



21ST CENTURY MUSIC

JULY 2009

INFORMATION FOR SUBSCRIBERS

21ST-CENTURY MUSIC is published monthly by 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC, P.O. Box 2842, San Anselmo, CA 94960. ISSN 1534-3219.

Subscription rates in the U.S. are \$96.00 per year; subscribers elsewhere should add \$48.00 for postage. Single copies of the current volume and back issues are \$12.00. Large back orders must be ordered by volume and be pre-paid. Please allow one month for receipt of first issue. Domestic claims for non-receipt of issues should be made within 90 days of the month of publication, overseas claims within 180 days. Thereafter, the regular back issue rate will be charged for replacement. Overseas delivery is not guaranteed. Send orders to 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC, P.O. Box 2842, San Anselmo, CA 94960. email: mus21stc@gmail.com.

Typeset in Times New Roman. Copyright 2009 by 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC. This journal is printed on recycled paper. Copyright notice: Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use is granted by 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC.

INFORMATION FOR CONTRIBUTORS

21ST-CENTURY MUSIC invites pertinent contributions in analysis, composition, criticism, interdisciplinary studies, musicology, and performance practice; and welcomes reviews of books, concerts, music, recordings, and videos. The journal also seeks items of interest for its calendar, chronicle, comment, communications, opportunities, publications, recordings, and videos sections. Copy should be double-spaced on 8 1/2 x 11 -inch paper, with ample margins. Authors are encouraged to submit via e-mail.

Prospective contributors should consult *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), in addition to back issues of this journal. Copy should be sent to 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC, P.O. Box 2842, San Anselmo, CA 94960. e-mail: mus21stc@gmail.com. Materials for review may be sent to the same address.

INFORMATION FOR ADVERTISERS

Send inquiries to 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC, P.O. Box 2842, San Anselmo, CA 94960. e-mail: mus21stc@gmail.com.

21ST CENTURY MUSIC

July 2009

Volume 16, Number 7

MICHAEL MCDONAGH	Rzewski Reviewski	1
ELLIOT HARMON	Automatic Review	2
CHRONICLE	Of May 2009	3
RECORDINGS		11
WRITERS		12
ILLUSTRATIONS	i. Dennis Russell Davies 1. Frederic Rzewski 2. John Bischoff 10. Sara Kirkland Snider 11. Kronos Quartet - Floodplain 12. Mark Alburger - Sex and Delilah	

Editorial Staff

Mark Alburger
EDITOR-PUBLISHER

Harriet March Page
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Patti Noel Deuter
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Erling Wold
WEBMASTER

Alexis Alrich
Katherine Buono
Ken Bullock
David Cleary
Jeff Dunn
Phillip George
Elliot Harmon
Brian Holmes
Jeff Kaliss
John Lane
Michael McDonagh
Tom Moore
William Rowland
Andrew Shapiro
CORRESPONDENTS

Rzewski Reviewski

MICHAEL MCDONAGH

It's sometimes said that composers are either German or French, and American vanguard one Frederic Rzewski, with his much vaunted admiration for Beethoven, is clearly on the German side. But how could he not be when some of his composition teachers like Luigi Dallapiccola and Milton Babbitt forsook a flowing lyric line for a jagged dramatic one, whose aim is not to seduce the ear, but to wow with intellectual rigor? But that doesn't mean that Rzewski's work is insincere, or lacks power -- it has that in spades -- but that it tends to be aimed at the mind and not the heart. It's often confrontational, too. But that's a good thing because any real musical interaction, like any real human one, has a built in confrontational element, and confrontations help us grow.

Rzewski's 1976 solo piano piece *The People United Will Never Be Defeated* (*El Pueblo Unido Jamas Sera Vencido*) is certainly a work in which he confronted the musical possibilities of all kinds of things that had been appearing in his output -- he was 38 at the time he wrote it -- until then and his discoveries here power lots of his subsequent work. It's as much as a watershed piece for him as Glass's massive ensemble work *Music In 12 Parts* (1971-74) was for him. It's also a kind of compendium of rhythmic, harmonic and coloristic approaches to Chilean composer Sergio Ortega's song for Salvador Allende on which it's based. There are sex variation sets of six each plus a coda, and Rzewski seems to use every possible pianistic device throughout.

He's easily one of the greatest pianists around, and having been a pupil of Charles Mackey who was himself a pupil of the great Russian virtuoso Josef Lhevinne, Rzewski knows that tradition from the inside out, and you get all kinds of takes on it here. The shadow of Beethoven weighs in, of course, as does a lot of the standard classical tradition, as well as whiffs of blues and Native American modes. It was amazing to watch Rzewski, on May 16 at the Mondavi Center in Davis (CA), draw on all these musics with such concentrated vigor and technical ease and make them his own. He used every imaginable kind of touch, both conventional and unconventional, and tactic. He played legato and with rubato -- one of the most beautiful stretches, Variation 23 (as fast as possible), was a kind of minimalist groove, with what sounded like alternations from major to minor, in a steady tempo, with terraced dynamics -- and produced loud sharply opposed sonorities. Walls of sound would sometimes collapse into extreme quietude without the slightest warning, and then go back to a kind of cataclysm reined in by Rzewski's superb

technique. Though describing his sound world is probably a fool's errand, Rzewski does seem to fall into the New England Transcendental tradition of Ives, Ruggles, and Earle Brown at his most granitic, with lots of European echoes thrown in. His performance, which clocked in at 62 nonstop minutes, was a lot different from that of Ursula Oppens, for whom he wrote it (I reviewed her Berkeley performance several years ago for www.sfcv.org as *The King Regrets*), but equally powerful and musically convincing.

Rzewski's *Nanosonatas*, from which he played Books V and VI (2008) showed what he's been up to lately, and while 32 years separated them from *The People United*, both pieces were obviously the work of an artist with an abiding interest in drama and timbral variety. The *Nanosonatas* also share Rzewski's predilection for moving between consonance and dissonance, delicacy and violence, the clangorous and the calm. There was also a wide range of color and density in these elliptical pieces -- even the portraits of the composer's children in Book VI sounded private -- which are to short to be etudes, and not properly sonatas, but something in between. They're also mercurial, like Rzewski, who delivered himself of many lively opinions and convictions in a post performance chat with Mondavi Center's executive director Don Roth. The *Nanosonatas* may be slighter in musical content and complexity than *The People United*. Still their composer gave this 38-minute set the same care and attention he gave to that bigger and obviously imposing piece. Rzewski didn't phone anything in, which is always the sign of a true and very serious artist, who's really in the moment, or in his case, element, or elements, given the physical and intellectual nature of his work. And his audience in the Mondavi Center's smallish and welcoming Studio Theatre clearly listened hard and asked him penetrating questions in the subsequent question-and-answer session.



Automatic Review

ELLIOT HARMON

Following the Potential of Fantastic Ideas: The League of Automatic Music Composers 1978-1983. New World Records.

The late 1970's saw huge strides in technology for electronic composition and performance. New software and hardware innovations were blowing up the possibilities for aural exploration and becoming the playground for a generation of experimenters. But a few composers preferred to forego sophisticated instrumentation and continue messing with twenty-year-old circuit boards. Among them was a collective - a more appropriate word than "ensemble" -- led by John Bischoff, Tim Perkis, and Jim Horton, with appearances by many others, most notably David Behrman and Rich Gold. The League of Automatic Music Composers sought a lack of control over their electronic works at a time when many composers were tightening the reins. With *The League of Automatic Music Composers 1978-1983*, recently released by New World Records, the music of this group can be heard by a much wider audience than was previously possible and grasped more clearly in the context of the American avant-garde.

