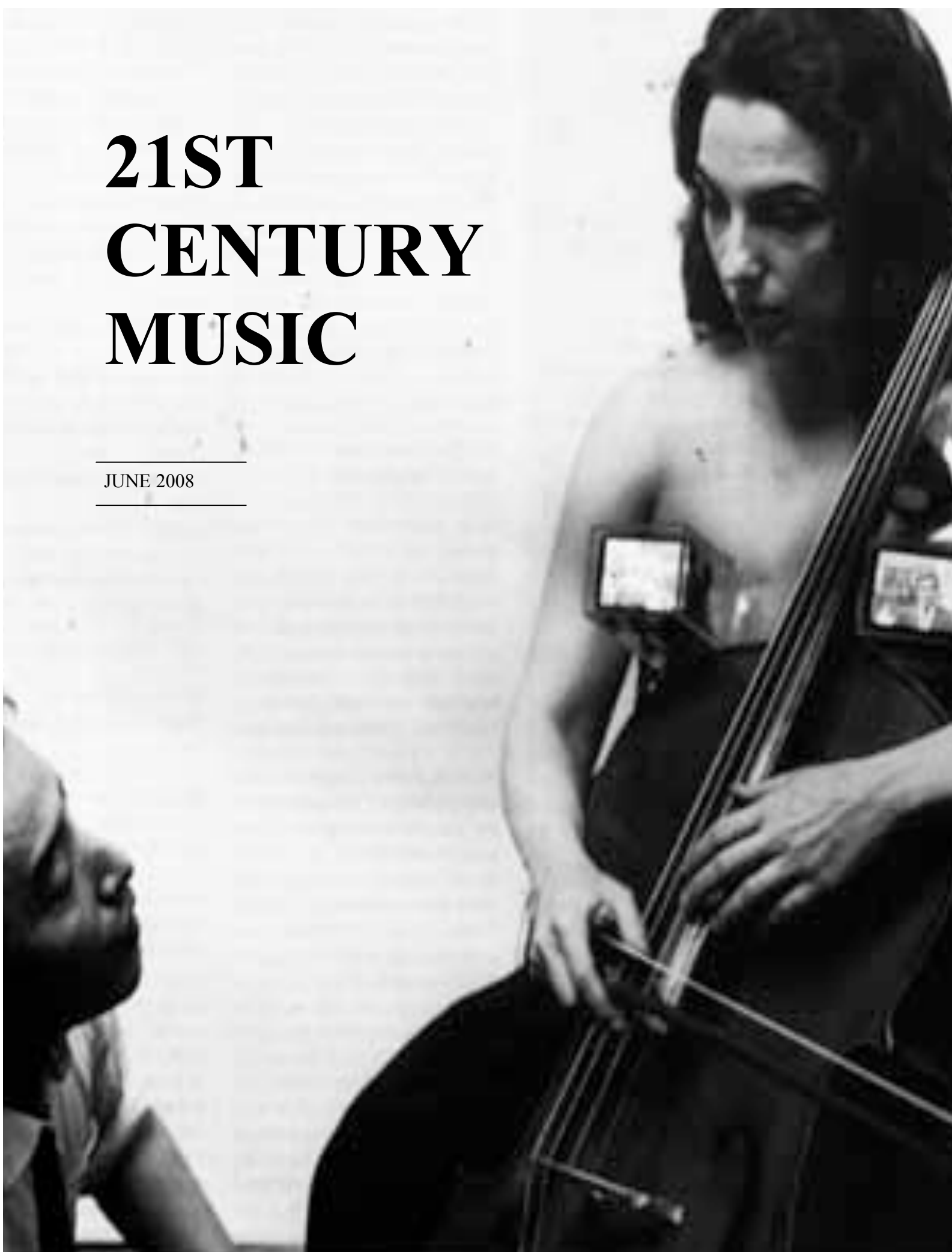


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Songs of Igor Stravinsky

After RICHARD TARUSKIN

The below is a partial repost re-organization of Richard Taruskin's *In Stravinsky's Songs, the True Man, No Ghostwriters* (The New York Times, 4/13/08).

That paucity is a telling fact in itself. When we think of art song, we think of lieder, pre-eminently the genre of intimate disclosure, and intimate disclosure . . . was anything but Stravinsky's bag.

Besides, his father, Fyodor Stravinsky -- a stern, unbending figure toward whom the future composer harbored feelings far more complicated than the Freudian minimum -- was a famous singer. Any wonder then that Stravinsky became the greatest of all composers of ballet: the one music-theatrical genre that excludes singers? Or that when he finally did write a great opera, it would be about King Oedipus?

But skimpy though it is, the list of Stravinsky's songs is unusually comprehensive. It covers all phases of his career and includes both his earliest extant work and his last finished composition.

The early item, *Storm Cloud*, was composed in 1902 on assignment for Fyodor Akimenko — a pupil of Stravinsky's eventual teacher, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov — to whom Stravinsky had been farmed out for preliminary (actually, remedial) instruction. It is a thoroughly conventional setting of a short poem by Pushkin, the sort of piece every 14- or 15-year-old composer-in-training turns out. But Stravinsky wrote it at 19. A wunderkind he was not. . . .

That intimate portrait has many earlier counterparts among Stravinsky's songs. The second in order of composition, *How the Mushrooms Prepared for War*, is a setting of a nursery rhyme every Russian child of Stravinsky's generation knew by heart, cast with hilarious incongruity as a huge concert aria for bass voice. It turns out to be a salad of allusions to Fyodor Stravinsky's favorite opera roles, composed in memoriam in 1904 and dedicated to the composer's best friend at the time, Andrey Rimsky-Korsakov, a son of Stravinsky's surrogate father.

Its sentimental significance seems obvious because Stravinsky kept the manuscript with him throughout his life but never published it; he never quite finished it. It was reassembled from two incomplete drafts by his son Soulima, who had it published by Boosey & Hawkes in memoriam in 1979, thus repeating the gesture of homage an ambivalent Stravinsky son paid to an illustrious, loved but also resented Stravinsky father.

Complex family relations inform the next Stravinsky vocal opus as well: a little cycle called *The Faun and the Shepherdess*, based on a set of erotic poems by Pushkin. It was conceived during Stravinsky's honeymoon with his first wife (and first cousin), Catherine, whom he betrayed (but never forsook) for Vera 18 years before death did them part. Though listed as Opus 2, it was Stravinsky's first published composition. The first edition (1908) carried a dedication to Catherine that was removed on reprinting. . . .

There are settings of Russian Symbolist poetry of a kind that every Russian composer was setting in the period before World War I. There are imitations of Debussy in the form of a pair of Verlaine settings made in 1910, after Stravinsky met the great French composer, and settings of Japanese poetry in Russian translation that show the dual influence of Stravinsky's new French friends with their

passion for japonaiserie and of Schoenberg, whose *Pierrot Lunaire* provided the immediate model. . . .

There are also songs dedicated to each of Stravinsky's children. Most poignant is a lullaby composed in 1917 for his daughter Ludmila (or Mikushka, as the endearing text calls her), who died of tuberculosis at 29 in 1938. It was published (as *Berceuse*, with a French text replacing the original Russian) only in 1962, in the appendix to one of Stravinsky's books of memoirs as dictated to Robert Craft. . . .

These are all minor works. But there is one spate of songs that, taken collectively, signify a major watershed in Stravinsky's musical development. These are the four sets that he composed in Switzerland during and immediately after World War I: *Pribaoutki (Jingles)*, *Berceuses du Chat (Cat's Lullabies)*, *Trois Histoires Pour Enfants (Three Children's Tales)* and *Quatre Chants Russes (Four Russian Songs)*. They have French or French-transliterated titles because they were published by a Geneva printer with French texts by the novelist Charles-Ferdinand Ramuz, and they were the work of a stateless person, but they are the most intensely Russian pieces Stravinsky (or perhaps anyone) ever composed.

Homesick and imbued with a nationalist fervor he had never felt at home, he became obsessed with Russian folk verses of a kind that had been published in quantity by 19th-century ethnographers but had never been of much interest to composers of art songs because they were, well, artless. But Stravinsky — inspired by the work of the painters associated with Diaghilev, who found not only subject matter but also stylistic models in folk art — saw in Russian folk verses the foundations of a far more authentically Russian art music than his teacher's generation had achieved.

The consummation of this quest was *Svadebka* (or *Les Noces [The Wedding]*), Stravinsky's choral ballet recreating a Russian peasant wedding, thought by some (well, by me) to represent the composer's absolute summit of achievement. The songs, written on the way to that towering work, were successful enough as imagined folklore to convince Bela Bartok that they were based on genuine Russian folk melodies. Actually only one tune in all the songs (the first in the *Pribaoutki*) was "genuine," that is, found in a book. That Stravinsky managed to take in a connoisseur like Bartok shows he had learned to make up rather than look up genuine folk melodies.

One of the ways he did this was to notice that the verbal accent in Russian folk singing was movable. It could fall on any syllable of any word, leading to all kinds of "wrong" accentuations that produced delightful rhythmic and metrical effects.

Stravinsky's account of these effects in his autobiography, as told to Nouvel, immediately preceded, and inspired, the famous declaration there that the true value of music was not to be sought in its expressive dimension but in the sound patterns. No public words of Stravinsky's were ever more potent, more overstated or more thoroughly misconstrued.

To realize what he meant, one need only compare the enchanting songs of the Swiss years, based on distorted folk texts, with Stravinsky's conventionally expressive, and (say it softly) rather pallid earlier songs. All of a sudden, . . . Stravinsky's music springs from watery pastels into blazing Technicolor.

Stravinsky continued to set words this way for the rest of his life. In languages other than Russian, his willful misaccentuations are often taken as errors. (Rarely does any reviewer of *The Rake's Progress* refrain from setting the poor old Russian straight about English pronunciation.) But in Stravinsky's manhandling of words he asserted the sovereign power of music, and he did it first in his songs.

... Stravinsky's solo songs include elegiac settings of verses by Dylan Thomas in memory of the poet, who at the time of his death in 1953 was planning to collaborate with Stravinsky on an opera, and by W. H. Auden in memory of John F. Kennedy. . . .

A more significant influence from Schoenberg can be seen in Stravinsky's late conversion to serial techniques, of which *Three Songs From William Shakespeare*, composed in 1953, was a harbinger. . . .

