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Perspectives of Robert Morris

PAYTON MACDONALD

Robert Morris has been a prominent force in the new-music scene for over 30 years. After receiving his education at the Eastman School of Music and the University of Michigan, he taught at the University of Hawaii and Yale University. Currently he teaches at the Eastman School of Music as chair of the composition department. Since the early 1970's, he has shown a consistent interest in non-Western music, with much of his work using structural principles from Arabic, Indian, Indonesian, and Japanese musics.

This conversation took place during preparation for his newest composition, *Playing Outside*.

MACDONALD: To get started, tell me a bit about your most recent project, *Playing Outside*. I understand this work is for various ensembles and is played in a park. Is this the first time you've written something like this?

MORRIS: Yes it is, with respect to location. However, for the U.S. bicentennial I was commissioned by the Yale Band to write a work for five wind ensembles lasting an hour to be played in the Yale Commons. The planning of the entire piece, called *Indifferent Voices*, involved not only determining a structure for the piece, but also working out the rehearsals and logistics ahead of time. My pre-compositional preoccupations were similar in *Playing Outside*, but the scale is larger. The piece is 100 minutes long and played in ten locations at Webster Park outside of Rochester, New York. The musicians independently move from one location to another within the 100-minute time-span of the piece to form different ensembles, and sometimes they play in transit from one place to another. This obliged me to choose appropriate and accessible locations, work out a matrix of how much time it takes to walk from one location to any other, determine the set-up of instruments and voices in each location, and so forth. And there is a huge musical super-structure, which holds everything together.

MACDONALD: Why did you decide to write a piece like this? I know you spend a lot of time outside, hiking and experiencing and thinking about nature. I also know John Cage's work has been influential on your thinking. Are these influences present in the work?

MORRIS: I'm not sure I ever make a decision to write a piece; either some idea pops into my head (but may stay dormant or transform over time, even years), or I'm asked to write something. In this case, the idea came to me while hiking in Webster Park in the summer of 1996 with a friend. We were mapping a rather intricate network of ski-trails just for fun and it occurred to me that since I compose music with a counterpoint of unfolding successions of musical association, cross-relation, and process -- something I have often described using the metaphor of a garden with multiple paths walked differently on each visit -- why not make a piece where this would be literally reflected in the space in which the music was performed? Time could be literally space. In addition, Webster Park has an interesting quality that seemed to invite my musical sensibilities to inhabit it. I had had such feelings when I first started hiking seriously in 1989 in Arizona where the look, feel, and character of the natural terrain of the dry desert seemed to reflect my own personality so prominently I felt my insides had been arrayed outside before me for all to see.

I also felt as if I had just been released from privation, as if coming home after a long, bitter absence -- a joy of connection, a joy of finding a vast space in which one could roam freely from one beautiful place to another. I had already noticed this connection of place to music to person in certain works of other composers, such as Bartók's "outdoor" and "night" musics and in Beethoven's Pastoral and Seventh Symphonies. And I've always been very moved by Chinese and Japanese landscape painting and scrolls. Many of my works have titles that betray these influences: *Strata*, *Night Sky Scroll*, *Terrane*, *Meandering River*, *Badlands*, and so forth. Of course, John Cage's work in all of its imaginative re-affiliations of sound to life has been an important, but perhaps a more intellectual influence. After reading *Silence* and listening to his *Indeterminacy* and *Lecture on Nothing* in 1961, I was moved to read the Buddhist and Taoist literature that had influenced him. Later I got quite serious about Buddhist thought and its connection to music, but in different ways from Cage. For many years I practiced meditation regularly, which changed the whole way I regarded the world of music and what music could be.

MACDONALD: There are obviously many factors that contributed to the creation of this piece, more perhaps than you could realistically communicate to an audience via program notes. This raises two questions in my mind. First, are there program notes for the work and if not are you concerned that the audience might not understand the full background for the work? Second, somewhat unrelated, what do these ideas and the piece mean to you in light of the terrorist attacks on September 11? I just read an article in *Time* in which the notion of art and especially entertainment is viewed as undergoing a reevaluation of sorts due to a perceived shift in the American psyche since the terrorist attacks. Do you see this? What does this mean to you?

MORRIS: To answer your first question, there are program notes, a statement on how to enjoy this piece—since it will be a novel experience for most of the audience—and an essay on the work's aesthetic dimensions, all three of these available on a specially designed web site, and the first two printed in the program given out at the performance. As you imply, there is always much more to a piece of music than what can be communicated in words. The purpose of program notes is really only to get the head pointed in the right direction, so to speak, so one doesn't miss something simply because one didn't know where (or how) to look. On the second question, I can't know what the horrible and infamous events of September 11 will bring to our culture and art. One thing is probably true, that our artistic involvement will be more serious. Another is that censorship may be thought justifiable on the basis of providing safety and security to Americans (This has been an argument on the right for some time). In such times it's hard to believe in the power of music and the other arts to influence current events and provide a basis for wise action. But we must remember that those of us who make things of beauty and significance should continue to do it -- for the highest products of people should not be forgotten in the rage to punish and revenge or in the grief of loss and death. That's what has happened to the people who planned and executed this unspeakable violence and disruption. None of the issues my piece raises or the experiences it provides are changed by the terrorist attacks. In fact, *Playing Outside* might offer solace to those who are concerned that the world has become unsafe and treacherous. We have war monuments that we keep in mind in times of peace; we also need monuments to peace and beauty in troubled times.

Not that my piece is a monument, but I hope it will help remind people of their connection to the world of living things, sentient or not.

MACDONALD: You said that our future artistic involvement might be more serious. Does this imply that much of the current artistic work in America, especially in American universities, is not serious? Or are you thinking in broader terms, including television and radio and rock concerts, etc.?

MORRIS: Well, by serious I meant two things. First, music and art may take on a more somber and considered tone. For instance, here in Rochester last week a benefit concert sprung up for the Red Cross in memoriam the victims of September 11, put on by the Rochester Philharmonic with a volunteer chorus. 250 people showed up to sing. And the music was "classical"—the Mozart Requiem. (It interesting how classical music tends to play a role in commemorating events of national importance.) In any case, we will probably see many creative people addressing the terrorist attacks and/or their implications in their work. Second, the distinction between art and entertainment may not be as blurred as it has been in the last few years. What is "serious music" and where does it reside? That depends not on time, place, style, function, or reward, but on intention. So there's serious music everywhere, if you are willing to look for it. Institutions that sell and/or promote music often want to bill it as entertaining, accessible, exciting, fashionable, and so forth, no matter what the music is actually like. This has created a climate where music that is created to literally satisfy these upbeat criteria is more likely to be supported. There's an old joke about the fish merchant that gives a big discount on a certain kind of flounder. When people come back and tell him the fish tastes terrible, he replies, "Oh, those fish are for selling, not for eating."

MACDONALD: That's funny! That's been my impression of a lot of new music I've heard recently. I've noticed how much effort some of the performers and composers expend making their work seem like the "next" thing. Do you see careerism as a prominent aspect of your student's agendas? Are things any different now than when you were a student?

MORRIS: Things are very different. When I was a student, the route for a young concert music composer was: get performances, reviews, and published. Musical journalists still held sway over composers' future. Publishers edited, engraved, distributed, and found performances of their clients' music. Performances and recordings, however, were about as difficult or easy to secure (depending on the location, influence, style of music, and so forth). The idea of an academic composer was not much of an issue -- many composers took jobs as theory instructors, while avant-garde composers tended not to have academic or teaching jobs. In any case, composers' compositional careers were forged in the musical and/or intellectual market place, largely outside of academe. Since then, at least in the United States, the situation for concert music has radically changed. Music publication is almost defunct, so composers perform, publish, and record their own music. The quality of reproduction is as good or better than any commercial publishing house or recording company. Music journalists rarely champion composers -- of course, there are few exceptions. They have become more or less passive and ineffectual and the intellectual and literary level of musical journalism has fallen severely. Most new-music composers are employed in academic venues of some sort these days. This connection gives them access to a potential audience and tools of their trade. It is not very well known that certain prominent composers who have remained independent of the academic world have often been supported by patrons or are independently wealthy.

Of course there are a few successful composers who can live off the proceeds of their own symphonic music by writing music for "kiddie concerts" and other "outreach" functions or setting up consortia among civic orchestras. Other composers have careers as performers or conductors, but not as many as in past years. Many would say that the present represents the failure of concert music to support its contemporary composers. Most young composers take a more positive view. They see the scene as wide open for entrepreneurial action. This might look like careerism, but it is simply a way some composers have chosen to adapt. Because they must publish, record, promote their music themselves, they have control of their music's presence and influence in the many layers and partitions of present-day musical culture. Some composers protect their music from commodification; others can sell as hard as they like. All must contend with the power of image to promote their music. Many are effectively using the Internet to get their music out and to publish their views.

MACDONALD: How do you get your music out to the public? What are your feelings about the promotion of your own work? Is your present approach different than in the past?

MORRIS: I don't actually often bring my music to the public directly. It usually gets there through the efforts of performers and musical institutions. However, I do have a web site, publish my own music and CDs, and sometimes organize concerts, either alone or with others. I have been known to write and give lectures on my stuff. Once in a while I go after a grant or commission. I must say I find promotion the least satisfying of my compositional activities. I'm much more interested in composing and writing about music. I also have some other academic interests that need concentration and effort: Indian music scholarship and the study of Buddhist and other Indian, Japanese, and Chinese philosophy. Being a co-editor of a major composition journal, *Perspectives of New Music*, takes some time. But, of course, promotion is a necessity. I find it problematic since I hate pushing my work on others, convincing them of its value and importance, or trying to negotiate via quid pro quos. Composers who do the hard sell turn me off. My underlying personality is somewhat retiring and even shy, and I need to protect my privacy -- otherwise I find it hard to create work I like. Until recently, I didn't have that much time for promotion, but since I am no longer teaching graduate theory students, I have adequate time to pursue theory research, compose, and market my work.

MACDONALD: To continue the discussion of the artist/audience relationship, how would you describe your music in words? Some of our readers might not be familiar with your work yet; what could you say that might give them some idea of what your music sounds like? (Keeping in mind, of course, the old adage that writing about music is like dancing about architecture...)

MORRIS: I was in a similar situation in 1992 when I was stopped by a state patrolman for speeding on the way to a concert premiering one of my compositions for computer generated sounds. He asked why I was going 15 miles an hour over the speed limit. I explained I was a composer going to hear the first performance of a piece and I had left late for the dress rehearsal -- really a sound check, but I didn't think he'd understand the difference. He got curious and said, "So you're a composer? What kind of music do you write?" I did my best to answer and came up with, "Have you heard of Stravinsky? Well, go in that direction a lot further." I got a ticket nevertheless. To say what any music is "like" is always a problem—while it's useful to get onto the same page and state I write in some style or manner, or for so and so forces, it tends to characterize one's music generically, and usually according someone else's category system. Furthermore, I am not really interested in providing a baseline for what distinguishes one's work from others; nor do I like to use a *via negativa* approach and say what my music is not like.

Rather I want to point out what's particular about my work, for the proof's in the pudding anyway, otherwise the description could stand for the work. So again, as I said before, anything I would say about my work would be to direct attention in an appropriate way, and about a particular piece, not my entire output. But in order not to disappoint you I'll cite a little essay that I wrote to accompany a recent piano piece called *Meandering River*. I hope it's not too long for this interview context. You'll note it does not describe the style or sound of the piece.

I'm not thinking of a large river. Mine is modest, flowing in the heart of the woods. You won't find it on a map. I like to stand near the place where it mysteriously emerges from an underground spring and watch it flow away.

There are only a few ways to get to the river without bushwhacking. The ruts of an old logging trail will lead you in; another way follows a path overgrown with high grass. Once you have found the river, it's difficult to follow its course. Its serpentine twists, dividing into alternate tributaries, creating island clusters, confounds the expert hiker, who must negotiate the banks of gnarled roots and slippery mosses and look out for tiny frogs and other creatures. There's no real danger though; the worst is embarrassment: falling in some scum-filled water. Better to get in and swim or float.

