

# **21ST CENTURY MUSIC**

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Prospective contributors should consult "The Chicago Manual of Style," 13th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) and "Words and Music," rev. ed. (Valley Forge, PA: European American Music Corporation, 1982), in addition to back issues of this journal. Typescripts should be sent to 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC, P.O. Box 2842, San Anselmo, CA 94960. e-mail: mus21stc@aol.com. Materials for review may be sent to the same address.

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January 2007

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# On *The First Emperor*

TAN DUN

It seems like nature is the huge orchestra of the gods. Although I conduct all kinds of orchestras around the world, I think the water and the stone and the ceramics -- all those things -- are the most charming sound-colors for me. . . .

The first time I heard classical music, I was quite shocked. Now I[']m always trying to have these two [musics] -- Western and Chin[ese] -- all living together as one in my heart. . . .

[Emperor Ch'in] unified the country and people -- the language, the currency, the measurement system. He was still thinking, "Can I find a music -- an anthem -- to unify people?" Because without [the] ability to unify the people's heart --how could you unify the country? . . .

[Music] is a kind of a metaphor -- a spiritual metaphor -- for him to find the destiny -- a spirit of a nature. It's a very romantic story through a musician, his daughter, and himself. .

[My home region of Hunan, China] is [the] memory of my childhood, especially the music from this village. The people, the water, the architecture is very deeply in my mind. The music is happening everywhere, if you pay attention. Immediately, it's so colorful -- everything is so colorful!

I put three motives as . . . black, white, and red. And I put the three motive[s] as . . . basic seed[s from which] . . . to compose. . . . For ritual music, for example, I can do [demonstrates a tritone passage]. It's very interesting. And secondly, can be developed as a very interesting, beautiful, but strange -- almost like an ancient Balinese gamelan, but even more twisted -- sort of beauty. . . .

Wonderful, those people [who sing in the old teahouses] who start to sing. I remember the first one singing like an extraordinary "rap" face -- Very, very high [demonstrates an ornamented passage from high to low]. Very, very high to very, very low. Always like "high / low, high and low, high and low." . . .

Western opera, to me -- it's just like Eastern opera, now: very familiar. . . . And so I have a kind of a wish -- to make this (my past experience and my present experience) -- [to] add them together as one experience on stage in the Met. And I hope my Eastern opera kind of experience and my Western knowledge will be melded together very chemically to become something new.

[transcript excerpts from *Live at the Met*, 1/13/07]

# Concert Reviews

## Cultural Learnings of San Francisco Symphony for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan

### BORAT GEORGESTAN

San Francisco Symphony, conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas, in Steve Reich's *Variations for Winds, Strings, and Keyboards*, Arnold Schoenberg's *Brettli Lieder*, and Gustav Mahler's *Symphony No. 4*. November 2, Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

Am walking into San Francisco Symphony on 2 November Davies Hall and is all Jewish composers! Jewish conductor, too -- Michael Tilson Thomas! Is good show, anyway!

Start with Steve Reich, who used drive cab San Francisco and maybe still should. Piece go on and on -- called *Variations for Winds, Strings, and Keyboard*, but mostly variations in how long oboe and flute players can play without passing out. Is some workout! Those woodwinds is amped, along with two pianos and three make-electrified organs, play on and on busy music make good, while strings and sometimes brass play sustained chords beautiful. Woman behind me say after it is over, "Thank God!" Funny, remind of woman who during Boston premiere of Steve *Four Organs* went front stage took off shoe yelled "I can't stand it." Make good!

Arnold Schoenberg, that troublemaker, up next. His *Brettli-Lieder* make good -- don't sound like him at all! Here he sound like charming cabaret nightclub composer (explain why he got music jobs in first place) -- totally delightful! -- not like nasty atonal-12-tone "who-cares-if-you-listen" guy later became maybe. Maybe he progressive here after all and don't know it. Piece sound very fresh and orchestrated by Patrick Davin (is Jewish? don't know!), in style maybe of group Schoenberg had at cabaret (maybe he only write piano-vocal originally). Oh and sung wonderful by Measha Brueggersgosman. What kind of name for black woman from Canada?! She total divine singer! Built, too, hubba-hubba! Bouncy red dress! Sell songs to audience with winning smile eye movements body movements hubba-hubba! Make good!

