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Charles Wuorinen’s two-act opera, *Brokeback Mountain*, with a libretto by Annie Proulx based on the short story of that name from her collection, *Close Range—Wyoming Stories*, finally had its American debut with four performances at the Rose Theater at Lincoln Center in late May and early June. A detailed telling of the story of the opera’s strange odyssey could easily take up more space than is usually available for these notes. Suffice it to say that it was originally commissioned by the old New York City Opera to be presented during the opening season of Gerard Mortier’s tenure as general director. When he bowed out due to the insecure financial status of the company before the scheduled closing of the New York State Theater in 2008/2009, the planned New York city premiere never took place. Instead Mortier arranged for the opera’s debut in January 2014 at Madrid’s Teatro Real, where Mortier landed as general director after the NYCO fiasco. Subsequent performances in Aachen, Germany and Salzburg, Austria, plus the stateside release of a video of the Teatro Real production have whetted the appetites of New York opera lovers for an American production.

The NYCO production is based on the minimalist design for the Salzburg Landestheater and uses the reduced orchestra version prepared by the composer. The orchestra was effectively led by the American conductor Kazem Abdullah, who had conducted the work in Aachen. The cast included two veterans from the original Madrid production, baritone Daniel Okulitch (Ennis Del Mar) and soprano Heather Buck (Alma Beers), whom Ennis marries. They were both first-rate as were the performers new to their roles, especially tenor Glenn Steven Allen (Jack Twist), mezzo-soprano Hilary Gunther (Lureen), bass-baritone Christopher Job (Aguirre) and soprano Jenni Bank (Mrs. Twist).

The libretto, by Ms. Proulx herself, is effectively wrought. The original story “Brokeback Mountain”, published initially in *The New Yorker*, is a taut tale of thwarted passion, told in thirty pages of terse, chiseled prose. It is a story like the character Ennis, that hasn’t an ounce of fat on it. And a story of doomed love between two inarticulate men is a fine, though tricky, subject for a modernist opera. By careful elisions the libretto makes the story comprehensible without the more extended scenes, greater local color and scenic effects that enhanced Ang Lee’s 2004 movie with Heath Ledger as Ennis and Jake Gyllenhall as Jack. It stays true to the sadness of the tale and the mysterious death of Jack that seems to prefigure the fate of the real-life Matthew Shepherd, murdered in Montana in 1998 for being gay.

The main problem with the opera and the reason it is not a complete success is the music of Charles Wuorinen. A committed atonalist, Wuorinen floods the opera with too much dense music, that heaves and churns without telling us much about the characters or really painting the scenes. From the opening pedal C it all sounds pretty much the same: harsh and splintery. The story demands a certain relentless bleakness, but less would be more in this case, a few thinner textures would provide needed contrast. The text is well set in terms of comprehension of the words, but of parola scenica, there is nary a trace. Wourinen’s voices do not soar. They chatter in relentless recitative until the...
final scene when Ennis returns alone to his trailer and holding Jack’s shirt, which he has saved for years, hanging it next to his own, soliloquizes on his lost love and the opera ends on his cry of pain and loss. The music almost takes off at this point: we finally connect with a character until a brutal twelve-note chord ends the story.

I have seen and heard part of the DVD of the original Madrid production, and the full orchestra does provide some of the color and background to the score that seems to be missing in this reduced version. The singers did a heroic job of performing it, and the smallish orchestra made a valiant effort to render the music in a way that would mean something. The production did not give a sufficient sense of what attracted the two principal characters, Ennis and Jack, to life on the treacherous mountain, but the latter scenes had some sense of the in town claustrophobia that bears down so heavily on the haunted Ennis, and his unfortunate wife Alma.

Charles Wuorinen, judging from recent interviews, is a somewhat bitter man who feels that serious music has turned in a false direction. In reality, fate and the change in taste toward neo-romanticism and minimalism, has simply left him behind. Music has simply moved on, evolving as always. A synthesis occurred in which tonal and atonal styles cross-pollinated with certain elements of contemporary pop music and a new music emerged to challenge what had been the dominant style. Where is Hegel when you need him!

The Berkshire Hills of Western Massachusetts are a lovely refuge from the urban life of Boston to the east and New York City to the south, and one encounters many folk from the musical worlds of both cities at the Tanglewood Festival of the Boston Symphony. The campus for the Festival is a lovely tract of land adjacent to the Stockbridge Bowl between Lenox and West Stockbridge, Massachusetts. To picnic on the grounds before a BSO concert is a special and highly civilized ritual and the view of the lake at the center of the Stockbridge Bowl is a particular delight on a pleasant summer evening. The highlight for me of a visit to Tanglewood in recent years has been the July Festival of Contemporary Music. It is usually curated by a distinguished composer or two, and this year the director was Thomas Ades, the Boston Symphony Deborah and Philip Edmundson Artistic Partner, and one of the most well-known of living British composers. The ties between the Festival of Contemporary Music and composers from Great Britain is well known, and the recent death of Oliver Knussen (a previous director and student of longtime director, the late Gunther Schuller) caused some re-shuffling of the programs to include a large work of Knussen’s on the final, orchestral program. All the programs feature performances by the Tanglewood Music Center (TMC) fellows, both students and distinguished faculty.