No matter where you go, from the source to where it empties into a lake or a larger river, you can't find the river's beginning. It is always flowing no matter where you go or when you get there. In some places the flow is strong and supple, good for rafting. Calmer when widest, there remain little eddies, which cause the leaves and insects to circle rather than progress downstream. There are jutting rocks here and there, violently splashed by spring water. The same rocks sit quietly among damp pebbles and stones in the later summer drought. Momentary rays of sunlight illuminate otherwise undistinguished patches of muddy water or washed out grass.

The river tells no story. If you want a story you can listen to the conversations of friends who visit on the weekends, or the stories told by campers late at night. You can make up stories about river sprites and forest gods, or the lives of the animals you might glimpse if you stay very still for a long time. These stories will not have plots that start or end if they are truly inspired by the river. And it doesn't matter if you tell your stories or keep them to yourself.

The river is always changing. It takes some time to appreciate that it never repeats. You might feel loss if you think on a time when the river was beautiful. You might feel impatient if you were hoping for the river to do something special. But you will get used to these feelings; besides, there are always surprises. Memory will fail, so you return again and again, but each 'again' is new.

MACDONALD: That's very lovely. I'm thinking that might be a nice place to end the interview, but I'm wondering what you've thought about over the years that you've always wanted to be asked about. Or maybe you've never wanted to be asked about anything! If you were interviewing yourself what would pique your curiosity?

MORRIS: That's a question I've never been asked. Of course, the only answer is "I don't know"; but it brings up an important point. We can never know what others will ask or receive from us or our music, but certainly we hope the discourse will be interesting and useful. Moreover, even we cannot know what we will ask or receive from our own music and thought—that we can never know it from the outside—and so we will never have an "objective" or stable way to evaluate it, no matter how hard we try. The process of making it makes it impossible to receive it as if we didn't make it up. "I don't know" is why aesthetic solipsism is impossible.

Concert Reviews

World Music Days 2000

ANTON ROVNER

World Music Days Festival. September 29, 2000, Luxembourg. Through October 7.

A very notable event in the fall of 2000 was the *World Music Days Festival* in Luxembourg. This annual concert series is hosted by a different country each year and tries to represent music from virtually all the countries. These concerts proved that the creative potential of Luxembourg by far exceeds its geographical size. Between September 29 and October 7, there were of 29 presentations, which took place in various venues in city and country.

The opening concert at the Luxembourg Cercle Municipale featured the Swiss Chamber Orchestra under the direction of Klaus Arp. Dan Dediu's *Viola Concerto No.2*, with Marius Ungureanu, was a large work combining neoromantic, impressionist, and modernist features. The piece had a melancholy mood and included many dramatic gestures and subtle extended techniques.

Marcel Wengler's *Flute Concerto*, with Carlo Jans, was elaborate and gripping. A striking feature was a combination of a very intense, restless orchestra, with a very lightweight, delicately textured and nonchalant flute. The piece had colorful, imaginative orchestration, alternating the static with the dynamic.

The morning concert on September 30 took place at the Cercle Municipale, and featured the Antipodes Ensemble, directed by Olivier Darbellay, the son of composer Jean-Luc Darbellay. *Albedo III*, by Helmut Zapf, was an advanced octet with unusual and intricate textures. The piece opened with quiet, introspective music and gradually expanded into the loud and dramatic.

Labyrinth: Promenade, IX by Hwang-Long Pan, was a dynamic solo saxophone piece, performed by Markus Niederhauser. Makoto Shinohara's *Evolution*, performed by cellist Imke Frank, utilized an assortment of extended techniques.

Especially impressive was the performance of Jean-Luc Darbellay's *Ein Garten für Orpheus* for horn, basset horn, and string trio -- an imaginative, colorful, and expressive piece. Particularly memorable was when one or two instruments (most prominently the horn and basset horn) held long notes, while the other instruments (often the strings) scurried around in micro-polyphony.

String Trio, by Tsung Hsien Yang, was elaborate and expressive with a Weberian type of linear polyphony, as well as a coherent formal development.

Iannis Xenakis's *Anaktoria* was an especially striking piece with a radical approach to texture and timbre, an imaginative variety of instrumental combinations (most notably the brass instruments), the dramatically effective well-placed pauses, and a wealth of timbral effects. The composition was polyphonically elaborate and contained great emotional breadth, which was balanced with intellectual substance. The performance was technically competent and interpretively superb.

Tangled Loops, by Jason Eckhardt, was an extensive piece for saxophone and piano with a romantic, impulsive rhetoric. The saxophone had plenty of chance to show of its technique and solo melodic capabilities, while the piano had mostly sparse, isolated fragments.

Rituals for Forgotten Faces, by Bongani Ndodana, was a solo piano piece with interesting textural elements, starting with almost a pointillist approach, featuring long, disjunct notes, then acquiring fuller linear textures and ending with a soft but rhythmically busy texture. Generally the piece was not very coherent formally, despite the interesting work with textures and the excellent performance by Annie Kraus.

Claude Lenners's *Monotaurus*, for solo saxophone, was an impulsive, technically vibrant and virtuosic composition with a pronouncedly athematic language, sudden, sporadic changes of textures, dynamics and mood. It was extremely disjunct in terms of textural usage and formal structure, the irregularity of which produced a favorable impression, especially enhanced by the excellent performance.

Saxophone Quartet, by John Buckley, was a dynamic, spirited piece in four contrasting movements. It had a moderately traditional style and a rhythmically regular, bouncy textures, though an atonal harmonic language, which occasionally purposely utilized tonal elements for purposes of explicit traditional polyphonic development.

Ting Cheong So's *To the edge of the corridors*, for solo piano, was a soft, slow, lyrical and very intricately textured piece of an impressionistic type, reminiscent of Takemitsu piano pieces. The piece was atonal in harmonies, at certain times remotely approaching tonality, with some extended techniques, such as playing inside strings. The piece and its performance produced a very favorable impression.

Rene Hemmer's *Coup de Des*, for saxophone quartet, was a rather traditionally styled piece with Romantic textures and an alternately atonal and nearly tonal harmonic language, contrasting tempi of slow and fast, as well as a discursive, matter-of-fact mood. *Opcit*, by Philippe Hurel, was a vibrant, virtuosic solo saxophone piece with fast, scurrying rhythms, a strong experimental slant and a bit of a jazz flavor.

Theo Verbey's *Passamezzo* was a dynamic saxophone quartet, combining neoclassical and minimalist approaches, with almost entirely tonal harmonies, and oscillations between bouncy, regular rhythms and athematically abstract and irregular ones.

Morton Feldman's *For Philip Guston* (flutist Markus Hufschmidt, keyboardist Christian Schulte, and percussionist Stephan Meier) lasted a few hours, and featured very static, repeated musical patterns, which changed gradually with intricate and delicate instrumentation, utilizing refined, subtle pianissimo effects. Curious was the addition (or "transplantation," according to the program) of theatrical effects by Wengler, which featured people dressed in white attire as doctors, nurses, and hospital assistants acting as if they were giving the musicians medical treatment -- administering "injections" with needles, looking into their mouths with tongue depressors, and bandaging their arms. Towards the end of this performance, the instruments faded out one by one, while the "medical attendants" seated each of the three musicians, gradually, into wheelchairs, and took them out of the audience's reach.

Working for Scale

D.C. MECKLER

Mark Alburger's *Henry Miller in Brooklyn*. May 4, Potrero Hill Neighborhood House, San Francisco, CA. Through May 20.

Mark Alburger's *The Little Prince*. July 20, Goat Hall, San Francisco, CA. Through July 22.

Mark Alburger's *Antigone*. August 3, Goat Hall, San Francisco, CA. Through August 5.

This year, I have heard three works by Mark Alburger: *Henry Miller in Brooklyn*, *The Little Prince*, and *Antigone*. *Henry Miller* is an evening-length affair. *The Little Prince* is a one-act, appropriate for all audiences, especially ones that include children. *Antigone* is a compact one-act. If you run an opera company or music theater group, I recommend each of them to you. If your group has done Kurt Weill's *The Three Penny Opera*, the subject and style of Henry Miller would be of great interest.

The first thing Alburger or his program notes will tell you about his works is that they are mounted on scaffolding borrowed from pre-existing works. For example, Henry Miller takes its number of numbers, tempi, and meter from *The Three Penny Opera*. Knowing this may give us a spark of pleasure now and then, but for most audiences, I imagine the point is lost, but with no loss to the primary pleasures and theatrical impact of Alburger's work. Alburger does his works no service by parking on his method of constructing them. He has a talent for creating vivid musical materials, and that is the main attraction. I know that for many composers, the question of form is a difficult one. It may be easy to create materials but shaping them is the ultimate difficulty or problem that causes pieces not to get assembled and finished. I suspect that Alburger hit upon this technique as a way of solving such a problem.

For all the advertised formal borrowing, I find the real interest in the originality of the musical materials Alburger creates to fill up those forms. There is a certain obviousness or recognizability in the melodic material -- diatonic and chromatic scales and stock arpeggio patterns. I have long been attracted to pieces that feature scales as what they are "about", scales being the ultimate in banal, undifferentiated source material. (Pieces such as Beethoven's *Symphony No. 7*, Robert Schumann's *Quintet in Eb Major*, the aria in Glass's *Satyagraha* that repeats a rising Phrygian scale over and over, and Anthony Braxton's *Composition No. 114 [+ 108A]* are examples.) There is a mysterious line that is crossed when a collection of scales and arpeggios becomes music. This is most astonishing to me when I look at Mozart. The melodies are sometimes so schematic in construction, the triads and scale structures so obvious to the eye, but instead of hearing those nuts and bolts clanking along in succession, we hear a music of beauty. Music that rubs our noses and ears in obvious scales has us hear both the musical gestalt and the clanking. Alburger gives us music with plenty of clanking in these three operas, with a different effect in each.

Henry Miller's writing introduced a great deal of explicit sex and vernacular slang, and this frankness shows up in Mel Clay's excellent libretto for *Henry Miller in Brooklyn*. This frankness is matched by the musical frankness of explicit scales. I was at the initial American Composers Forum session that brought writers and composers together; in particular, it brought Mel Clay and Mark Alburger together. The dramatist said he envisioned "cheap and tawdry" music for the piece, and that is what Alburger delivered. He delivered it in such a fitting way, the overall effect far transcends "cheap and tawdry" and is powerfully expressive.

Alburger shifts from tawdry chromatic scales to diatonic innocence in *The Little Prince*. The extended scale runs in this piece attract attention to their constituent materials as well as challenging the singers. The hidden (and ironic) framework for this piece is Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, which gets a thorough bleaching. It is interesting that the explicit scales of *Henry Miller* illustrate a very experienced and world-weary cast of characters, while a similar musical frankness in *The Little Prince* speaks only of innocence and childhood.

Antigone does not exhibit the same degree of scale-based melody, but rather adopts the monumentality of baroque and classical melodic formulae. As a composer, I have often lusted after certain baroque shapes, especially in the diatonic erotic of Handel, but I have not successfully integrated it into my own music. Alburger is successful in creating an individual voice using potentially anonymous-sounding melodic material. Earlier readings of *Antigone* featured the conflict between religion and the state. Later this interpretation shifted to the individual versus the state. This *Antigone* is existentialist, focusing on individual choice. The character Antigone projects, 'I choose to do what I do because I choose to do it.' Alburger's accomplishment in creating an individual voice out of an amalgam of baroque habits, romantic passion-formulas, and a spin or two (or three or four...) of Philip Glass reflects the existentialist-individualist gist of the libretto.

Made in Heaven

MICHAEL MCDONAGH

White Raven, an opera in five acts by Philip Glass and Robert Wilson, performed by vocal soloists, Dennis Russell Davies, and the American Composers Orchestra. July 13, New York State Theater, Lincoln Center, New York, NY.

