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Oliver Knussen

PHILLIP GEORGE

Oliver Knussen's (June 12, 1952, Glasgow, UK) father, Stuart, was principal double bass of the London Symphony Orchestra, and participated in premieres of Benjamin Britten's music. Oliver began composing at about six and studied composition with John Lambert (1963 and 1969), receiving encouragement from Britten. The commercial public service network ITV's program about Stuart's his work with the London Symphony Orchestra, prompted a commissioning for Oliver's Symphony No. 1 in the 1966–1967 season.

At 15, Knussen stepped in to conduct the work's première at the Royal Festival Hall, London, on April 7, 1968 after István Kertész fell ill. After this, Daniel Barenboim asked him to conduct the symphony's first two movements in New York a week later. In this piece and his Concerto for Orchestra (1970), Knussen had absorbed the influences of Berg and Britten, as well as many mid-century American composers. As early as the Symphony No. 2 (1971), Knussen's mature compositional personality seemed set.

The young composer spent summers studying with Gunther Schuller at Tanglewood, MA and Boston. He was the Aldeburgh Festival's co-Artistic Director (1983-1998) and later became Tanglewood's Head of Contemporary Music Activities (1986-1993), marrying his wife Sue, a US-born music producer and director for BBC television and Channel 4.

Among his major works from the 1980's are two children's operas, *Where the Wild Things Are* and *Higglety Pigglety Pop!*, both with libretti by Maurice Sendak, after the author's eponymous books. *Where the Wild Things Are* received its New York premiere by New York City Opera in November 1987

Knussen has also been Principal Guest Conductor of The Hague's Het Residentie Orchestra (1992-1996), and the London Sinfonietta's Music Director (1998- 2002), now the latter's Conductor Laureate. Knussen's wife died of a blood infection in London in 2003. The Sue Knussen Composers Fund (originally the Commissioning Fund) honors her memory. In 2005 Knussen was the Music Director of the Ojai Music Festival.

Songs for Sue, a setting of four poems for soprano and 15-piece ensemble, was written as a memorial tribute to Knussen's wife, the music receiving its world première in Chicago in 2006.

Since September of that year, the composer has been Artist-in-Association to the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, and, from 2009, has held a like position with the BBC Symphony Orchestra.

New York City Opera presented a concert version of *Where the Wild Things Are* in April of 2011.

In the fall of 2012, Knussen began a Symphonic Adagio for the Philadelphia Orchestra.

Knussen lives in Snape, Britten's base for the Aldeburgh Festival.

Works List

- Symphony No. 1, Op. 1 (1968),
for orchestra (withdrawn)
- Processionals, Op. 2 (1968/78), for chamber ensemble
- Masks, Op. 3 (1969),
for solo flute and glass chimes 'ad lib.'
- Concerto for Orchestra, Op. 4 (1969)
- Symphony in One Movement, Op. 5 (1969/2002),
for orchestra (revised version of Concerto for Orchestra)
- Hums and Songs of Winnie-the-Pooh, Op. 6
(1970/1983), for soprano solo, flute, cor anglais,
clarinet, percussion, and cello
- Three Little Fantasies, Op. 6a (1970/1983),
for wind quintet
- Symphony No. 2, Op. 7 (1971),
for high soprano and chamber orchestra
- Choral, Op. 8 (1972),
for wind, percussion, and double basses
- Rosary Songs, Op. 9 (1972),
for soprano solo, clarinet, piano, and viola
- Océan de Terre, Op. 10 (1972-73/1976),
for soprano & chamber ensemble
- Music for a Puppet Court (after John Lloyd), Op. 11
(1973/1983), "puzzle pieces"
for two chamber orchestras
- Trumpets, Op. 12 (1975), for soprano and three clarinets
- Ophelia Dances, Op. 13 (1975),
for flute, cor anglais, clarinet, horn, piano,
celesta, and string trio
- Autumnal, Op. 14 (1977), for violin and piano
- Cantata, Op. 15 (1977), for oboe and string trio
- Sonya's Lullaby, Op. 16 (1978–79), for piano solo
- Scriabin Settings (1978)