All memorized, too. Wow. Plus featured in Gustav Mahler, too (not memorized, though, but still make good). She look and sound like cross between Bessie Smith and Pamela Z. Nice hair, too! Skyscraper. Have to wait a long time to hear her in Mahler *Symphony No. 4*, though, because singer doesn't sing until last movement, so she doesn't even get sit on stage and wait until halfway through. We have listen three lovely movements with just orchestra first. Start with jingle bellsy snow music like home, then complex called "sonata movement." Brilliant! But can barely follow.

Then diabolical called "scherzo" where concertmaster first violinist have two violins! One tuned wrong too high (it sit all by self on own chair for while before he use) for make diabolical music by Alexander Barantschik. Is he diabolical Jewish, too? Don't know!

Third movement like heaven, slow, nod-off music, but then wake with start as angels in horns and timpani wow. Then Measha sing her song. Wow. Is child's heaven with lyrics like "The wine costs nothing in the heavenly cellar. The angels bake the bread." Am not making this up! Wow! Sound like home, except for "costs nothing" part. Am heading home now! Will tell all Kazakhstan is glorious concert for make benefit!

## Scots Guard at Marin Symphony

### PHILLIP GEORGE

Marin Symphony, conducted by Alasdair Neale, in Peter Maxwell Davies's *An Orkney Wedding, with Sunrise*. November 5, Veterans Auditorium, San Rafael, CA.

Those unaware of the Scottish theme of the Marin Symphony's November 5 concert were set straight by the stirring sounds of bagpipes and drums at the entrance to Veterans Auditorium.

Kilts and pageantry were in evidence to set the stage for Peter Maxwell Davies's *An Orkney Wedding, with Sunrise*. Davies, an avant-garde English composer whose works such as *Antechrist* (1967) and *Eight Songs for a Mad King* (1969) impressively assaulted in the 60's, turned relatively more accessible thereafter upon his move to the paradoxically inaccessible Orkney Island of Hoy, that severe-weather region north of the Scottish mainland. From this vantage point, "Max" has offered symphonies and occasional pieces, including the charming *Wedding*, which begins in orchestral fireworks and then settles into tunefulness, before offering up an arresting climax that features a bagpiper (in this case the impressive young talent Colin Berta) processing to the stage from the back of the hall. The orchestra, gamely conducted by Alasdair Neale, was in perfect rhythmic and tonal synchronization with the offstage bagpipe -- no mean trick, considering that the latter was not conceived for use in such a large scale ensemble, and certainly not at such a distance.

## From Absurdity to Zorn

MARK ALBURGER

*Composer Portrait: John Zorn.* November 12, Hertz Hall, Berkeley, CA.

I first came across John Zorn's music on a Nonesuch cassette tape (yes, there were commercial cassette tapes back then!) -- can't-judge-a-book-by-its-cover thing -- in 1986. It was *The Big Gundown: John Zorn Plays the Music of Ennio Morricone*, and the distorted faces on the cover were more evocative of punk rock than contemporary classical music. But I trusted the Nonesuch label, and went for it. I was not disappointed.

Zorn's dangerous, demented, and deranged music has been an important force since the 1970's. As David Bither noted in the Nonesuch notes, "In any given performance, blocks of cacophonous free improvising, horror music themes, bucolic Japanese folk melodies, bebop jazz lines, squealing duck calls or roaring metal guitars might hurtle past. The effect is like watching a chameleon race through a paint box."

Over the years, he has performed with many of the stars of the avant-garde, including vocalist Diamanda Galas, turntablist D.J. Spooky, accordionist Guy Klucsevsek, guitarists Bill Frisell and Fred Frith, harpist Zeena Parkins, violinist Jennifer Choi, cellist Fred Sherry, bassist Greg Cohen, and played in clubs as varied as New York's Knitting Factory, Oakland's DNA Lounge, San Francisco's American Music Hall, and even The Palms in Winters (the little hamlet abutting the inner Coast Range west of UC Davis).