We like to think that theater music is a lesser and more compromised endeavor than "absolute" music simply because its intentions seem different. But is it really just decor, and is its role only a supporting one? The best theater (and film) music stands on its own. The music that Philip Glass has written for *White Raven* (1991) certainly does. Sure, like any theater score it's about something other than its own inner workings. But Glass's music here is so strong that I was often tempted to turn off the images on stage and listen to it as pure sound. And that's quite an assertion when the director is Robert Wilson, who cooked up some really stunning stage pictures.

White Raven (O Corvo Branco) kicked off this summer's Lincoln Center Festival. Commissioned in 1990 by the Comissao Nacional para as Comemoracoes dos Descobrimentos Portugeses, *Raven* premiered on 26 September 1998 at Lisbon's Expo '98, and was presented that November by its co-producer, Madrid's historic Teatro Real. The work celebrates 500 years of Portuguese explorations, though the years 1490-1500 are perhaps the most pivotal because that's when Vasco da Gama found India and opened trade with the East. And though the opera uses him as a central character, Luisa Costa Gomes's literate and evocative libretto casts a wider net than that. The raven was a snow-white crow which Apollo left to guard his lover Coronis, and while he was away she admitted Ischys to her couch. The god cursed the bird for not pecking his eyes out, or as Gomes notes -- "The world turned black... and, as punishment, he (Apollo) turned the raven into a black omen forever... the quiet bliss of ignorance forever undone." And so the piece becomes an almost Blakean parable of the conflict between innocence and experience, and a meditation on myth and history.

The opera has not one but two ravens, sung here by soprano Suzan Hanson and mezzo Maria Jonas, who performed the opening scene, or Kneeplay 1 -- there are four -- in front of a drop curtain with Lucinda Childs enacting the speaking role of The Writer, the only one in English, the rest being in Portuguese. Gomes's incantatory text tells us we're in for a serious piece -- "We did not save the martyr from death / But we are watching over his sleep" -- and though Glass's setting has a natural conversational tone, it reminded me of the Norms' warning in Wagner's *Ring*. The subsequent scenes at the Portuguese court are opulent and stylized, and though both staging and music bear the fingerprints of their two very unique artists, *White Raven* resembles Rameau's opera-ballets which use fantastic characters and stage pictures as well as striking coloristic and harmonic effects, another historical echo.

Story and setting have clearly inspired both partners, and Glass has written one of his most expansive and expressive scores, with a wide dynamic, coloristic and emotional range. There's a lot of openly seductive music too, like the big and very moving flute solo played by Laura Conwesser which accompanies The Writer's speech -- an account of the first Lisbon-Rio flight -- at the beginning of Act V. Other parts are strikingly dramatic. Overture II: "Sea storm, maritime disasters, with monsters, shipwrecks", which opens the second half of the opera (moved here from its original place as the second number -- Prologue -- of Act 1), is loud and percussive, with massed, trilling winds and brass, syncopated rising and falling scales, a wordless chorus, and telling contributions from tambourine, maracas, snare drum, and electric piano -- an enthusiastic Christopher Oldfather -- with dry yet resonant string attacks. But even finer music occurs in *Raven's* meditative parts, especially Act IIA, where Childs recites a Wilhelm Reich text while following a ring of light across the floor as a spike descends from the flies above stage left. The scene's static, timeless quality is evoked by the use of a nine-note drone figure -- in harp, electric piano, and cellos -- of unaltered octaves and fourths repeated several hundred times (a device taken from raga practice) over which Glass floats wind and brass chords and sustained notes. Miss Universe (mezzo Janice Felty) and Scientist 1 (coloratura soprano Ana Paulo Russo), 2 (Maria Jonas), and 3 (tenor Douglas Perry) are part of another Wilson-Glass coup de theatre in which exquisite wind dissonances accompany the fashion queen who enters on a crescent moon as the scientists (in white robes, suspended on a bench within a deep engulfing blue) sing ecstatic solos and ensembles.

And speaking of exquisite who could ever forget the miraculous scene -- Act IIIB -- in which a boat with a little boy and an old man (the writer) glides out from stage right, their tiny craft afloat like an innocent's picture of eternity, and the music softly and inevitably welling, with the harmonies -- so subtle yet so pungent with their occasional false relations -- mirrored and extended by Wilson's perfect lighting scheme? Moments like these when nothing yet everything seems to happen made me realize that the theater isn't just a place of heightened reality but a reality you can't get anywhere else. And though image and sound were sublime on their own separate terms, their union made the ineffable a done thing.

Wilson also made an idea which may have looked corny on paper work. And this "simple" stroke of having the chorus exit the pit (where they've been all night) and join all the other characters onstage singing a wordless tune at the end was overwhelming, and I don't usually cry in the theater. Why did it work? Hard to say. But the audience was likewise overwhelmed and gave the performers a loud, vigorous and heartfelt ovation, with the remarkably theatrical and witty Lucinda Childs getting the lion's share. Dennis Russell Davies's direction throughout was stylish and tight, and he looked utterly relaxed, which is pretty amazing given the difficulty of the piece, what with all that transparent writing, all those complex repeats, rhythmic and timbral shifts, and intonational and ensemble challenges. The 60 plus American Composers Orchestra produced a powerful, coherent sound, with beautifully blended unisons and touching solo turns. Judith Clurman's chorus projected precisely, and warmly, and every performer seemed inspired by the piece's nobility, and there was a further sense of a real communal adventure in which all difficulties were equally shared. The emotional depth of *White Raven* came through loud and clear, and so did its overriding melancholy. Maybe sadness is the price of experience, and come to think of it, it often is.

Last Night at the Luggage Store

TILDY BAYAR

Jeff Kaiser, horns and electronics; Dan Plonsey, woodwinds; Ernesto Diaz-Infante, guitar-percussion. Damon Smith, doublebass; Tom Djill, trumpets. October 4, The Luggage Store, San Francisco, CA.

So horn player Jeff Kaiser had this table full of gear and was playing CDs mostly (precomposed) and mixing everyone else's sound. Woodwind player Dan Plonsey sat out for the first ten minutes or so, but more than made up for it. Guitarist and percussionist Ernesto Diaz-Infante rushed in after about 20 minutes and proceeded to play subtle gorgeous quiet counterpoint to the others' raucous... but I'm getting ahead of myself.

Kaiser's CDs (the opening of this October 4 concert at The Luggage Store), a multioctavous babble overlain with low throbbings, caused gravity and direction to be exerted on the other players -- in very dense, very forward motion. A favorite was the medieval material in the middle of the set, complete with hocketing and an impromptu sung canon. The drunken minstrels caroused while the philosopher pondered.

Immediately thereafter on a different scale altogether were Serious Musicians and Serious Music, with bassist Damon Smith and trumpeter Tom Djill -- not stuffy though, not highfalutin, not pretentious; just serious and focused -- out on a limb, just the two, and if there was a safety net they'd have to weave it themselves. Smith started in right away with gorgeous deep rumbles and what was that Djill doing...? Far-away mournful... ta-tum. Two-thirds through "The Star-Spangled Banner," the altered tune became recognizable, with the bassist paying homage to Jimi Hendrix (the saddest smallest version of that tune ever). Very much in jazz mode, the two performers wove in and out of each other's sound: playing high lonesome on the bridge, using a what?! as a mute -- from blaring to whispering, from rumble to song, and back again. It was music about how great (and it was) music can be.

Deja Vu and Differences

MARK ALBURGER

Stanislaw Skrowaczewski and the San Francisco Symphony in his *Music at Night* and Nielson's *Flute Concerto*, with James Galway. October 18, Davies Hall, San Francisco, CA. Through October 20.

A curtain-raiser by a contemporary composer, a concerto with acclaimed soloist, a Tchaikovsky symphony -- that was the bill of fare at the Marin Symphony opener two weeks ago and also last week at the San Francisco Symphony. But the latter (October 18 at Davies Symphony Hall) was both *deja vu* and distinctly different.

This time the opener was not an Adamsian creampuff, but guest composer-conductor Stanislaw Skrowaczewski's substantial *Music at Night*, a four-part rumination in its first San Francisco Symphony performance. If the music sounded "old-hat" modern, it was -- originally stemming from the maestro's 1949 ballet *Ugo et Parisina*, adapted in 1956 under its present title, and revised in 1960. Whew! Skrowaczewski's small but impressive body of work bears a unique stamp (his *English Horn Concerto* bears related harmonic fingerprints in a prominent lyrical descending melody, for instance).

If, over the course of the decades, Skrowaczewski has not proved half as influential or progressive as John Adams (heard at the Marin Symphony opener with his *Lollapalooza*), Skrowaczewski has a wonderful feeling for color and drama, and an uncompromising artistic vision.

The star for most of the audience was not the composer but the flutist. Renowned Irish virtuoso James Galway was heard in Carl Nielson's intriguing two-movement *Flute Concerto*, which concludes with a comic relief bass-trombone-and-flute bit worth the price of admission. The flutist further upstaged all comers with no less than five ("lollipop," as he charmingly called them) encores: a lithe and energetic penny-whistle-like folk dance (by "Mr. Anonymous", a moving (there were cumulative sighs resonating through the hall) rendition of "Danny Boy" (by Anonymous's friend, "Mr. Traditional"), and light-speed interpretations of the final movement in the Bach "Third Suite" and the ever-popular Rimsky-Korsakov "Flight of the Bumblebee." Five you say? When in doubt, repeat Bach....

The Final Frontier

ALLISON A. JOHNSON

The Space Between, with Philip Gelb, Pauline Oliveros, and Dana Reason. October 20, Trinity Chapel, Berkeley, CA. Repeated October 22, Stanford University.

When Hermann Hesse wrote about the *Glasperlenspiel*, a futuristic game of unknown rules which distills and expresses all known concepts in a synthesis of the artistic, the intellectual, and the metaphysical, he might have been presaging The Space Between, a trio consisting of Philip Gelb on shakuhachi, Pauline Oliveros on just-intonation accordion and Dana Reason on piano. The trio played two concerts recently in the Bay Area, at the Trinity Chapel in Berkeley on October 20 and at the *Strictly Ballroom* series at Stanford University on October 22.

Both concerts held to the same general format: a first half of solos followed by a group improvisation. The concert opened with Gelb's shakuhachi solo, a rhapsodic miscegenation of Jewish, Arab, and Japanese music-cultures and temperaments consisting of an improvisation built on the Hassidic folk melody "Baym Rebin's Sude" ("At the Rabbi's Table"). The touching folk melody was handled warmly and ingenuously by Gelb who embellished and adorned it with an impressive array of pitch bends and melodic curvatures.

In her piano solo Reason explored the instrument -- the keyboard, the inside, and the outside -- and captivated listeners with the seemingly limitless sounds and sonic paths she could evince from the instrument's body. Displaying a thoughtful and thought-provoking solo, Reason based ideas and structures in her piece *Impulsion*, according to the program notes, on an alap from Indian classical music, deconstructed blues, and a child's lullaby. Her inventive and sublime soundworlds, along with a rich command of technique and genre produced an elegant, sonorous triptych.

Pauline Oliveros, the distinguished and iconoclastic composer and performer, presented a solo at the Trinity Chapel that was stunning. Working with gestures based on breath inspiration and expiration, Oliveros seemed to embody the piece – allowing her audible inhalations and exhalations to synthesize and propel the piece and the sonic energy. At times Oliveros touched lightly on a skeletal bass outline on accordion, but with a prismatic tactility that reflected and refracted the upper layers of breathing material. And when she intoned sounds vocally on top of the tapestry of just-tuning and atmospheria, it was as if she were suddenly expressing layers of ethos, pathos and humanity. There could be no other reaction than awestruck silence for several moments at the end of her solo. In her notes on the piece Oliveros writes: “Listening to this space I sound the space...I dedicate this music to compassion in this world now.”

After a brief pause, the ensemble reappeared and shone in a glorious give and take, a collective real-time invention of shifting languages and sound spectrums. The parsing, then recombining of timbres and textures allowed countless permutations of sonic personalities: from electronica, to harpsichord to muted Morse codes tapped on sideboards and keyboards. The trio provided the audience a captivating aural arena, both warmly familiar and fantastic, as if the listener had wandered into an engaging conversation in some indeterminate and unknowable patois, subtitled by gesture and intention.