Coursing, Op. 17 (1979), for large chamber ensemble
Symphony No. 3, Op. 18 (1979), for orchestra
Frammenti da Chiara, Op. 19a (1975/1986),
for two antiphonal a cappella female choirs
Where the Wild Things Are, Op. 20 (1979–83),
fantasy opera, libretto by Maurice Sendak
Songs and a Sea Interlude, Op. 20a (1979–81),
for soprano & orchestra
The Wild Rumpus, Op. 20b (1983), for orchestra
Higglety Pigglety Pop!, Op. 21 (1985, revised 1999),
fantasy opera, libretto by Maurice Sendak
Fanfares for Tanglewood (1986),
for thirteen brass & three groups of percussion
The Way to Castle Yonder, Op. 21a (1990), for orchestra
Flourish with Fireworks, Op. 22 (1988 revised 1993),
for orchestra
Four Late Poems and an Epigram of Rilke, Op. 23
(1988), for solo soprano
Variations, Op. 24 (1989), for piano solo
Secret Psalm (1990), for violin solo
Whitman Settings, Op. 25 (1991), for soprano and piano

Whitman Settings, Op. 25a (1992),
for soprano and orchestra
Songs without Voices, Op. 26 (1992),
for flute, cor anglais, clarinet, horn, piano, and
string trio
Elegiac Arabesques (in memory of Andrzej Panufnik),
Op. 26a (1991), for cor anglais and clarinet
Two Organa, Op. 27 (1994), for large chamber ensemble
Horn Concerto, Op. 28 (1994),
for horn solo and orchestra
"...upon one note" (fantasia after Purcell) (1995),
for clarinet, piano, and string trio
Prayer Bell Sketch (in memory of Tōru Takemitsu),
Op. 29 (1997), for piano solo
Eccentric Melody (for Elliott Carter's 90th birthday)
(1998), for cello solo
Violin Concerto, Op. 30 (2002),
for violin solo & orchestra
Ophelia's Last Dance, Op. 32 (2004/2009-10),
for piano solo
Requiem: Songs for Sue, Op. 33 (2005-6),
for soprano & chamber ensemble



Coming Unstuck at Cabrillo

MICHAEL MCDONAGH

Anniversaries are always welcome occasions, and the Santa Cruz-based Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music celebrated its 51st year with a typically varied series of programs of which I alas only caught one on August 10, at the Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium. Festivals are mix and match affairs, and the program paired pieces by two "emerging" composers -- Enrico Chapela (b. 1974) and Andrew Norman (b. 1979) -- with the latest symphony by Philip Glass, led by Brad Lubman, who along with Carolyn Kuan, served as co-music director for Marin Alsop.

Hearing divergent voices in the same room is both a challenge and a pleasure though it was hard to know at first encounter what Norman and Chapela had up their sleeves. Were they full-[grown artists or just up and coming ones? Norman more or less got off the hook with *Unstuck* (2008), which he said was about his writer's block, or "how can I stitch bits and pieces into a coherent whole"? It's a tried and true modernist ploy which in the hands of someone like Poulenc, who was accused of being a pasticheur, can sound both surprising and new. but in Norman's was a mostly stop-and-go effort which wanted at once to be a serious endeavor and a romp. Rambunctious Ives-like material shared the stage with what sounded like send ups of jazz and rock, plus seco or espressivo writing a la Mahler or the New Viennese School. The dial kept turning but to little avail, though *Unstuck* worked perfectly well as a curtain raiser which Lubman and company rendered with vigor and point .