The last piece, a past-masterly setting of Edward Lear's *Owl and the Pussycat*, was composed nearly 65 years later, in the fall of 1966, and is lovingly dedicated to the composer's second wife, Vera, who had learned the poem when studying English. Like all the music Stravinsky composed in the last two decades of his life, it uses 12-tone technique. Far from conventional, the piece is anything but forbidding. It is not even dissonant, its tone row having been calculated to yield up pretty harmonies. And the piano part, easy enough for a nonpianist to play, was actually played by Mr. Craft in its first recording, making the piece doubly an intimate family portrait.

Concert Review

Past Tense, Future Perfect

MARK ALBURGER

"Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past," said George Orwell memorably in 1984, and so it must ever be as we constantly re-evaluate what-was- once as we head on to who-knows-where.

Such thoughts came to mind when taking in a glorious and visceral performance of Carl Orff's great *Carmina Burana* (1936) at Marin Symphony and Chorus, conducted by Alasdair Neale, this past April 27. Yes, the rendition was magical, abetted and aided by the first usage that this writer has experienced of supertitles outside the confines of opera.

The ribald texts of these *Songs of Beuren*, attributed to medieval wandering goliard-scholars, are all the more immediate when projected above a chorus and orchestra, such that an audience cannot miss their import. Sure, one can follow words in a program booklet, but how many do? The answer in this related case was clear, as glee alternated with wonder in communal laughs and gasps.

My goodness, this stern piece, sung by a youth chorus, is about young people getting it on! That clangorous one, sung resolutely and theatrically by baritone Igor Vieira, is an heretical drinking song! And so on.

Commonality and reinterpretation were everywhere. Here were emotions just as present then as now (of course, in the reproductive

cycle, the only reason we're here is that they're there), re-worked in Orff's telling and re-experienced by us.

The opening "O Fortuna," with its suspended-ninth dissonances, and tense minor interplay of three-patterns in the choral melody against two-patterns in the animated accompaniment, sounded in top form. For many, this familiar music has become inextricably associated with various movies and movie-trailers, eliminating certain odious comparisons with Igor Stravinsky's formerly better-known *Symphony of Psalms* (written six years previously) and goose-stepping Hitler youth (Orff didn't exactly flee Nazi German at his earliest opportunity).

Corey Head's tenor solo in "The Song of the Roasted Swan," was almost too beautiful (how often do critics complain along such a line?) as the bizarre and surreal text and orchestrations evoke a Rite-of-Springian fantasy world that shocked yet again.

Soprano Ronit Widmann-Levy's ethereal upward major-ninth leap before "Blanziflor et Helena" set the stage for an erotic and sinfully stately chorale-paeon to the pleasures of the flesh before it all came crashing down in the turn of Vanna's celestial Wheel of Fortune in the recapitulation of "O Fortuna."

Marvelous.

Also featured was a sparkling rendition of Colin McPhee's *Tabuh-Tabuhan*, a work composed in the same year as *Carmina Burana*, by one of the pioneers of musicology. If the work lacks, by design, the forward thrust of Western art music in its evocation of Balinese models, it offers a refreshing proto-minimalist take on life, the universe, and everything that one can now hear was far ahead of its

Calendar

June 7

San Francisco Composers Chamber Orchestra presents *Variations of the Ghost of Sousa Dancing*, including Allan Crossman's *Coastal Ghost*, Gary Friedman's *Concerto for Erhu and Orchestra*, Loren Jones's *Haight-Ashberry* and *The Castro* from *Dancing on the Brink of the World*, and *The Sousa Variations*, an 8-part Diabelliesque collaboration by Mark Alburger (*Variations on Americana*), Alexis Alrich, John Beeman, Harry Bernstein, Michael Cooke (*Stripes and Stars*), David Graves (*Sousa Variance*), Loren Jones (*Stars and Stripes for Desert*, w/ John Philip Sousa Khan), and Erling Wold (*On the Death of David Blakely*). Old First Church, San Francisco, CA.



Chronicle

April 1

Opera National de Paris presents Alban Berg's *Wozzeck*. Bastille Opera, Paris, France. Through April 19. "Even tradition-minded fans in New York, wary of what [Gerard] Mortier has in mind for the City Opera, might have been swept away by this production from the director Christoph Marthaler, a bleak, audacious and humane staging of Berg's masterpiece, first performed in 1925. Heading the strong cast was the English baritone Simon Keenlyside, a courageous artist singing *Wozzeck* in this production. . . . Mr. Marthaler's updated *Wozzeck* takes place entirely in what looks like a tacky fast-food restaurant, a suburban joint with a mishmash of chairs and tables and cheap Japanese paper lanterns. It could be a makeshift eatery with soft, clear plastic walls, through which you see a children's play area with garish-colored swings and inflated playhouses. Youngsters tumble in the background during much of the action. . . . Yet Mr. Marthaler's staging, with sets and costumes by Anna Viebrock, could also depict a tawdry recreation area on a military base, where the mismatched pieces of furniture come from surplus items. In not heaving to the multiple scene changes in the libretto, Mr. Marthaler asks the audience to take some metaphorical leaps. For example, in the barracks, when *Wozzeck* finds his comrades snoring (effectively evoked in the chorus), the soldiers simply sit at their tables, staring forward, looking blank. Yet the image conveys the everyday gloom of the scene with chilling effect and surprising tenderness. Though Mr. Keenlyside's lyric baritone voice may be a little light for the role, he sang with intelligence, vulnerability and stamina. . . . The German soprano Angela Denoke was riveting as Marie, singing with cool, luminous tone and poignancy. The heroic tenor Jon Villars was an unlikely seducer as the drum major, dressed as a punk rocker with slicked hair and loud T-shirts. . . . The compact, 90-minute score to "*Wozzeck*," with its lush orchestral colorings, piercing atonal harmonies and ruminative, aching lyricism, presents formidable challenges, fully met here by the renowned French conductor Sylvain Cambreling, who drew an urgent and inexorable account of the music from the impressive orchestra" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 4/21/08].

April 4

Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra cancels its performance of *State of Siege*, by Dror Feiler, due to noise levels of 97.4 decibels, just below the level of a pneumatic drill and a violation of new European noise-at-work limits. Munich, Germany. "I had no choice. . . . The decision was not made artistically; it was made for the protection of the players" [Trygve Nordwall, *The New York Times*, 4/20/08].

April 8

Leonard Bernstein's *Candide*. New York State Theater, New York, NY. Through April 20. "What the show has going for it is Bernstein's music. Eclectic as Bernstein was, his work has a thumbprint that grows more distinct as time passes. Everything about the melodies and rhythms of songs like *The Best of All Possible Worlds*, *Glitter and Be Gay*, *Auto da Fé*, and *Make Our Garden Grow* tells you that they're Bernstein's; if you knew his music but hadn't heard these pieces before, you would guess their authorship in a matter of seconds. . . . [I]t has these gems, not to mention the overture, which is now an orchestral staple. Agility was a quality all the singers shared. Lauren Worsham, a petite Cunegonde, sang with a tightly wound, fast vibrato and had the high notes needed for *Glitter and Be Gay*" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 4/10/08].

Ursula Oppens performs Elliott Carter's *Night Fantasies* and *Caténaires*, William Bolcom's *Ballade*, Charles Wuorinen's *The Blue Bamboula*, Joan Tower's *Holding a Daisy*, and Frederic Rzewski's *Mayn Yingele*. Zipper Concert Hall, Colburn School, Los Angeles, CA. "Elliott Carter's *Night Fantasies*, completed in 1980, was the first major work for solo piano by the composer since his 1946 Piano Sonata and the first major work by him after he turned 70. At the time, the fiendishly difficult score, which captures the unpredictable flickering of neurons in the sleepless brain at night, suggested the onset of an impulsive late style. Now we're not so sure, since Carter has had nearly 30 more years of capricious evolution and is still writing as his 100th birthday approaches in December. Four brilliant American pianists commissioned *Night Fantasies*. One of them, Charles Rosen, who is also one of our foremost musical authorities, has called the piece "perhaps the most extraordinary large keyboard work written since the death of Ravel." Well, it is at least one of the most extraordinary. The other commissioners were Paul Jacobs, who died in 1983; Gilbert Kalish; and Ursula Oppens, who gave the first performance of *Night Fantasies* in Bath, England, just two weeks after Carter had finished it. She is one of Carter's favorite interpreters and has played the work often since. . . . In writing for four pianists, Carter made sure no one would own *Night Fantasies*. Its complexities alone could keep you up at night. At a public conversation with Carter at USC, shortly after the piece was completed, Rosen proudly revealed that he had discovered two rhythmic sequences that continue in the insane ratio of 24 to 25. The many sections that flow in and out of one another have their harmonic basis in all-interval chords, the identification of which helps provide an occupation for music theory post-docs. Carter was unimpressed by such analysis. He spoke of poetry, emotion, Schumann, the unsettled state of the modern world, jazz. *Night Fantasies*, he said, is nothing more than his fascination with the hyperactive brain in the deep of night when nothing distracts it and nothing can stop it. Oppens' performance . . . may have been the most hyperactive that *Night Fantasies* has ever received. Her 1989 recording lasts 21 minutes and 32 seconds, about an average length for the piece. She has now shaved a full five minutes from that. She did not give the impression of speeding but rather of exhilaration. . . . Oppens has so internalized this music that she makes a work for which there exist more than a thousand pages of sketches sound spontaneous. Oppens built her program Tuesday around music by friends, most of it written for her. These composers are today around the age that Carter was when he wrote *Night Fantasies*, although their compositions are dated from 1980 to the present. None of these composers are like any of the others. Charles Wuorinen's *The Blue Bamboula* is thorny music with a colorful bite. Joan Tower's *Holding a Daisy* and *Or Like a . . . an Engine* are seductive confections. William Bolcom's *Ballade*, a beautiful 12-minute piece that Oppens premiered this year, catches the often upbeat composer in a gloomy mood. She ended with a short recent Carter work, *Caténaires*, a single line taken so fast that melody blurs into harmony. . . . Oppens played Frederic Rzewski's *Mayn Yingele*, written for her in 1988. A reflection on the 50th anniversary of Kristallnacht, these extravagantly inventive variations on a Yiddish ballad capture, in a fleeting dozen or so minutes, the sleepless nights of Jews trying to regain a culture lost to the Nazis. Once more, Oppens left no time for contemplation. She played the piece in about half the time that Rzewski takes. But when she reached the disturbing tremolo at the end, she produced such a stabbing sound that it, like so much of *Night Fantasies*, continued to penetrate long after the resonance had ceased and became an unforgettable memory" [Mark Swed, *Los Angeles Times*, 4/10/08].