Duos emerged continuously with musical dialogues: an interplay between Oliveros and Reason conferred whimsy and complexity, with gestures and phrases seeming to rotate around an intervallic axis and submerged in abstract circus melodies. They suddenly merged voices into a layer of gentle sonorities and potential energy to allow Gelb, playing the quietest instrument, to define the main strata with bold and commanding held tones. Quickly moving to a duet between accordion and shakuhachi, the musicians locked into a chord, then expounded and evolved into Oliveros eliciting squeaks and knocks from above the keyboard. Joining the others in quick and quirky gestural runs – with Reason now taking up the above-the-keyboard rubbing and squeaking – the accordion then led the way to a sudden decompression into soft, plucking sounds. It was a truly lovely moment. The series of ad hoc duets continued, each introducing a new sonorous gestalt – everything from piano-accordion tone poems, to Gelb’s impressively fast, flying, yet somehow understated, flutter-tonguing partnering Reason’s utterly graceful, rounded arpeggio sweeps.

Finally, the trio emerged with a combination of held notes and runs (shakuhachi), sudden pitch-bending (accordion), and a low intoned passacaglia figure (piano) morphing together and separately into almost unrecognizable timbres – you would swear a theremin was on stage – and into a dreamfield of multi-phonic, harmonics and multi-dimensional arcs.

At the *Strictly Ballroom* concert there was an overflowing, standing room crowd – a heartening sight for this brand of sonic exploration— and you could hear a pin drop (or a cricket chirp) throughout the evening, such was the awe and concentration afforded these first-rate performers. They did not fail us.

Gelb opened again with a simple evocation of Hassidic song which he ornamented further and further while digging his heels into the material with fervor and finesse. Extending and expanding the idioms of the instrument, Gelb proffered ultra-quiet whistle tones and frenzied flurries of notes and everything in between.

Reason followed with an expansive, all-out offering of melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic chimera, first catapulting a tempestuous, insistent gesture, spinning out as if trying to dislodge from itself, then allowing rhythmic offshoots of this to shift and settle into a

contemplative and exploratory chordal recitation of deconstructed blues. Near the end of her solo she served up a torching melody, traversing the keyboard with virtuosic abandon, unafraid to evoke and invoke and repeat and exhale and shed. It is this kind of solo which earns Ms. Reason the well-deserved reputation as one of the most inventive, fearless and exacting pianists of her generation.

In the last solo of the evening Oliveros offered a resonant metaphor for the reductive, then expansive musical forms explored throughout the evening. She effortlessly presented complex arrays of layers while delineating discrete pools of sound: gesture versus prolongation versus space. Unafraid to allow breathing room, Oliveros would integrate then disintegrate sounds until only a single note was held and held. Then, presenting masses of sound like dense test patterns slowly undulating and falling away, again revealing a solitary note, Oliveros depicted a daunting paradigm: in the end the body stands alone and for itself.

The group work began with a soft descent of muted and intermittent sounds and expanded with stunning soloistic and group effects, at times converting the collective breathing of a roomful of rapt listeners into moments of audible marvel. Prompting and triggering one another with plucks and squeaks, then frenzies of notes, the performers negotiated each music terrain with characteristic eloquence and aplomb. In the end the piece gently settled into soft whistles, completing a fluid and fearsome symmetry that started from nothing, burned through the heights and depths, and finally evaporated into a reverie of nothingness.

Tight Space

D.C. MECKLER

The Space Between, with Philip Gelb, Pauline Oliveros, and Dana Reason. October 20, Trinity Chapel, Berkeley, CA. Repeated October 22, Stanford University. Reviewed October 22.

October 22’s concert by The Space Between at Stanford was attended by a capacity crowd, about 100 people. So there is always something to complain about. The full audience made the room too hot, so the windows had to come open, admitting some very sensitive contributions to the music by crickets and airplanes and cars and sirens. It would have been great to hear the group in Stanford Memorial Church. It would’ve been cool enough there, and the acoustics are very cool, the reverb being set to maximum stun. Next time?

The concert featured three solo pieces and then the trio. Three can sure seem to be the magic number in improvisation, where ego disappears and the music seems to be a thing -- a being -- in and of itself. The various tuning systems in use sometimes created gently seething miasmas of pitch, and sometimes, due to the spectacularly sensitive pitch choices by the musicians, in spectrally fused sonorities.

While a recording of this would be pleasant to listen to, this is a case where being there made a huge difference, despite the imperfections and discomforts of the venue. And it was not just the theater of live performance (never mind the bad lighting), since I had my eyes closed for most of the performance.

Rewards of Discipline

JEFF DUNN

San Francisco Girls Chorus presents *Mystery, Magic, and Madness: Chorissima and Virtuose in Concert*, with Susan McMane, Artistic Director; Susan Soehner, piano; and auxiliary instrumentalists, including members of the San Francisco Contemporary Players. October 26, First Unitarian Church, San Francisco, CA.

Newcomer Susan McMane was appointed in June 2001 to lead the San Francisco Girls chorus. Among her many honors, she has served as Chair of Repertoire and Standards of Women's Choral Music for the Southwestern Division of the American Choral Directors Association. As former Chair of Repertoire, Dr. McMane had the creativity and daring to present for her first S.F. concert a small-"t" trinitarian theme of *Mystery, Magic, and Madness* at First Unitarian Church, and make it work. As former Chair of Standards, McMane drilled an extremely challenging, mostly 20th-century program into her charges with results of amazing aural perfection. As opposed to visual.

The night's festivities began with the Chorissima group of 40 girls singing the Robert Young (b. 1920) setting of Shakespeare's *How Sweet the Moonlight Sleeps* -- a nice-sounding opening number, sung from the church's rear rafters, with pleasant triads occurring at line ends. Unfortunately, Vaughan Williams has blown all competition away with *his* setting in the immortal *Serenade to Music*.

Chorissima then processed from the rafters down the aisles to the stage singing Ross Whitney's 1996 *Pentatonic Alleluia*. Seven pentatonic "cells" were freely improvised by each singer. The result was stunning, one of the highlights of the program.

On stage at last, the group sang the 1985 *Missa Brevis* of Nancy Telfer (b. 1950). This fine work was characterized by artful word settings and deft melodic imitations. Powerful accents on the gutturals in the Kyrie brilliantly brought out the true begging for mercy that the ancient words convey: here the "madness" part of the concert's theme was emphasized over what could have been the "magical." Wise choice. Unfortunately, one of the visual flaws alluded to earlier emerged here in the overly grim expressions held by many of the singers in the Sanctus. The words "Hosanna in excelsis" cannot be completely effective without the glory being portrayed in looks as well as sounds.

The highly theatrical *Ubi Caritas*, by Canadian Rupert Lang (b. 1948), was the most memorable moment of the program. The spirit evoked here was the same as in Part II of Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms*, where Psalm 23 "The Lord is my shepherd" is forcefully contrasted by "Why do the nations rage" of Psalm 2. In the *Ubi Caritas*, "Where there is charity of love, God is there" is contrasted with "Lest we intentionally become divided." God's love is portrayed strikingly by two medium-sized, hand-held bells. The "fighting" portion of the piece, choral agitation is further enhanced by foot stamping before the singers "sound the name of God by choosing their own cultural name for the Creator and melting their voices into one," according to the program notes.

The explosive Lang work was appropriately contrasted by the excellent, gentle and subtler *O Magnum Mysterium* by Kurt Erickson. This world premiere was commissioned by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. Here the "mystery" part of the thematic trinity came beautifully to the fore.

As resident composer at the National Shrine of St. Francis of Assisi, Erickson, it is hoped, will not have his efforts thrown to the birds, as has happened to so many contemporary composers, but will instead will continue to receive acclamation such as was bestowed on him by the evening's audience. Hands clapped enthusiastically; no feathers were ruffled.

The 14-member Virtuose sang Krenek's *Three Madrigals* and two selections from *This Wonderful Feeling*, by Joan Szymko (b. 1957). The late Krenek madrigals were lively, tonal and triadic, but not particularly memorable. On the other hand, Szymko's music was charming (the "magical" vein here), based on happy poetry by two San Mateo elementary-school children.

The French school was represented next by *Chorissima* in the seafoamy *Les Sirènes* by the brief-lived Lili Boulanger. Odysseus would have had to have been blindfolded as well as tied to the mast for this concert's rendition to work properly, for the stiff poses of the chorus members and soloist greatly detracted from the gorgeous sinuosity of the words and music.

All distractions evaporated when the superb counterpoint of Lloyd Pfautsch's *Laughing Song* was performed in top-notch manner by the singers. Their admirable skill really shone in the songs set by Andrew Imbrie, selected from his suite *Songs of Then and Now* and accompanied by members of the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players.

Hearing the Imbrie selections again after their premiere in 1998 reinforces the initially ambivalent reaction of the present reviewer. The music is consummately crafted throughout, and a pleasure to hear. But the word settings do not always succeed. Now, one can take a high modernist road and claim words are irrelevant, but if *some* words are set effectively, should other major word-mood opportunities be ignored? If the e.e. Cummings line "who knows if the moon's a balloon" is described in the program as "a fantasy of total happiness" (italics mine), why does little happiness appear in the music? Why are the extreme irony and internal contrasts of Shakespeare's "Blow, Blow, Thou Winter Wind" not exploited by the composer? On the other hand, Imbrie takes up the word-painting palette in the Halloween-like Cummings "hist whist" (supremely charmy-scary), and Stevenson's "Land of Nod" (appropriately dreamy-weirdy).

The conclusion of the concert began with the most gorgeously melodic work on the program, "Weep No More," by David N. Childs (b. 1969). During the rendition, the chorus noisily dispersed off the risers into the aisles to sing more directly to the audience. Nevertheless, the beauty of the music overcame the distractions. *The Nightingale* of György Orbán (b. 1947) and a campy acted-out arrangement of "Sing a Song of Sixpence" concluded in a cheerful spirit.

In all, this was a cornucopia of mostly unfamiliar music and a technical triumph. McMane's disciplined approach has worked wonders. This, combined next time with a little more facial expression -- and perhaps a little less straight-laced uniforms -- could create the top ensemble of its kind in the country.

Record Reviews

Sax, Lines, and Berio Tape

MARK ALBURGER

Art Music Ensemble. *Look Both Ways* [Luciano Berio. *Sequenza I, VII, and IXa*. David Sherr. *Debussy Deb-You-Do Pt. 1 and Pt. 2. Sax Lines and Audio Tape. Sequenza VII / Palimpsest. In The Pocketa Pocketa*]. Art Music Ensemble. Innova.

The third-stream connections between high modernism and postbop are certainly apparent in David Sherr's Art Music Ensemble, specifically in their *Look Both Ways* release on Innova. The both ways are Berio and Sherr himself, in a series of stimulating juxtapositions of several *Sequenzas* (or should that be *Sequenzi? Sequenzoni?...* We'll have the *Sequenzoni*, specifically *I*. with flute, *VII*. for oboe, and a side of *IXa*. clarinet, thanks...) and some Sherezias, one supposes...

As for the Berioian side, these are fine performances, state of the art from Sherr himself in all three cases. The oboe *Sequenza* is particularly alarming with its multiphonics and microtones, coming off as decidedly "modern" with respect to the later works. A fantastic performance of a fantastic piece.

As for Sherr's original jazz-based compositions -- you've got your incessant ride cymbal, punching Theoloniusing piano chords, fevered Dizzy trumpet, drum breaks, the works. It often sounds pretty straight ahead, but by now, of course, we're used to the unusual... to just about anything. Cute titles, though.