Mexican composer Enrico Chapela's electric cello concerto *Magnetar* (2011), which he wrote for Berlin-based Johannes Moser who premiered it with the LA Philharmonic and played it here, is a horse of a different color, but not quite. It observes the Baroque-Classical three movement fast-slow-fast with cadenzas, but mostly failed to put new wine into these old bottles. Chapela's remarks from the stage made me fear that his idea of barely-glimpsed star phenomena was better than his realization could ever hope to be. Still the interplay between the canned Moser cello which was hooked up to a patch and was all silhouette with its guts out -- is this post-modern life in a nutshell? -- and his live accomplices kept one awake, though it felt like five movements instead of three. And it didn't help that Chapela found time to diss from the stage yet seemed to glancingly quote three of the best cello concertos in the Western canon: Haydn, Dvorak, and Elgar. It was brash, bold, and frequently loud, and the massed overtones clotted on the verge of pain. Philip Glass's *Symphony No. 10* (2012) aced the night, not because he's a famous composer, but because simplicity has been the biggest casualty in the modernist wars.

Glass's music however is rarely simple yet always clear, and great composers from Monteverdi to Verdi have written clearly and succinctly, even Brahms and Beethoven, and you could call the latter's *Symphony No. 5* minimalist because it's reduced to its bare elemental essentials. The *Glass 10* is equally succinct and its five movements go inevitably from its first to last note. His trademark syncopations are here, plus his 3+ 2 or 3 and 2 combinations which function as lead or inner voices often disguised. The music advances logically and with point, its textures growing generally more complex with each successive movement, though there's nothing as extreme as the piercing piccolo tritones in the third and final movement of the composer's massive and more densely scored *Symphony No. 9* (2012). It's virtuosic, superbly orchestrated, and its densities and rhythms both cross and contrary surprise and even startle the ear. Lubman and his overworked band observed the letter but not the spirit of the work, and his percussion and string sections sometimes seemed to "spell" their parts instead of embedding them into the musical sentence. It was amusing to hear the audience applaud after movement one, and erupt in cheers after a nanosecond pause at the end, as they did at the Tenth's UK London Proms premiere this summer in a tighter and more convincing reading by Nicholas Collon and his *Aurora Symphony*.

Opus 8

CAROL MARIE REYNOLDS

The Opus Project presents Opus 8 (August 31) was a concert of parts and wholes, mostly of the 8th numbered selections of 20th- and 21st-Century composers. On the whole, the event was well-planned and co-ordinated, and quite well done.

The storefront Berkeley Arts Festival, however, leaves much to be desired, being in a rather dangerous area, with difficult parking, and uncomfortable, claustrophobic seating, much of which was rather too close to the orchestra.

With all these drawbacks, the orchestra still managed to sound sensational. By no means was this music easy to perform, but these excellent musicians, who come together to rehearse just one day before the performance, did a tremendous job.

Sopranos Sarita Cannon, Megan Cullen, and Letitia C. Page projected their parts well, but were still overpowered by the orchestra at times. Their diction could have been somewhat clearer, since texts were at times difficult to understand.

Although Cannon's voice was beautiful as always, it was challenging to follow the English lyrics of the supposedly comic number, Harry Bernstein's *Mary Had a Little Lamp*. Despite a questionable rhythmic flow and not terribly-engaging melodic line, Cannon succeeded nonetheless in selling the piece.

Bela Bartok's *Romanian Folk Dance: I*, presented in video form, proved over-long and taxing. By contrast, however, three selections from Igor Stravinsky's *Firebird* were quite arresting in a stupendous performance by The Opus Project Orchestra.

The first movement of Darius Milhaud's *Suite for Piano* was performed by virtuoso Elizabeth Lee, who incredibly learned the piece overnight. She played gracefully this intricate work, in a refined manner.