To understand the League's project, it's useful to consider the state of music in the Bay Area in the 1970's. Mills College's reputation in the innovative music world -- and its liberal open-studio policy -- made it a natural hangout for experimenters of all stripes and a hub for cross-pollination. When classically trained performers met musicians of other idioms -- punk rock, jazz, electronica -- improvisation became a common unit of exchange. An improvisational dialogue built momentum at Mills, California College of Arts and Crafts, and the New College of California, as well as numerous independent art spaces around San Francisco and Oakland.

At a time when grants and institutional backing were not as freely available to musicians on the West Coast as they were in New York, musicians were free to push themselves and each other into darker and stranger territory. According to Perkis and Bischoff, "Since the audience was sparse, and opportunities for an actual career futile, why not spend one's efforts following the potential of fantastic ideas, rather than worrying about the practical applications of those ideas within traditional musical domains?"

Behrman, Gold, Bischoff, and Horton -- the first iteration of the League -- sought to create computerized music with the organic nature of improvisation, a music in which the computers were also improvisers. Such immediacy was not possible with the synthesizer software of the time, so instead they built their own crude networks of microprocessors. In one such network, a computer would play a predetermined melody. A second computer, programmed with a simple just-intonation algorithm, would create harmonies to follow the first. A third would echo the key changes of the second, and the first would speed or slow its tempo to stay in time with the

third. Once such a program was arranged, human interaction with the processors was kept to a minimum until a piece had run its course and the League adjusted the arrangement. The League's performances, informal affairs in and around Mills, would regularly go on for several hours, during which audience members would come and go, talk and ask questions.

What I find most remarkable about *The League of Automatic Music Composers 1978-1983* is, despite its conceptual loftiness, how utterly listenable the thing is. True, much of it is very difficult, but frequent are the moments when the various elements come together for minutes on end of sheer indulgence. The album deserves a place in the improvised music canon, if only because it captures sessions that humans should be jealous of.

According to producer Jon Leidecker's notes, the 55-minute album began as 40 hours' worth of tapes, and reading that saddens me a little. Perhaps the brief CD fails to capture the leisureliness of the original performances, but instead it offers a comprehensive yet digestible account of a fascinating moment in experimental music.



Chronicle

May 1

American Composers Orchestra, in music of Lukas Ligeti, Derek Bermel, Robert Beaser, and Thomas Larcher. Zankel Hall, New York, NY. "[One] purpose of the evening was to honor artistic leaders who have been crucial to the orchestra's success: [Robert] Beaser, its artistic director; [Derek] Bermel, just finishing his tenure as composer in residence; and Dennis Russell Davies, the conductor laureate, who founded the orchestra 32 years ago and looked elated to be back. Mr. Bermel's work, *A shout, a whisper, and a trace*, was particularly effective and often exhilarating. Mr. Bermel draws from myriad genres: jazz, rock, gospel, cerebral modernism, you name it. That his interests are so wide-ranging could prevent him from forging a distinctive voice were his ear not so keen and his technique so assured. Mr. Bermel says that this 20-minute piece was inspired by his reflection on Bartok's final five years, as a transplant to New York. Though relieved to have left Hungary, his homeland, under the Nazis, Bartok maintained a personal connection to his musical roots. Mr. Bermel's piece begins with earthy, foursquare tunes and rhythmic riffs that seem reminiscent of Bartok works that incorporate Eastern European folk music. The tunes alternate with clattering instrumental outbursts that could be frenzied ritornellos in a neo-Baroque concerto. . . . [There were] brass chorale touched with tartly jazzy harmonies; Coplandesque modal musings; a ruminative middle movement with dense, blurry impressionistic string chords. But the allusions somehow enhance the voice that comes through. The music is strangely alluring and constantly surprising. Mr. Ligeti's *Labyrinth of Clouds* is a 25-minute concerto for marimba lumina, an unusual electronic instrument. By playing on its surface with mallets and adjusting levers, Mr. Ligeti, who performed the solo deftly, evoked a prepared piano, the metallic tones of a zither and all manner of electronic beeps and static. The music is rich with atmosphere, piled-up harmonies and Minimalistic patterns. The element of confrontation between a soloist and an orchestra that has long been characteristic of the concerto genre does not much interest Mr. Ligeti here. For the most part the solo was folded into the overall orchestral sound, except during a cadenza, partly improvised, that was riveting. As for prepared pianos, Mr. Larcher used one (a Steinway fitted with rubber pieces, screws and a metal ball to slide atop the strings) in his *Böse Zellen* (*Malignant Cells*) [(2007)] for piano and orchestra. He performed the solo part. After the marimba lumina, the prepared piano sounded endearingly old-fashioned. But Mr. Larcher used it with enormous imagination to create waves of clanking percussion, perpetual-motion drum toccatas and more. Mr. Beaser's *Guitar Concerto* was written for the soloist, Eliot Fisk, an old friend and Yale classmate. That Mr. Fisk had great input into the piece's composition was a wise move; the writing for guitar was very effective, with spiraling passagework, oscillating chords and poignant melodies.

For me, the music was too safely neo-Romantic and, at 30 minutes, self-indulgent. Mr. Davies, still wiry and youthful at 65, drew colorful and compelling performances from the excellent players" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 5/1/09].

Wallace Norman and Larry Alan Smith's *Oh Virgil! A Theatrical Portrait*. Judson Church, New York, NY. Through May 10. "[The production] describes itself as a snapshot of "one of the most remarkable, influential and controversial artists in the history of contemporary American music." But that guy never shows up. Instead some sour, self-absorbed old dude plants himself on the stage; you're tempted to go up there and heave him into the wings to make way for that erudite, multitalented fellow you've heard so much about. The play . . . is a biographical sketch of Virgil Thomson, the noted composer and music critic, who until his death in 1989 was a fixture in New York intellectual circles, hosting famous dinner parties at the Chelsea Hotel, where he lived. Thomson had an odd specialty, composing musical portraits of people. ("When you sit for a painter he draws what he sees," the Thomson of this production explains. "I write what I hear.") The play, written by Wallace Norman in collaboration with Larry Alan Smith, seeks to turn the tables on him, creating a portrait of him, using his own words and music. . . . [T]his show came from a workshop at the Woodstock Fringe Festival The music -- Thomson's settings of poems by William Blake and others -- is well chosen to complement the biographical elements, and a few (far too few) snippets of Thomson's critical writing are heard. But the man himself, played aimlessly by Victor Truro, is a whiny annoyance. Where is the fellow who was so dazzling at dinner, who wrote a film score that won a Pulitzer, who matched wits with Gertrude Stein? Did this man have a generous spirit, a sense of humor, a devotion to his craft or any other qualities actually worthy of celebration? We're left to try to figure that out for ourselves from the samples of his music (the baritone Troy Valjean Rucker and the soprano Watson Heintz do the singing; Michael Conley is the pianist) and those occasional fragments of his writing" [Neil Genzling, *The New York Times*, 5/1/09].