Debussy Deb-You-Do is based on melodic fragments from *Sequenza I* and *IXa* and a Gillespie solo. *Sax Lines and Audio Tape* derives from an 11-note row in Charlie Parker's improvisation on the Jerome Kern "The Song Is You." *Palimpsest* is a weird accompaniment to *Sequenza VII*, in the spirit of Berio's *Sinfonia* which "covers," so to speak, a Mahler scherzo. The net result is a double performance of the oboe *sequenza a capella* and accompanied. *In the Pocketa Pocketa* finds an 11-note row in the wonderful development section of the last movement of the Mozart Symphony No. 40. Surprise! Surprise! But it becomes a 12-bar, rather than 11-bar, blues....

Post-Modern Post 9/11

MICHAEL MCDONAGH

Ingram Marshall. *Kingdom Come. Hymnodic Delays. Fog Tropes II*. American Composers Orchestra, conducted by Paul Lustig Daniel; Theatre of Voices, conducted by Paul Hillier; Kronos Quartet. Nonesuch.

Should musical art be a personal communication from one heart and mind to another, or should it address broader human concerns? The September 11 attacks on New York make the self-involved stare at your navel art we're used to seeing seem utterly trivial. But turning art into something determined by a doctrinaire position often results in work that's either agitprop or Social Realist in nature and tone. And though I don't think composer Ingram Marshall's music has ever been overtly political, at least one piece on his new CD, *Kingdom Come*, has political overtones, and it also seems to be the most humanly motivated one.

Kingdom Come (1997) "was composed in memory of Francis Tomasic, my brother-in-law who, while working as a journalist in Bosnia, was killed by a mine near Mostar on May 1, 1994." But all the noble intentions in the world don't matter if the work doesn't do its job, and fortunately this piece does. It also skillfully combines a recording of the congregation of a Croatian Catholic Church in Dubrovnik singing a hymn not unlike "Nearer My God To Thee," a recording of a male and female cantor at a Serbian Orthodox Church (both by the composer), as well as an old one of a Bosnian Muslim gusle singer, into the orchestral texture. The floating planes of sound here have a Varèse-like expansiveness, and an intentionally fractured effect. But the cadential figure in lower strings and brass against a shivering one in higher strings, and the low, primordial piano chord at the end, have entirely expressive ends, the sound both seductive and chilling. And, heard within the context of our post September 11th world, the mixture of chant from 3 different traditions, can't help but resonate in an entirely new way.

Would that Marshall's *Hymnodic Delays* (1997), composed for and performed here by Paul Hillier's Theatre of Voices, had that kind of power. But his settings and transformations of 17th-19th century singing master composer feels like a self-conscious exercise in hocketing techniques, and being aware of a device as just a device is never a good thing. The concluding *Fog Tropes II* (1994), however, is a vividly re-imagined version of the original brass sextet, foghorns, and ambient sounds one, which has become something of a new music classic, which has been recorded several times, its most famous version being probably the first, on New Albion. Like many of Marshall's works, this one is reflective, inward, and rather somber. This version, played by its commissioners, the Kronos Quartet, has a similar affect and effect, though one which is heightened and made more human by the almost vocal sound of the strings, with their sudden tremolos and dramatic overlappings, and wide, though controlled sense of nuance. While not a statement of our present world crisis, it's still a heartfelt one, and "a private bell for inexplicable needs," which was Tristan Tzara's definition of poetry. *Fog Tropes II* may not bear witness, but it works.

All the performances here are fine, though the institutional church acoustic of *Hymnodic Delays* seems to hinder its projection. The composer's notes are informative, and the packaging elegant.

Comparison Shopping In C

MARK ALBURGER

Terry Riley. *In C*. Member of the Center of the Creative and Performing Arts in the State University of New York at Buffalo. 42' 03". CBS, 1968.

Terry Riley. *In C*. *25th Anniversary Concert*. 76' 20" New Music Theatre and Life on the Water. New Albion, 1995.

Terry Riley. *In C*. Ensemble Percussione Ricerca. 41' 00". Mode, 1995.

Terry Riley. *In C*. Bang on a Can. 45' 51". Cantaloupe, 2001.

Seems like every couple of years now a new recording of Terry Riley's groundbreaking / seminal / fill-in-the-blanks-with-another adjective *In C* comes out. The new adjective that comes to mind is durable. This beautiful monster of a work, notated on one page, can certainly hold up to multiple interpretations over the decades.

So how to choose? Don't. But if you must, here are some factors. The original 1968 recording is... what can we say? The original. Or at least the first commercially available recording. It, like the 25th-anniversary recording, were more-or-less under the direct supervision of the composer. The original, however, is also a dub -- a multi-track recording of three superimposed takes, so the instrumental forces are heard in triplicate.

The New Albion recording is live, with a huge instrumentation, and an earthy, rangy, shambling affair, intriguing in reflecting the composer's evolving ideas about the piece over the span of years. Unlike earlier renditions, the pulse is played here and by Bang on a Can by marimba.

The Mode and Cantaloupe releases are both crisp studio recordings, and show an understanding of Riley's aesthetics. The Bang on a Can folks seem particularly sympathetic. They have both an energy and respect for the work, providing their own NYC twist with a bit of aggression and angst thrown in. Both the 25th anniversary and BAC groups pay homage to Riley's Eastern leanings (something the original recording could not quite so fully deal with, given that the composer had not yet immersed himself in Pandit Pran Nath's world). On the earlier album, it is Riley's own voice that makes a particularly telling contribution; in the latter Wu Man's pipa provides the pungency. Glissandi and tremoli from the assembled forces also add to the exoticism.

Ironically, of the four recordings, the Bang on a Can one comes off at times as the most like classical chamber music, perhaps due to the high percentage of string instruments. The recording also strikes an interesting balance with regard to clarity of counterpoint. There are enough instruments to keep things cooking, but few enough to be able to hear the contrapuntal interplay very clearly.

The BAC duration lines up with what seems to be the performance norm. Although performances of *In C* have clocked in as long as three hours, three of these four recordings are in the 40'-45' range. CBS, Mode, and Cantaloupe are 42' 03", 41' 00", and 45' 51" respectively. Only the New Albion is way out there at 76' 20".

Among the chief differences remain instrumentation -- take your pick of the below and enjoy.

CBS, 1968

Flute
Oboe
Clarinet
Bassoon
Trumpet
Trombone
Marimbaphone
Vibraphone
Piano (Pulse)

New Albion, 1995

Clarinet
Bass Clarinet
Soprano Saxophone
Alto Saxophone
Tenor Saxophone
2 Trombones
2 Guitars
Accordion
Piano
2 Synthesizers
2 Xylophones
Marimba
Marimba (Pulse)
Glockenspiel
Drums
2 Voices
2 Violins
Viola
Cello

Mode, 1995

2 Xylophones
2 Marimbas
Crotales
Glockenspiel
Vibraphone

Cantaloupe, 2001

Clarinet
Soprano Saxophone
Electric Guitar
Mandolin
Pipa
Piano
Chimes, Marimba
Glockenspiel, Vibraphone
Violin
Cello
Bass

Unsilent Plight

LAURIE HUDICEK

Perry Townsend. *no suggestion of silence*. John Root and Perry Townsend, piano; Hugh Williams, flute; The Next Stage Speaking Chorus; The Barbad Chamber Orchestra; The Choir of the Church of St. Mary the Virgin; and The Goliard Chorale. Capstone Records.

It is not often that a composer's music stands out against the vast array of contemporary music recordings available today. It is, perhaps, in the detailed process of recording that the soul of the music is lost. However, this is not the case for Perry Townsend. His recording, *no suggestion of silence*, is truly refreshing. The composer makes it perfectly clear that these are live performances, and that all the eccentricities of live performance are present.

This is a recording of several different genres of music including varieties of piano pieces, orchestral works, and choral works. The opening piece, *Frontispiece for piano four hands* (1997), is a brief, jazzy, energetic work lasting about a minute and a half. This highly virtuosic piece is played breathlessly by Root and Townsend, and ends as quickly as it began. It is an unlikely prelude to this recording, for it seems to possess an entirely different character than any of the other works.

Townsend's other traditional piano work, *Episodes for Piano* (1998 rev. 1994), is similar to the first in virtuosity. However, the lightheartedness of the first work does not penetrate the latter. There are three characters that Townsend introduces in this work: "a swirl of sensuous cascades ... a hypnotic loop of counterpoint, and ... a dark, quivering bass melody." All three are clearly introduced and intertwine gracefully throughout the piece. The characters are very similar in that they are quite dark and sensuous. The composer leaves one to question "whether the three episodes remain separate or become fused somehow." This listener believes that these episodes seem to wander around in a seamless manner and appear to peacefully exist, occasionally encountering one another, but not disturbing the natural balance of being.

Townsend includes four excerpts from his *Suite for Prepared Piano* (1995). Because this recording is live, the quality of the different timbres is not as clear as one might like. The preparations seem skillfully placed, creating a wealth of different colors. However, this is probably more evident in live performance. What is needed is to be able to hear the differences between the timbres and different preparations. The most fascinating of these excerpts is the three-voice fugue "for marimbas, rattles, and gongs." Here, Townsend keeps each voice limited to one of the three timbres that represent the above in such an innovative way that one may believe he is listening to three entirely different instruments.

Most of the remaining works on this recording can fit into the same category: eerie. Townsend seems, throughout his music, to exploit those sounds most listeners associate with the "unknown." His vocal works, *Don't Ride Off* (1998), *Laudate Dominum* (1998), and *Kaleidostrophe* (1999) all possess this same eeriness. *Don't Ride Off*, a very humorous work, is written for a capella speaking chorus. The text is taken from a New York City subway station's rules for riding an escalator. However humorous Townsend would like it to be, the word that comes to this listener's mind is "freaky," and although it is dedicated to commuters, it seems more likely to be similar to what a commuter might hear in his nightmares. Whispers of "face forward," "attend your children," and "ride safe" are extraordinarily haunting.

Kaleidostrophe fits into this same category. The composer takes excerpts of poetry from Yeats, Wordsworth, and Stein and intermingles them throughout this work for choir and children's chorus. With the addition of cello, clarinet, and piano, all of the vocal parts are sung or chanted or whispered. The trio of instruments also seems to "speak" rather than "sound." Imagine how projected sounds in outer space might sound if they were projected back to Earth. They might merge into one. This is *Kaleidostrophe* – here and there words are recognizable as something we understand, but most seem to come from some unknown place.

The two works, which seem to be the most traditional are *Laudate Dominum for mixed choir* and *Nightvision for chamber orchestra* (1997, revised 2000). These two works, although quite haunting, are probably more accessible to the general public. Each has traditional scoring and recognizable parts, such as the Latin in *Laudate* and the swooping romanticism of *Nightvision*. Although not spectacles in the realm of this recording, these pieces are incredibly poignant.

The most impressive work is *The Jester Sings (an elegy) for solo flue with digital effects* (1995). Although there is an ever-present buzz from the digital effects, this piece is breathtaking. The flute is quite melodic and definitely character driven. At times there is the illusion of an echo, and at other times one might think there is more than one instrument. It is as if there is someone listening who grabs only select notes and holds on to them as if looking at a gem. In addition to the difficulty of playing with outside sounds, the performer has to jump between dance-like sections and moments of utter obscurity. It is perhaps disturbing but quite effective.

Although Townsend edits out the applause, the audience's reaction is clear many times throughout the recording. There is no attempt at perfection, nor is there any excuse for unsatisfactory passages, for there aren't any. Even with the coughs and laughs of the audience, the music is still quite powerful. Whether it is uneasiness or pleasure, certainly, every listener will walk away with something from Perry Townsend's world.

Calendar

December 1

Stanford Symphony in Chen Yi's *Violin Concerto* and Mahler's *Symphony No. 5*. Dinkelspiel Auditorium, Stanford University, CA.

Wind Music of Elliott Schwartz, in honor of the composer's 65th year, presented by the Harvard University Wind Ensemble. *Chiaroscuro*, *Zebra Variations*, *Scatter*, *Celebration*, and the premiere of *Hall of Mirrors*. Lowell Hall, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

December 2

Kurt Erickson's *O Magnum Mysterium* performed by San Francisco Girls Chorus. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

Italian and Pan-American Mavericks Symposium. Herbst Theatre, San Francisco, CA.