The first program (which I missed) was on Thursday evening, July 26 and included music by Per Norgård, Oliver Christophe Leith, Francisco Coll, Veronika Krausas and Conlon Nancarrow. The second program, which I attended, was Friday, July 27 at 2:30 in the fabled, woody Florence Gould Auditorium of Seiji Ozawa Hall, a wonderful space for chamber music of any kind, which serves as the venue for all concerts in the contemporary music festival. It began with a stunning performance of As in a Dream (1988) by Chen Yi in its original version for soprano, violin and cello, replete with the pitch sliding, oscillations and mixture of singing and speaking characteristic of the Chinese operas that so impressed the composer in her youth. Followed by the late Jonathan Harvey’s String Quartet No. 3 (1995), which had the British composer’s usual blending of the Eastern and Western musical aesthetics; a thematic idea of East-West influences in the program seemed to be emerging. The Quartet, a beautiful sound world of fleeting ideas and extended string techniques (col legno, microtones, glissandi, et al.), was brilliantly rendered by the young players, Jacob Schafer and Chi Yi, violins, Samuel Pedersen, viola and Sonia Mantel, cello, all New Fromm Players. The last piece on the first half was Fletch (2012) by a younger composer from the UK, Rebecca Saunders. An essay in sound with a
furious texture that was less appealing, but also reflected an Asian view of extended instrumental techniques as an end in themselves and a way to imitate Asian instruments in a Western context. The performance seemed well-planned and executed by a quartet of TMC students, Yanki Karatas and Shannon Fitzhenry, violins, Rachel Halvorson, viola and Ethan Brown, cello.

The second half of the program began with two studies by Conlon Nancarrow, originally (as is most of his music) for player piano, transcribed by Thomas Ades for two conventional pianos and finely performed by Ades and TMC student, Nathan Ben-Yehuda. I confess I have a blind spot where Nancarrow is concerned, usually finding his music dry and over-larded with tricky rhythmic byplay. However I was almost won over by the seductive performance of the languid Study No. 6, with its distinctly Spanish flavor. In any event, both pieces were mercifully brief. The final piece on the program was Julian Anderson’s String Quartet No. 3, hana no hanata-ba (2017/18). The subtitle, chosen for both sound and sense, means “bouquet of flowers” in Japanese, was apt: the music had a colorful serenity, for the most part. Except for one short presto section in the sixth, and last movement, the music was moderate in tempo and full of lovely, idiomatic string writing. There was one minor mishap in the final movement (a broken string), but in every other aspect the performance, again by the members of the New Fromm Players (as above, but with Jacob Schafer and Chi Yi switching chairs) was first rate. The work, which replaced an originally scheduled quartet by Poul Ruders, was co-commissioned by the Tanglewood Music Center and is dedicated to Ellen Hightsein, longtime TMC Director.

Next up was the Saturday evening concert, at 6pm (billed as a Prelude concert to the main Tanglewood event at 8pm in the Shed, a screening of West Side Story, the movie of Leonard Bernstein’s path-breaking Broadway musical, here with live orchestral accompaniment by the BSO itself). The Prelude concert (just about an hour in length) featured wonderful pieces by two American composers, Andrew Norman and Sean Shepherd, both born in 1979, as well as a lively fanfare by Javier Alvarez (Mexico, b. 1956), Trompatufarria al Pastor (2006) for four horns, and music by Judith Weir (b.1954) and Gyorgy Kurtag (b.1926), of less interest. Shepherd’s piece, Quartet for Oboe and Strings (2011), inspired by Mozart’s identically scored K. 370, had Shepherd’s usual lyrical inventiveness and fine sense of what the instruments can do best. In one movement, it deftly juggled variations of mood and character in four discernable and contrasting sections and seemed just right in length at 12 minutes. The performance, by TMC Fellows, was everything a composer could ask for. Likewise, Andrew Norman’s Light Screens, a ten-minute piece inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright’s Prairie-style stained glass windows, for flute, violin, viola, and cello, shows this gifted composer’s mastery of the chamber music medium. Using a broad range of familiar contemporary techniques (sul ponticello, flutter-tonguing, harmonics et al.), Norman rarely strays into mere sound effects and produces music both colorful and coherent. Both of these composers deserve their growing acclaim as among the leading American composers of their generation. Their contributions were highlights of this visit to Tanglewood. The TMC musicians once again were very well prepared and gave ample demonstration of their considerable gifts.

The last chamber music concert of the Festival was at the early hour of 10am on Sunday, July 29, but was definite-
ly worth getting up for. Ranging from music by Irish composer Gerald Barry’s (b. 1952) Sextet for bass clarinet, trumpet, two percussionists, piano and double bass, to the stunning (and well-known) string quartet *Officium Breve in memoriam Endrê Szervánszky*, Op. 28 (1989), by Hungarian master György Kurtag, the program was played with polish and confidence, thanks to the rotating cast of TMC players. The Kurtag has rarely seemed more dazzling than it was in this superb performance. Music by Harrison Birtwistle (b.1932), Cortege, a ceremony for 14 musicians (2007), Niccolò Castiglioni (1932-1996), *Cantus planus* (1990) for two sopranos, flute/alto flute, clarinet, percussion, harp, piano, violin and cello and a magically glowing, but brief, String Quartet No. 10 (Harvest Timeless) by Per Norgard (b. 1932) were also included. But my heart belonged to the next to the last selection on the program: Reflection for Violin and Piano (1917), by Oliver Knussen (1952-2018). His recent death was a great blow to those who knew him, both as a conductor, mainly of twentieth century music, and as a composer, whose pain-ful slowness at producing new works was legendary. He loomed large both physically and in his dual roles over the music of the last fifty years. Many of his most memorable works (*Songs and Hums of Winnie the Pooh, Where the Wild Things Are*), fash-ioned from elements of a ballet score and described by the composer as an “ingenious demonstration of Ades’ compositional ingenuity and ability to manage large-scale forces.” Gerstein played like a demon and the players of the TMC Orchestra were outstanding.

After a brief intermission the orchestra offered Irish composer Gerald Barry’s short and lively *Diner* (1980), fashioned from elements of a ballet score and described by the composer as opening “Like a brash can-can.” It is a classic boisterous concert opener, full of rhythmic high jinks and startling textural contrasts, and was ably conducted by Gemma New.