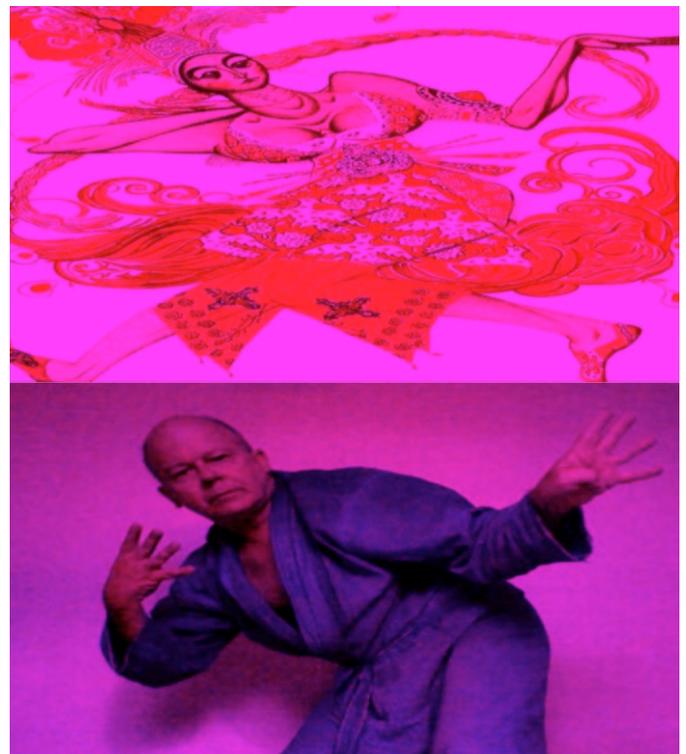
The Paul Hindemith *Phantasiestuck* from *Three Pieces for Cello and Piano* began with a lovely melodious sound, then moved into very dissonant territory. Again Lee contributed her talented playing to the great mellow sounds of Elizabeth Morrison's cello.

The introductory section of Kurt Weil's *String Quartet No. 1* came across nicely, despite a language which seems to suggest performers at odds with one another. On the other hand, the beginning of Dmitri Kabalevsky's own essay in this genre contains enough sweetness to ameliorate the occasional clangor, in a lovely melodic adventure..

The keyboard seems to carry all the dissonance in Dmitri Shostakovich's *Piano Trio No. 1 in C Minor*, with very sweet sounds coming from violin and cello. Written in 1923, the music seems to mirror the madness of the era, with enthralling passages towards its conclusion.

The *March* from Mark Alburger's *The Twelve Fingers* was stimulating and most enjoyable, as an updated rival to John Philip Sousa's classic endeavors. Works by Jan Pusina, Michael Kimbell, and *Stardust* seemed to merit further thought.

The biggest surprise was the program's conclusion with an unbelievable explosion of musicianship in 24-year-old Michael Stubblefield's *March of the Defiled Horde*. An amazing, astonishing, and awesome work, again from The Opus Project Orchestra.



Calendar

October 3

Aaron Copland's Appalachian Spring. Diablo Valley College, Pleasant Hill, CA.

October 4

U.S. premiere of Gravity, with music of Steven Price.

October 12

Gustav Holst's The Planets, with The Awesome Orchestra. Firehouse Art Hangar, Berkeley, CA.

Carl Orff's Carmina Burana. Mormon Temple Auditorium, Oakland, CA.

October 25

Allison Lovejoy's Seven Deadly Pleasures. Community Music Center, San Francisco, CA.

October 26

The Opus Project presents Opus 10. Arnold Schoenberg's String Quartet No. 2, Op. 10, No. 3; Bela Bartok's Image, Op. 10, No. 2; Igor Stravinsky's Petrushka: Russian Dance, Anton Webern's 5 Pieces for Orchestra, Op. 10; Sergei Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 1, Op. 10: Allegro; Darius Milhaud Poem of Lucile de Chateaubriand, Op. 10, No. 3; Paul Hindemith's String Quartet No. 2, Op. 10, No. 1; Kurt Weill's Frauentanz, Op. 10, No. 1; Dmitri Shostakovich's Symphony No. 1, Op. 10, No. 2: Trio; Samuel Barber's James Joyce Song, Op. 10, No. 1; Benjamin Britten's Variation on a Theme of Frank Bridge, Op. 10, No. 1; Oliver Knussen's Ocean de Terre, Op. 10, No. 1; John Bilotta's The Lottery in Babylon; and Mark Alburger's Nocturnes for Insomniacs, Op. 10, No. 1. Community Music Center, 544 Capp Street, San Francisco, CA.