Aurelio de la Vega: Complete Piano Music, with Marh Marchena. Christ and St. Stephen's Church, New York, NY.

December 3

San Francisco Contemporary Players in Lindroth's *Light*, Higdon's *rapid fire*, Levine's *Glimpses*, Campion's *Domus Aurea*, and Dzubay's *Dancesing in a Green Bay*. Yerba Buena Gardens, San Francisco, CA. Repeated December 10, LA County Museum of Art, Los Angeles.

Michael Tilson Thomas conducts the San Francisco Symphony in Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

December 5

Michael Tilson Thomas conducts the San Francisco Symphony in *Italian Mavericks*. Berio's *Epiphanies* and Respighi's *Roman Festivals*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA. Through December 8.

December 6

Alex Hills. Campbell Recital Hall, Stanford University, CA.

December 8

Derriere Guard Winter Salon, with Michael Dellaira. Studio 1/2/ FW, New York, NY.

December 10

Ultimate Romantics, including Webern's *Six Bagatelles* and *Pieces for Cello and Piano*. Green Room, Veterans Building, San Francisco, CA.

December 11

Performance Ideas: Myth and the Contemporary, with Meredith Monk and Mary Lucier. Location One, New York, NY.

December 12

Michael Tilson Thomas conducts the San Francisco Symphony in *Pan-American Mavericks*. Brant's *Ice Field*, Varèse's *Déserts*, Piazzolla's *Tangazo*, and Villa-Lobos's *Choros No. 10*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA. Through December 15.

December 14

NOW Music Festival. 400 Missouri Street, San Francisco, CA.

December 15

San Francisco Youth Orchestra in Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA. Repeated December 16.

December 16

Prokofiev Marathon. Miller Theatre, New York, NY.

Chronicle

October 1

Dana Reason. Mills College, Oakland, CA.

Left Coast Ensemble in Imbrie's *Piano Quartet*, plus music of Carlos Sanchez Gutierrez, Pamela Z, and Beth Custer. Green Room, Veterans Building, San Francisco, CA.

October 3

Ernesto Diaz-Infante. Zeum, San Francisco, CA.

Elliott Schwartz's *Mehitabel's Serenade* performed by the New England Conservatory Honors Orchestra. Jordan Hall, Boston, MA.

October 4

Paul Drescher Ensemble Electro-Acoustic Band in *A Deep Dark Spoonful of New Music (And a Whole Lotta Pianos)*. Premiere of Martin Bresnick's *Fantasia (On a Theme of Willie Dixon)* with pianist Lisa Moore, the world premiere of Lois V Vierk's *Deep-water Waves*, the San Francisco premiere of Terry Riley's four movement piano concerto *Banana Humberto 2000* with Riley as soloist, and Paul Drescher's *Concerto for Violin & Electro-Acoustic Band* with violinist Tracy Silverman. ODC Theater, San Francisco, CA. Through October 6.

Jeff Kaiser and Ernesto Diaz-Infante. The Luggage Store Gallery, San Francisco, CA.

Michael Tilson Thomas conducts the San Francisco Symphony in Knussen's *Choral*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA. Through October 6.

Ligeti's *Poème Symphonique*, Reich's *Pendulum Music*, and Nancarrow's *Etudes for Player Piano*. Knoll Ballroom, Stanford University, CA.

October 5

American Composers Forum Salon. Belinda Reynolds's *Coming Around*, Erling Wold's *Close*, Hyo-Shin Na's *Dirge*, Paul Davies's *The Mirror of the Sea*, and Dan Becker's *S.T.I.C.*. Old First Church, San Francisco, CA.

October 6

Stephen Vitiello's *Humming Bird Feeder* and *World Trade Center Recordings*. Diapason, New York, NY. Through October 27.

Temple University Symphony in Scott Watson's *Concerto for Trumpet and Orchestra*. Academy of Music, Philadelphia, PA.

October 9

Composers, Inc. presents music of Aquilanti, Greenberg, Mobberley, Rudy, Sheinfeld, and McClowry. Green Room, Veterans Building, San Francisco, CA.

Iannis Xenakis Remembered. Palimpsest, Jalons, Thallein, and Waarg performed by Ensemble Sospeso. Columbia University, New York, NY.

October 10

Michael Tilson Thomas conducts the San Francisco Symphony in Schoenberg's *Theme and Variations* and Krenek's *Die Nachtigall*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA. Through October 13.

Mark Alburger's *The Wind God* (libretto by Harriet March Page), performed by the composer and librettist. Goat Hall, San Francisco, CA.

October 12

John Bischoff and Bob Ostertag. 7hz, San Francisco, CA.

East/West Guitar Quartet. Zeum, San Francisco, CA.

National Symphony, with Evelyn Glennie, in Wallace's *Gorilla in a Cage*, Varèse's *Ionisation*, Ravel's *Bolero*, and Revueltas's *Noche de los Mayas*. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY.

October 13

National Symphony, with Evelyn Glennie, in Tsontakis's *Mirologhia*, Tower's *Strike Zones*, and Chen Yi's *Percussion Concerto*. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY. "Glennie [was] at her best" [Paul Griffiths, The New York Times, 10/15/01].

Gisela and David Gamper. Diapason, New York, NY.

October 15

Berkeley New Music Project. University of California, Berkeley, CA.

William Susman's *Daydream Believer*. KTEH, San Francisco, CA. Repeated October 17.

California EAR Unit in *The Pursuit of Musical Enigmas*. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA.

San Jose Symphony curbs its activities due to funding difficulties. San Jose, CA.

October 16

A Damien Hirst installation is accidentally dismantled by cleaning man Emmanuel Asare, who mistook the work of art for garbage. Eyestorm Gallery, London, UK. "The work -- a collection of half-full coffee cups, ashtrays with cigarette butts, empty beer bottles, a paint-smear palette, an easel, a ladder, paintbrushes, candy wrappers and newspaper pages strewn about the floor -- was the centerpiece of an exhibition of limited-edition art . . . [shown] off at a V.I.P. preopening party . . . Heidi Reitmaier, head of special projects for the gallery, put its sales value at 'six figures' or hundreds of thousands of dollars. 'It's an original Damien Hirst,' she explained. . . . 'And when we came back [in the] morning, we realized that someone had come through and, well, sort of tidied up.' . . . Asare, 54, told *The Evening Standard*: 'As soon as I clapped eyes on it, I sighed because there was so much mess. It didn't look much like art to me. So I cleared it all in bin bags, and I dumped it.' Ms. Reitmaier said that Mr. Asare had not thrown everything away. 'He just sort of set it aside.' The gallery owners retrieved as much of it as they could and, working from photographs made the day before, put it back together. Far from being upset by the mix-up, Mr. Hirst greeted the news as 'hysterically funny,' Ms. Reitmaier said. 'He has already signed off on the new one, and since his art is all about the relationship between art and the everyday, he laughed harder than anyone else.'" Mr. Asare will keep his job, said the gallery's public relations spokesman, who suggested there was a deeper meaning to his custodial act. . . . The resurrected work of art is as identical to the original as possible, with one exception. There is an added element, a sign standing by its side. It reads: Keep off" [Warren Hoge, *The New York Times*, 10/ 20/01

Death of Etta Jones (b. Aikin, SC), of cancer, at age 72. "[She] died . . . the same day her last recording, *Etta Jones Sings Lady Day*, hit music stores. New York, NY.

October 17

Death of Jay Livingston, at age 86. Los Angeles, CA. "[He] collaborated with Ray Evans on three movie songs that won Academy Awards [including] 'Que Será Será' . . . [which] was sung by Doris Day in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956), an Alfred Hitchcock remake of a film of the same name that he had first directed in 1934. In the later movie, Miss Day was in a cavernous house filled with nefarious international wrongdoers, and she belted out 'Que Será Será' so that her young son, who had been kidnapped and was being held upstairs, would know that she and her husband (James Stuart) had come to the rescue. . . . Livingston was directed by his wife Lynne to change the lyrics for the song that became 'Silver Bells,' a Christmas standard first sung by Bob Hope and Marilyn Maxwell in *The Lemon Drop Kid* in 1951. The song was originally written as 'Tinkle Bells, but Mrs. Livingston admonished her husband, 'Are you out of your mind?' The song remains among the most popular Christmas songs; Mr. Livingston frequently referred to it as 'our annuity.' By 1995, it had sold 140 million recordings and was sung for years by Mr. Hope in his Christmas specials. [He was] the song of Alan Livingston and the former Rosa Wachtel. When he went to the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania in the 1930's he started a dance band and became friendly with Mr. Evans. . . . Over the years the team of Livingston and Evans contributed songs to more than 80 movies, many with Bob Hope, some for Hitchcock. Among the films are . . . *Mr. Roberts* (1954), . . . *Vertigo* (1957), [and] *The James Dean Story* (1957). . . . The team tried the theater without much success, and when rock 'n' roll arrived, their kind of music was not much in demand in Hollywood. . . . After their movie heyday, the pair wrote the theme music for long-running television series like *Bonanza* and *Mr. Ed*. It is Ray Livingston's voice heard singing, 'A horse is a horse / of course, of course'" [Richard Severo, *The New York Times*, 10/18/01].

Carnegie Hall presents an all-Carter program, including *Cello Sonata*. and *Two Diversions*. Weill Recital Hall, New York, NY.

October 18

Stanislaw Skrowaczewski and the San Francisco Symphony in his *Music at Night* and Nielson's *Flute Concerto*, with James Galway Davies Hall, San Francisco, CA. Through October 20. Sooner or later we all end up at a dinner party with a guest like flutist James Galway. . . . This guest is intelligent, charming, witty and utterly captivating. And he *won't shut up*. Galway's ostensible purpose was to serve as soloist in Carl Nielsen's *Flute Concerto* conducted by Stanislaw Skrowaczewski, an assignment he dispatched with all due seriousness. But once that was out of the way, he returned to the stage, newly rejuvenated, and leaped to the podium to run through a string of encores -- what he called 'lollipops,' using Sir Thomas Beecham's term -- that lasted nearly 15 minutes, or about half the length of the concerto. Suddenly one began to suspect that this was in fact the whole point of the exercise, and the Nielsen merely a pretext. What had begun as a Symphony subscription became The James Galway Show -- a pleasant enough diversion, certainly, but perhaps not quite what was advertised. In his long blue coat, lilac waistcoat and purple tie, Galway even looked the consummate entertainer, and he cajoled the crowd with little canned witticisms as he introduced each number.. They included . . . the 'Badinerie' from Bach's Second Orchestral Suite done twice -- an encore of an encore! -- and even (Heaven help us) 'The Flight of the Bumblebee.' All of them included the orchestra, and all were done with considerable beauty and verve -- Galway may be God's own ham, but he's a splendid flutist. The Bach in particular was sharp and direct. Still, there was something a little unseemly in the way he simply hijacked the program , leaving Skrowaczewski sitting forlornly and irrelevantly at the side of the stage. And with malice aforethought, too -- this is the first time in decades of concertgoing that I've ever heard an artist announce his intention to play four or five encores right up front. Nielsen's blithely episodic concerto, full of jokes and whimsy, might have been written for Galway, and in spite of some laziness about rhythms, it was a delightful performance. Skrowaczewski led off with his own *Music at Night*, an intriguingly dark and gnarled score" [Joshua Kosman, San Francisco Chronicle, 10/20/01].

Carter's *Cello Concerto*, with Yo-Yo Ma, Daniel Barenboim, and the Chicago Symphony. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY. "The auditorium was packed; the performance was riveting. At its conclusion, when Mr. Carter, who is 92, climbed the steps to the stage with a cane to steady him, he received a prolonged standing ovation" [Anthony Tommasini, The New York Times, 10/22/01].

Solo Flights 2001 Pianorama!, with Sarah Cahill, Amy Rubin, Marija Ilic, Michael Harrison, and Jed Distler. Clark Stydio Theater, New York, NY.