April 9

Chen Yi's *From the Path of Beauty* and Gyorgy Ligeti's *Idegen Foldon* performed by Chanticleer and the Shanghai Quartet. Temple of Dendur, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY. "[Chen Yi and Gyorgy Ligeti] use similar thinking to arrive at different places. Ms. Chen's piece is a seven-part song cycle. . . . The Ligeti songs were constrained by the cultural populism of Communist Hungary at the end of World War II. Like *From the Path of Beauty*, they invent a folk music that may sound Hungarian or Chinese but is really made up. Ms. Chen is relentlessly theatrical, alternating between misty vocal lines and violently busy string-writing. Her singing parts can be quiet vocalises supporting the strings, or else shouts, sound effects and a nonverbal cross between scat singing and the Swingle Singers. Ms. Chen wants her listeners to think of Chinese calligraphy and opera, but there are also visits to a simpler, popular modal melody. Her hard work showed up in the virtuoso demands made on everybody. Chanticleer's 13 singers were admirable. The huge, echoing hall served *From the Path of Beauty* well. Sheer sound color is a major ingredient here. Plucked strings resounded like cannon shots, and if the audience heard some of this music once and then once again on the immediate rebound, the more the better. Ligeti's part songs, which included *Papaine* and *Magany*, were quieter but infinitely more potent, with a magical spilling-over of crossing voices, at once harmonious and ambiguously at odds. Their beauty sticks in the mind" [Bernard Holland, *The New York Times*, 4/11/08].

Beginning of a five-part *Stravinsky Festival*, with the International Contemporary Ensemble: 15 scores for a kaleidoscope of instrumental combinations, including *Pastorale* (1907), *Three Pieces for String Quartet* (1914), the rollicking *Étude for Pianola* (1917), *Lied Ohne Name* (1918), *Ragtime* (1918), *Three Pieces for Clarinet* (1918), *Octet* (1923), *Dumbarton Oaks Concerto* (1938), *Elegy for Viola* (1944), *Septet* (1953), *Double Canon* (1959), *Epitaphium* (1959), *Fanfare for a New Theater* (1964). Morgan Library & Museum, New York, NY. "Instead of a player piano [i.e. pianola], this performance used a [digital] Yamaha piano. . . . Joshua Rubin's rendering of the *Three Pieces for Solo Clarinet* (1918) made the soulful opening movement as vivid, in its way, as the speedy, bent-note finale. The *Fanfare for a New Theater* (1964) for two trumpets and *Lied Ohne Name* (1918) for two bassoons also offered a high quotient of dazzle. And Maiya Papach gave a ruminative, focused performance of the *Elegy for Viola* (1944). As a chamber music composer, Stravinsky was mostly a miniaturist who could pack an enormous amount of music into a few moments. The *Three Pieces for String Quartet* (1914), for example, are texturally dense essays that juxtapose grittiness and lyricism. His *Double Canon* (1959) is plangent and dark, and oddly inconclusive: it seems to end midphrase, like the final fugue of Bach's *Art of Fugue*. . . . Other sides of Stravinsky on display included the sweet-toned innocence of the early *Pastorale* (1907, in a 1933 arrangement); the acidic jazziness of *Ragtime* (1918) and the *Concertino for 12 Instruments* (1920, arranged 1952) . . . ; and the plain, slightly sour modernism of the *Octet for Wind Instruments* (1923) and *Epitaphium* (1959). The performances, conducted by Jayce Ogren when the ensembles were large enough, were consistently polished and energetic" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 4/12/08].

The New York Philharmonic, conducted by Leonard Slatkin, in the premiere of Tan Dun's *Piano Concerto* (with Lang Lang), plus Igor Stravinsky's *The Firebird*. Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY. Repeated April 11-12. "Tan, whose concert works combine Asian elements with the avant-garde, became an international celebrity when his ferociously propulsive film score for *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* earned him an Academy Award in 2001. . . . In a spoken introduction, the composer Steven Stucky predicted that the concerto would be both a crowd pleaser and a head-scratcher. I'm not

sure about the head-scratcher part. Though the 30-minute piece is eclectic, skillfully written and viscerally dramatic, the music seemed to give away most of its secrets on first hearing. But it is certainly a crowd pleaser. In the best sense, Mr. Tan's concerto, vibrantly scored for an orchestra rich with Western and Asian percussion instruments, has the entertaining vitality and coloristic allure of his brilliant film music. In a taped interview that was screened just before the premiere, Mr. Tan said that the concerto was inspired by his love for the martial arts and that Mr. Lang, a pianist he reveres, embodies the qualities of a martial arts master in his playing. The ancient practice, he explained, is an art of seeming contradictions. A stance of physical stillness can convey tension and quickness, and bursts of action can seem cool and deliberate. Mr. Tan tries to capture this duality in music that veers from passages of stillness to explosions of energy. Each of the three movements is broken up with episodic sections. The piece begins with a low, softly ominous rumbling trill in the piano, over which the orchestra floats pungent, deceptively calm chords that blithely slink from harmony to harmony. Soon the percussion section, alive with pummeling drum riffs, intrudes, prodding the pianist into bouts of fidgety chords and spiraling runs. The Bartok concertos, with their astringent harmonies and percussive piano writing, seem a model for Mr. Tan here. Yet during extended passages of dreamy lyricism, when the piano plays delicate melodic lines over rippling arpeggio accompaniments that sound like Asian salon music, Mr. Tan seems to be channeling Rachmaninoff. The orchestral writing is full of striking touches, as when a propulsive episode in the piano is backed up by rhythmically staggered fortissimo chords of slashing strings and clanking brake drums. And Mr. Tan proved good at his word in treating Mr. Lang as a martial artist of the keyboard. In the most hellbent outbursts Mr. Lang played cluster chords with fists, karate chops and even the full weight of his forearms. Yet there are just as many delicate moments where Mr. Lang created spans of fleecy passagework and haunting melodic lines of fast repeated notes, an evocation of the guqin, the Chinese zither. Mr. Slatkin drew a sweeping, urgent and nuanced performance from the orchestra, and at the conclusion he, Mr. Lang and the elated composer received prolonged ovations. It was a good idea on Mr. Slatkin's part to pair the new concerto with Stravinsky's complete *Firebird*, a score that also combines Impressionistic colorings, folkloric tunes and fantasy" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 4/11/08].

April 10

Opera National de Paris presents Arnold Schoenberg's *Ode to Napoleon* (1942) and Luigi Dallapiccola's *The Prisoner* (1948). Palais Garnier, Paris, France. Through May 6. "Many directors of American opera companies would never even consider presenting Luigi Dallapiccola's one-act [II] *Prigioniero*, a bleak, 12-tone, boldly modernistic work from the mid-20th century about a despairing prisoner during the Spanish Inquisition. But unlike many of his timid counterparts, Gerard Mortier, the director of the Paris National Opera, has faith in audiences. . . . [I]n this stark staging, with a compelling cast and the conductor Lothar Zagrosek drawing a rhapsodic, shimmering performance from the fine orchestra, *Il Prigioniero* emerged as an intensely dramatic, musically arresting and grimly moving work. Dallapiccola had a personal connection to the subject matter. He was born to Italian parents in 1904 in a town now part of Croatia. His father was headmaster of an Italian-language school. But because of ethnic and regional conflicts the family was interned in Austria for a period during World War I. During World War II the composer, who was openly anti-Fascist, was forced for a time into hiding in Italy. *Il Prigioniero*, composed during the mid-1940s to Dallapiccola's own libretto, is a protest work lasting less than an hour. The simple story concerns a Spaniard who has been imprisoned during the Inquisition. Visited by his tormented mother, he tells her that during the height of his suffering he was befriended at the prison by a jailer who called him brother, 'fratello.' But after

fleeting moments when the prisoner believes he will escape, he falls into the arms of the jailer, who is revealed to be the Grand Inquisitor himself. For the duped prisoner having hope has been the ultimate torture. After beginning his career composing in a richly chromatic, quasi-tonal language, Dallapiccola became the leading exponent of 12-tone technique and serialism in Italy by the 1950s. But a composer cannot grow up in Italy without succumbing to that opera-mad country's feeling for lyricism. The 12-tone musical style of "Il Prigioniero" is certainly complex -- tremulous with astringent harmonies and fraught with skittish thematic lines. Yet Dallapiccola used the 12-tone language in a sensually lyrical way. Vocal lines sing and plead. Chords are stacked with intervals that produce plaintively consoling sustained harmonies. . . . Mr. Pasqual's staging of *Il Prigioniero*, with sets by Paco Azorin and costumes by Isidre Prunés, is dark, imposing and powerful. In the first scene we see the mother, the mezzo-soprano Rosalind Plowright, who brought anguished vocal colorings and fierce intensity to her portrayal, treading her way to the prison, hobbled with grief as she walked on a shifting section of the stage floor that keep her, metaphorically, stuck in place. Barely visible behind her is the prison, a gargantuan construction of slatted walls and staircases that slowly rotates. When we meet the prisoner, the stentorian bass-baritone Evgeny Nikitin in an impassioned portrayal, he is tattered, bloodied and exhausted. A harrowing choral scene depicting the inmates takes place within the rotating prison, though the audience's view is inhibited by the slatted walls. But enough is visible to make the moment gruesome. A bare-chested prisoner, suspended upside down from a rope tied to his ankles, is pushed back and forth by brutish guards with clubs as if he were a human piñata. The other prisoners look on in horror. The choral director, Alessandro Di Stefano, is visible. Yet his conducting of the prisoners becomes a visual metaphor for their servitude. In the final scene, when the jailer, the dynamic tenor Chris Merritt in a coolly menacing performance, morphs into the Grand Inquisitor, he removes his clerical robe and is revealed as a priest-doctor in a white lab coat, syringe in hand. The prisoner is strapped to a gurney and administered a lethal injection. In the final line of the opera, he sings, 'La libertà?' More than worthless hope, death would seem to hold the only promise of freedom. . . . Ode to Napoleon [is] a 15-minute . . . setting of Byron's poem castigating the fall of a tyrant, in which the text is spoken by a reciter, accompanied by string quartet and piano. Schoenberg seized on the text to vent his antipathy to Nazism. In this performance the text was spoken, with occasional half-sung phrases, by the American baritone Dale Duesing, dressed in drag like a 1920s Berlin cabaret singer, with the band nearby. During the course of his recitation, which broke into bouts of hectoring, Mr. Duesing gradually changed costumes, slowly putting on the striped uniform of a concentration-camp prisoner" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 4/23/08].