His "game pieces," best-known of which is *Cobra* (also the name of one of his many ensembles), feature Earle-Brown style, aleatory instructions, held aloft by a "conductor," but far more improvisational, in such a manner as recently exemplified by local composer-saxophonist Michael Cooke with the SF Composers Chamber Orchestra, and, by now, many others. His notated music drew enough attention by 1994 to be featured in *Perspectives of New Music*, in an article by Stephen Drury, on the formidable syncretist piano masterpiece, *Carny*, which Drury characterized as "in some respects the most complex piece of music I have performed -- a complexity not just of notes, but of meanings and inferences as well."

By the mid-90's and beyond, Zorn had identified himself with "Radical Jewish Culture," founding groups and characterizing a 205-tune collection as *Masada*, sitting on the floor while conducting, running the experimental music label *Tzadik* (Hebrew for "Righteous Man"), growing his hair long, putting on a little weight, and composing music while watching old episodes of *McHale's Navy*.

So here we are at Berkeley's Hertz Hall for a Cal Performances presentation on November 12, and what's he like now? Well, he's cut his hair and slimmed down again, and still every inch a radical New York insider. "Hey Berkeley!" he smiles and shouts to the audience, like a cheerleader at a Cal game music presentation. He's dressed in orange-red fatigue-style pants which he characterizes as "fall camouflage." He serves as auxiliary stagehand through the course of the evening. The house is well-nigh packed.

However, tellingly, his musicians are arrayed in pretty standard issue (though often striking), new-music concert hall black. There is a traditional program booklet, although, for the third time in recent months reviewing new-music events, Grace Cathedral and Del Sol being the other two, there are no program notes -- is this a trend? And for the first half of the show, the music is not terribly more radical than anything one would hear at SF Contemporary Players or from many other fine Bay Area groups. Somehow, thoughts turned to Terry Riley, who after the at-the-time musical radicalism of the open-ended *In C*, finds himself featured in many new-music concerts in traditionally notated formats in sober, compact time-spans.

True to form, Zorn surrounded himself with among the best-of-the-best in new music, including the radiant flutist Tara Helen O'Connor, the aforementioned Drury, manic percussionist extraordinaire William Winant, the great Cal Arts conductor David Rosenboom, fabulist San Francisco Symphony harpist Karen Gottlieb, and gifted Lynn Morrow, conductor of the Pacific Mozart Ensemble.

The entire program was billed as one large work, *Mysterium*, noted by Zorn as the premiere (a related "Composer Portrait" at Columbia was previously given), consisting of six pieces more-or-less tied to "pagan" themes -- but as Andy Warhol, or someone like him, once said, "Art is what you can get away with," and, by now, Zorn can get away with just about any juxtapositions that he likes, in his hyperecclecticism.

Ensemble-wise, *Orphee* was almost a revisionist spin on the "traditionalist-Pierrot-percussion-ensemble," here given as flute, laptop computer, viola, harp, celesta/harpsichord, and percussion. The work was invigorating, along the lines of related works such as David Graves's *Yearnings of a Middle Aged Composer About to Be Drowned*, heard recently at Old First, where triggered electronic sounds in real-time are simply part of the mix.

Next up was the decidedly nightmarish *Sortilege* (far from the childish *Dreams* of Ravel) in two energetic and unlikely bass clarinetists -- an awesome duo of Michel Lowenstern and Anthony Burr -- who blurtingly intoned like Tibetan Lamas in a sewerpipe and then caterwaulingly wailed extreme high flourishes, all while bobbing up and down choreographically like dachshunds on a dashboard. Entertaining, and related to works given at Composers, Inc. in years past, but with enough differences to make a difference.

Zorn can be categorized as defying categories, and his music can turn on a dime or not, depending on the context. He can be "high-modern" frenetic along the lines of Pierre Boulez and Elliott Carter, and then break into a minimalist riff that could be in a Mills College rendition with Pauline Oliveros. Certainly the collage consciousness of Charles Ives (further amplified by the "quick cuts" of Warner-Brothers-cartoon-composer Carl Stalling) and the love of noise from Edgar Varèse have been ever with him. But Zorn can also stay in a groove, like a mellow version of his minimalist / pop predecessors, and such was the case in *Frammenti del Sappho*, from Pacific Mozart, with what-fragments-of-words-there-were not printed in the program. The sounds were mostly vocalise, lovingly and challengingly delivered by this unusually named group (I've heard far more new music than Mozart from this group, not that I'm complaining, and not a word in their name suggests a fine a cappella vocal group), armed with tuning forks. *Walpurgisnacht* diabolically brought to life a consummate string trio of Choi, violist Richard O'Neill, and Sherry, in some sort of reverse-Satanic-Messiaen evocation in three unacknowledged movements, the last whispering skitteringly into the darkness.