The program ended with a well-planned and executed performance of Witold Lutoslawski’s epic Symphony No. 3 (1983). Scored for a large orchestra (winds in 3s with the usual doublings), 4/4/4/1 brass, timpani and 4 additional percussionists, 2 harps, celesta, piano 4-hands and a large string section, it is a kaleidoscopic riot
of orchestral color and uses a kind of “limited aleatoricism” characteristic of Lutosławski’s later music. The Symphony is in two continuous movements that contrast rhythmically active music with more pensive gestures. The tension apparent in much of the music belies the composer’s claim that the work is not political. Written over a ten-year period during much turmoil in Poland, the composer’s native country, the era of Solidarity and the beginning of the gradual collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, it is hard not to hear that struggle for freedom in this powerful piece, ending as it does with the return of a powerful four note tattoo on E natural by brass and timpani that has recurred throughout the work. It was wonderful to hear the Symphony again and Thomas Ades conducted the admirable orchestra with verve and steely authority.

Though I enjoyed much of what I heard, I should mention that the Festival seemed unbalanced in two areas: diversity and timeliness. Compositions from the last five years were outnum-bered more than two to one and composers from the British Isles and other Commonwealth nations dominated the programming, which no doubt reflects Thomas Ades’ interests. The latter was not a problem for me, an anglophile in almost all respects, but the lack of a wider representation of music by newer European and Asian composers, was very noticeable. Granted, this was a minor blemish on an otherwise delightful visit to a favorite summer spot for enjoying first-rate music making.

How to Celebrate an Anniversary:

By Jean Ballard Terepka

Birthdays and anniversaries—major milestones of any sort—are occasions for reflection. Glances backwards provide opportunities to assess origins; future plans build on current achievements, mixing pride and optimism in equal measure. The New Amsterdam Singers’ May 30, 2018 concert, Rejoice in the Lamb: A Century of Favorites was the culmination of the chorus’ season-long fiftieth anniversary celebrations.

Clara Longstreth founded the New Amsterdam Singers and has been its Music Director for all fifty of its busy seasons. NAS’s rich repertoire of both a cappella and accompanied repertoire stretches from the sixteenth century forward and has, from the beginning, included contemporary pieces, some of which they have commissioned. Typically, NAS concerts feature as many as 80 singers, including the smaller Chamber Chorus—whose individual members often take solo parts in larger works—and the full Chorus. As one of the tri-state region’s premier avoca-tional choruses, NAS has cultivated and consistently maintained a musical tone of thoughtful intelligence, careful attentiveness to texture and nuance, and elegant artistry.

For their spring-time fiftieth anniversary celebratory concert, Longstreth chose all twentieth and twenty-first century music, including a world premiere. Overall, the evening’s pieces offered and examined two of contemporary choruses’ major repertoire anchors: works by Arvo Part (b. 1935) and Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) represented a formal, classically-developed tradition and works by Robert S. Cohen (b. 1945), Alice Parker (b. 1925) and Shawn Kirchner (b. 1970) represented adaptations of more informal, folk traditions. The premiere, The Wave Rises by Ben Moore (b. 1960), embodied the best of contemporary choral composers’ engagement with a centuries-old challenge: how to write music for texts not conceived with any musical association or expectation.

The concert opened with Part’s gorgeous 2001 Nunc dimittis followed by two 1950s Britten works, excerpts from Gloriana and from Five Flower Songs. Though these composers’ sensibilities differ, Longstreth found and highlighted their shared fluidity. The divine lumen/
light celebrated by Part revealed humanity’s capacity for both noble, processional grandeur and intimate, tender hopefulness. The folk qualities of Britten’s Green Broom led naturally into Cohen’s lovely I see and his jazzy, doo-woppy Do You Believe?

The last piece of the concert’s first half was Moore’s full-chorus The Wave Rises, “commissioned by New Amsterdam Singers in honor of its founder and Music Director, Clara Longstreth on the occasion of the chorus’s 50th anniversary.” At Longstreth’s invitation, the composer spoke briefly about his purposes in writing the piece, a three-section setting of Virginia Woolf writings taken from her diaries, A Room of One’s Own and The Waves. Moore noted that in choosing texts to set to music, one must “get under the skin” of the author’s words, feeling the full range of a text’s power to unnerve and inspire. Moved by the “fearlessness” of Woolf’s writing and by her “unflinching” ability to write about human experience, Moore divided his Woolf texts into three categories, On Life, On Beauty and On Death.

Moore successfully associated musical sound with words and phrases, illuminating the intensely poetic quality of Woolf’s prose, and weaving together clear, distinct melodies with alternating passages of lush sensuality, mystery and haunted restlessness, delicacy and ravishing sweep. The closing lines of On Death—“Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding. O Death! The waves broke on the shore” worked simultaneously as the story’s conclusion and an affirmation that death is a meaningful part of life.

Though a fairly short work—less than 20 minutes—The Wave Rises is both accessible and complex; it is a rewarding and satisfying work; it deserves to become a part of any first-rate chorus’ repertoire.

The music of the concert’s second half—Britten’s popular and marvelous Rejoice in the Lamb followed by Parker’s Hark, I Hear the Harps Eternal and Kirchner’s Unclouded Day—was celebratory and open-hearted, a fine conclusion to both the evening and the anniversary.

Twentieth and twenty-first century choral music such as the New Amsterdam Singers have been presenting for the last fifty years is music of community: singers become a community, bound together in passionate devotion to music and in disciplined preparation for performance, and the audience becomes a community of response and appreciation. The music itself comes from a variety of historical origins: it is liturgical and religious, sacred and ceremonial; it is social, secular and entirely human. Throughout the United States, there are many first rate choruses; the New Amsterdam Singers is one of them. NAS’s particular success lies in its effective application of high performance standards to first rate pieces of music: their commitment to the commissioning of new works ensures that an old-fashioned activity—singing in community—maintains its secure future.
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Piano Works of Lalo Schifrin
Played by Mirian Conti
[Grand Piano GP776]

Who knew that Lalo Schifrin, the Argentinian composer of the “Mission: Impossible” theme, as well as more than a hundred film and television scores, was also a student of Olivier Messiaen and an arranger for Dizzie Gillespie? This disc of Schifrin’s music for solo piano (including the Mission: Impossible theme) shows him to be a versatile master of many musical languages, from Argentinian tango to American jazz to various European idioms, both high and low. He is a true musical cosmopolitan.