May 5

Birds of a Feather: Messiaen and His Legacy. Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY. "[S]everal ensembles and soloists largely set Messiaen's music aside in favor of works by four of his best-known students: Pierre Boulez, Gérard Grisey, Tristan Murail and Allain Gaussin. Only at the very end of the program was Messiaen's own music heard. Yet that single delayed Messiaen work -- *Oiseaux Exotiques* (1956), electrifyingly performed -- rolled over the rest of the program like a tidal wave. Not that the other composers' works were less vivid, in their different ways, but each explored an element or two that linked its composer to Messiaen.

Oiseaux Exotiques offers nearly the full slate of Messiaen's signature moves: themes drawn substantially from birdcalls, though filtered through Messiaen's pointed harmonic sensibilities, rhythms based on patterns found in Asian music and a pervasive sense of the mystical (if not quite the specific references to Roman Catholic theology that provide signposts in many of his other works). Gilbert Kalish painted Messiaen's bursts of solo piano writing in bright hues and with sharply defined edges, an approach matched by the woodwinds, brasses and percussion of the Stony Brook Contemporary Chamber Players, led by Eduardo Leandro. The concert began with Mr. Gaussin's *Satori*, which touched on Messiaen's spiritual side, although the influence here is Buddhist: the title refers to the moment of inner awakening and oneness with the universe. The music, for solo clarinet, evokes that moment in slow motion; a pianissimo line, slow moving and with bent pitches, gradually becomes louder, faster and more densely chromatic. Carol McGonnell, the clarinetist, made her way from the meditative patience of the opening to the ecstasy of the finale with inexorable momentum and carefully calibrated virtuosity. In Mr. Murail's *Courants de l'Espace*, performed by the Argento Chamber Ensemble and the Stony Brook group, the common ground was the *ondes martenot*, an electronic keyboard instrument that Messiaen used in several works. Mr. Murail, who played the *ondes martenot* line himself, used the instrument subtly, as part of the orchestral texture, often doubling string or vibraphone lines. Like Mr. Gaussin's work, "*Courants*" evolves from the simple (a sustained tone) to the complex (clusters that jangle like a machine gone haywire). Grisey's *Manifestations* evolves, at first, almost exactly like Mr. Murail's piece, but it also includes an amusing central movement that includes blowing up and bursting balloons, and a finale that sets a pair of gracefully melodic flute lines against the ensemble's sustained dissonances. *Face the Music*, a student ensemble (ages 11 to 16) gave a knockout performance, directed by Jennifer Undercofler. After the relatively subtle textural shifts of the Gaussin, Murail and Grisey works, Mr. Boulez's concise *Improvisé Pour le Dr. K* seemed an oasis of vigorous counterpoint. Michel Galante led the Argento Chamber Ensemble in a brisk, incisive account that made a listener wonder why this 1969 score is heard so rarely" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 5/6/09].

May 7

Premiere of Peter Lieberman's cantata *The World in Flower*, given by the New York Philharmonic. Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY. "Some of the last performances that the extraordinary mezzo-soprano Lorraine Hunt Lieberman gave before her death in July 2006 were of the "*Neruda Songs*," composed for her by her husband, Peter Lieberman. This rapturously lyrical work, for voice and orchestra, a setting of five sonnets by the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, was like a love letter from the composer to his wife, who was grappling with breast cancer at the time. But Mr. Lieberman wrote another piece for Ms. Hunt Lieberman before she died at 52 in Santa Fe, N.M., where they lived: . . .

The World in Flower, a cantata for mezzo-soprano, baritone, chorus and orchestra. Like the *Neruda Songs*, the cantata is another venture by Mr. Lieberman, whose complex earlier music hewed mostly to 12-tone procedures, into a more tonal and accessible idiom. Commissioned by the New York Philharmonic, it was to have had its premiere in May 2006 with Ms. Hunt Lieberman singing, but she was too ill. The Philharmonic gave the belated premiere of this serene, sincere and sometimes perplexing piece on Thursday night at Avery Fisher Hall in a radiant performance conducted by Alan Gilbert. The mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato and the baritone Russell Braun were the excellent soloists. The premiere was also delayed by Mr. Lieberman's own health crisis. Shortly after his wife's death, Mr. Lieberman was told that he had lymphoma. He orchestrated the cantata in a hospital room in Houston. But during a preconcert talk with the composer Steven Stucky, Mr. Lieberman looked well, a youthful 62. The cantata won a warm ovation in Mr. Gilbert's ambitious program, which included a gripping account of Mahler's exuberant First Symphony. For the elaborate text to *The World in Flower*, Mr. Lieberman, a Buddhist, assembled words of 11 writers, ranging from medieval mystics and North American shamans to Rilke, Whitman and, again, Neruda. As Mr. Lieberman said in the discussion, the texts, taken together, do not express some "we are all one" sentiment. Rather, the poems and prayers show spiritual people who see the world as a sacred place, however different their points of view. Still, this long work has a lot of words in it. The texts are challenging, confessional and strange, the most startling being a pugnacious, dense poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins. . . . [T]he cantata [clocks in at] . . . 45 minutes. During the talk Mr. Lieberman shared insights into the shift he had taken in his music toward a more direct style. During his younger days as a 12-tone composer, his music was complicated, he said, "but I was more complicated." The 12-tone discipline was tremendously beneficial, he added, but finally too limiting. Still, Mr. Lieberman's rigorously modern earlier music is expressive and elegant in its own ways. . . . Listen beneath the richly chromatic surface of the opening chorus, *I Live My Life in Widening Circles*, a Rilke poem with a pensive saxophone solo threading through, and you hear pungent, intense strains of Mr. Lieberman's modernist side embedded in the chords. . . . In Part 6, a setting of a four-verse Neruda poem in Spanish . . . skirts . . . close to Manuel de Falla. In the final section, a poignant and, by the end, exhilarating setting of Navajo prayer, Mr. Lieberman takes . . . chances and pushes to extremes, with hard-edged, clanking percussion chords amid the wild Messiaenesque ecstasy. . . . Gilbert began with Mahler's short, lyrical symphonic movement *Blumine*, originally a part of the First Symphony, though later removed from the score. In a programming coincidence, Mr. Gilbert's performance of the revised version of the Mahler First after intermission came the night after Daniel Barenboim had conducted it with the Staatskapelle Berlin at Carnegie Hall. After the ardent, impetuous . . . performance from the Berlin orchestra, it was a thrill to hear the work performed with such precision and daring by the Philharmonic under Mr. Gilbert, conducting from memory. During the blazing episodes in the finale, he drove the orchestra to frenzied outbursts, all the more terrifying for being executed with such cool command.

The tremendous ovation bodes well for his coming tenure as the orchestra's music director" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 5/8/09].

May 9

Pierre Boulez conducts the Staatskapelle Berlin in Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 4 and six songs from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY. "[Dorothea] Röschmann sang . . . and Mr. Boulez and the orchestra gave a lovely performance of the Fourth Symphony. The strings were especially fine in the songful moments leading into the outburst before the finale. In that finale, as in the "Wunderhorn" songs, Ms. Röschmann sang with beautiful soaring or lilting tone but tended toward overcuteness in her manner. . . . Among the hard-working musicians, none worked harder than Wolf-Dieter Batzdorf, the concertmaster in all the concerts. He was equally effective in sinuous melodies and in the morbid dance of the Fourth Symphony's scherzo, with its weirdly retuned fiddle. Christian Batzdorf, a trumpeter and the concertmaster's son, made fine work of the posthorn solos in the Third's scherzando" [James R. Oestreich, *The New York Times*, 5/10/09].