The second half of the program was even more compelling than the first. Steven Drury's consummate performance of [a triangular three-dot glyph] (*fay ce que voudras*) -- after the old French "Do what you will" -- is like a Zorn compendium of license -- delicate, intricate, impossibly fast, jazzy-improvisational figures and clusters; big Claude Debussy *Sunken Cathedral* open fifths; extreme-range Dmitri Shostakovichian doublings, prepared-piano, high-range freneticism a la John Cage, inside-the-piano raspings, strummings, and imposed objects (certain intriguing circular sounds) in the tradition of Henry Cowell and George Crumb. Wow! A piano masterpiece, of impressive coherency/non-coherency, which ended just when it should have, finding its own way in avoiding unconscious cliché and parody.

The afternoon was capped by a resounding mouthful-of-a-title, *Evocation of a Neophyte and How the Secrets of the Black Arts Were Revealed unto Her by the Demon Baphomet*, with a thoughtfully provided reproduction of Aubrey Beardsley's related artwork: *Evocation of a Neophyte and How the Black Art Was Revealed unto Him by the Fiend Asomuel*. The full contingent of the Pacific Mozart Ensemble (heard before only in a fine female sextet lineup), was arrayed semi-circularly (actually more semi-three-sides squarely) behind a wonderful chamber array of contrabassoon, harp (damn! -- he's beaten me to the punch, I still want to write a piece for bassoon, contrabassoon, and harp), and two percussionists, each symmetrically assigned their own double pair of bass drums, tam-tams, chimes, and up-ended brooms (OK, I concede I've never thought about writing for upended brooms, but I have written for their metallic handles).

*Evocation* was a tour-de-force as brilliant as its orchestration. Contrabassoon and harp sounded marvelously together and in consort with Martha Cluver's ethereal amplified solo soprano loveliness, and the glorious sustains and murmurs from Pacific Mozart (again Michael Cooke came to mind, in his impressive work *Music for Humans* with Schola Cantorum). After smashing probably the largest gong peels in memory, I thought percussionists Winant and David Johnson were going to kill the bass drums -- offering them up as violent sacrificial lambs to the black mass slaughter -- and then they moved delicately to tickling the straw-sounds of the witchy brooms -- funny! I hated to leave. This was a concert worth savoring.



# Calendar

January 6

Marin Symphony. Veterans Hall, San Rafael, CA.

Miguel Frasconi. *Intensive Care*. Diapason Gallery, New York, NY. Through January 27. "Intensive Care was originally created for modern dance pioneer Anna Halprin's performance event of the same name. When I first joined Anna, she and her performers were exploring the farthest edges of life, the final moments when a person passes from life into something other than life. I went on to create a music that shared this exploration of extremities, working only with very high and very low sounds. Sounds that approach the point where they are no longer sound. The combination of high and low sounds, with almost no middle range, creates a unique psycho-acoustic effect where each listener can experience their own imagined music. The original work involves very raw and intense emotions, where the performers used their bodies to express the last moments of actually having a body. To support this I made a music that can be experienced not only with one's ears, but with one's entire body. Once this is established, the piece transitions to a music where the body is of no matter. The sounds used are from basic physical elements: air and water, glass and wood, and breath. These sounds are transformed and modified to the point where they are no longer recognized. The installation at Diapason will be a sound-only, site-specific, re-imagining of the original work. The time frame will be expanded to enable a closer hearing of this transition from life to something other than life, from sound to something other than sound" [Miguel Frasconi, internet release].

January 17

Premiere of Robert Ashley's *Concrete*. La MaMa, New York, NY.

January 18

*Women on the Way Festival*, including Mark Alburger's *Cats, Dogs, and Divas* (libretto by Harriet March Page), with Sandra Castleberry, Sarah Hutchinson, Janet Lohr, Susanna Mizell, Maggie Tennenbaum, and Cynthia Weyuker. Dance Mission, San Francisco, CA. Repeated January 19. Other programs through January 28.