Alondra de la Parra leads the Philharmonic Orchestra of the Americas in *Brazilian Fanfare*, by Clarice Assad, Lalo Schiffrin's *Concierto Caribeno* for flute, Paul Brantley's *Electric Fan*, and Heitor Villa-Lobos's *Bachianas Brasileiras No. 7*. Town Hall, New York, NY. "Assad's colorful, deftly orchestrated work incorporates rhythms from different regions of her native country, like the olodum from Bahia and the samba from Rio de Janeiro, and earlier styles like the waltz, with boisterous brass and percussion and sultry string interludes. . . . Schiffrin, an Argentine, was inspired by local musical flavors and rhythms . . . Venezuelan flutist María Fernanda Castillo played the rhapsodic solo part and syncopated rhythms with virtuoso panache. . . . To write this appealing, rhythmically driven, jazz-inflected work, Mr. Brantley was inspired by the diversity of Latin music he heard in Washington Heights" [Vivien Schweitzer, *The New York Times*, 4/12/08].

April 11

Philip Glass's *Satyagraha*. Metropolitan Opera, New York, NY. Through May 1. "I take Mr. Glass at his word that when *Satyagraha* was introduced, in Rotterdam in 1980, he was following his own voice and vision, not firing a broadside against the complex, cerebral modernist composers who claimed the intellectual high ground while alienating mainstream classical music audiences. Happily, that divisive period is finally past. . . . [W]hen Mr. Glass appeared onstage after [this] the Met's first performance of *Satyagraha* . . . the audience erupted in a deafening ovation. . . . Gandhi, portrayed by the sweet-voiced tenor Richard Croft in a heroic performance, lies on the ground in a rumpled suit, his suitcase nearby. . . . [I]n the hauntingly mystical opening scene when Gandhi reflects on a battle between two royal families depicted in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Mr. Croft, in his plaintive voice, sang the closest the score comes to a wistful folk song while undulant riffs wound through the lower strings. That the impressive young conductor Dante Anzolini, in his Met debut, kept the tempos on the slow side lent weight and power to the repetitive patterns. At times, though, during stretches in the opera when Mr. Glass pushes the repetitions to extremes, as in the wild conclusion to the final choral scene in Act I, the music became a gloriously frenzied din of spiraling woodwind and organ riffs. . . . The cast entered into the ritualistic wonder of the work and the production despite solo and choral parts that are often formidably hard. It's almost cruel to ask male chorists to sing foursquare, monotone repetitions of 'ha, ha, ha, ha' for nearly 10 minutes, as Mr. Glass does. Yet the chorus sang with stamina and conviction. . . . *Satyagraha* emerges here as a work of nobility, seriousness, even purity. In the final soliloquy, timeless and blithely simple, Gandhi hauntingly sings an ascending scale pattern in the Phrygian mode 30 times. To some degree the ovation at the end, after a 3-hour-45-minute evening, was necessary. The audience had to let loose after all that contemplation" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 4/14/08].

April 12

Sergeis Prokofiev (*Romeo and Juliet*) and Rachmaninoff (*Piano Concerto No. 3*, with Yefim Bronfman), performed by Michael Tilson Thomas and the New World Symphony. Adrienne Arsht Center's Knight Concert Hall, Miami, FL

April 13

James Conlon leads Axiom in a program of Franz Schreker's *Chamber Symphony* and Igor Stravinsky's *Histoire du Soldat (Soldier's Tale)*, plus the first of Schoenberg's *Three Piano Pieces* (Op. 11), performed by Irene Wong. Gerald W. Lynch Theater, John Jay College, New York, NY. Repeated April 16. "Conlon led the second of three concerts of 'degenerate' — the term the Nazis applied to the works of Jewish composers and some others — and 'generative' music, Mr. Conlon's term for music written under unrestricted circumstances and able to influence future generations. Some composers straddled both groups, he said before the concert. Schoenberg, for example, was branded a degenerate but continued composing after he fled to the United States. . . . Axiom, an excellent Juilliard ensemble, aptly illuminated the iridescent textures of [Schreker's] richly scored work, written in 1916. Rooted in late Romanticism and redolent of early Schoenberg, its one movement traverses lustrous string surges, shifting moods and rhythms, impressionist swirls and mystical soundscapes conjured by the harp, piano and harmonium. The angular harmonies of Stravinsky . . . were in vivid contrast to Schreker's voluptuous sonorities. Written in 1918 when the composer was living in Switzerland, the work doesn't comment on the horrors of war, but its reworking of the Faustian legend and portrayal of moral bankruptcy seemed appropriate to a

program exploring the legacy of a truly degenerate. Lydia Hong was commendable in the vital violin role, and the Axiom Ensemble played with steely bite and incision. With the exception of a few questionable foreign accents, three Juilliard drama students played the speaking roles with flair. Amari Cheatom, dressed in a brown uniform, was persuasive as the soldier led astray, Ben Rappaport brought energy and clear diction to the role of the narrator, and Finn Wittrock worked his charm as a smooth and cunning Devil. The staging was enhanced by the dancer Andrea Miller (a Juilliard alumna) whose choreography of bristling, jerky movements and a languid dance brought the princess to life" [Julien Jourdes, *The New York Times*, 4/15/08].

April 14

Helmut Lachenmann, including his *Wiegenmusik* (*Cradle Music*, 1963), *Ein Kinderspiel* (*Child's Play*, 1980), *Mouvement* (-- *vor der Erstarrung*, [*Movement* (-- *Before Paralysis*), 1984]), and *Allegro Sostenuto*. *Monday Evening Concerts*, Zipper Concert Hall, Los Angeles, CA. "In Germany, he is often referred to as 'Professor Helmut Lachenmann.' He is 73, lanky, bearded. A student of Luigi Nono and Karlheinz Stockhausen, he is perhaps the foremost representative of the second-generation European avant-garde. His intellectual ties are with the old Frankfurt School and the cantankerous philosopher Theodor Adorno. . . . The concert was a sensation. Empty seats were hard to find at the Colburn School's Zipper Concert Hall. A buzz was in the air. Members of the L.A. music elite, including composers from the academic and film worlds, were on hand. The audience stood and applauded lustily. More than once. Lachenmann's situation is a curious one. He remains devoted to making music in new ways at a time when what is new is said to have become old. Many of his favorite techniques -- the rasping of bows against the bridge of a violin or cello, the tapping on the tops of clarinets with their mouthpieces removed, the clicking of flute keys, the blowing of wind instruments into a piano to make the strings resonate -- are things the avant-garde has been up to for decades. What Lachenmann brings to the experimental table is a captivating sense of quest. He achieves an unusually sharp focus. He operates just at the edge of tradition. The result is music that sounds remarkably fresh, that is quite mysterious yet readily engages the ear. . . . (For all his seriousness, Lachenmann has a terrific sense of fun. The English translation of one movement of *Child's Play* is *Fake Chinese* (*Slightly Drunk*). He obsesses on such nonsense as tripping down the scale or getting hung up on a repeated chord while toying with its dying resonances. *Mouvement* . . . was played by the Argento Chamber Ensemble conducted by Michel Galante. This was the work . . . that contributed to Lachenmann's international recognition as not just an earnest avant-gardist doing funny things to instruments but a visionary who put all those funny things together with brilliant dramatic conviction. The ensemble is a strange one: Clarinets, violins and percussion come in threes; flutes, trumpets, violas and cellos are in pairs; the bass is the only single. Everyone does something unusual, and a kind of sonic jungle is evoked, the sounds resembling animals and nature communicating in languages you don't understand but still realize are languages. *Allegro Sostenuto*, which was the big work after intermission, is for clarinet, cello and piano, and it received a gripping performance from Shizuyo Oka, Asa Akerberg and Jean-Pierre Collot. The composer describes the work as containing six sections that flow together. His notes almost make it sound like normal music, with an introductory section, an allegro, an appassionato climax, etc. Near the end, clarinet and cello are said to project "normal" notes over piano clusters. Well, by the end, after so much alluringly odd activity, nothing seems normal. . . . Your ears are never on solid ground" [Mark Swed, *Los Angeles Times*, 4/16/08].

Steven Clark's *Amok Time*, troped on the *Star Trek* music of Alexander Courage and Gerold Fried, with William Loney (Captain Kirk), Karl Coryat (Mr. Spock), Mark Alburger (Dr. McCoy), Suzanna Mizell (Lt. Uhura / Stonn), Cynthia Weyuker (Mr. Chekov / T'Pring), and Susan Clark (T'Pau). Boxcar Theater, San Francisco, CA.

Chicago Chamber Musicians *Freshly Scored Series*: Brian Precht's *Vision of the Apocalypse* (1995), Robert Chumbley's *Three More Self Studies*, and Stephen Paulus's *Concerto for Brass Quintet*. Merit Music School, Gottlieb Hall, Chicago, IL. "*Apocalypse* . . . [is] a 20-minute exposition from the *Book of Revelation* depicting visions of John on the island of Patmos . . . Chumbley evoked a much larger ensemble than the five players . . . might have suggested. . . . The rollicking gestures of the second movement (*Play*) were ingratiating, and the young cellist Clancy Newman shone brightly in the final movement, *Peace*. Stephen Paulus's . . . first movement (*Dramatic*) was concise and rhythmically robust, and the second (*Pensive*) included expertly graduated contrasts of texture" [Michael Cameron, *Chicago Tribune*, 4/17/08].

Victoria Bond's *Cutting Edge Concerts*, featuring music from her *Mrs. President*, plus Dalit Warshaw's *Muse IV: Erato*, Huang Ruo's *Four Fragments*, Wang Gouwei's *Sheng*, and a discussion with architect James Polshek. Symphony Space, Thalia Theater. New York, NY. "Polshek, the architect for many new and reconfigured concert settings, including Carnegie Hall, the Santa Fe Opera Theater, Seiji Ozawa Hall at Tanglewood and Symphony Space itself. . . . seemed uninterested in the connections Ms. Bond wanted to make. A slide show of his concert halls began with Goethe's famous observation that 'architecture is frozen music,' which Mr. Polshek immediately contradicted, saying that architecture was 'closer to frozen custard.' 'These Romantic notions of comparing different disciplines,' he added, leaving the sentence unfinished. Presumably he remembered that he was participating in exactly that. . . . Discussing Carnegie Hall, he said, matter-of-factly, that Carnegie's 'prerenovation sound was quite terrible.' That's the opposite of what those of us who spend a lot of time there remember (stage concrete, anyone?), and several heads could be seen shaking in the audience. . . . The harpist Susan Jolles gave a picturesque, richly detailed performance of . . . *Erato*, a vivid piece inspired by the Greek muse of love poetry. Cornelius Dufallo, the violinist, gave a taut, virtuosic account of . . . *Fragments* which at times used the intervals and sliding string sounds of Chinese traditional music to evoke the erhu, a Chinese fiddle. The erhu was heard in *Sheng*, an inventive work . . . that moved deftly between Western and Chinese gestures. Mr. Wang was the erhu soloist. . . . Bond led six excerpts from *Mrs. President*. . . about Victoria Woodhull, a 19th-century proto-feminist who ran for president against Ulysses S. Grant in 1872" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 4/16/08].