Dawn Upshaw and Osvaldo Golijov showcasing eight composers. Zankel Hall, New York, NY. "Lev Zhurbin, a k a Ljova, whose *Niña Dance* opened the Saturday concert, used bright Tex-Mex-inflected trumpet figures to frame a gripping cycle about the hundreds of young women who have disappeared (or been found murdered) in Juárez, Mexico, since 1993. But the Mexican accent was just the first of many signposts. Mr. Zhurbin also used tango rhythms and a Weillian darkness. Sofia Rei Koutsovitiss sang the haunting texts (by Marjorie Agosin and Saúl Yurkievich) movingly in a vibrato-free pop style. Jeremy Flowers's *Three Songs* -- settings of William Carlos Williams and Elizabeth Bishop poems -- were also written for a pop voice and had a powerful advocate in Olga Bell, who moved from a whisper to a shout as the score demanded. Supported by low strings, guitar, piano, drums and pitched percussion, as well as Mr. Flowers's own electronics, these chamber-pop pieces would have been at home on a late-1960s art-rock album. But they are also part of an affectingly direct hybrid style that many young composers favor now. Paola Prestini chose a handful of anonymous Italian texts that examine feminine archetypes -- virgin, martyr, mother and queen -- in her *Oceanic Verses*, and set them for two sopranos (Leona Carney and Rie Miyake) and a mezzo-soprano (Katarzyna Sadej). Ms. Prestini's singers use vibrato and traditional expressive techniques most of the time, but the music draws on Italian folk styles and it is sometimes rendered using the plain, gritty vocal sound in which the music is rooted. Russian folk songs inspired Elena Langer's hauntingly modal, eerily scored *Songs at the Well*, for two sopranos (Ariadne Greif and Rachel Schutz). Ms. Langer's innovation was to assemble her songs into a poignant drama about a young woman's increasingly unsatisfactory marriage. Other works had a dramatic underpinning too.

David T. Little's project was the start of an opera, *Dog Days*, based on a short story by Judy Budnitz, in which a family in postapocalyptic survival mode descends (or in some cases resists descending) into barbarism. Mr. Little's writing is melodic and shapely, and the five singers -- Mary Bonhag and Megan Taylor, sopranos; Tania Rodriguez, mezzo-soprano; Patrick Cook and Sung Eun Lee, tenors -- gave wrenching portrayals of a couple and their three children. Matti Kovler's *Here Comes Messiah!* -- a monodrama, in some onomatopoeic detail, about giving birth -- was sung, spoken, whispered and breathed, heavily, by Tehila Goldstein, an agile soprano. It, too, had a folk touch: its ending is a graceful setting of *Peliah*, a Hasidic song based on a Psalm text. Judd Greenstein's *Vayomer Shlomo* (And Solomon Said) weaves together three biblical texts by or about Solomon (from *Kings*, *Song of Songs*, and *Ecclesiastes*) into a meditation on the nature of wisdom. Mr. Greenstein's sharply rhythmic setting of the Hebrew text (with brief passages in English) at the start, and the clapping figures at the end, seemed to be pointed allusions to Steve Reich, but mostly Mr. Greenstein went his own consonant and sometimes modal, rhythmically complex way. The piece was performed by a finely balanced vocal trio: Solange Merdianian, mezzo-soprano, and Celine Mogielnicki and Madysen Page, sopranos. Of the eight composers only Kate Sopor, in *Helen Enfettered*, a setting of sections from Christian Bök's *Eunoia*, veered toward the melodic angularity of the atonal style. Even so, as this peculiar fantasy about Helen of Troy unfolded, that angularity melted, yielding an increasingly lyrical piece for two sopranos, Melanie Conly and Jamie Van Eyck" [Alan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 5/11/09].

May 11

Music of Elliott Carter, with the composer in attendance. Zankel Hall, New York, NY. "In a recent interview with National Public Radio the composer Elliott Carter, whose 100th birthday in December has been celebrated with many concerts this season, said his *Cello Sonata* was considered 'extremely modern' at the time of its 1948 premiere at Town Hall. Compared to some of Mr. Carter's later works, that sonata now sounds entirely accessible, especially with a dynamic performance like that given by Claudius Popp . . . and Daniel Barenboim . . . Carter champion [who] is in New York to conduct Mahler symphonies with the Staatskapelle Berlin at Carnegie Hall. . . . Mr. Carter's interminable, impenetrable *Quintet for Piano and Winds* (1991) is another story. To judge by the audience's restlessness, the quintet won't be included in many listeners' desert island playlists. . . . The program also included vibrant works for percussion, including selections from Mr. Carter's *Eight Pieces for Timpani*, performed with flair by Torsten Schönfeld. . . . Dominic Oelze played the brief, colorful *Figment V* for Marimba (2009) with panache. It was written as a birthday present for Mr. Carter's grandson Alexander" [Vivien Schweitzer, *The New York Times*, 5/13/09].

May 12

Pierre Boulez and the Staatskapelle Berlin in Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 6. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY. "The odds were good, when the Staatskapelle Berlin began its chronological survey of Mahler's symphonies at Carnegie Hall seven symphonies ago, that Pierre Boulez's account of the Sixth on Tuesday evening would prove the major highlight. The odds are still . . . Boulez has long made a specialty of the work, evidently drawn not only to the formal clarity of the first three movements but also to the challenge of bringing a like lucidity to the huge and unwieldy finale. In a recent interview he discussed that finale at some length, calling it a crucial turning point in an evolution of Mahler's language, leading toward the sound world of the Second Viennese School. The trick in performing it, he said, is to sort out the climaxes from the lesser peaks, so that the real ones stand out. This he did meticulously . . . On the surface, Mr. Boulez and Mr. Barenboim, for all their joint labors and mutual respect, seem to represent polar opposites of Mahler interpretation, the cool and cerebral and the hot and emotional. But Mr. Boulez's coolness, given the intensity of his focus and his uncanny command, verges on white heat, and those climaxes, judiciously measured but passionately rendered, carry tremendous force. . . . As for textual matters in the Sixth, Mr. Boulez, like most conductors today, omits the third hammer blow in the finale and, unlike a growing number, retains the traditional order of the inner movements: Scherzo before Andante. His reasons, he said, have less to do with Mahler's superstitions about removing the third of the hammer blows representing fate, or the composer's other afterthoughts, than with musical sense" [James R. Oestreich, *The New York Times*, 5/14/09].

May 14

New York Philharmonic in Dmitri Shostakovich's Violin Concerto No. 1 (with Christian Tetzlaff) and Jan Sibelius's Symphony No. 5. Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY. "The Shostakovich, if more commonplace than the Szymanowski, was a worthy replacement, and Mr. Tetzlaff is generally worth hearing, no matter what he has on his stand. And if listeners used to hearing the Shostakovich in classic recordings by Oistrakh and other Russian players find Mr. Tetzlaff's sound light for this work, there is much to be learned from the perspective he offers. . . . It may be that a brawnier, more opulent approach is more germane to the work. But Mr. Tetzlaff's performance was a moving alternative view. . . . The Sibelius, too, had moments of sublime beauty -- the icy, pizzicato string lines in the central, slow movement" [Alan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 5/15/09].

May 15

Pierre Boulez conducts the Staatskapelle Berlin in Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 8 ("Of a Thousand"). Carnegie Hall, New York, NY.