January 19

San Francisco Symphony performs music by Stravinsky and Mozart. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

January 28

Noe Valley Chamber Music. Noe Valley Presbyterian Church, 1021 Sanchez, San Francisco, CA.

# Chronicle

November 1

Death of Swiss conductor Silvio Varsivo (b. 2/26/24), after a short illness, at 82. Antwerp, Belgium. "Varsivo conducted . . . the world premiere of Heinrich Sutermeister's *Die Schwarze Spinne*. . . [H]e led the American premiere of Britten's *Midsummer Night's Dream* and the German-language premiere of Prokofiev's *Fiery Angel*" [Anne Midgette, *The New York Times*, 11/3/06].

Meredith Monk's *Impermanence*. BAM Harvey Theater, New York, NY. "The big themes have always been Meredith Monk's concern: birth, womanhood, memory, family, roots, death. And her art has always been a hybrid, mixing dance (the field in which she first became well known, nearly four decades ago) and music and theater and film and photography. . . . [T]he finest moments were hypnotic. . . . *Impermanence* was inspired by the death of her longtime partner, Mieke van Hoek, in 2002. . . . The piece lasts 95 minutes . . . Monk's music has always been seemingly simple, for all the complexity of her ethnically inspired vocal techniques. By now it has evolved, especially in terms of its instrumental layerings and sonic combinations. There's an acoustic piano, an electric keyboard, saxophones and a mouth organ, and a marimba and a vibraphone, along with all manner of sometimes exotic-sounding and looking percussion" [John Rockwell, *The New York Times*, 1/3/06].

November 2

PBS begins broadcasting Michael Tilson Thomas's *Keeping Score*, which will include programs on Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* and Copland and the American Sound.

San Francisco Symphony, conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas, in Steve Reich's *Variations for Winds, Strings, and Keyboards*, Arnold Schoenberg's *Brettli Lieder*, and Gustav Mahler's *Symphony No. 4*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

November 3

Steve Reich's *The Cave* (video by Beryl Korot). Gerald W. Lynch Theater, John Jay College, New York, NY.

Mariss Jansons conducts the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra in Dmitri Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 6* and Richard Strauss's *Four Last Songs* and *Der Rosenkavalier Suite*. "[T]he slow opening movement of the Sixth, a plaintive Largo, suggests that [Shostakovich] was still grappling with inner turmoil and doubt. . . . Is this [final] movement as bluntly comic as it seems, or is it bitterly ironic" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 11/6/06].

November 4

*Elliott Carter: Time Present*, including the composer's *Figment No. 2 -- Remembering Mr. Ives*, *Tempo e Tempi*, *Con Leggerezza Pensoso -- Omaggio a Italo Calvino* (With *Pensive Lightness -- Homage to Italo Calvino*), and a screening of Frank Scheffer's feature film on Carter, *A Labyrinth of Time*. Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY. "Elliott Carter is 97. . . . It was striking . . . to see him presented as a great humanist and friend through pieces he wrote as character portraits for and about specific musicians" [Anne Midgette, *The New York Times*, 11/6/06].

November 5

Marin Symphony, conducted by Alasdair Neale, in Peter Maxwell Davies's *An Orkney Wedding*, with Sunrise. Veterans Auditorium, San Rafael, CA.

November 7

Pianist Joseph Rubenstein's second *Key to the Future Festival*. Howard Skempton's *The Keel Row*, *The Cockfight*, *Late*, and *Toccata*; Leo Orenstein's *Solitude*, Henri Dutilleux's *Jeu de Contraires*, Bruce Stark's *Ode to 'Ode to Joy'*; Fred Hersch's *24 Variations on a Bach Chorale* and Radiohead's *Let Down* (arranged by Christopher O'Riley), with additional pianists Lisa Moore and Blair McMillen "[The] eight aphoristic works by Howard Skempton, [were] couched in the dominant current style, which is to say, a style-agnostic eclecticism. . . . [including] memorials to John Cage and Morton Feldman. *Late* (1992) touches on the mercurial Cage spirit, just as the spare, sustained tones of *Toccata* (1987) evoke Mr. Feldman's insistence on patience as a musical virtue. . . . *Ode* . . . [is] a fantasy . . . couched in jazzy rhythms, rumbling bass figures and a healthy measure of overt virtuosity. It was as if Liszt, while musing on the Beethoven work, were suddenly possessed by the spirit of Art Tatum. . . . McMillen[']s was] a powerhouse account of Fred Hersch. . . . Using 'O Haupt voll Blut und Wunder' from the *St. Matthew Passion* as his theme, Mr. Hersch summons all the classic variation moves: there's a pointillistic variation, a couple in minor keys, several lyrical flights and Schumanesque character pieces, intensely chromatic variations a grand romantic thundering finale. The chorale tune readily sustains all that" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 11/9/06].