On this disc Pianist Mirian Conti, a long-time collaborator of Schifrin’s, has recorded his complete works for solo piano, almost all of which are presented here as world premiere recordings. The album includes two major piano works: The Jazz Piano Sonata, Op. 1 (1963/2016), and the Theme and 10 Variations on an Original Theme (2016). The rest of the disc contains works arranged for piano specifically for this recording. That they are as gracefully pianistic as they are is probably due to Schifrin’s being a professional pianist himself. He knows what he’s doing. The music is soulful, lively, and full of invention. It is a pleasure to hear.

To Open in Praise
Vocal Works by Daniel Asia
[Summit Records DCD 703—performances by Jeremy Huw Williams, Lontano, and Robert Swenson]

This disc contains three works by Daniel Asia on Jewish themes, composed over a span of twenty-five years. There is a psalm setting (in Hebrew) for baritone, violin and piano, a group of songs for tenor and chamber ensemble on poems by the New York poet Paul Pines, and a cycle on poems by the Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai (sung in English), also set for baritone and chamber ensemble. Conductor Odaline de la Martinez leads the London-based Lontano ensemble.

Mr. Asia is a professor of music at the University of Arizona. He is prolific as a composer and trenchant as a commentator on the contemporary musical scene. You can read his blogs in the Huffington Post.

The pieces represented here are a workmanlike compendium of familiar musical idioms—there is a high serious cantorial style, some middle-brow modernism and occasional nods to popular styles. Jeremy Huw Williams is the baritone. His diction is often so British that it is hard for this American to understand. The tenor Robert Swensen is easier to follow in his interpretations of the very Brooklyn poetry of Paul Pines. Among these poems is one that Mr. Asia has set as a catchy musical theater song: “My Father’s Name Was.” This is perhaps the most memorable item and the least like anything else on the album. I hope Mr. Asia continues to explore this vein of his talent.
According to their website, “La Caccina is a Chicago-based, professional women’s vocal ensemble committed to musical excellence across a wide range of styles. La Caccina is dedicated to “exploring the power of the female voice, and contributing new and innovative works to the treble canon.” Their CD “Open Book” presents unaccompanied vocal works by Don MacDonald, Augusta Read Thomas, Matthew Harris, David Lang, Kim André Arnesen, Carl Kennedy, Katherine Pukinskis, and Rob Redei. All of these compositions were composed in the 21st century, and three of them were commissioned by La Caccina.

Listening to these well-tuned and well-blended performances one is reminded of the sound of the “a cappella” groups that are popular these days on college campuses. Of course, the material here is more sophisticated than what you would find on a typical close harmony program. But the approach is similar. The sound of these combined women’s voices has a powerful sensual appeal.

My favorite work on the recording is Matthew Harris’ Women in Love (2006). It is cleverly and economically composed and is the only work whose words I had no trouble understanding. I had to go to the composer’s website to learn that the poetry of this charming cycle is by Wendy Cope. As far as I could tell, none of the poets set here are given credit on the CD. The three short commissioned works attempt to musicalize the unattributed words of young women who are experiencing emotional difficulties. In two of these pieces there is some spoken text over accompanying vocalizations, a technique that is hard to bring off. Like “complaint choruses,” (many examples of which may be found on YouTube) these pieces are part of a recent movement to give musical voice to the troubles of ordinary people. The intention may be worthy, but the paradoxical effect is that it trivializes what it purports to take seriously. I think that is why it is best for composers to set the words of professional poets and lyricists.

This album of choral pieces composed by professors at Queens College is, by definition, academic music. It is heartening to note, however, that these days “academic” is not necessarily a damning epithet. Unlike in the bad old days of my youth, academic composers today are free to write in almost any style. This freedom is amply illustrated here. From the campus that once harbored George Perle, Henry Weinberg and other Viennese-inspired modernists, we hear sacred and secular works from a variety of non-controversial aesthetic viewpoints. While it is true that there are no women and only one composer of color represented here, there is, nevertheless, some stylistic diversity. And though you will find no minimalists or post-modernists, no French spectralists
or Californian nature-worshippers, no jazz or improvisation, you will hear choruses sung in Hebrew, Latin, Italian, and Chinese—as well as in good old English.

The exemplary performances are by the New York Virtuoso Singers, and by the Queens College Choir and Vocal Ensemble.

If you have never heard Robert Dick, flutist/composer/improviser, then you have never heard anything like what he does. On his new disc, Our Cells Know, out on John Zorn’s Tzaddik label, you will hear him at his amazing best.

Straight out of the chute with Mitochondrial Ballet, you are confronted with a new language performed on—as are all the works—the contrabass flute. The sound is an experience in itself, and as Dick plays in a counterpoint of pitch and rhythm, this is not your mother’s flute. This is one defined by Dick’s almost fifty years of study, experimentation, codification, and exploration. It is his own, but tinged with influences of Jimi Hendrix, Indian drumming, Parker and Coltrane, contemporary classical music, electro-acoustic music, and the drive of Heavy Metal. This first piece is relentless, brimming over with energy. Dick has the physical agility of a 25 year-old but the mind and creativity of one just a bit older, whose lifetime of experience shines through. It is a tour de force. I have been tracking this guy for almost a half century and this new album reaches a new level even for him. This music is all improvised, which is to say it is conjured up in the moment and is music of the moment. Most of the works come in between five and eight minutes, with one being considerably more extensive at twelve minutes.

