Toru Takemitsu's *A Flock Descends Into the Pentagonal Garden*, Maurice Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloe Suites*, and Béla Bartók's *Piano Concerto No. 3*. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY.

Valery Gergiev conducts the Kirov Orchestra in four Dmitri Shostakovich symphonies in two days -- *No. 6, 11, 12, and 14* -- continuing a cycle begun in the spring of the complete 15 works. Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY. The second program is on October 24.

October 26

Composer Portrait: John Zorn. *Eloges (Odes and Epitaphia for Medieval Ensemble, Shabboleth, Fourth Litany for Heliogabalus, fay ce que voudras, and Evocation of a Neophyte and How the Secrets of the Black Arts Were Revealed Unto Her by the Demon Baphomet*. Miller Theatre, Columbia University, New York, NY.

October 27

Katharina Otto-Bernstein's film *Absolute Wilson*, about Robert Wilson, opens. New York, NY.

October 28

Deutsche Oper Berlin reinstates their version of W.A. Mozart's *Idomeneo*, featuring the severed heads of Muhammad, Jesus and Buddha. Berlin, Germany.

Doug Varone and Dancers perform to Philip Glass's *The Light*, Prokofiev's *Waltz Suite* from *Romeo and Juliet*, and Arvo Part's *Te Deum*. Joyce Theatre, New York, NY. Also October 29.

Steve Reich's *Clapping Music, Tehillim, and You Are (Variations)*. Alice Tully Hall, New York, NY. "In *You Are (Variations)*, he drew three aphoristic text fragments from sacred sources; the fourth comes from Wittgenstein Rippling percussion and stuttering tones . . . a quotation of . . . *L'homme arme* and funky rhythms based on the music of James Brown . . . revealed the work as one of Mr. Reich's most radiant, inviting creations" [Steve Smith, The New York Times, 10/ 31/ 06].

October 29

Mark Alburger's *Business As Usual* and *Cats, Dogs, and Divas* (Harriet March Page). Goat Hall, San Francisco, CA.

Benjamin Hochman performs Alban Berg's *Piano Sonata*. Metropolitan Museum, New York, NY.

Evan Hughes sings Eric Ewazen's *To Cast a Shadow Again*. St Bartholomew's Church, New York, NY.

Valery Gergiev conducts the Kirov Orchestra in Dmitri Shostakovich *Symphony No. 8 and 13*, completing a cycle begun in the spring of the complete 15 works. Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY.

Comment

By the Numbers

Amount of space given over to a review of the San Francisco Conservatory's inaugural concert for its new performance space in the San Francisco Chronicle's October 5, 2006, Datebook front page.

2.25 x 11 inches = 24.75 square inches

Amount of space given over to a review of an old-style mariachi ensemble in a strip mall in San Pablo, CA, in the San Francisco Chronicle's October 5, 2006, Datebook front page.

9 x 13 inches = 117 square inches

Tenures of Philadelphia Orchestra conductors

Leopold Stokowski	29
Eugene Ormandy	44
Riccardo Muti	12
Wolfgang Sawallisch	10
Christophe Eschenbach	5

Item

The humble trombone, of all things . . . Charlie Vernon . . . bass trombonist . . . signed autographs for 45 minutes: for one late September night, he was the Elvis of the brass set. . . .

Daniel J. Wakin
The New York Times, 10/15/06

["humble"?!
who? - ed.]

Lucille Rollins died not quite two years ago . . . [Sonny] Rollins . . . wistfully remember[s] . . . "a perfect existence," in which Mrs. Rollins handled everything but the music.

Nate Chinen
The New York Times, 10./21/06

No one can believe that Tower Records, the retail chain that has dominated the market for decades, is going out of business. The bankrupt operation's assets were sold to a liquidation company early this month for more than \$130 million. All 89 of its United States stores are closing, probably by the end of the year

Anthony Tommasini
The New York Times, 10/25/06

The members of the national dance troupe of Iraq are performers without an audience. They rehearse daily, but hardly ever put on a show.

Michael Luo
The New York Times, 10/30/06

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