"Then again, maybe it will be Pierre Boulez's performance of the Eighth Symphony, on Friday evening, that will live longest in memory from the Staatskapelle Berlin's cycle of Mahler symphonies at Carnegie Hall, conducted alternately by Mr. Boulez and Daniel Barenboim. Comparisons with Mr. Boulez's Sixth, on Tuesday, are in any case odious, each performance having been treasurable in its way. Mahler's Eighth Symphony is his simplest in concept, consisting of two movements setting first the hymn *Veni, Creator Spiritus*, then the final scene from Goethe's *Faust*. But in its working out, with typically large orchestra, huge chorus and eight vocal soloists, it is the most unwieldy and complex, and thus putty in the hands of the wizardly Mr. Boulez, even though he came to this work rather late. In both movements Mr. Boulez built with measured yet inexorable tread to the climax of the ending. The shining close of the first movement, especially, was stunning in its solidity and power: for this listener the first truly spine-tingling moment of the cycle. Subtitled 'Symphony of a Thousand,' the work was here a symphony of 300-plus, with the Westminster Symphonic Choir and the American Boychoir totaling about 200. . . . With so much going on in this work the orchestra is not always the central player. But Mr. Boulez drew the finest performance of the first eight from the Staatskapelle. If a listener could still wish for richer, fuller tone from certain instrumental soloists, the collective effort was wholly admirable. . . . Here, finally, was an orchestra that you could love for more than just its work ethic" [James R. Oestreich, *The New York Times*, 5/17/09].

May 17

George Crumb's *Vox Balaenae* and music of Ingram Marshall. American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY. "Any musician intent on engaging a young audience could do worse than to start with the work of George Crumb. An inventive composer known for bold sounds and flamboyant effects, Mr. Crumb has fashioned an oeuvre well suited to engaging listeners with open minds and unfettered imaginations, regardless of age. Four fellows of the Academy, an educational outreach program run by Carnegie Hall, the Juilliard School and the Weill Music Institute in partnership with the New York City Department of Education, put that notion to the test at the American Museum of Natural History Sunday afternoon. The performers -- Owen Dalby, violinist; Romie de Guise-Langlois, clarinetist; Erin Lesser, flutist; and Julia MacLaine, cellist -- used Mr. Crumb's *Vox Balaenae* (Voice of the Whale) as the centerpiece of an ambitious multimedia event, *The Voice of the Whale Project*, in the museum's Milstein Hall of Ocean Life. Mr. Crumb's work, inspired by recordings of humpback whale song, is meant to be an immersive experience. In addition to vivid instrumental effects, the piece calls for masked performers and evocative lighting. Sections named for geological eras suggest expanses of time beyond everyday reckoning; references to music by Strauss and Messiaen add layers of allusion for those inclined to dig. Here *Vox Balaenae* was surrounded by two pieces by Ingram Marshall. *Middle Bank Rounds*, a bubbly five-minute commissioned work heard in its premiere, was inspired by the playful swirl of a dolphin pod.

In the more elaborate *Sea Tropes*, from 2007, recorded waves and brass drones lapped against melancholy hymn-tune melodies layered in canon" [Steve Smith, *The New York Times*, 5/19/09].

Brad Lubman conducts *Signal* in Philip Glass's *Symphony No. 3* (1995) and *Suite* from "The Hours" (2003). *Le Poisson Rouge*, New York, NY. "It was a performance that had Mr. Glass's imprimatur, or something like it. Michael Riesman, for decades the conductor of Mr. Glass's own ensemble, joined Mr. Lubman and company as the piano soloist in the "Hours" *Suite*, a quasi concerto based on music from Mr. Glass's score for the 2002 film. Though Mr. Glass did not oversee the rehearsals . . . he was in the audience and took a spotlighted bow from his seat. The performance was in the round, an unusual arrangement for *Le Poisson Rouge*: the orchestra took up the center of the room, with listeners surrounding it. At moments, you might have wished for some distance, if only for acoustical reasons, but generally the directness and energy of the playing, heard at such close range, had a visceral power that was hard to resist. Mr. Glass's *Symphony No. 3* was written for a small string orchestra, and if it seems modest beside his expansive *Fifth*, *Sixth* and *Eighth*, its ear-catching effects (including his rapid-fire update of the 18th century's 'Mannheim rocket' in the finale) and flirtations with Middle Eastern modes work their charms. So does the sheer zestfulness of the second and fourth movements. And the lushly Romantic violin solos (split among four players) in the third can catch you off guard if you're focusing on Mr. Glass's repeating, syncopated rhythmic figures or a fleeting chord progression that hints at his music for *Satyagraha*. The "Hours" *Suite*, arranged by Mr. Riesman, uses episodes from the film music effectively without particularly evoking the film itself. And if the piano line isn't overtly virtuosic, it works as a dramatic persona of sorts, ambling through the woven-together film themes and imposing a sense of structure on them. Mr. Riesman played the piano line deftly and, in the best moments, soulfully, with Mr. Lubman and his players providing an elegantly shaped accompaniment" [Alan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 5/18/09].

May 19

Keys to the Future Festival. Greenwich House Music School, New York, NY. "[This year's festival] offers 32 works by 22 composers, performed by 9 pianists. Five of those pianists shared the opening bill, beginning with [festival founder Joseph] Rubenstein, who played his own *Romance No. 3* ("Labyrinth") (2007), an easygoing work in which a gently rippling accompaniment supports a flowing, chordal melody. Mr. Rubenstein's style is consonant and appealing, and often has a quality that calls to mind the unfolding improvisations that the rock and jazz pianist David Sancious sometimes performs. It is pianists' music, as opposed to composers' music: instead of giving listeners a lecture in form and syntax, it invites them to eavesdrop as it gradually finds its way. Tatjana Rankovich played two more rigorously organized works. Aaron Jay Kernis's *Before Sleep and Dreams* (1990) captures the state of half-awake fantasy suggested by the title in its gauzy, gently dramatic textures.

Mr. Kernis's eclecticism ranges freely here: passages at the top of the keyboard have the uninflected innocence of a toy piano, yet at more sophisticated moments Debussy's ghost seems to glide past (playing, or perhaps merely dreaming of, *La Cathédrale Engloutie*). Ms. Rankovich's second work, Bruce Stark's *Fanfare* (2003), is built on the same undulating textures as Mr. Rubenstein's piece, but it moves further afield, and proves as solidly extroverted as Mr. Kernis's score is inwardly focused and fanciful. Radiohead's music has been heard at this festival in past years, by way of Christopher O'Riley's transcriptions, and it was back as the opening piece in Lisa Moore's set. Ms. Moore's account of *Knives Out* (2001) made little attempt to mimic Radiohead's own laconic phrasing and pace. There is no reason she should have: Mr. O'Riley's arrangements are restatements of the music, not slavish covers. Ms. Moore presented *Knives Out* as a study in shifting texture, almost as if it were a Frederic Rzewski score. And she offset the Radiohead song with a vigorous reading of John Adams's brash, sharply rhythmic *American Berserk* (2001). Karen Tanaka's *Crystalline II* (1996), performed by Blair McMillen, turned out to be the program's most entrancing piece, mainly because of the way it expands from the mysterious, delicately cascading figures that open it to the full-throttle fortissimo called for in its final pages. Mr. McMillen's astute, focused playing brought that transformation to life, and his assertiveness contributed mightily to the success of Chester Biscardi's muscular, texturally busy *Piano Sonata* (1986) as well. Marina Lomazov closed the program with Carter Pann's *Three Strokes* (2000) and William Bolcom's *Serpent's Kiss* (1969), works with an academic connection: Mr. Pann was a student of Mr. Bolcom's. In Mr. Pann's work a lyrical movement of childlike simplicity is framed by steely toned, rhythmically sharp-edged, almost mechanistic movements. Mr. Bolcom's piece is more lighthearted: hints of ragtime and late-19th-century salon styles are intertwined with virtuosic figuration and theatrical effects (tapping the piano and whistling, for example). In Ms. Lomazov's outgoing performance the work's tongue-in-cheek turns made their point, drawing laughter mixed with admiration for both Mr. Bolcom's and Ms. Lomazov's comic deftness" Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 5/20/09].