Pianist Bruce Levingston performs Wolfgang Rihm's Brahmsliedewaltzer, Sebastian Currier's *Departures and Arrivals*, Charles Wuorinen's *Heart Shadow*, and Arvo Pärt's *Für Alina*. Zankel Hall, New York, NY.

April 15

Autechre, Rob Brown and Sean Booth, Music Hall, New York, NY. "There were bits of melody and a few hummable bass lines, yet Autechre has little use for tunes. Riffs were just as likely to be scattered notes, atonal clusters or stray swoops. Meanwhile, the beats often used drum sounds that had been reversed -- with their attack arriving at the end of the impact rather than the beginning -- to disorienting effect. . . . The duo barely established one pattern before mixing in suspenseful harbingers of the next one, which was likely to turn what preceded it inside out: midrange instead of sub-bass,

sustained instead of staccato, ratchety instead of pulsating, bell tones following up thuds. The music stayed foreboding, even menacing. Autechre's soundscape is crowded and discordant, determinedly antipop. . . . Autechre's drive, variety and relentless inventiveness were pleasures of their own. [Jon Pareles, *The New York Times*, 4/17/08].

Baritone Nathan Gunn and pianist Julie Gunn in a program including three of Olivier Messiaen's *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jesus*, Fred Franko's *Five Songs on Poems by Thomas Merton* (2004), and Samuel Barber's *Hermit Songs* (1953). Zankel Hall. "Between songs Ms. Gunn gave sensitive performances of three solo piano pieces from Messiaen's *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus*, music that juxtaposes stillness, mysticism and frenzied ecstasy. . . . "[The first piece . . . *Regard du Père (Watch of the Father)*, is pensive music built from subdued, steady and mystical chords. As Ms. Gunn played, phrases from the poem settings that were about to be sung -- words by Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk and theologian, who died in 1968 -- were scrolled slowly along the rear wall of the stage in video projections: 'Be still,' 'Listen,' 'The insupportable knowledge of nothing' and more (the work of Laura Chiamonte, a video designer and choreographer). Mr. Gunn . . . began aptly with a [Franko Merton] song, *In Silence*, that evoked Messiaen's cluster chords. There were humorous episodes in the music and the staging, as in *Reduced to This*, Merton's exasperated depiction of writer's block, which Mr. Ferko conveys through fidgety music and sputtering riffs. . . . Barber's affecting *Hermit Songs* . . . settings of 10 poems by medieval Irish monks, written mostly in the margins of holy books they were copying. Mr. Gunn was in his element here, especially in the whimsical works. 'I do not know with whom Edan will sleep,' one cagey, sly short song begins, before Mr. Gunn sang the concluding phrase with an insinuating turn: 'But I do know that fair Edan will not sleep alone.' In the plaintive final song, *The Desire for Hermitage*, he conveyed the longing for monastic solitude, in a little cell, far away from the houses of the great. Solitude is not something he has much of in real life: the Gunns are the parents of five young children" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 4/17/08].

Beth Ditto and Gossip. Webster Hall, New York, NY. "Outspoken as a lesbian, as a self-proclaimed fat woman and as an all-around misfit -- 'I survived high school in Arkansas!' she cried defiantly at one point -- she works hard to spark pride among her constituencies. "I don't want the world," she belted in one potent chorus, "I only want what I deserve." It was a call to rights masquerading as romantic protestation. For most of the show the Gossip assumed its usual form as a three-piece, with Brace Paine on guitar and Hannah Blilie on drums. The sound of the group was raw but focused, as Mr. Paine's abrasive riffing met with Ms. Blilie's powerhouse churn, producing a hard-driving mishmash of punk, disco and guttural indie-rock. . . . Much of her singing was actually rasping or screaming, which she invested with the same practiced abandon that guided her movements onstage. When she hit a note clearly, with a shiver of vibrato, it was disarmingly humanizing . . . [S]he started up another chant, shouting, 'You are important!' over a rhythmic rally of hand claps. After a while she modified it slightly: 'We! Are! Important!' It was a powerful exhortation, precisely because she wasn't speaking only for the band. [Nate Chinen, *The New York Times*, 4/17/08].

Bill Frisell's 858 Quartet. Village Vanguard, New York, NY. "Bill Frisell wrote some string quartet music for a CD to accompany a book of Gerhard Richter paintings in 2002. The paintings were all called 858, so Mr. Frisell used the same title for his eight pieces and for the band itself. These works . . . weren't tunes so much as gestures: slow or frenetic, based on short figures. Looking at the wide, heavy paint-slicks on the canvases and thinking of music, he tried for something more sublime, dense and basically classical than what he's associated with. The group outlived the project. Mr. Frisell

has cultivated it onstage a bit since then, and the 858 Quartet has grown out of its original purpose into something else. [T]he band played a wickedly beautiful first set. . . in line with Mr. Frisell's other music, with its mild sense of humor" [Ben Ratliff, *The New York Times*, 4/17/08].

Obsession à la Russe, presented by the New York Festival of Song, including Sergei Prokofiev's *Vocalises*, Igor Stravinsky's *Two Poems of Konstantin Bal'mont*, Erik Satie's *Dapheneo* (from a set of three songs dedicated to Stravinsky), Maurice Ravel's *Sainte*, Sergei Rachmaninoff's *Aleko*, and Francis Poulenc's *Le Portrait*. Weill Recital Hall, New York, NY. Repeated 4/17.

April 16

Icelandic soprano Disella Larusdottir sings Dominick Argento's *Songs About Spring*. Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY. "[F]ive inventive settings of E. E. Cummings's verse that expertly capture his appealing quirkiness" [Steve Smith, *The New York Times*, 4/19/08].

April 17

Eighth Blackbird in Steve Reich's *Double Sextet* (2007), and the David Lang / Michael Gordon / Julia Wolf *Singing in the Dead of Night* (2008). Zankel Hall, New York, NY. "Singing [is] . . . an energetic and occasionally spooky collaboration . . . the overall title for the works by Mr. Lang (*These Broken Wings*), Mr. Gordon (*The Light of the Dark*) and Ms. Wolfe (*Singing in the Dead of Night*), and it offers a choice as well: the pieces can be played separately or, as they were here, in a unified 50-minute production. The titles are all taken from the Beatles' song *Blackbird*, but the tune itself is not quoted. Instead, Mr. Lang provides a three-movement work with virtuosic and sometimes subtly comic outer movements and a slow, eerie middle section. Mr. Gordon's and Ms. Wolfe's scores, interposed among these movements, in some ways match their impulses. Mr. Gordon's piece continues the rambunctiousness of Mr. Lang's opening movement, upping the ante by having the musicians play additional instruments, including accordion and harmonica, usually with an aggressive edge. And Ms. Wolfe's work expands on the melancholy edge of Mr. Lang's middle movement, gradually picking up speed, heft and lyricism. The performance, virtuosic, polished and played largely from memory, was choreographed by Susan Marshall with an amusing quirkiness that reflected the music's energy" Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 4/19/08].

The Complete Songs of Igor Stravinsky. Morgan Library and Museum, New York, NY.

April 18

10,000-member International Association of Jazz Educators, a de facto trade organization, announces that it is going out of business, filing for bankruptcy, and canceling its annual convention, which was to be held in Seattle next year, in an e-mail message. Manhattan, KS.

A New Italian Renaissance. American Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Leon Botstein, in Ottorino Respighi's *Fountains of Rome*; the United States premiere of Gian Francesco Malipiero's *Pause del Silenzio I* (1917) and Ildebrando Pizzetti's *Three Preludes to Sophocles' 'Oedipus'*; Giuseppe Martucci's *Symphony No. 2*; and Alfredo Cassella's *Italia, Rhapsody for Orchestra*. Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY. "[T]here are echoes of Verdi in Casella's *Italia, Rhapsody for Orchestra*. Written in 1909 during a lengthy stay in Paris and, in the composer's words, entirely remote from

Debussyism,' the work weaves the *Funiculi, Funiculà* tune into a brash, patriotic orgy of fortissimo grandeur and clashing cymbals. The musicologist Massimo Mila called Casella, along with Malipiero, Pizzetti and Respighi, who were all born between 1879 and 1883, 'the 1880 generation' -- a bridge between verismo and the Italian modernists. . . . Malipiero's intriguing [work] . . . subtitled *Seven Symphonic Expressions*, . . . was the most memorable of the rarities offered. Malipiero attended the premiere of *The Rite of Spring*, and a hint of Stravinsky permeates *Pause*, which Malipiero said reflected his 'agitated state' at the time. The sections, each anchored by a variant of a fanfare, range from a gentle pastoral idyll to agitated and impressionistic swirls of shimmering colors. In 1956, Malipiero described Martucci's *Symphony No. 2 in F* (1904) as "the starting point of the renaissance of non-operatic Italian music." . . . Pizzetti's vibrant *Three Preludes to Sophocles' 'Oedipus'* (1903) . . . also mostly looks back. Unlike Malipiero, Pizzetti was baffled by *The Rite of Spring* and in 1932 signed a manifesto against modernism. The lyrical, richly orchestrated *Preludes* include a concertolike violin solo, played with finesse by the concertmaster Erica Kiesewetter. . . . Respighi, who also signed the manifesto, was the only member of the Generation of 1880 whose works became repertory standards. . . . *Fountains of Rome* (1914-16) [is] a kaleidoscopic aural snapshot of changing light and moods" [Vivien Schweitzer, *The New York Times*, 4/21/08].