October 19

Ensemble Sospeso in an all-Xenakis program.: *Thallein*, *Zyia*, *N'shima*, *Dmaathen*, and *Palimpsest*. Miller Theater, New York, NY. Xenakis's . . . music goes on loud with life. . . . Xenakis never learned to do things nicely. Even in his 60's -- in . . . *Thallein (Burgeoning)* . . . -- he was out there, with stomping reiterations and fierce mismatches of instrumental tone. He kept his immediacy and lack of self-consciousness, to the extent that one cannot be quite sure in this piece whether the strong suggestions of *The Rite of Spring* are deliberate or accidental. . . . *Zyia* from 1952, . . . [was] made available just a few years before his death, perhaps unwisely. Soprano and flute alternate in modal invocations, while the pianist hammers in the middle bass to create the effect of drums or gongs. The music is certainly primitive, but it is everybody's primitivism, and it goes on for a mighty long time. Xenakis's achievement was to find a primitivism that was all his own, and that led to works of vigor and diversity without peril to his freshness. *Zyia* sounds like a dead end. You would think this was a composer who had to learn something. Instead he had to forget better. . . . [I]n *N'shima*, [t]wo mezzo-sopranos chant, yell and growl with the hot accompaniment of horns and trombones in pairs and a stray cello, a combination completely unexpected and completely right. *Dmaathen*, for oboe and percussion, had Jacqueline Leclair precise in blowing chords and astonishing in creating a high whistle, to powerful accompaniment from Thomas Kolor. *Palimpsest* featured superfast, sparkling and rightly objective piano solos from Stephen Gosling and some glorious Xenakis grunge" [Paul Griffiths, The New York Times, 10/24/01].

October 20

Pauline Oliveros, Philip Gelb, and Dana Reason. Trinity Church, Berkeley, CA. Repeated October 22, Stanford University.

October 21

West Coast premiere of Tan Dun's *Concerto for Water Percussion and Orchestra* and world premiere of his "*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*" *Concerto for Erhu and Chamber Orchestra*. Orange County, CA.

Rachel Condry performs Steve Reich's *New York Counterpoint* and Andrew Shapiro's *Orange*. Community Music Center, San Francisco, CA.

San Francisco Symphony musicians in Shostakovich's *String Quartet No. 8*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

Nancy Bloomer Deussen's *Ascent to Victory* performed by the SUNY Albany Symphony Orchestra. Albany, NY.

Nancy Bloomer Deussen's *Trio for Violin, Clarinet, and Piano* performed by the American Chamber Ensemble. Weill Hall, New York, NY.

The Noise of Time, a multimedia presentation of the music and life of Shostakovich, with the Emerson String Quartet. John Jay College Theater, New York, NY.

October 23

Deniz Ince's *Turn It Up!* performed by Strata. Berkeley City Club, Berkeley, CA.

80th-birthday tribute to Karel Husa. Merkin Hall, New York, NY.

October 24

Bright Sheng wins a MacArthur Fellowship.

San Francisco Symphony in Blacher's *Variations on a Theme of Paganini*, Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, and Sibelius's *Symphony No. 2*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

October 25

Eight Strings and a Whistle. Greenwich House Music School, New York, NY.

Vector Five. Stefania de Kenessey's *High Summer*. Miller Theater, New York, NY.

October 26

Staged premiere of Blitzstein's *No for an Answer*, with musical advice from Michael Tilson Thomas. Zeum, San Francisco, CA. "Answer was Marc Blitzstein's follow-up to his cause celebre 1937 musical *The Cradle Will Rock* (the one that opened despite being padlocked by the Federal Theatre Project, when Blitzstein and director Orson Welles led the audience 20 blocks to another theater and the actors performed from seats in the house). . . . Answer is . . . a series of revelations. . . . Some of the most haunting melodies are breathtakingly simple" [Robert Hurwitt, San Francisco Chronicle, 10/29/01].

New Music Ensemble in music of Yarnell, Copland (*Music for the Theater*), and Takemitsu. San Francisco Conservatory, San Francisco, CA.

Kurt Erickson's *O Magnum Mysterium* premiered by San Francisco Girls Chorus. Universalist Unitarian Church, San Francisco, CA.

Americas the Beautiful: Music of the Western Hemisphere, including the premiere of Max Lifchitz's *Still Life*. Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Chapel, New York, NY.

Marilyn Nonken in Crawford-Seeger's *Preludes* and *Study in Mixed Accents*. Brooklyn College, New York, NY.

Death of Laszlo Halasz (b. 6/6/05, Debrecen, Hungary), at 96. Port Washington, NY. "[He was] the first music director of the New York City Opera He enrolled at the Liszt Academy in Budapest, where his teachers included Béla Bartók, Ernst von Dohnany, . . . and Zoltan Kodaly. . . . [He led] the American premiere of Kodály's *Hary Janos* at the 1939 New York World's Fair. . . . When the [City Opera] presented its first American premiere, Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos* in 1946, Mr. Halasz conducted[, a]s he did for the City Opera's first world premiere, William Grant Still's *Troubled Island*, with a libretto by Langston Hughes" [Allan Kozinn, The New York Times, 10/31/01].

Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* and *Chamber Symphony*. Alice Tully Hall, New York, NY.

October 27

NACUSA Metal Concert, with The Menlo Brass Quintet. Christopher Ballard's *Brass Quintet*, John Beeman's *Escapade*, Rosemary Barrett Byers's *It's About Time*, Sondra Clark's *Two for Five*, Ilana S. Cotton's *Speed Trap Blues*, Nancy Bloomer Deussen's *Tribute to the Ancients*, Herb Gellis's *Mojave*, Brian Holmes's *Tales of a Cultural Revolution*, and Warner Jepson's *Eight Trifles*. Valley Presbyterian Church, Portola Valley, CA.

Montreal Symphony in Ginastera's *Glosses Sobre Temes du Pau Casals*, and Piazzolla's *Bandoneon Concerto*, *Oblivion*, and *Adios Nonino*. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY.

Orchestra 2001 premieres Holland's *Naomi in the Living Room* and Whitman's *Sukey in the Dark*. Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA.

October 28

Bang on a Can Marathon. Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York, NY.

Comment

Listening Sessions

CHRIS DELAURENTI

In the spring of 2000, my friend Henry, fed up with the perpetual dearth of venues for non-commercial music in Seattle (not to mention its paltry, predictably late-night presence on local radio), invited a few friends over for a "listening session." His request was simple: Bring several pieces of adventurous music less than ten minutes long on cassette, LP, or compact disc. The definition of "adventurous" was left to individual discretion. Everyone was expected to take a turn and only mention the composer(s) and title when the music -- and any subsequent discussion -- had concluded.

To keep things cozy, Henry invited less than ten people, all of whom he hoped would be attentive listeners. Those attending knew our host had a well-nigh world-class stereo system and thus quiet, focused listening would reap rewards. After several monthly sessions, Henry moved to a new abode and, barring illness or obstreperous employment, scheduled a listening session every other week or so. The start time was fixed at 8pm. Latecomers were expected to wait until a piece ended before entering -- just like a concert.

Gathering 'round the gramophone is not new; in one form or another, music lovers have convened sonic potlucks long before the salons of 19th-century Vienna and 20th-century Paris harbored the famous and not-so-famous musicians of their respective heydays. Today, despite the popularity of Nuremberg-style arena concerts and the pervasive aural wallpaper polluting our public spaces, listening to music in an intimate social setting is far from obsolete. Indeed, the listening sessions sometimes hark back to an idyllic society for private musical performances. Apart from luxuriating with like-minded listeners in luminous labyrinths of sound, such sublime sonic experiences also raise issues about how we encounter, consume, respect, adore, and listen to adventurous music.

The obvious benefit of these sessions is the chance to discover unfamiliar composers, improvisers and performers. The majority of adventurous music is released by small labels who advertise very little, if at all, and press limited quantities of LPs or CDs. Corporate-owned "major" labels periodically delve into adventurous music, but never for very long. Columbia's *Music of Our Time* imprint, Deutsche Grammophon's sought-after *Avant Garde* series, BMG's *Catalyst* line, and Sony's aborted *Ligeti Edition* remain the most prominently abandoned corporate commitments to the avant-garde. Noise, free improvisation, and out jazz also appear in haphazard fashion, but usually on smaller, boutique labels.

Listeners tend to specialize, anyway. I'm chiefly interested in instrumental and electroacoustic compositions, but like most who attends the session, I'm open to the sonically adventurous or unusual. Some attendees champion undeservedly obscure musicians such as Lucia Dlugoszewski, Richard Maxfield, and MSBR. Others have brought field recordings or strange audio products such as a demonstration CD of psychoacoustic principles. A few months ago, I was enlisted to play AMK's "the wig box" (from a 7-inch record titled *Hi-Fi*), which requires the performer to lift the record player's needle from lock groove to lock groove. Such variety reveals connections among apparently dissimilar musics and underscores how little we adventurous music mavens have actually heard.

Obviously, it is impossible for one person to buy and listen to every release; adventurous music seems doomed to suddenly disappear from store shelves, or generally not make it into stores at all. The culprits include indifferent distributors struggling to market hundreds of new releases each month, record stores pushing popular music to pay the rent, and frustrated musicians who, after selling several dozen CDs and not quite breaking even, stash the remaining discs in the basement and start working on their next project. I can only surmise the motivations of rock or pop consumers. Most of my purchases investigate exploratory musicians rather than serve as souvenirs of what I heard on the radio.

A listening session can offer substantial advantages over a radio broadcast. Even in major metropolitan areas, most "weird music" (i.e. anything without a steady beat) programs get shunted towards the witching hour of 10pm and beyond, when only the devoted will hear them. Radio has other, lesser-known effects. As a radio DJ, I have often heard FM compression mutilate the carefully constructed dynamic range of music. When broadcast on FM, pieces such as Bernhard Günter's near-silent *Impossible Grey*, Tom Heasley's *Ground Zero* for tuba and electronics, and Luigi Dallapiccola's *Tempus Destruendi-Tempus Aedificandi* acquire additional timbres, sometimes becoming different pieces altogether. As for high-bandwidth internet streaming, how many people want to run their computer's mediocre sound card into the stereo?

Some will argue that acoustic music needs to be played by live musicians, not world-class hi-fis. As a listener, I do not heed the Musician's Union dictum that "Live music is best." As a lover of music, I am moved by sound, not the emotional eruptions of performers. Here I should admit that my ears came of age in the stereo era; I discovered Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* not in school, or in a book, or in a score, or at a concert, but on a faux-burlap covered LP lurking atop a dusty shelf. After Stravinsky, encountering Beethoven and a clutch of classic 1970s Nonesuch LPs (Carter, Xenakis, Crumb, Ives) inaugurated my journey into classical and avant-garde music. Several years later, I started attending concerts of classical, contemporary, and improvised music. What I heard appalled me.

While everyone is familiar with the constellations of coughing and sussurating concert programs, the attentive must also endure the bodily indiscipline of musicians. Most musicians are keenly sensitive to page turns or emptying spit valves, but corporeal control has yet to creep into the conservatory curriculum. There are still brass players who should learn how to set a mute gently on a thin foam pad, not clack it against a hard wood floor. I'll spare you a description of the concertmaster who routinely (and unconsciously) scraped his right foot one beat before his solos!

My fellow concertgoers remain the worst offenders. Unused to reveling in the allegedly artificial quiet of recordings and unfamiliar with ascribing meaning to the tiniest transient sonic phenomenon, too many people think that a quick whisper or a slight squirm will not matter much. To those who delve into the deep strata of music's sound and structure, it does. The compulsive clappers who cannot wait for the final notes to reverberate through the hall also aggravate the sensitive listener. Alas, without a place to learn prolonged concentrated listening, it is foolish to expect symphony audiences to respect the music with hushed bodies and rapt attention.

I have found the quietest audiences at free improv gigs. It is marvelous when master improvisers exploit a chasm of silence and bask in the subsequent stillness of a communally inaudible audience. Unlike symphony concerts, these gigs invariably suffer from the aural contamination of passing cars, an anticlimactic toilet flush from down the hall, scattered footsteps from the floor above, or other sonic detritus common to informal 'underground' performance spaces.