November 8

After an on-an-off restitution battle lasting six decades, the Austrian Culture Ministry agrees to return Edvard Munch's *Summer Night on the Beach* to Marina Mahler, granddaughter of Gustav and Alma Mahler, the original owners. Vienna, Austria.

The Who. HP Pavilion, San Jose, CA. "With half the original members dead and a two-hour show based substantially on the band's first new album in 24 years, the Who can be forgiven" [Joel Selvin, San Francisco Chronicle, 11/10/06].

Albert Hague, Dr. Seuss, and Mel Marvin's *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* Hilton Theater, New York, NY. "Rest easy, Grinch-o-philes: the two immortal tunes from the television special, by Albert Hague and Dr. Seuss, are given prominent placement, with the mordant 'You're a Mean One, Mr. Grinch' used in brief sing-along segment" [Charles Isherwood, The New York Times, 11/9/06].

Gustav Klimt's *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer II* sells for \$87.9 million. Christie's, New York, NY.

November 9

*Julius Hemphill: Composer Portraits.* Miller Theater, New York, NY.

November 11

Premiere of Libby Larsen's *Every Man Jack* (libretto by Philip Littell). Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, CA.

The artist once again known as Prince. 3121, Las Vegas, NV.

And You Will know Us By the Trail of Dead and Blood Brothers. Irving Plaza, New York, NY.

Boston Symphony in Béla Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle*, conducted by James Levine. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY.

*Maryinsky Academy of Young Singers Sing Shostakovich: Four Monologues by Pushkin, Six Romances on Texts of Japanese Poets*, incidental songs from *Hamlet*, and *From Jewish Folk Poetry*. Weill Hall, New York, NY. "No one taught the four singers . . . not to emote. No one dissuaded them from using their chest voices, particularly not the mezzo-soprano Ekaterina Semenchuk, who positively wallowed in her rich lower register. It must be fun to be a mezzo in a country that appreciates a woman with some meat on her sound. . . . Shostakovich had an ear for words and voice, and good taste in texts. The bleak expressive power . . . came across loud and clear. . . . From Jewish Folk Poetry . . . offers eight gut-wrenching songs followed by three paeans to the joys of life in the collective, as acidly jolly as if the music had inhaled helium" [Anne Midgette, The New York Times, 11/13/06].

*Composer Portrait: John Zorn.* November 12, Hertz Hall, Berkeley, CA.

November 13

Panic! at the Disco. Theater at Madison Square Garden, New York, NY.

November 15

Premiere of Kevin Volans's *Atlantic Crossing* by the San Francisco Symphony. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

November 19

Twyla Tharp's *The Times They Are A-Changing'*, to music of Bob Dylan, closes. Brooks Atkinson Theater, New York, NY. "The show, which Ms. Tharp worked on incessantly from its run at the Old Globe Theater in San Diego almost up to its opening last month [in New York] will have played 63 performances on Broadway when it closes. It lost its entire investment of \$8.5 million" [Campbell Robertson, The New York Times, 11/9/06].

Cellist Ralph Kirshbaum and pianist Peter Jablonski in Sergei Prokofiev's *Sonata in C*, Shostakovich's *Sonata in D Minor*, Sergei Rachmaninoff's *Vocalise*, and Claude Debussy's *Sonata for Cello and Piano*. Frick Collection, New York, NY.

Lark Quartet in Peter Schickele's *String Quartet No. 2 ("In Memoriam")*, Paul Moravec's *Atmosfera a Villa Aurelia* and *Vince & Jan: 1945*, Daniel Bernard Roumain's *String Quartet No. 5 ("Rosa Parks")*, five songs by George Gershwin, and Giovanni Sollima's *Federico II*. Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY.