Lunatics at Large. Thalia Theater, Symphony Space, New York, NY. "[The group] was formed at Mannes College the New School for Music in 2007, and the players decided to remain together after finishing their degrees. To judge from their program . . . they seem drawn mainly (though not exclusively) to the thorny, post-tonal side of the repertory. That sets them against the current -- or at least against the most commercially rewarding of the several currents -- flowing through the new-music world. They are also joining a crowded field in an uncertain economy. But they have a lot going for them too. The ensemble has a signature piece, Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, which gives them a lineup varied enough to take on instrumental and vocal works of many kinds. And the musicians are young, energetic and finely polished, with a sense of humor about their generally sober repertory. Only a group that can laugh at the conventions it holds dear would program Eric Gaudibert's *Orées* (1986), a virtuosic but subtly satirical look at the most extreme contemporary techniques. . . .

Katharine Dain, the ensemble's engaging soprano, gave as graceful, and as intense, a performance of Schoenberg's stylized vocal line as you could want. She moved easily between its slides, whispers and more straightforward expressivity, as she also had earlier in the program, in Hanns Eisler's *Palmström*, which uses a similar *Sprechstimme* style. In the Eisler *Ms. Dain's* bright, light tone marked her as a *soubrette*. But she quickly countered that impression with the warm, almost mezzolike sound she brought to Peter Kelsh's appealing, neo-Romantic *When Shall We Set Sail for Happiness?* The program also included two Webern works: *Four Pieces* (Op. 7), in a vivid, beautifully shaped reading by Erik Carlson, the violinist, and Evi Jundt, the pianist; and *Three Little Pieces* (Op. 11) in an equally supple account by Ms. Jundt and Andrea Lee, the cellist" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 5/19/09].

May 20

Bamberg Symphony, conducted by Jonathan Nott, in Bela Bartok's *Piano Concerto No. 1* and *No. 3* (with Pierre-Laurent Aimard), and Claude Debussy's *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*. Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY. "Aimard's dazzling and crystalline performance of the *First Concerto* (1926), a bold experiment in driving rhythmic energy and percussive sonorities. In keeping with Bartok's request, the percussion instruments were placed behind the piano, to make clear that Bartok treats the piano as the percussion instrument it is" [Anthony Tomassini, *The New York Times*, 5/22/09].

May 21

Bamberg Symphony, conducted by Jonathan Nott, in Bela Bartok's *Piano Concerto No. 2* (with Pierre-Laurent Aimard), Claude Debussy's *La Mer*, and Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY.

Juilliard Orchestra, conducted by James DePreist. Alice Tully Hall, New York, NY. "Aulis Sallinen's short, evocative *Shadows* and Launy Grondahl's virtuosic *Trombone Concerto* were [there] for fans of contemporary music and orchestral oddities. And a warm-hued reading of . . . Hindemith's *Symphonic Metamorphosis on Themes by Carl Maria von Weber*, with its cornucopia of solo passages, undoubtedly gave parents (on hand for commencement ceremonies on Friday) a sense of what they had paid for. The runaway hit of the evening was the Grondahl. *Trombone concertos* are rare, but a work like the Grondahl, which requires a solo trombonist to play with the suppleness of a violinist and the energy of a trumpeter, makes you wish more composers would take up the challenge. Grondahl's style was unabashedly Romantic, and he orchestrated with a seductive richness. Against that backdrop he gave the solo trombone a singing line full of chromatic twists and turns, which touches on both the upper and lower reaches of the trombone's range and provides flourishes that in another context would sound operatic. This ambitious score was beautifully served by Vanessa Fralick . . . [who] played with a sweet but firm tone and brought a superb lyrical sensibility to her account.

Even more striking, she created the illusion that her quietly virtuosic performance came easily. Mr. Sallinen's *Shadows*, a dark, moody prelude, put the spotlight firmly on the low strings and woodwinds and the percussionists (six of them, with a lot of thundering to do), with an occasional sweeping violin line cutting through the gloom. Mr. DePreist drew a suitably fluid performance from his young players, and he had the strings sounding better still in his lively, finely balanced performance of the Schubert. The Hindemith is an inventive work . . . [showing] off the strengths of individual woodwind players, pairs of hornists, and large and small groups of strings, and given the strengths of this orchestra's performance" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 5/22/09].

May 22

San Francisco Cabaret Opera presents *Fresh Voices IX*, including Gary Friedman's *I Do Not Love You Three Ways*, Mark Alburger's *Sex and Delilah*, and music of Cynthia Weyukker. Community Music Center, San Francisco, CA.

Sarah Kirkland Snider's *Penelope*, a 10-song cycle derived from a multimedia-theater piece that created with the actress and playwright Ellen McLaughlin. "Ms. Snider's songs, scored for a solo vocalist, string octet, electric guitar, double bass and two percussionists, had an elegiac quality that deftly evoked sensations of abandonment, agitation, grief and reconciliation. Rachel Calloway, a mezzo-soprano, sang in an emotive, pop-derived style that never felt at odds with the formality of Ms. Snider's wistful music. The performance, conducted by Brad Lubman, ably demonstrated the poised elegance of Ms. Snider's writing. Still, it was troubled by issues of balance. Ms. Calloway and the members of *Signal*, a versatile chamber ensemble, were amplified; at times you sensed the performers could not hear one another clearly" [Steve Smith, *The New York Times*, 5/24/09].

May 25

David Robertson conducts the New York Philharmonic's annual Memorial Day Concert. Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, New York, NY. "Robertson led four works, all composed in the 20th century and all quiet, slow-moving, thoughtful scores that promote sober introspection. Even when that was not the composer's original goal, as with Vaughan Williams's painterly *Lark Ascending*, the context pushed the music in that direction. Mr. Robertson began with Ives's *Unanswered Question* and moved immediately into Barber's *Adagio for Strings*, without waiting for applause. It was a brilliant touch. Ives and Barber were worlds apart in attitude and harmonic language. Yet the nebulous, pianissimo string writing at the heart of the Ives -- against which the mysterious solo trumpet and the dissonant woodwind passages stand out starkly -- seemed to melt into Barber's more sumptuous textures. Just as the Ives seems to meditate on imponderables, the Barber work's history inevitably evokes a sense of loss. . . . Robertson's performance acknowledged that association, but the link to the Ives and the Philharmonic's fine balance and fluidity kept the piece from sounding mawkish.