To Elisabeth Sprague Coledge

APPALACHIAN SPRING

(Ballet for Martha)

Suite

AARON COPLAND
(1903-1990)
Original version for 12 instruments

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Very slowly $\text{♩} = 60$

Faster $\text{♩} = 80$

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Chronicle

August 26

Taka Kigawa plays music of Elliott Carter, Sean Sheperd, and John Zorn. Le Poisson Rouge, New York, NY. "It's hard to put your finger on just what it is that makes the pianist Taka Kigawa a phenomenon. . . . [O]ther pianists have made a specialty of the demanding modernist works that Mr. Kigawa favors. Webern, Boulez, Xenakis and Stockhausen are among his staples And in his considerable technical prowess, Mr. Kigawa is not without peers. . . . Still, something about his work has attracted a veritable cadre of devoted followers. . . . Having watched Mr. Kigawa at work several times, I have grown convinced that part of what makes him a magnetic attraction is awe: not only in the sense that his skill dazzles the listener, but also in his own evident humility and zeal. Some listeners will intuit more fully than others the exact challenges of this or that work. But anyone can appreciate how the wonder and joy Mr. Kigawa conveys in talking about his repertory during a concert is also manifest in the way he performs it. . . . Kigawa brought all the precision and finesse you could want to John Zorn's Carny, a Frankenstein's monster of fleeting quotations, distortions and allusions, bolted together in the manner and spirit of a vintage Looney Tunes soundtrack. Moody murmurings shift without warning into booming avalanches or cocktail-bar vamping. Wagner's Tristan chord materializes abruptly, like the Mona Lisa spotted on a video-arcade wall. Here, every detail was in place, but what I missed was a frisson of impudence; Mr. Kigawa seemed too polite to indulge Mr. Zorn's rude vitality. . . . Carter's Piano Sonata, from 1946, is among the stronger expressions of an early Neoclassical phase, its lucid architecture reinforced with Romantic ardor and brilliant color. . . . [H]e seemed intent on connecting this early work with Carter's second landmark piano composition, Night Fantasies, completed in 1980. . . . Sean Shepherd's three Preludes made a striking impression with their economy and individualistic language. In two ghostly outer movements and one prickly, briefly cheeky centerpiece, Mr. Shepherd neatly and poetically explores the piano's aural resources. Mr. Kigawa was a diligent, compelling advocate. Night Fantasies . . . was [a] . . . clear triumph. A ceaseless roil of shadowy impressions fleeting and half-sensed, the piece is one of Carter's grandest, most poetic achievements. With subtlety and finesse, Mr. Kigawa produced a haunting palette of crepuscular shades while providing a sensation of flowing continuity across the work's full span" [Steve Smith, The New York Times, 8/26/13].

August 28

Labor Day Festival. Bargemusic, New York, NY. Programs through 8/31. "The first concert . . . included four world premieres. But the composer of one, David Del Tredici, insisted that his Dynamic Duo "Farewell" for Violin and Bass Trombone was more than that: a "civilization premiere," the first pairing -- ever, anywhere -- of those two instruments [not true -- Mark Alburger's Duo Sonata ("Hyphenated"), 1981 - ed.] 'If you go back to the origins of the instruments,' he explained from the stage, "the violin was always treated well and kept indoors on cushions. The trombone was out with the animals in the barn. So it was a social thing: they never got together' [also untrue -- re use of sackbuts / trombones in church, dating back to Medieval music]. . . . Dynamic Duo was written for Mr. Del Tredici's nephew, the extraordinarily versatile trombonist Felix Del Tredici, and the violinist Mark Peskanov, who is also the artistic and executive director of Bargemusic. The two instruments got along swimmingly, thanks to the skillful writing that found common timbres in the muted trombone and the high range of the violin's G string, as well as to the trombonist's ability to match the nimble articulation of Mr. Peskanov's violin. The younger Mr. Del Tredici also performed his uncle's hair-raisingly virtuosic Felix Variations for Solo Trombone, on the theme of Paganini's Caprice No. 24, covering, with the help of four different mutes, a range of expressive moods and sonic effects. Paganini also played godfather to two compositions for three violins -- that, too, a surprisingly rare configuration. In Colin Jacobsen's bluesy 13 4 3, based on Paganini's [Caprice No. 13], the composer was joined by Mr. Peskanov and the violinist Jesse Mills, who took turns carving a rhythmic pizzicato groove underneath jazzy riffs. In Mr. Mills's own elegiac 4th Caprice Fantasy, the focus was on rich harmonies and singing phrases. The flutist Alex Sopp performed alongside the pianist Steven Beck in Russell Platt's elegant Memoir for Flute and Piano, and alone -- but armed with flute, autoharp and loop pedal -- in Mr. Jacobsen's Project Pterodactyl for Solo Flute. That work, Mr. Jacobsen explained, weaves in the sounds of a mockingbird often heard in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Windsor Terrace, where he and Ms. Sopp live. Mr. Beck's performance of Oliver Knussen's Variations (Op. 24) [!] stood out as the most polished of the evening, shimmering with a broad palette of hues and meticulously voiced textures.