November 20

Death of filmmaker Robert Altman, of complications of cancer, at 81. Cedars Sinai Medical Center, Los Angeles, CA.

November 22

David Robertson conducts the San Francisco Symphony in Charlie Chaplin's *City Lights*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

November 23

Death of Betty Comden (b. Elizabeth Cohen, 5/3/17, New York, NY), of heart failure, at 89. New York, NY. "Comden . . . with her long-time collaborator Adolph Green, wrote the lyrics and often the librettos for some of the most celebrated musicals of stage and screen. . . . During a professional partnership that lasted for more than 60 years, and which finally ended with Mr. Green's death in 2002, the Comden-Green blend of sophisticated wit and musical know-how lit up stage shows like *On the Town*, *Wonderful Town*, *Peter Pan*, and *Bells Are Ringing*. Their Hollywood credits included the screenplays for two landmark film musicals, *Singin' in the Rain* and *The Band Wagon*. Through the years they worked with composers like Leonard Bernstein, Cy Coleman, Jule Styne and Andre Previn, creating songs like *New York, New York*, *The Party's Over*, *It's Love*, and *Some Other Time*. . . . The title of one of their own songs, from *Bells Are Ringing*, summed up their joint career: it was truly a *Perfect Relationship* in which they met daily, most often in Ms. Comden's living room, either to work on a show, to trade ideas or even just talk about the weather. 'We stare at each other,' Ms. Comden said in a 1977 interview with *The New York Times*. 'We meet whether or not we have a project, just to keep up a continuity of working. There are long periods when nothing happens, and it's just boring and disheartening. But we have a theory that nothing's wasted, even those long days of staring at one another. You sort of have to believe that, don't you? That you had to go through all that to get to the day when something did happen.' Ms. Comden, slim, dark-haired and composed, was the ideal counter-balance to the often ruffled, wild-haired and restless Mr. Green. Sometimes, during discussions, Ms. Comden would finish one of his sentences, or vice versa. Songs and shows grew that way too, although the story was always the starting point. 'The book comes first,' Ms. Comden said in the 1977 interview, recalling how the song 'Just in Time' took shape. 'At some point when we were working on *Bells Are Ringing*, she said, 'Jule Styne wrote that tune. Dee da dum, da dee da dee da dum. We all agreed it had to be in the show somewhere, but for months we couldn't find a place for it or even a title, but Jule was playing it all over town at parties, calling it 'Dee Da Dum.' And that became the official title until the point where, rewriting part of the book one day, the situation was there, and we finally wrote the words to fit 'Dee Da Dum.' The starting point for their partnership was Greenwich Village where, in the late 1930s, they joined up with another aspiring entertainer named Judy Holliday and two other friends to form a cabaret act. They called themselves the Revuers and persuaded Max Gordon, the owner of a club called the Village Vanguard, that their act would be good for business. It was. The Revuers opened at the Vanguard in 1939, performing material that included freewheeling sketches like 'The Banshee Sisters' and 'The Baroness Bazooka,' a zany operetta, and frequently accompanied at the piano by one of Mr. Green's friends, a talented young musician named Leonard Bernstein, who dropped in often enough to be taken for part of their act. The act's success earned them a movie offer, and the Revuers traveled west in hopes of finding instant fame in *Greenwich Village*, a 1944 movie starring Carmen Miranda and Don

Ameche, in which the newcomers turned out to be virtually invisible. Ms. Comden and Mr. Green came back to New York, where they resumed working at the Vanguard and other clubs. It wasn't long before they heard from Mr. Bernstein, their erstwhile accompanist, who said he'd been working on a ballet with Jerome Robbins and that the two of them had decided that the ballet, called *Fancy Free*, had the makings of a Broadway show. They were looking for someone to write the book and lyrics. Ms. Comden and Mr. Green jumped at the chance and jumped into the limelight with their work on the show. The result, *On the Town* . . . was a smash. Both Ms. Comden and Mr. Green appeared in the show, he as one of the sailors and she as Claire de Loone, an amorous anthropologist. New Yorkers . . . were soon humming . . . 'New York, New York, It's a helluva town.' . . . Comden . . . studied drama at New York University, graduating in 1938. By that time she had changed her surname to Comden, had had nose surgery to make her look more stageworthy [!], had acted with the Washington Square Players and had met and become friends with Mr. Green, another aspiring actor. . . . Comden married Steven Kyle, a designer and businessman, in 1942. He died in 1979, and she never remarried. They had two children . . . . After the success of *On the Town*, Ms. Comden and Mr. Green tried their hands at writing the book for another Broadway musical, *Billion Dollar Baby*, which opened in 1945, had a score by Morton Gould, [and] choreography by Mr. Robbins . . . Their early Hollywood credits included *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* (1949)" [Robert Berkvist, *The New York Times*, 11/24/06].