These works also suited the cathedral's overly vibrant acoustics. . . . [T]he Ives and Barber works are so gentle, and move so glacially, that overwhelming resonance never overtakes their natural movement. And when a passage was loud enough to bring that resonance into play -- when the solo trumpet was sounded in the Ives, for example -- the effect was magnificent. That was also the case in the Vaughan Williams. The orchestral music in *The Lark Ascending* rarely rises above a whisper, but the solo violin soars gracefully and benefits greatly from a rich acoustic ambience. Karen Gomyo used that to her benefit, and the music's, in a sweet-toned, beautifully shaped performance. Mr. Robertson closed the program with L'Ascension, Messiaen's majestic four-movement contemplation of divinity and its earthly manifestations. This was the only score that put equal pressure on the Philharmonic's strings, woodwinds and brasses, and the only one -- though only briefly, in the energetic third movement -- that threatened to push the acoustics into overdrive. But Mr. Robertson and his players held that in check and delivered a thoroughly seductive, deeply moving performance" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 5/26/09].

May 26

Ursula Oppens and Jerome Lowenthal. Yamaha Piano Salon, New York, NY. "Three of the greatest inspirations for the visionary French composer Messiaen were his Roman Catholic faith, birds and Yvonne Loriod, the student who became his second wife. All three are celebrated in his *Visions de l'Amen*, a majestic piano duo written shortly after Messiaen was released from a World War II prisoner of war camp. . . . Messiaen experienced a form of synesthesia and associated colors with particular sounds or harmonies. *Visions* is largely written in the key of A, which for the composer represented blue -- the color of the sky and eternity. The work in seven movements is based on what Messiaen called a 'theme of Creation,' a cadence of solemnly unfolding chords. The opening 'Amen of Creation' crescendos to an ecstatic clanging of bells. Messiaen described the ensuing 'Amen of the Stars' as a 'wild and brutal dance,' and its cacophonous energy was vigorously conveyed by Mr. Lowenthal and Ms. Oppens. In 'Amen of the Angels, of the Saints and of Birdsong,' Messiaen displays his fascination with nature, which he said 'never displays anything in bad taste.' He wove transcriptions of bird songs into many of his works, represented in this section by brilliant, sparkling keyboard writing -- played with flair by the two musicians. The dizzying palette of colors in the final, exuberant 'Amen of the Consummation' suggests thousands of pealing bells. The program opened with an evocative rendition of Debussy's *En Blanc et Noir* for piano duo, in which the pianists illuminated the contrasting character of the three movements. The work was written during World War I, and Debussy attached a quotation from the libretto for Gounod's opera *Roméo et Juliette* to the first movement: 'They dance, but at home / I must sit alone / This blow and this shame / With bowed head I proclaim.' In the somber second movement, mournful chord progressions and phrases reminiscent of bugle calls depict war and a soldier's death with a focus, according to Debussy, 'on blackness and tragedy, as in a capriccio by Goya.'

Debussy died a few years after composing *En Blanc*, but the harmonically adventurous final movement (dedicated to Stravinsky) hints at what future works might have sounded like" [Vivien Schweitzer, *The New York Times*, 5/27/09].

May 29

Phil Spector is sentenced to 19 years to life in prison for the murder of Lana Clarkson. Superior Court, Los Angeles, CA. "[Clarkson was] an actress who was shot through the mouth in [Spector's] home six years ago. Mr. Spector, 69, looked straight forward and showed no emotion as Judge Larry Paul Fidler . . . ordered a term of 15 years to life for second-degree murder plus four years for personal use of a gun. . . . The judge also ordered Mr. Spector to pay \$16,811 in funeral expenses, \$9,740 to a state victims' restitution fund and other fees. . . . Ms. Clarkson, who was 40 when she died, had been best known as the star of Roger Corman's 1985 cult film classic *Barbarian Queen*. Ms. Clarkson's body was found in Mr. Spector's home in a Los Angeles suburb in February 2003. Defense lawyers argued that she had killed herself. Mr. Spector's chauffeur, who was the key witness at the trial, said he had heard a gunshot and then saw Mr. Spector emerge with a gun and heard him say, "I think I killed somebody" [Associated Press, 6/29/09].

May 31

Nico Muhly and Valgeir Sigurdsson's *Green Aria*: A ScentOpera, with Christophe Laudamiel. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY. "This beguiling 30-minute work was the result of a two-year collaboration initiated by the writer and director Stewart Matthew with the composers Nico Muhly and Valgeir Sigurdsson and, critically, the French perfumer Christophe Laudamiel, who has created fragrances for Ralph Lauren, Estée Lauder and other companies. The Peter B. Lewis Theater was packed for this premiere, part of the museum's adventurous *Works & Process* series. In the piece the creators meticulously paired prerecorded music with an orchestrated array of more than 30 distinctively named fragrances. Indeed, the scents, whether subtle, pungent, intoxicating or stinky, became this opera's characters, with names like *Absolute Zero*, *Runaway Crunchy Green* and *Shiny Steel*. The technological challenge was coming up with a way to deliver the scents to audience members. As Mr. Laudamiel explained during a preperformance panel, if the scents were just dispersed from the stage, even aided by a big fan, they would take up to 50 seconds to spread through the auditorium, making it impossible to coordinate a specific fragrance with a musical phrase. The problem was solved by affixing to each seat in the theater its own scent microphone, as it was called, an adjustable tube that could be placed as close as desired to your nose. Mr. Matthew urged everyone to relax and breathe naturally. Mr. Matthew wrote a scenario from which his perfumer and composers worked. There is no spoken or sung script, just a nebulous story: Technology joins forces with Nature; *Evangelical Green* preaches the gospel of modernism, forging a manmade world where 'scents sound, touch and pour,' to quote the *précis*.

But, as *Green Aria* proved, the sense of smell powerfully affects the perception of music. At the start, the opera's *dramatis personae*, five elements and 18 supporting characters, were introduced. As each name was projected on a video screen, the audience heard the music and smelled the scent associated with that character. Fire + Smoke had crinkling electronic sounds and a piercing, burnt-ash scent. In a comic touch, it was announced that the character of Fresh Air was indisposed, and since no replacement existed in New York, the role would be performed by Clean Air, which combined a bracing, clinically pure scent with wistful music, rather like Copland in his bucolic Americana mode.

Once the opera proper started, though, the house lights were turned off, and the audience, sitting in near darkness, experienced an abstract drama of sound and scent. The eclectic music was episodic yet subtly flowing, with skittish flights; contrapuntal passages where dueling voices were pushed to wide extremes of register; steely electronic agitation; and calming harmonic writing for dusky, sustained strings. At the end the characters took curtain calls, in effect, when their names were flashed on the video screens, and the audience got one final whiff of their scents. The loudest ovation went to the faintly sulfurous, aptly named *Funky Green Imposter*" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 6/1/09].