A sense of alienation predominated in Mr. Jacobsen's *Vocalissimus*, performed by the expressive mezzo-soprano Blythe Gaissert and the pianist Jason Wirth, and in Elizabeth Adams's *What Solidarity Sounds Like*, featuring Marianne Gythfeldt on bass clarinet and Felix Del Tredici on trombone. In *Vocalissimus*, spiked with gibberish, laughter and *sprechstimme*, Ms. Gaissert's dramatic conviction lent a note of Weillian street toughness to an otherwise whimsical part. Ms. Adams roughed up the sounds of the two instruments, which alternated between passages of lively, rhythmic conversation and morose togetherness. The evening ended with James Nyoraku Schlefer's *Sankyoku No. 1*, a piece for koto, a Japanese 13-stringed harp, here played by Yoko Reikano Kimura; shakuhachi, a Japanese flute, played by the composer; and cello, played by Hikaru Tamaki. The blending of Japanese and European chamber traditions with a very American rhythmic propulsion was unexpectedly groovy" [Corinna da Fonseca-Wollheim, 8/30/13].

August 31

The Opus Project presents Opus 8. Arnold Schoenberg's *Nature*, Op. 8, No. 1; Bela Bartok's *Romanian Folk Dance*, Op. 8a, No. 1; Igor Stravinsky's *The Firebird: Infernal Dance, Berceuse, Finale*; Anton Webern's *Song after a Poem of Rilke*, Op. 8, No. 1; Sergei Prokofiev's *Autumnal Sketch*, Op. 8; Darius Milhaud's *Suite for Piano*, Op. 8, No. 1; Paul Hindemith's *Fantasy for Cello and Piano*, Op. 8, No. 2; Kurt Weill's *String Quartet No. 1*, Op. 8, No. 1; Dmitri Kabalevsky's *String Quartet No. 1*, Op. 8, No. 1; Dmitri Shostakovich's *Piano Trio No. 1 in C Minor*, Op. 8, No. 1; Samuel Barber's *Let Down the Bars, O Death*; Benjamin Britten's *The Grasshopper and Our Hunting Fathers: Prologue*; Jan Pusina's *Pool*; Michael Kimbell's *Celestial Encounters*; Harry Bernstein's *Mary Had a Little Lamp*; Mark Alburger's *The Twelve Fingers: March*; Stardust's *Opus 8*; Michael Stubblefield's *March of the Defiled Horde*. Diablo Valley College, Pleasant Hill, CA.



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 The Opus Project, San Francisco Composers Chamber Orchestra; and San Francisco Cabaret Opera; Instructor in Music History and Theory at Diablo Valley College, author and subject of articles in The Grove Dictionary of American Music (2nd ed.), and Grove Online; music critic, musicologist, oboist, pianist, recording artist, and vocalist. His Double Piano Concerto ("Fellow Travellers"), Op. 204, will be premiered at Old First Concerts in San Francisco on November 9.

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

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*. He is currently working on a collaboration with clarinetist-composer Rachel Condry.

CAROL MARIE REYNOLDS is a Bay-Area music consultant, critic, pianist, and student of languages and literature.