United States debut of Etran Finatawa (Stars of Tradition), a band from Niger. Symphony Space, New York, NY. "It was easy to tell who was who. Three Wodaabe musicians wore long, almost rectangular robes, hats with a single feather pointing skyward and white stripes of face paint down their foreheads and noses. Three Tuareg musicians wore ornately embroidered burmooses and robes. For centuries Tuareg and Wodaabe nomads have traversed the Sahel grasslands and Sahara in northern Africa, herding cows, camels and goats, and sometimes feuding over water and pastures. They now face the erosion of their age-old cultures and the desertification of their lands. Etran Finatawa responds in its songs while it symbolically reconciles the two groups. 'A man is nothing when he is alone/People need other people, they sang in Jama'aare Many of Etran Finatawa's lyrics insist on the value of heritage. Meanwhile, the music looks forward, altering that heritage by bringing together Wodaabe and Tuareg musicians and by using instruments that were introduced to Tuareg music in the 1970s: electric guitar and bass. From stoner rock in California to African nomad songs, the desert fosters drones. Most of Etran Finatawa's songs revolve around one of Alhousseini Mohamed Anivolla's repeating guitar lines: not chords, but picked, syncopated notes and trills. While the guitar lines probably derive from regional fiddle music, Americans might also hear a kinship with the oldest Delta blues. The other instruments are portable and unplugged: calabashes, clapping hands and the jingling, metallic percussion that Bammo Angonla, a Wodaabe, held in his hands and had strapped to his leg. Their instruments use the environment. A Tuareg drum is stabilized by sand; the Wodaabe float a calabash in a larger calabash basin of water, for a steady, deep-toned pulse. The songs ride multilayered six-beat and four-beat rhythms that seemed easy and natural until clapping audience members tried, and failed, to keep up. While the rhythm section was merged, the vocal styles were distinct. The Tuaregs sang in open, equable voices while the Wodaabes sang in high, pinched tones that must carry a long way across sand and savanna. In the Tuareg songs, in the Tamashek language, the vocal melody usually ran parallel to the guitar line. The Wodaabe songs, in Fulfulde, were more contrapuntal, with voice and guitar diverging and multiple singers in call and response. There were also Wodaabe songs that began with a lone, unaccompanied singer sustaining a note in a long crescendo until the other voices converged to join him: the sound of a community forging itself in a wilderness" [Jon Pareles, *The New York Times*, 4/22/08].

Kurt Weill's *Ballad of Mack the Knife* and *Surabaya Johnny* (Bertolt Brecht) and Richard Rodgers's *Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered* and *This Funny World* (Lorenz Hart), delivered as spoken monologues with piano accompaniment by the cabaret singer Julie Wilson. Metropolitan Room, New York, NY. Through April 27. "[T]o discover [the songs] stripped naked under a surgeon's lamp. In recent years Ms. Wilson has abandoned conventional singing to concentrate on interpreting lyrics, which she delivers with a furious theatrical intensity. Only hints of melody remain in readings in which her accompanist supplies most of the musical content. . . . [H]er musical partner (and occasional prompter) is Christopher Denny, a pianist so in sync with Ms. Wilson that he seems to read her mind. Free to tell the story without having to worry about pitch and conventional time, Ms. Wilson turns songs into darkly funny misanthropic rants. At 83 she is still svelte and beautiful in a clinging dark gown and gloves, her trademark white gardenia tucked behind her ear. Her heavily rouged face suggests an elegant Kabuki mask. Singing *Mack the Knife*, Ms. Wilson delivered short mocking pantomimes of the killer Macheath's besotted admirers, Suky Tawdry, Jenny Diver, Polly Peachum and Lucy Brown. In *Surabaya Johnny* a woman's sadomasochistic attachment to a scoundrel is voiced by a narrator who might be described as the ultimate doormat. 'But I still love you so,' Ms. Wilson bleats helplessly after enumerating his outrageous abuses. Ms. Wilson found variations of the same human dynamics in songs by Rodgers and Hart. *Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered* is essentially a softer confession of a woman in a state of heat sacrificing her dignity for passion. Ms. Wilson's performances are all the more remarkable for the absence of personal bitterness in these howls of pain and disgust. Behind everything, there is always humor. For her encore, Ms. Wilson sang Rodgers and Hart's *This Funny World*, a song that advises, 'If you're beaten, conceal it!/There's no pity for you./For the world cannot feel it.' Ms. Wilson is a great, sad clown who asks us to laugh at the absurdity of it all. What other choice is there?" Stephen Holden, *The New York Times*, 4/21/08.

April 19

Horsewomen of the Apocalypse: The Red Horse, including Mark Alburger's *Antigone: III-V* and *The Bald Soprano: The Fire*, Allen Crossman's *Log of the Skipper's Wife*, John Partridge's *Mary's Song*, Judith Weir's *King Harald's Saga*, selections from Kurt Weill's *The Threepenny Opera* and *Happy End*, and music of Benjamin Britten. St. Gregory of Nyssa, San Francisco, CA.

Miller Theater's *Stravinsky Festival*. Vox Vocal Ensemble and Gotham City Orchestra, conducted by George Steel, in Igor Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*, *Mass*, *Variations (Aldous Huxley in Memoriam)*, and *Requiem Canticles*. Park Avenue Armory. "As for big, it is, so let's get the gags . . . out of the way. The space is not a hangar for a jumbo jet, nor is there room for one to land. It is not Victoria Station gone to seed. The view from one end to the other is not obscured by the curvature of the earth. Stravinsky's *Variations (Aldous Huxley in Memoriam)* was played twice after intermission (on the theory that more is more revealing), but the echo did not mean that you heard it four times. Being a Southerner steeped in the beauties of dilapidation, I liked the armory a lot. . . . People pay too much attention to acoustics anyway and not enough to their powers of imagination. A place like this, on the other hand, pushes music and musicians around. The time taken for a sound to make its way to the far walls and back is startling. Close your eyes, imagine yourself in some gigantic high-ceilinged cathedral and then add a second or two to your expectations. It's easy to say this is the wrong way to hear music; I think it's a different way with its own rewards. Having good performers helps, and I much admired Mr. Steel's chorus and orchestra in difficult music. Although the armory is designed for soldiers not of the onward Christian variety, the program was deeply

religious. Stravinsky's . . . [liturgical works] reminded us that devotion and humanity can be expressed without sacrifice of dignity. The chantlike sequences of the *Mass* were mesmerizing. The nine parts of the *Requiem Canticles* appeared and disappeared like imperfect fragments; they speak in 20th-century abstractions, but sound like archaological discoveries. The *Symphony of Psalms* rises out of the horrors of the 20th century as one of its redeeming acts of good. The success of the performances varied with Stravinsky's instrumentation, which assuredly did not have the Park Avenue Armory in mind when written. The *Mass*, with its wind-band ensemble, worked beyond expectations, cutting through the acoustical haze and making use of the space's resounding accentuation. The spareness of the *Requiem Canticles* was in the piece's favor too. The orchestra Variations were simply too complicated to explain themselves well in these conditions. One had hopes for the *Symphony of Psalms*, but its multiple flutes and relatively delicate double-reed figures tended to lose themselves in clouds of sound. To the rescue, the Vox Vocal Ensemble sang this great piece with style and devotion" [Bernard Holland, *The New York Times*, 4/21/08].

April 20

Death of Bebe [Charlotte May Wind] Barron (6/16/25, Minneapolis, MN), at 82. Los Angeles, CA. "[W]ith her husband Louis[, she] composed the first electronic score for a feature film — the eerie gulps and burbles, echoes and weeeooos that accentuated invisible monsters and robotic creatures in the 1956 science-fiction classic *Forbidden Planet*. . . . The score for *Forbidden Planet* -- the tale of a starship crew that travels 17 light years from Earth to investigate why settlers on the planet Altair-4 have gone silent -- 'is truly a landmark in electro-acoustic music,' Barry Schrader, a professor of electro-acoustic music at the California Institute of the Arts, said Thursday. While the Barrons created electronically produced themes for the film's characters and events, Professor Schrader said, their score crossed the traditional line between music and sound effects. 'At some points it's actually impossible to say whether or not what you're hearing is music, sound effect or both,' he said. 'In doing this, they foreshadowed by decades the now-common role of the sound designer in modern film and video.' While later electro-acoustic scoring became more melodic, the Barrons' breakthrough fixed the technique's otherworldly identity in public consciousness. Perhaps the most memorable character in *Forbidden Planet* is Robby the Robot, who brews bourbon and performs herculean feats; for him, the Barrons composed a mechanically bubbly theme. For the invisible monster Id, a percussive sinking sound with a descending pitch punctuates every hole his footsteps leave on the planet's rugged terrain. Contemporary electro-acoustic effects are digitally synthesized. The Barrons used vacuum tubes and tape recorders. When it came to amplifying vibrations from a stylus on a record, vacuum tubes were a major advance from the days of the phonograph horn. Mr. Barron designed vacuum tube circuits, organizing them in patterns that controlled the flow of electricity to produce combinations of pitch, timbre, volume and other variables. The sounds were recorded on tape. Mrs. Barron would sort through hours and hours of tape. Together the Barrons would cut and splice; play segments at varying speeds to change the pitch; run segments in reverse to create new sounds; or induce delays to produce echoing feedback. . . . She earned a music degree at the University of Minnesota in 1947, then moved to New York, where she worked as a researcher for Time-Life while studying music composition. Soon after, she met and married Mr. Barron, who was trained in electronics. Attracted by the avant-garde music scene in the early 1950's, the couple lived in Greenwich Village. Their fascination with electro-acoustic music began with a wedding gift: a tape recorder. Part of their apartment became a studio. There the composer John Cage recorded his *Project of Music for Magnetic Tape*. In 1952 the

Barrons recorded the score for *Bells of Atlantis*, a short based on a poem by Anaïs Nin, who appears on screen. Then, in 1955, the Barrons crashed an art party in Manhattan for the wife of Dore Schary, the president of MGM. They told him about their unusual recordings. Ten days later they were driving to Hollywood, where Mr. Schary signed them for *Forbidden Planet*.

The score drew critical praise, but a dispute with the American Federation of Musicians prevented the Barrons from receiving credit for it; their work was referred to as 'electronic tonalities.' That slight was soothed in 1997, when Mrs. Barron was given the Seamus Award of the Society for Electro-Acoustic Music in the United States. The Barrons divorced in 1970. In 1975 she married Leonard Neubauer. The Barrons never scored another feature film." [Dennis Hevesi, *The New York Times*, 4/25/08].