Whereas Mitochondrial Ballet explores the upper range of the instrument in conjunction with low drums, Aura Aurora and Efflorescence explore the deep and sonorous registers of the instrument in a slow, wandering way. But they also find their way to upper registers, or a combination of the two, as Dick frequently sings and plays in octaves. This is a flute version of the great jazz guitarist Wes Montgomery, who also loved to play in octaves, or the flutist Ian Anderson of the rock group Jethro Tull. These works are hesitant and soulful, and explore rich timbral possibilities, like a guitarist using a wa-wa pedal, other timbral shift pedals, or feedback (like Hendrix’s The Star-Spangled Banner at Woodstock). Afterimage, Before is a true percussion piece, something akin to Cage’s prepared piano, in that with Cage the piano does not sound like a piano at all, but rather a percussion ensemble. So it is with the flute in this composition. This is like an extended percussion solo in a jazz context, employing drums, cymbals, and even a tambourine! It is unbelievably virtuosic, simply unprecedented.

On the Restless Seas of Time is the most extended, open-ended, and generous with idea of all the works on this disc. Its library of sonic imaging and gesture is the most extensive of all. One is treated to percussion and many variants of colored noise (like a whisper) that are rich in content. Tunes flow in and out of the swirling ether. The polyphonic imagination is detailed and presents textures of bewildering and magical complexity. The stream of creativity is unending. This is impetuous music, almost

**OUR CELLS KNOW**

Music of Robert Dick

By Daniel Asia
nakedly emotional, but with clear shape and form that holds its contents congenially. Whether orgiastic or cosmic, it flows with dreamlike unconscious connections.

Our Souls Know demonstrates Dick’s keen interest in the blues and music from other cultures, particularly the flute traditions of India and Japan. This piece provides warmth, a bit of familiarity, and a sweet sense of closure—albeit not definitively so—as one hears the possibilities of further rushes of inspiration in the silent echoes after the piece and the disc conclude.

Go grab this disc and take a listen, maybe with a glass of wine or a good whiskey. This is music to be listened to, not placed in the background. It will take you places you have never been, and you will know that you are in the presence of a conjurer of the spirit—like no other.
It lets you hear the speaking voice of Harpo Marx. It lets you hear the recorded voices of every U.S. President since Benjamin Harrison, and watch sound films of every U.S. President since Calvin Coolidge. It lets you see John Barrymore get halfway through Hamlet’s “To be or not to be” soliloquy before going up on his lines. It shows you Samuel Seymour, last surviving person to have witnessed Lincoln’s assassination, talking on TV in 1956, and Ronald Reagan and James Dean acting together in a live TV drama from 1954. It shows you Jeanne Calment, age 119, talking and reminiscing lucidly in clear French about meeting Vincent Van Gogh in Arles in the 1880s, and ancient Civil War Confederacy veterans in the 1930s reenacting the “rebel yell,” as well as elderly ex-slaves reminiscing.

And for the historically minded musician, listen to Louis Krasner play Berg’s Violin Concerto under the shockingly wobbly baton of Anton Webern in 1936, or hear Bartok talk (in English) in 1944 and Arnold Schoenberg in 1949. You can watch Stravinsky, Shostakovich, and Prokofiev speak, perform, and even compose; watch Hindemith conduct the Chicago Symphony; listen to historically important airchecks of great singers, conductors, and pianists both jazz and classical; hear Vladimir Horowitz’s rejected takes for studio recordings, and see Art Tatum’s nonchalantly blazing fingers. You can even watch legendary French soprano Mado Robin hit _and sustain_ the B flat a seventh above high C.

Of all the corporate goliaths of the internet age (Facebook, Google, Twitter), it is YouTube—an actual audiovisual Borgesian Library of Babel—that is arguably the most paradigm-breaking. Its hive of uploaders seem to have harvested billions of overlooked AV historical moments that are collectively retelling Western Civilization between the lines. But by providing all these treasures for free, YouTube has bulbized the concept of gated museums and nullified the exchange value of digital artifacts—truly a revolutionary, if parlous, innovation. Even more problematically, for musicians, YouTube has reversed centuries of progress of intellectual property protection, trashed copyrights, restored de facto piracy as the norm of permissible use, and changed the economics of the musical marketplace for the little man, especially the non-pop composer and private teacher. (Though I love to trawl it anyway.)

On the plus side, YouTube can be an excellent virtual classroom in free continuing education for musicians. Instrumentalists, singers, and conductors can all access video master classes by top professionals in those trades. YouTube affords composers in particular myriad demonstrations of instrumental techniques that go far beyond the QuickTime videos of Samuel Adler’s fine orchestration book; the Philharmonia Orchestra (among others) has in fact uploaded a complete syllabus of instrumental demos by their players. There are also some good instructional videos on orchestration. And self-page-turning scores are now widely uploaded in YouTube in real-time sync with recordings of their works. Even without scores so embedded, practically any piece past or present can now be heard on YouTube, an archive of sound greater than almost any institutional library and diabolically useful for an orchestrator. I for one as a composer have searched my copy of Gardner Read’s _Thesaurus of Orchestral Devices_ to find uses in the literature of strings sul tasto with bowed tremolo and compare them with uses of string harmonics with bowed tremolo, and then looked up sound recordings of these occurrences on YouTube to try to study the sound differences between tasto tremolo and harmonics tremolo (admittedly an imperfect solution aurally with the compressed reproduction of YouTube). If the score I seek is not available in YouTube embedded with a recording, I usually find it by opening another window with either a Petrucci Music Library full score or a New York Philharmonic archive score so I can still track the passage as I listen. Publishers sometimes upload perusal full scores of brand new works so they can be studied too (though not downloaded or printed).

On the minus side, these same YouTube instructional demonstrations have hurt the market for private instrument lessons (ask any teacher). With YouTube, FaceTime, etc. there is an increasingly widespread perception that live instruction is less urgent for the needs of many amateurs who previously would have
sought professional teachers, so YouTube indirectly perpetuates a cascade of lesser quality education and general cultural debasement. Also, YouTube uploads of classical music have tended to minimize or omit liner notes (there are exceptions), not a practice that promotes better education of the uninformed listening audience, as the rampant infantile, ignorant, and abusive comments on threads attest. Even so, thread comments can be highly educative themselves. One favorite of mine is cellist Lynn Harrell’s post on an aircheck of Toscanini’s New York Philharmonic broadcast of part of the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto (played by Nathan Milstein) from the 1930s: “And aside from my first job in the Cleveland Orchestra with George Szell I believe it is the only performance that has the winds really with the violin in the last movement....” However, a drawback of such YouTube uploads of older historical recordings is that YouTube often transcribes them a quarter tone or semitone high, which of course also falsifies the tempo.