November 30

Gunther Schuller conducts the Mingus Orchestra. Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY.

## Comment

### By the Numbers

*Seeds of a Classical Collection for the Musically Literate Child*, as recommended by Anthony Tommasini [The New York Times, 11/3/06].

J.S. Bach - *Brandenburg Concertos*  
W.A. Mozart - *The Magic Flute*  
Ludwig van Beethoven - *Symphony No. 5*  
Edvard Grieg - *Peer Gynt*  
Giacomo Puccini - *La Boheme*  
Peter Tchaikovsky - *The Nutcracker*  
Igor Stravinsky - *Firebird Suite*  
Aaron Copland - *Appalachian Spring Suite*

Number of paragraphs before the principal composer, Mel Marvin, is mentioned in a review of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* [The New York Times, 11/9/06]

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### Items

Arnold Sundgaard, a librettist and playwright who worked with such leading composers as Kurt Weill, Douglas Moore and Alec Wilder . . . has died. He was 96.

Mr. Sundgaard died Oct. 22 at a retirement home in Dallas, according to his daughter, Joy Kaiser. The cause was congestive heart failure, she said.

He was best known for his collaboration with Weill on *Down in the Valley*, an opera of 1948 with melodies based on American folk songs. It premiered at Indiana University and later was staged by a small opera company in New York City. It also aired on PBS television stations. . . .

Mr. Sundgaard collaborated with Moore on several operas including *Giants in the Earth*, a 1951 drama based on the novel by Norwegian writer O.E. Rolvaag about immigrants in the Dakota Territory.

Mary Rourke  
Los Angeles Times, 11/10/06

## Opportunities

Music Omi International Music Residency Program is now accepting applications for the summer 2007 session, August 2 through August 19 (NYC concert August 20). Performing composers, improvising musicians, and sound artists from all musical disciplines and backgrounds who wish to take part in a collaborative music-making residency are encouraged to apply. No application fee. Full room and board will be provided, but residents must provide their own travel. The beautiful Omi campus is located in upstate New York. Summer 2007 Guest Mentor: Adam Simmons of Australia. Visit <http://www.artomi.org/music.htm> for more information and application instructions. Deadline: February 1 (postmark) Jeffrey Lependorf, Director; Music Omi International Musicians Residency Program; Omi International Arts Center; 55 Fifth Avenue, 15th Floor; New York, NY 10003; USA; [www.artomi.org](http://www.artomi.org)

## Recordings

Akon. *Konvicted*. SRC/Universal. The Senegalese-American singer Akon has figured out how to stay out of the dreaded world-music category. He moved from Senegal to New Jersey when he was 7, and after a somewhat successful criminal career (he served a sentence for car theft), he began an unlikely -- and so far hugely successful -- musical one" [Kalefa Sanneh, The New York Times, 11/13/06].

The Game. *Doctor's Advocate*. Geffen. "Why you hate the Game? That question is the title of the last track . . . He's not really looking for answers, but answers aren't hard to find. Why would anyone hate this guy? Well, maybe because he's an overbearing braggart, a tireless name-dropper, a mealy-mouthed provocateur, a sluggish rapper, a witless wag and a shameless sycophant. For a start. And yet, barring some last-minute surprise, he has made the best hip-hop album of the year" [Kalefa Sanneh, The New York Times, 11/9/06].

Yusuf Islam (formerly Cat Stevens). *An Other Cup*. YA/Atlantic.

Neil Young and Crazy Horse. *Live at the Fillmore East: March 6 & 7, 1970*. Reprise. "A Fresh Blast of Yesteryear's Raw, Slobby Sound" [The New York Times].

# Writers

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