April 22

Miller Theatre Stravinsky Festival. Stephen Gosling and Eric Huebner in a program of Igor Stravinsky's Three Movements from "Petrushka" (1911), Piano-Rag-Music (1919), Concerto for Piano and Winds (1924), Piano Sonata (1924), Tango (1940), and Sonata for Two Pianos (1944). St. Bartholomew's Church, New York, NY. 'George Steel, Miller's executive director, said in his introductory remarks that the program served as a sort of portrait of Stravinsky, who created at least some of this music for his own use. He composed at the piano and wrote for it idiomatically. No virtuoso player, he emphasized counterpoint and character over dazzling flourishes. . . . Sonata for Two Pianos . . . [is] a late manifestation of Stravinsky's Neo-Classical style mingled with evocations of Russian folk song. Bright, ingratiating melodies mix with jazzy harmonies and percolating rhythms in the outer movements. Between them comes a theme-and-variations movement that looks back to Bach's contrapuntal logic while also hinting at the spidery atonal works to come in Stravinsky's near future. The Piano Sonata . . . was among Stravinsky's early attempts to bottle his wild energy and strange harmonies in a compact, conventional form. Mr. Gosling played with a dark intensity in the outer movements, and lingered over the tender Adagietto. Mr. Huebner followed with an authoritative account of Stravinsky's most famous piano work, his exhilarating arrangement of three movements from the ballet *Petrushka*. Piano-Rag-Music . . . was an irreverent homage to the American style, all thrust elbows and buckled knees. Tango. . . on the other hand, was an earnest attempt at writing commercial music, and Mr. Huebner played it with an appropriate panache. . . . [In] a two-piano arrangement of the Concerto for Piano and Winds . . . Two Allegro movements bustled with a sort of silent-movie electricity; the Largo evoked Bach first with elegance, then with pomp" [Steve Smith, 4/24/08].

April 23

Ned Rorem's *Our Town* (after Thornton Wilder). Juilliard Opera Center, New York, NY. "Its just-folks serenity could only be American. There are no big people doing grand things in turn-of-the-20th-century Grover's Corners, U.S.A., nor are there little people doing violence to one another on the grand scale that opera expects. In *Our Town* getting up and having breakfast are events as major an any. It's not something Puccini would have understood. . . . Wilder's play and, happily, Mr. Rorem's setting of it are sweet-tempered without being sugar-coated. Death and the unhappinesses it leaves behind are as much topics as life and its small pleasures. Mr. Rorem's music builds on favorite hymns and sings with a familiar tunefulness subjected to touches of acid. The Juilliard Orchestra, conducted by Anne Manson, makes important use of the piano. Mr. Rorem's vocal style could possibly be described as one continuous horizontal flow, but I like to think of it as a series of closely connected, self-sufficient arias. Mr. Rorem does acknowledge grand opera by elevating the

soprano role of Emily to something wide-ranging and declamatory. Jennifer Zetlan, who played the role at the Aspen Music Festival two years ago, sings beautifully and affectingly. The part could not be in better hands. Alex Mansoori (the Stage Manager) and Alek Shrader (George) are solid and convincing. The singing citizenry of Grover's Corners includes Marc Webster, Jessica Klein, David McFerrin, Renée Tatum, Julie Boulianne and Nicholas Bentivoglio. Edward Berkeley's direction adheres to the tone of simplicity that *Our Town* brings with it. John Kasarda's set is a deep, blank stage with straight-back chairs arranged and rearranged. The story of J. D. McClatchy's libretto is operatic in itself: Wilder didn't want his play as an opera, refusing applications by eminences like Leonard Bernstein and Aaron Copland. In 2001, the Wilder estate gave in" [Bernard Holland, *The New York Times*, 4/25/08].

April 24

Simon Gaudenz conducts the Orchestre National de France in Henri Dutilleux's *The Shadows of Time*. Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris, France. "[A] splendid Art Nouveau hall that was the site of the most scandalous premiere of the 20th century, the first performance of Stravinsky's ballet *The Rite of Spring* in 1913. . . . [A] ravishing account of a major 1997 work by . . . this French master composer, who is 92. . . . Though Mr. Dutilleux comes from the heritage of Ravel and Albert Roussel, he has been keenly alert to the major developments of 20th-century music, including serialism. In this lush, quizzical and elusive 25-minute score he explores the capacity of time to erase memories of brutality and horror, including, for him, those of World War II. In one short, crucial episode the shimmering, astringent sonorities; darting instrument lines; and restless rhythms are stilled as a voice from on high, here that of Amel Brahimi-Djelloul, a young soprano performing from a side balcony, sings fragmentary phrases in French from Anne Frank's diary: 'Why us? Why the stars?'" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 4/26/08].

The *New York Times* relates that *The Festival of Two Worlds*, Spoleto, Italy; and *The Spoleto Festival U.S.A.* will renew an association that ended 15 years ago. Spoleto, Italy. "The two arts festivals say they are discussing at least one joint opera production for the summer of 2009. Spoleto U.S.A.'s music director, Emmanuel Villaume, is to conduct at the Italian festival this summer. And there is even talk about forming a single orchestra, though that possibility so far appears remote. . . . The rapprochement was set in motion by the death last year of . . . Gian Carlo Menotti, who, in 1958, founded the Italian festival in the Umbrian hills 80 miles north of Rome. Mr. Menotti founded Spoleto U.S.A. in 1977, and for a time the two festivals shared top staff members, an orchestra, a chorus, and chamber music programs. But after the 1993 season Mr. Menotti cut ties with the American festival at a time when it was having money problems and after years of tussling with local officials. The 'subtext,' [Nigel] Redden said, was Mr. Menotti's desire to impose his son, Francis, adopted as an adult, as director of Spoleto U.S.A. In 1997 Francis Menotti took over as artistic director of the Italian festival, although his father's influence remained strong, and relations between the festivals remained chilly. Last summer was the first edition since Gian Carlo Menotti's death and was subject to criticism, Mr. Redden said. 'Apparently it was quite unsuccessful,' from both the point of view of audiences and ticket sales, he said. Meanwhile tension had been growing between Francis Menotti and Italian officials in recent years. In late November the culture minister, Francesco Rutelli, effectively ousted Mr. Menotti and put the festival under the control of Mr. Ferrara, a film and theater director. A ministry statement said the intention was to restore the festival's 'glorious past,' noting that public money had paid for the restoration of many spaces the festival used.

Mr. Redden blamed the Menottis for the festivals' 15-year separation. 'It was a one-way street,' he said. 'Now that Francis has left, it just makes sense that we establish a partnership that is different from one we had before.' The phone at a number on the Spoleto festival Web site still controlled by Mr. Menotti was not answered Wednesday. The site, www.spoletofestival.it, makes no mention of the 2008 season and still contains details from last summer. The new management's site is www.festivaldispoeto.it. Mr. Redden said he and Mr. Ferrara had begun discussing a collaboration almost immediately after Mr. Ferrara's appointment, and they visited each other in their respective countries. In the first sign of collaboration Mr. Villaume will conduct *Padmavati*, a rarely heard opera by Albert Roussel, to open the Italian festival this summer. Sanjay Leela Bhansali, a Bollywood film director, will handle the staging. . . . The Italian festival this year is exceptionally flush, having received \$7 million from the national government, out of a budget of \$11 million. The rest comes from local government and private sponsors. The total is about twice last year's budget, though it was unclear what the former management spent because it has not provided an accounting, Mr. Ferrara said. . . . The programs include several French plays, a [Kurt Weill / Bertolt Brecht] *Threepenny Opera* directed by Robert Wilson, world music ensembles, a performance by the Orchestra of the 18th Century conducted by Frans Bruggen, chamber music concerts dedicated to Messiaen and Ravel, and an evening of male dance including Savion Glover and others. The festival closes with a concert by the London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Daniel Harding. No works by Gian Carlo Menotti are on the schedule" [Daniel J. Wakin, *The New York Times*, 4/24/08].

The Grateful Dead donates a cache of their papers, posters, and props towards a research center. University of California, Santa Cruz, CA.

Leif Ove Andsnes performs several of Claude Debussy's *Preludes*. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY. "[A] selection of Debussy's picturesque Preludes . . . [where] restraint and introspection prevailed. . . . [S]ubtle as his playing was, the muted colors of *Des Pas Sur la Neige* and *La Sérénade Interrompue*, as well as the more vivid timbres of *Ondine* and *Ce Qu'a Vu le Vent d'Ouest* coalesced as hazy but almost palpable landscapes all the same" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 4/26/08].

April 25

American Composers Orchestra in *Playing It Unsafe*. Charles Mason's *Additions*, Anna Clyne's *Tender Hooks*, Dan Trueman's *Silicon/Carbon: An Anti-Concerto Grosso* (with members of the Princeton Laptop Orchestra), and Ned McGowan's *Bantammer Swing*. Zankel Hall, New York, NY.

April 26

Prince. Coachella Music Festival, Indio, CA.

Death of Henry Brant (9/15/13, Montreal, Canada), at 94. Santa Barbara, CA. "Brant's *Ice Field* (2001), which won the Pulitzer Prize for music in 2002, was inspired by his experience, as a 12-year-old in 1926, of crossing the Atlantic by ship, which navigated carefully through a large field of icebergs in the North Atlantic. The work, first performed by Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony in December 2001, was in many ways typical of Mr. Brant's spatial techniques. The strings, two pianos, two harps and timpani were on the stage of Davies Symphony Hall. Oboes and bassoons were in an organ loft. The brass and a jazz drummer were in the first-tier seats, and piccolos and clarinets were at one end of the second tier with pitched percussion at the other end and other percussion instruments to the side of the audience on the main floor.

Mr. Brant played organ in the first performances. Mr. Brant was already an established composer of sometimes experimental, sometimes conventional music when he began to consider space an important compositional element. In the early 1950's, he began to find that as his music became more texturally complex, the details of the individual lines within a work became more difficult to hear. Inspired partly by the music of Charles Ives, who sometimes juxtaposed multiple ensembles playing different music, and partly by a work for five jazz orchestras by Teo Macero, one of his composition students who later became an important jazz producer and arranger, Mr. Brant began using space as a compositional element. He sometimes called it the fourth dimension, along with pitch, timbre and duration. His own first spatial work, *Antiphony I* (1952-3), was composed for five widely spaced orchestras, each with its own conductor. Simply distributing the musicians around a concert space was not the end of Mr. Brant's experiment. Taking advantage of the new clarity that his expansive placements provided, he also gave each of the widely spaced ensembles music of a different character. In *Hieroglyphics 3* (1958), for example, a lachrymose solo viola is set against a timpani rumble or sometimes an eerie mezzo-soprano line; and tactile, delicately plucked sounds from a harp contrast with brisk, staccato organ figures. Other works bring together angular, contemporary writing, ear-catching melody, arresting jazz rhythms and world music. His father, a professional violinist, encouraged his early interest in composition. When he was 9, he wrote for an ensemble of his own invented instruments. At 12, he wrote a string quartet. Mr. Brant pursued his formal studies at the McGill Conservatorium in Montreal, and in 1929 he moved to New York to study at the Institute of Musical Art (which became the Juilliard School) and the Juilliard Graduate School. He studied privately with George Antheil and Wallingford Riegger. Early in his composing career, Mr. Brant supported himself by conducting radio orchestras, arranging music for ballet companies and jazz ensembles and orchestrating Hollywood film scores. He also taught composition at Columbia University from 1945 to 1952; at Juilliard from 1947 to 1954; and at Bennington College, from 1957 to 1980. Mr. Brant moved to Santa Barbara in 1981. Last year he completed *Textures and Timbres*, a textbook on orchestration that he began in the 1940's. He is survived by his wife, Kathy Wilkowski; a daughter, Piri Kaethe Friedman of Portland, Ore.; two sons, Joquin Linus Brant of Escazu, Costa Rica, and the sculptor Linus Coraggio, of Manhattan; and a brother, Bertram Brant, of Dayton, Ohio" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 4/30/08].