But how many of us have been surprised to find uploads on YouTube of our works or performances without our permission? Whether your work is available on a physical disc or a download on iTunes, this can happen either because a private party likes your ASCAP-licensed, commercially-for-sale work so much he/she has decided to upload it, doing you a “favor” (?) by thereby making it available for free, or because The Orchard—a digital robo-distribution outfit used by recording companies to help them “monetize” their products—has auto-uploaded it in agreement with your CD company or other distributor. Just don’t expect this “monetization” to help you accrue monies. A hit on YouTube is judged by the PROs (ASCAP, BMI, etc.) to be a performance, not a sale. If you or your publisher has designated your video a “music asset” you are theoretically eligible to collect fees from the PROs. But BMI will only print YouTube activity on your statement if the royalties earned that quarter are at least $0.01, and they only receive reports from YouTube if there are at least a few thousand hits per quarter, so unless you’re Taylor Swift, forget about seeing pennies, let alone dollars. A more or less similar monetary situation occurs with streaming video of performances on YouTube.

To what do we owe this state of affairs? It is true that for centuries, artists, writers, and composers created the art and literature of the world without copyright protection. Shakespeare, no less, pirated the plots of all but one of his 37 plays from other dramatists and chroniclers. It was considered a triumph for the advance of civilization when ASCAP was founded by Victor Herbert, American music’s equivalent of a cross-over/polymathic Leonard Bernstein 100 years ago, to ensure that composers were compensated for all uses of their copyrighted music; the litigated instance involved a salon orchestra (the Muzak of its time) in a New York restaurant. The principle of no more piracy was legally defined with the imprimatur of Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, who wrote in his 1917 decision on the Herbert case: “if music did not pay [for its commercial reusers], it would be given up....Whether it pays or not, the purpose of employing it is profit, and that is enough.” It is said that before Mark Twain only Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper made steady livelihoods as American writers, and it is doubtful that any composers did. Performing rights organizations made it more possible for composers as well as authors to earn a living.

With the arrival of the internet, however, a new intellectual property concept, the cultural commons, was born. Is it piracy redivivus? This theory, most famously propagated by poet/scholar Lewis Hyde, holds that for much of history great minds like Benjamin Franklin thought that access to what we now call knowledge bases should be a free right. Hyde feels art de facto does, and de jure should, exist through a “gift economy”—an oxymoron if there ever was one. (In reality this term is a disingenuously euphemistic way of restating Lou Harrison’s blunter remark that “the composer himself subsidizes the art of music.”) “Creative commons” licenses are now widespread on the internet; they are, at base, extravagant if not unrestricted extensions of the fair use copyright doctrine (fair use strictly limits free quotation of copyrighted material to a small number of words). The leading legal advocate for the larger philosophy behind creative commons—often called “remix culture”—is the Harvard law professor Lawrence Lessig, who co-founded the organization Creative Commons. His concept is not universally endorsed, however: author Mark Helprin, for one, in his book Digital Barbarism, opined that it amounts to laundered intellectual theft, and many lawsuits have been brought to test the principle.

I have often mused that it’s easy for Profs. Lessig and Hyde to propound their doctrine because they are supported by academic salaries. The rest of us, if we don’t have academic sinecures, are Lou Harrisons. If Prof. Lessig didn’t teach, he could make a living practicing law. Would he dispense his legal advice free of charge for the greater good of the “commons”? Who would then subsidize him? Would Aaron Copland, who didn’t have a college job, be self-supporting in the YouTube/remix/culture commons era? Perhaps, but his income from royalties would be appreciably lower than it was in his lifetime. Who are the bread-
winners in the macrocosmic bazaar that is YouTube? The aggregators. Not the artists. It used to be that one had to make an effort, and a decision to spend money, even to listen to a single LP. There was no way of sharing (in the current digital sense) your record unless you physically lent it to someone or made a pirate tape recording of it. Jobs with radio stations were desirable because of the perk of free access to their sound libraries. And watching archival film footage was a rarity, attainable to only a limited degree and only at repositories like the George Eastman House of Photography in Rochester or the Museum of Broadcasting (now renamed the Paley Center for Media) in Manhattan.

The issues, though, are ambiguous. Leon Botstein has publicly characterized the failure of orchestras to program many neglected works as a “crime against history.” Perhaps YouTube, at the price of supporting new artists, is rescuing neglected older ones from a crime against history. I have learned a lot of lost history trolling through YouTube (though not as a “troll”). What an unheralded genius composer Nikos Skalkottas was. That Dimitri Mitropoulos wasn’t the lax podium leader of legend but rather a brilliant molder of sound (plus there’s a documentary appearance by him with the NY Phil). That the instrument known as the piano luthéal (Ravel composed for it) beat Cage’s prepared piano to the punch but has been forgotten. YouTube has given me a broader appreciation of musical history than the commercially available discography and my own live concert-going experiences previously afforded me. Whole operas, often with superstitles, can be watched, even the complete Ring. I also have enjoyed the chance to watch and hear Bernard Shaw clown for the movie camera, hear Hemingway’s prosly pronunciation of the word “writer,” and look out the window of the 3rd Avenue El in Manhattan going all the way down the line in multiple videos (it was demolished in 1955—you can travel through time with YouTube). I could go on and on. Watching a complete 1986 performance on YouTube of Ravel’s L’enfant et les sortilèges by Jiří Kylián’s Netherlands Dance Theatre is almost a guilty pleasure. Worse, it seems somehow indecent—to see one of the most imaginatively orchestrated pieces of music in history matched to one of the most inventively choreographed, costumed, and set-designed ballets imaginable, for free.