Formal concert halls have problems too. Although rarely recognized as such, the performance space is also an instrument. Hearing a cavernous hall congeal a Mozart symphony into mush convinced me that music must be heard in a suitable acoustic setting: free improvisation, composed chamber music, and early Haydn symphonies in auditoriums and other intimate venues, Strauss tone poems in modern concert halls, and so forth. Wielding precise specifications and detailed diagrams, Stockhausen and other contemporary composers boldly treat the performance space as an instrument, but the ignorance of concert promoters and performers frequently yields a regrettable compromise. Occasionally, a spellbinding performance will banish even the most blatant distractions from my ears; however, live concerts remain my most frustrating musical experience.

The listening sessions are not totally quiet either, but have proved quieter and more satisfying to me than most concerts. High quality speakers can create a rich acoustic space - without coughs, unwrapping candies, or cavernous mush. A small, comfortably seated audience of engaged listeners makes it much easier to joyfully commune with music. As a result, my ears have become more sensitive and alert; my ability to concentrate has been magnified beyond my expectations. Some listeners struggle with "train spotting" and waste their time ascribing a piece to Gottfried Michael Koenig or Josef Anton Riedl or discerning Rashied Ali from Tony Oxley.

Where else will you find the challenge to listen to the music - and only the music - laid bare? What a pleasure it is to encounter a composition or improvisation without the burden of a title, performer, or composer! When a work is good enough to abduct the audience's attention, the experience is thrilling. For me, such intimate, immediate, immersive contact with music, free of encumbering expectations opens the soul to the essence of sound.

Many who attend the listening sessions are musicians and a few share their own creations. Like most creators of electroacoustic music, I listen to my pieces hundreds of times before letting them "out the door" yet all those listens cannot replace hearing my work with others in the room. We makers must be made of strong, stern stuff. Absorbing the unvarnished reactions before the creator's identity comes to the fore can be disappointing, fortifying, crushing, instructive, and vindicating.

Several suggestions have improved the listening experience. Concealing the CD and cassette players' time display removes another distraction and demolishes the temptation to see if the music breaks down into 5, 10 or 30 second chunks. Some have presented a suite of pieces under 10 minutes and thereby fractured temporal expectations. Not knowing a work's length hones the ears' attention; what we are hearing might not be with us long! We have also listened to pieces much longer than ten minutes; to allot the time equally, those who present such pieces skip their next turn. The variety of music genres and mastering jobs make calibrating the volume essential, though regular attendees soon get a feel for the stereo's impressive dynamic range. Aside from the aforementioned ground rules, things proceed very loosely by informal consensus.

A few sessions have been devoted to extremely long works such as Cardew's *Treatise* or Stockhausen's *Hymnen*. Concert and festival directors usually shun long pieces out of practical need and pervasive fear. Not every gargantuan opus deserves sweeping swaths of sonic real estate, but listening sessions offer a refuge for such supposedly impractical, risky music.

Of course, the listening sessions are fun and filled with camaraderie. Along with knowing everyone's name, the ability to trade seats between pieces or mutually agree to an intermission expunges any excess formality. Socializing seems integral to experiencing music. In my five short years of organizing music concerts and festivals, I found that people want to discuss or berate or exalt what they've heard, speculate on the composer's tools and techniques, and otherwise carouse or commiserate with fellow aficionados.

Discussions between pieces and during breaks range from quick biographical and historical details, to questions and comments ("Wow, what instrument was that?") to outright condemnation. Not everyone agrees with what is adventurous. One person's masterpiece is another's trite garbage, but those disagreements spur valuable discussion and debate. We've probed many musical issues including the essence of music ("Music is an act!"), the physiology of hearing, the nature of taste, and recording techniques of the last century.

Fortunately, the same folks don't always show up. An irregular cast of about 30 listeners and the semi-regular nature of the session ensures diverse music (and opinions!) as well as forestalls the complacency that inevitably accompanies a regularly scheduled event. Those who miss the session stay apprised by emailed playlists that tally who brought what. Newcomers are welcome, and we're encouraged to invite the like-minded. After a quick review of how the sessions proceed, it is easy to feel at home and join the adventure.

I hope the previous paragraphs are self-evident. Surely others around the world are also instigating a different chamber music, a new yet very old and obvious setting for adventurous musics and musicians. You too can sidestep the current concert hall system where bland new works are played to be forgotten and partake of (or establish!) this vibrant provocative arena in your community. Aside from igniting much-needed discourse and furnishing a new home for the work of sonic explorers, such sessions (why not call them concerts?) have the potential to renew what in our distracted times has become a radical act: listening.

Comment

By the Numbers

Number of articles on contemporary classical music in The New Yorker, June-October 2001 (20 issues)

1

Number of contemporary classical composers profiled in Time's "Artists & Entertainers" issue (July 9, 2001)

0

Number of contemporary classical composers profiled in Time's "Music Goes Global" issue (Fall 2001)

1

Number of articles on contemporary classical music in Time magazine, July-October 2001 (18 issues)

1

Total number of articles on contemporary classical music in Time magazine, April-October 2001 (31 issues)

2

Number of articles on contemporary classical music in the San Francisco Chronicle's Sunday Datebook, July-October 2001 (16 issues)

3

Total number of articles on contemporary classical music in the San Francisco Chronicle's Sunday Datebook, April-October 2001 (29 issues)

7

Number of pictures of contemporary popular musicians in The New York Times Sunday Arts & Leisure Guide, June 2001 (4 issues)

2

Number of pictures of classical musicians in The New York Times Sunday Arts & Leisure Guide, June 2001 (4 issues)

2

Number of pictures of contemporary classical musicians in The New York Times Sunday Arts & Leisure Guide, June 2001 (4 issues)

0

Items

Unlike most of American classical music in those days [of the early 60's], *In C* evoked the modern West Coast, with its sunbaked blend of modal jazz and Eastern mysticism, rather than early 20th-century Vienna. By impudently turning his back on Europe, [Terry] Riley was committing an act of heresy, but today there is little doubting the wisdom of his decision. As Bang on a Can's new recording (Cantaloupe Records CA 21004) superbly demonstrates, *In C* is one of the grooviest, most euphoric pieces ever written by an American composer. Bang on a Can's urbane, elegant rendition, a wonderfully shaggy document released by Columbia Masterworks in 1968.

Adam Shatz
The New York Times, 10/7/01

[The ballet] *Death and Fire* owes something to its score by Tan Dun, which is excruciating and has passages that sound as though someone is doing something unsuitable to a seagull.

Clement Crisp
Financial Times, 10/9/01

Writers

MARK ALBURGER began playing the oboe and composing in association with Dorothy and James Freeman, George Crumb, and Richard Wernick. He studied with Karl Kohn at Pomona College; Joan Panetti and Gerald Levinson at Swarthmore College (B.A.); Jules Langert at Dominican College (M.A.); Roland Jackson at Claremont Graduate University (Ph.D.); and Terry Riley. An ASCAP composer, Alburger writes for *Commuter Times* and is published by *New Music*. He is Editor-Publisher of 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC, and has interviewed numerous composers, including Charles Amirkhanian, Henry Brant, Earle Brown, Philip Glass, Lou Harrison, Alan Hovhaness, Meredith Monk, Pauline Oliveros, Steve Reich, and Frederick Rzewski. An excerpt from his *Bald Soprano* will be given this month at San Francisco's NOW Music Festival.

TILDY BAYAR is a Bay Area new-music writer.

CHRISTOPHER DELAURENTI is a Seattle-based composer and improviser. Incorporating murky atmospheres, unusual field recordings, everyday speech, and an array of instruments deployed in maniacal recombinant polyphony, Christopher's music resides at www.delaurenti.net along with many music-related essays and articles.

JEFF DUNN is a freelance critic with a B.A. in music and a Ph.D. in Education. He is an avid collector of recorded performances of new music, a dedicated operagoer, and a composer of piano and vocal music. His post-modernistic career has included stints as a ranger-naturalist, geologic explorationist, and geography professor. He now serves on the board of directors for New Music Forum and is a Bay Area correspondent for 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC.

Laurie Hudicek began her musical education at the age of five. In 1988 she began studying at the Peabody Preparatory School where she was a student of Frances Cheng-Koors. She completed the school's certificate program in 1991. In 1995, Hudicek graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in music from St. Mary's College of Maryland where she studied with Brian Ganz and focused on twentieth-century repertoire with Eliza Garth. In 1998, she received her Master's of Music degree in Piano Performance from the University of Maryland while studying with Bradford Gowen. Hudicek has won awards from several institutions including the Maryland State Music Teacher's Association (1989, 1990), and the Arts Alliance of St. Mary's College (1994). She was a prizewinner in the Crane Festival of New Music National Solo Performers Competition in April 1995, and participated in the first Annual Institute for Contemporary Music Performance Summer Master Session in Buffalo, NY in the same year. Hudicek continues to study with Gowen while in the Doctoral program at the University of Maryland, where she has a teaching assistantship. She focuses on the performance of contemporary piano music and has performed several masterpieces of this century including volumes I and II of George Crumb's *Makrokosmos* for solo piano and volume IV for piano four-hands. Hudicek had been on the piano faculty of St. Mary's College of Maryland (1995-96) and is currently on the piano faculty of the Levine School of Music in Washington, D. C.

ALLISON ADAH JOHNSON is a composer who studied at Stanford University (B.A.), the California Institute of the Arts (M.F.A.), and is currently completing her Ph.D. from the University of California San Diego. Her principal composition teachers have been Mel Powell, Morton Subotnick, Chaya Chernowin, and Brian Ferneyhough.

She studied Javanese gamelan with Djoko Walujo at CalArts and with Suhardi in Yogyakarta, Central Java. Her compositions have been performed throughout the US, Asia, and Europe and at the *Frau Musica (nova) Festival* in Cologne, the *New Directions in Asian-American Music Festival* in Santa Barbara, and at *Feminist Theory & Music VI* in Boise, Idaho. She teaches at Skyline College and Cogswell Polytechnical College in the Bay Area.

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*.

PAYTON MACDONALD is a performer and composer. He currently teaches percussion and world music at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh and performs with the Verederos flute and percussion duo and Alarm Will Sound, a new music ensemble based in New York.

D.C. MECKLER holds a doctorate in composition from the University of California, San Diego. He writes regularly for *Paris New Music Review* and 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC.

ANTON ROVNER was born in Moscow, Russia, in 1970 and has lived in the United States since 1974. He studied piano at the Manhattan School of Music, Preparatory Division, then, composition at the Juilliard School, Pre-College Division, with Andrew Thomas and the Juilliard School (undergraduate and graduate programs) with Milton Babbitt, graduating in 1993 with an MM. In 1998 he received a Ph.D. degree from Rutgers University, where he studied with Charles Wuorinen. Rovner received a BMI Award in 1989 and an IREX Grant in 1989-1990. He attended the Estherwood Music Festival studying composition with Eric Ewazen. He studied music theory at Columbia University with Joseph Dubiel for two years. Since 1992 he is the artistic director of the Bridge Contemporary Music Series. His music has been performed in New York, Moscow, Paris, Kiev, Lvov, Kazan, Nizhni-Novgorod, Chisinau, and Bucharest. He has participated and his music has been performed in such music concerts and festivals as the Composers' Concordance contemporary music series in New York, the Moscow Autumn Music Festival, the Alternativa festival in Moscow, the International Forum for Young Composers in Kiev, the Nicolai Roslavetz Music Festival in Bryansk, Russia, the 3rd International Contemporary Music Festival Europe-Asia in Kazan, Russia, the Contrasts festival in Lvov, and the Moscow Forum/Dutch-Russian Music Festival in Moscow. His theoretical articles, interviews with various composers and reviews of contemporary music concerts and festivals have been published in such music journals as *Myzykal'naya Akademiya* and 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC. He is a member of the American Music Center and the Composers' Guild of New Jersey.

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