April 27

Joan Tower's *Simply Purple* and *Trio Cavany*. Society for Ethical Culture, New York, NY. Repeated April 29.

April 28

Madonna's *Hard Candy* album released.

Thomas Ades's ambitious piano concerto entitled *In Seven Days*, mixing Tal Rosner's hi-tech imagery (known for his striking title sequence for the TV drama *Skins*). Festival Hall, London, UK. "We've taken something that everyone knows, the Creation story, but as Tal is Israeli we took it from the Hebrew version, which is a little different. The story is like writing music; you start with chaos and it feels like it's all jumbled up and suddenly you think 'oh, these three notes – that's an idea' and then you develop them and that makes something else and by the end of the process with any luck you've got a piece of music. . . . "I was worried this was going to be an awful disaster . . . but in fact it's been incredibly natural because [Tal] knows my way of thinking and I know his. We did have a rule that at

the end of the day we just had to say 'no more' otherwise the danger would be that you'd have no escape. You have to have something else to talk about" [Thomas Ades, *The Times of London*, 4/18/08]. "Rosner's visuals will be played out across six huge screens with seemingly abstract images, taken from video footage of the two concert halls that jointly commissioned the piece – the Walt Disney Concert Hall in LA, represented by Frank Gehry's swooping shapes, and the South Bank Centre (scaffolding used during the Festival Hall renovation masquerades as trees and plants on the third day of Creation). Working with your partner is probably most people's idea of hell, but Adès insists that the experience has been 'harmonious'" [Steve Bustin, *The Times of London*, 4/18/08].

Frederic Rzewski plays his *War Songs*, arrangements of six traditional war/antiwar songs over six centuries from *L'Homme Arme* to tape, a two-piano version of *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues* (with Steven Drury) from *North American Ballads, Spots, Attica* (with Opus 21 ensemble), and *Natural Things*, with all the above players, a work pieced together from 49 mostly unrelated segments that run 20 to 25 seconds each. Gilmore Keyboard Festival, Kalamazoo, MI. Repeated May 2, Zankel Hall, New York, NY. "In photographs the American composer Frederic Rzewski resembles an Old Testament prophet, all high-domed brow, deep-gazing eyes and white, wind-swept hair. Over the phone from Brussels, his home since the 1970's, he projects a different image: casual, common-sensical, to the point. Toss him a question sure to prompt the self-important -- something about the extramusical associations of old songs, say, or the consolations of tragedy — and Mr. Rzewski (pronounced ZHEV-ski) shoots it down. 'I don't think I have any more to say about that,' he replies. Or, 'I think we're getting into deep waters here.' Politics is another subject that fails to coax him onto a soapbox. Yes, his scores are shot through with melodies associated with the left and often have titles to match. Yes, the blacklisted folk singer Pete Seeger was a culture hero of his. But Mr. Rzewski is a musician, not a pamphleteer. None but the naïve could imagine contemporary classical music as the lever for social upheaval. It was a teaching job that brought him to Belgium, not the state of the American nation. 'No philosophy,' he said recently. 'I had a family to support.' More than music is on his mind these days. He turned 70 on April 13, "and for some reason, it made me go back to Ibycus," he said. He quoted the poet's haunted lines about falling in love in old age: 'Like the old racehorse, I tremble at the prospect of the course which I am to run, and which I know so well.' Mr. Rzewski reads the ancient Greeks in the original. Tolstoy too. . . . A prefatory note to the score [of *Natural Things*] alludes to the Haymarket massacre in Chicago in May 1886, which began as a labor rally in support of striking workers. And it lists household objects to be incorporated into the percussion section: tin cans, cardboard boxes, bottles and a bathtub or trash can. 'It has to be a large metal container,' Mr. Rzewski said, 'like a black hole in the middle of the music.' Once asked if commentators were right to call him a Marxist composer, he snorted, 'Harpo or Groucho or what?' The anarchic streak in his music is as much comic as it is political.' . . . More interested in structure than in timbre, Mr. Rzewski makes no great claims for his skills as an orchestrator. Writing for instruments other than the piano, he often leaves the choice of instruments and even of octave up to the performers. That came in handy for the oddball collective Opus 21 when it picked up a piece called *Spots*. But *Natural Things* was written for its specific configuration of violin, cello, clarinet, saxophone, and piano, plus two percussionists. 'The new piece brings together so many things that Rzewski is noted for,' said Richard Adams, the ensemble's founder and artistic director. 'The speaking of text of a political nature, moments that are very lyrical and almost Minimalist, others that are pointillist and 12-tone, along with a lot of everyday sounds and ad hoc sounds like tapping and strange effects like a musical saw'" [Matthew Gurewitsch, *The New York Times*, 4/27/08]. "[H]is music does make sense, but it has a mischievous current within it. *Spots* (1986), which opened the program, includes a movement in which a vigorous

cello melody is supported by the rhythms of a bounced basketball. In others a player recites a weather report, and jazziness gives way to rhythmic and contrapuntal complexity or to plain, cheerful melodiousness. . . . *Natural Things* . . . performed with palpable passion by Opus 21, is texturally spare and largely slow-moving. Startling fortissimos -- the players suddenly stamping, a percussionist kicking a large metal can across the stage -- explode amid long, ruminative passages. Musicians pour bags of hard objects onto the stage, and recite fragments of protest speeches, sometimes through a megaphone, sometimes whispered with exaggerated articulation. Attica, composed in the wake of the 1971 upstate New York prison rebellion and the state's lethal crackdown, finds Mr. Rzewski coming out of his early Minimalist period. The score builds on repeated fragments that expand into a touching melodic fabric, against which similar methods are used to build, and then take apart, a simple text: 'Attica is in front of me,' the response of a freed prisoner when asked by a reporter how he felt about putting Attica behind him. With the warm-toned support of Opus 21, the actor Steve ben Israel gave the text a harrowing performance. Mr. Rzewski is often at his best when putting his own gloss on older material. In *Winnsboro Cotton Blues*, which he and Stephen Drury played in a two-piano version, the song's simple melody emerges from the din of factory machinery. His new *War Songs*, which he played from the handwritten score, uses six songs from different countries and eras as raw material for a rhythmically complex solo piano meditation on war "By Allan Kozinn, The New York Times, 5/3/2008].

April 30

Madonna's *Hard Candy* Tour. Roseland Ballroom, New York, NY

Street Scene, Kurt Weill's 1947 opera (libretto by Langston Hughes, after Elmer Rice) about life in a New York tenement on a sweltering summer day. Manhattan School of Music, New York, NY. "With more than 50 roles (and a small ensemble of children), *Street Scene* is a challenging work to stage. The Manhattan School of Music's smartly produced, professional-quality production . . . vibrantly conveys the conflicted lives of the tenement's gossip inhabitants" [Vivien Schweitzer, The New York Times, 5/3/08].

Comment

By the Numbers

Most Populated English-Speaking Agglomerations in the World

New York City / Newark - 19,040,000

Los Angeles/Long Beach/Santa Ana - 12,500,000

Chicago - 8,990,000

London - 8,567,000

Miami - 5,585,000

Philadelphia - 5,492,000

Toronto - 5,213,000

Dallas / Fort Worth - 4,798,000

Atlanta - 4,506,000

Boston - 4,467,000

Houston - 4,459,000

Washington, D.C. - 4,338,000

Detroit - 4,101,000

Melbourne - 3,728,000

Montreal - 3,678,000

Phoenix - 3,551,000

San Francisco / Oakland - 3,450,000

Items

The main thing is for a composer to stick around as long as possible and keep working. Otherwise, you miss things like that.

Henry Brant
upon winning the Pulitzer Prize

When [Leonard Bernstein's *Candide*] opened on Broadway, it landed with a thud, closing after 73 performances. . . .

It still sounds more like a musical than an opera, though. . . .

If the score is a good deal more talky than anything pretending to be an opera ought to be

Allan Kozinn
The New York Times, 4/10/08

[If closing after 73 performances is landing with a thud, what does one make of a standard opera or concert-series run?

Is not the definition of opera that of continuous sung drama, -- as opposed to any considerations of style?

And what of singspiel (the W.A. Mozart Magic Flute) and opera comique (Georges Bizet Carmen)?
. . . ed.]

[Leonard] Slatkin's conducting [in the New York Philharmonic's rendition of the Igor Stravinsky *Firebird*] was curiously blatant, fussy and ineffective, with extremes of dynamics that seemed overly manipulated. It was like listening to a poorly engineered CD, when you keep cranking up the volume during pianissimo passages and turning it down during the fortissimo climaxes.

Anthony Tommasini
The New York Times, 4/12/08

[Spoken like a true pop critic, or someone (perhaps me) trying to listen to Richard Wagner on a car stereo with the window open.

Time was when a diversity of dynamics, recording engineered or otherwise, was considered a virtue. Imagine the delicate gradations of Olivier Messiaen's dynamic rows obliterated by studio equalizing techniques, where all dynamics are brought virtually equally to the fore. - ed.]

Opening a Window on a Forgotten Work and Feeling That Fresh Air Rush In

Headline to an article on Igor Stravinsky's *Histoire du Soldat*
The New York Times, 5/1/08

[Clearly someone must have forgotten to educate the NYT Editor in what is a widely-known work - ed.]

I look at the world, and it makes no sense. So I try to write music that makes no sense.

Frederick Rzewski
The New York Times, 5/3/08

Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues (and its companion pieces in the *Four North American Ballads*) makes its point forcefully because the song is known, . . . when the best-known strand is the 14th-century chanson *L'Homme Armé*, listeners are likely to miss the points Mr. Rzewski's juxtapositions are intended to make.

Allan Kozinn
The New York Times, 5/3/08

[On the other hand, we're not familiar with many *Missa Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues* settings... -ed.]

Recordings

Autechre. *Quaristice*. Warp.

Etran Finatawa. *Desert Crossroads*. Riverboat/World Music Network.

Madonna. *Hard Candy*. Warner Brothers.

Frederic Rzewski. *Rzewski Plays Rzewski: Piano Works*, Nonesuch.

George Perle. *Works*. Bridge.