The great (if now little remembered) vaudeville and radio comedian Fred Allen famously called television “chewing gum for the eyes.” YouTube is now chewing gum for the eyes, ears, and brain, but, perhaps, anesthesia for the conscience.

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Michael Jon Fink
Celesta
Twelve elegant, gem-like celesta solos performed by the composer.

Fink’s reductive but expressive music has been described by the Los Angeles Times as “lustrous,” “metaphysically tinged,” and “unapologetically tranquil.” LA Weekly has written that it is “of ethereal simplicity…refined…distinctly his own.”

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Michael Byron
Fabric for String Noise
NYC’s noted violin duo String Noise (Conrad Harris & Pauline Kim Harris) and bassist James Bergman play wildly virtuosic violin music and a bass quartet.

“Byron creates maximalist effect out of minimalist means”—ClassicalNet

“String Noise…New York’s most daring violin duo.”—TimeOut New York

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John Luther Adams
Ever ything That Rises

Peter Garland
Moon Viewing Music

www.coldbluemusic.com
OBVIOUS TO THE POINT OF VIRTUAL TAUTOLOGY

by Mark Zuckerman

A talk delivered at Princeton University’s celebration of Milton Babbitt’s centenary, on September 18, 2016 in Taplin Auditorium at Princeton University.

“The issue of ‘science’ does not intrude itself directly upon the occasion of the performance of a musical work, at least a non-electronically produced work, since—as has been said—there is at least a question as to whether the question as to whether musical composition is to be regarded as a science or not is indeed really a question; but there is no doubt that the question as to whether musical discourse or—more precisely—the theory of music should be subject to the methodological criteria of scientific method and the attendant scientific language is a question, except that the question is really not the normative one of whether it ‘should be’ or ‘must be,’ but the factual one that it is, not because of the nature of musical theory, but because of the nature and scope of scientific method and language, whose domain of application is such that if it is not extensible to musical theory, then musical theory is not a theory in any sense in which the term ever has been employed.”

So goes perhaps the most extraordinary sentence in all of music theory, written by the most extraordinary composer whose 100th birthday we are acknowledging here today. To my mind, this sentence exemplifies essential characteristics of Milton Babbitt—the man, his prose, and his music: candid, categorical, cerebral, challenging, charismatic, charming, clear, clever, colorful, compelling, complex, and consequential, to use but a dozen adjectives beginning just with the letter C. Milton would be the first to point out that the choice of C is arbitrary (though by convention it’s regarded as corresponding to pitch class 0), as is the lexical ordering of the list. That the list has 12 members pays homage to the compositional system that was Milton’s musical laboratory.

There are those today—including those who should know better—who trivialize 12-tone composition as a superstitious obligation to count up to 12. As the music on today’s programs demonstrates, the 12-tone system provided Milton Babbitt tools for expressiveness, drama, wit, and gracefulness; tools he wielded with unique mastery.

Moreover—as the sentence of his I read at the start shows—while Milton could certainly count up to 12, he also tirelessly made the case for what counts in music. We see this not only in his more technical articles, like 1965’s The Structure and Function of Musical Theory I’ve quoted from, but also the article for which he is probably most famous (or infamous): “Who Cares if You Listen?”, appearing in the February, 1958 issue of High Fidelity Magazine. What he says in this article has particular significance for our commemoration today, here at Princeton University, Milton’s headquarters.

The literature is littered with writings by people claiming musical or cultural erudition who never get past the provocative title. They completely ignore the context in which the article appeared and misconstrue the sensible arguments it makes. Instead, they rail against a supposed aloofness they find unseemly in a composer, all because the composer had the temerity to expect that people treat music with the same level of intelligence they treat anything else they consider important.

Let’s set the context and review these arguments. It may be difficult today with our abundant digital media for us to fully appreciate the impact of the long playing phonograph record, commercially introduced in 1948—just 10 years before “Who Cares if You Listen?”—which gave rise to a new kind of listener: the audiophile, passionate about sound and the listening experience. High Fidelity Magazine came out in 1951 to cater to audiophiles and their enthusiasm for high—quality music and audio technology.

1951 was also the year that RCA, which manufactured audio equipment as well as made records, developed the Mark I synthesizer. Part of the goal was to produce note-perfect, high-fidelity orchestral recordings (with the side benefit that RCA could avoid paying live musicians). Folklore has it that in the focus groups RCA assembled to compare recordings made by live orchestras with those made with the Mark I, 75% of the audience couldn’t tell the difference. Needless to say, Milton would be interested only in the other 25%, and these would be the likely clientele for High Fidelity Magazine.

But he was also interested in the synthesizer, though not at all for the reasons RCA originally built it. So when, with the aid of a Rockefeller Foundation grant,
RCA installed the Mark II synthesizer in Prentis Hall at the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center in 1957, Milton set to work inventing a new sonic vocabulary—utterly different from what the RCA engineers had imagined—with a virtuosity that has yet to be matched. We’ll be hearing some of this work later.

Milton always claimed that “Who Cares if You Listen?” was not his title, but the editors’; yet this does not obscure the fact that he wrote it for people who cared very much about what they heard, how they heard it, and how it was created. In the same issue of High Fidelity is an article about an avant-garde audio technology, “The Promise of Disc Stereo.”

However the title was arrived at, the editors introduced Milton’s article sympathetically: “Wherein a contemporary composer, who is also a trained mathematician, puts it to us straight: if purely experimental science, innocent of practical aim, is worthy of public support and approval, why is not also experimental music—however little it may convey now to listeners? We think his case is a good one.” Milton’s case consists basically of 3 points (though not in this order):

He condemns the undue influence of musical dilettantes, who he submits are useless, at best, or at worst, actively harmful. In his view, they perpetuate romantic yet unrealistic myths about the world of music and engage in unfocused, imprecise chatter that is accepted as meaningful musical discussion.

We can probably include in this chatter many of the hostile reactions to his article.