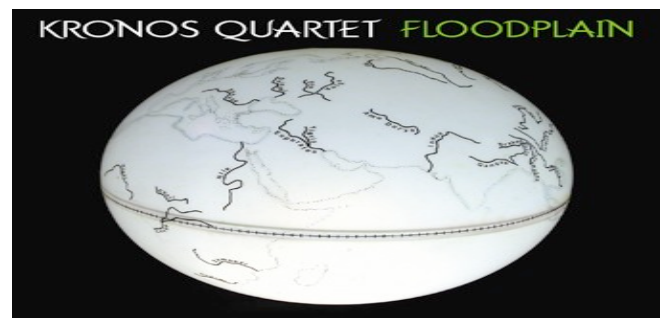
Recordings

Kronos Quartet. Floodplain. Nonesuch. "It can be tempting to think that there are two different Kronos Quartets: the admired ensemble founded by the violinist David Harrington in 1973 to champion contemporary works by composers like George Crumb, Terry Riley and Steve Reich, and the polyglot band behind globe-trotting concept albums like *Pieces of Africa* and the Mexico City-inspired *Nuevo*. The truth is more complex. Mr. Crumb's composition *Black Angels*, which sparked the group's formation, turned the introverted quartet idiom outward through its extramusical effects and social concerns. Mr. Harrington and company have been extending that path ever since. On *Floodplain*, the Kronos Quartet takes up music associated with lands blessed with abundant water yet prone to devastation through flooding. Those in search of musical exotica will not be disappointed: the disc covers a range that includes seductive pop from Egypt (Midhat Assem's *Ya Habibi Ta'ala*), a gorgeous Lebanese devotional hymn (*Wa Habibi*), electronica from Palestine (Ramallah Underground's *Tashweesh*) and a nameless, haunting Iranian lullaby. The violist Hank Dutt has an especially lovely solo turn in the introductory alap from Ram Narayan's *Raga Mishra Bhairavi*, and the quartet seamlessly melds with the Alim Qasimov Ensemble, an Azerbaijani troupe, in *Getme, Getme*. But the concept of a fragile natural balance also serves as a potent metaphor for cultures whose native arts have been shaped by migration and threatened by political and religious conflict. A recording engineered to sound like a tinny shortwave transmission makes the chattering machine-gun rhythms of *Oh Mother*, the Handsome Man *Tortures Me*, an anonymous Iraqi song arranged by the quartet and Ljova (Lev Zhurbin), sound still edgier. And in ... hold me, neighbor, in this storm ... the Serbian-born composer Aleksandra Vrebalov intermingles rustic, pious, intimate and bellicose themes in a gripping sequence, evoking a homeland sundered by ethnic wars" [Steve Smith, *The New York Times*, 5/29/09].

David Lang. *The Little Match Girl Passion*. Ars Nova Copenhagen, Theater of Voices, conducted by Paul Hillier. Harmonia Mundi. "[In] *The Little Match Girl*, by Hans Christian Andersen, . . . a shoeless child wanders through the snow trying unsuccessfully to sell matches, unable to return home because her father will beat her. Sitting under a Christmas tree and lighting a match, she has a vision of her dead grandmother, who gathers her up to heaven. She is found frozen to death the next morning, holding a handful of burned matches. Mr. Lang's achievement is in yoking together opposites so thoroughly that they seem inextricable, even though, logically, they should hardly work together at all. His libretto, which he wrote himself, alternates among stripped-down, poetic imagery, prose description in grimy detail and fragments from Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*. The score sounds simple and neo-medieval at first, but further listening reveals layers of harmonic and contrapuntal complexity. And the choir, singing with an icy, uninflected detachment, paints a deeply moving portrait of the girl within a harrowing landscape. *The Little Match Girl Passion* won the Pulitzer Prize for music in 2008.

Four companion works, on texts from the *Song of Songs*, *Ecclesiastes*, the opening pages of *Genesis* and a Yiddish love song, are cut from similar cloth. Listeners familiar with Mr. Lang's more obstreperous instrumental works may not recognize his style here (though a few more meditative ensemble pieces hint at it). But these choral settings, composed from 2001 to 2007, show that he has idiosyncratic but effective ideas about how to use voices" Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 5/29/09].

Yehudi Wyner: *Chiavi in Mano* and *Other Works*. Robert Levin, pianist; Boston Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Robert Spano; other performers. Bridge. "In time for Yehudi Wyner's 80th birthday, on [June 1], the Bridge label has released a splendid recording of four major works by this respected American composer, including his piano concerto *Chiavi in Mano*, awarded the 2006 Pulitzer Prize for music. A comprehensive musician, Mr. Wyner is an elegant pianist, a fine conductor, a prolific composer and a revered teacher. His works show a deep understanding of what sounds good and is technically efficient. His musical interests range widely. I have heard him discuss insightfully both Monteverdi's approach to recitative and Frank Sinatra's legato singing. All these qualities come together in the concerto, written during a stay at the American Academy in Rome in 2004. '*Chiavi in Mano*,' a term used by car salesmen and real-estate brokers in Italy, translates as 'Keys in Hand.' This 19-minute, single-movement concerto is run through with American vernacular. Yet the overall language is distinctively modern. Mr. Wyner absorbed the idioms of 12-tone music without practicing the technique strictly. *Chiavi in Mano* was commissioned by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, a project instigated by the pianist Robert Levin. And this live recording from Boston in 2005, conducted by Robert Spano, is a knockout. Mr. Levin plays with fleet technique and rhapsodic freedom. The piece ends with an odd outburst of what seems pummeling honky-tonk, further evidence of Mr. Wyner's free thinking. Susan Davenney Wyner, his wife, conducts three other searching works. She leads the Odense Symphony Orchestra of Denmark in Mr. Wyner's 1994 cello concerto *Prologue and Narrative* (with Maximilian Hornung as soloist), a 25-minute piece rich in ruminative lyricism and quick-changing moods, and in his *Epilogue: In Memory of Jacob Druckman*. She also leads the Festival Orchestra of Boston in a rapturous account of Mr. Wyner's *Lyric Harmony*. [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 5/29/09].



Writers

MARK ALBURGER is Editor-Publisher of 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC, an award-winning ASCAP composer of concert music published by New Music, Music Director of San Francisco Composers Chamber Orchestra and San Francisco Cabaret Opera, Instructor in Music History and Theory at Diablo Valley College, oboist, pianist, vocalist, recording artist, musicologist, theorist, author, and music critic. His *Sex and the Bible: The Opera*, Op. 169, will be premiered in the spring of 2010 as part of the Fresh Voices X programs. Alburger's multiple websites include markalburger.blogspot.com, markalburger2009.blogspot.com, markalburgerworks.blogspot.com, markalburgerevents.blogspot.com, markalburgermusichistory.blogspot.com, 21st-centurymusic.com, and 21st-centurymusic.blogspot.com.

PATTI DEUTER is Assistant Editor of 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC and a Bay Area pianist.

PHILLIP GEORGE is an editor for New Music, and serves on the staff of 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC.

ELLIOT HARMON is a San Francisco-based poet and writer on the arts who runs the 505 Poetry Series and writes at idiollexicon.com.

MICHAEL MCDONAGH is a San Francisco-based poet and writer on the arts who has done two poem/picture books with artist Gary Bukovnik, *Before I Forget* (1991) and *Once* (1997), the former being in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, The Berkeley Art Museum, and the New York Public Library. He has also published poems in journals including *Mirage*, and written two theatre pieces -- *Touch and Go*, for three performers, which was staged at Venue 9 in 1998; and *Sight Unseen*, for solo performer. His critical pieces have appeared in the San Francisco Chronicle, San Francisco Review of Books, 3 Penny Review, California Printmaker, Antiques and Fine Art, The Advocate, High Performance, and In Tune. He writes for The Bay Area Reporter and heads the Bay Area chapter of The Duke Ellington Society. He co-hosted nine radio shows on KUSF with Tony Gualtieri with whom he now shares a classical-music review website -- www.msu.edu/user/gualtie3 -- which has also been translated into Russian and appears in Intellectual Forum.

HARRIET MARCH PAGE is Artistic Director of San Francisco Cabaret Opera, as well as soprano, librettist, monologist, and Associate Editor of 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC.