He speculates that composers writing highly specialized music would attract niche audiences of highly specialized listeners. This was particularly shrewd, given his readers, who spent fortunes turning their living rooms into ideal listening spaces and collecting esoteric music to play there. What better source for potential recruits? Given the current ubiquity of individual listening devices with personalized playlists, and today’s proliferation of niche musical markets, we should credit Milton with prescience.

But most important, he argues that composers ought to be provided with environments where they can develop their art free from commercial and social pressures—and free from any compulsion to pander to dilettantes or engage in self-aggrandizement. He proposed the university as the ideal setting for this—and labored to make the Princeton Music Department such a place.

Among other things, he was instrumental in establishing the Ph.D. degree in music composition at Princeton. His contribution to Princeton is an important and often overlooked part of the legacy we are celebrating today—and why Princeton is the most appropriate venue for this celebration.

Milton’s ideal for a university music department supports a wide variety of composer career paths, not just those limited to conventional notions of success. It engenders a sense of community where mutual support and unfettered exploration are the principal aims. As many of us here can attest, Princeton’s realization of this was a model incubator for musical learning and artistic inquiry.

Milton would be the first to applaud composers achieving popular recognition and winning awards. But for when those privileged composers need respite from the politics and capricious fashions of the competitive musical world—and for those composers whose ambitions or aptitudes do not include engaging them—if they are lucky enough to be able to take advantage of the kind of sanctuary Princeton provides—at whatever institution—they should credit Milton Babbitt for his vision, his courage in advocating it, and his dedication to making it a reality.

As Milton said in completing the quotation with which I began: “This should sound neither contentious nor portentous, rather it should be obvious to the point of virtual tautology.”

Today’s exciting programs are the result of a collaboration between the Composers Guild of NJ and the Princeton Music Department. My name is Mark Zuckerman, and as a Princeton graduate alumnus, former member of the Princeton music faculty, and student of Milton Babbitt’s, it’s been my privilege to serve as the Composers Guild’s liaison with the Princeton Department for this event. On behalf of the Composers Guild, welcome. I want to acknowledge the Department Chair, Wendy Heller; the Department’s liaison to this event, Juri Seo, who curated this evening’s concert; Henry Valoris and the Concert Office staff; and the many participants in today’s programs, whose love and respect for the music of Milton Babbitt are testament to his enduring legacy.
U.S. subscriptions to New Music Connoisseur are $28 for 2 years or $35 for 3 years. online at www.newmusicconnoisseur.org or by check to P.O. Box 515, 127 W. 83 St. Planetarium Station New York, NY 10024
Adam Ockelford, Professor of Music at Roehampton University and Director of the Applied Music Research Center, has written a well-informed and wide-ranging book: Comparing Notes, How We Make Sense of Music. He both summarizes previous attempts to grapple with this problem and develops his own theory. He draws on additional music-theoretic concepts, psychology of music, and research in child psychology in the process. Despite some issues, I strongly recommend it.

Inspired by his work with blind, autistic and learning-challenged children who also have unusual musical abilities, Ockelford set out to understand how ‘neurotypical’ people, who have no special training, understand music. By the term ‘music’ he refers to tonal music broadly construed. He noticed that musical savants were able to internalize music and reproduce it on their instruments, easily transposing it, and sometimes recombining passages from different compositions in fascinating ways. They could do this without having had the benefit of traditional instruction. Clearly, a musical understanding was at work beyond simple memorization. He posits that the absolute pitch (AP) that many of them displayed, coupled with their intense early and ongoing focus on sound, helped them develop skills that few can attain even after years of training. He contends that the musical qualities that enable these abilities to develop are those that allow untrained people to understand and make sense of music.

As he develops his theory, he offers an overview of past efforts to understand the perception of musical structure. To mention a few, he includes an introduction to the hierarchical theories of Schenker, of Lerdahl and Jackendoff, as well as Bernstein’s efforts to link musical structures to Chomsky’s syntactic ones. He also discusses multiple additional approaches aimed at elucidating how we understand music, including those based on expectation (Leonard Meyer, David Huron), as well as Schoenberg’s pedagogical emphasis on the importance of repetition and variation.

All of these thinkers, and Ockelford himself, are profoundly influenced by Gestalt grouping principles. His aim differs from those he cites, however, in his effort to sort out how we perceive music from moment-to-moment, going beyond the notion of expectations thwarted and met, or the fact of repetition and variation. He looks beyond these to examine how—without formal training—we make sense of music as it unfolds. To do so, he
proposes a ‘zygonic conjecture,’ which details not only the role of repetition and what he surmises is a sense of derivation between successive notes, but also the perception of intentionality that in turn gives rise to a network of relationships that allows us to make sense of musical structure.

He uses the term ‘zygonic’ to denote the relationship between two notes that are mentally perceived to have a connection forged by repetition and intentionality, and lays out multiple connective strata that build on these basic connections. Further, he links these to the pitch framework and rhythmic grid structure that we learn implicitly within our culture of origin. He offers many supporting examples, which he analyzes with subtlety, ranging from simple melodies, such as Frère Jacques, to popular songs, such as You Are My Sunshine, to examples drawn from Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony and Schubert’s Winterreise. His lucid expositions make a strong case for his argument, drawing upon his rich music-theoretic understanding.

However, while one might like to believe that the general listener, with no particular experience, can perceive and enjoy a complex piece such as a Brahms symphony, this seems true only for those who have built up their understanding through many listening experiences to this type of music. Indeed, the combination of the pop-industrial complex, the cost-cutting that has gutted the core of arts education and the prevalent anti-elitist cultural attitudes have led to a dramatic shift in the range of music that many people understand, or at any rate wish to experience. So, it is by no means clear that the ‘cognitive space’ shared by composers, performers and listeners is as large, or as historically and culturally unconstrained, as he contends. No longer can we accept the idea that classical music of the common practice period lies in the mainstream of our current culture.

I found myself wishing that Ockelford had limited his discussion to the issues suggested by his title, and to the characteristics of music that he contends are required for untrained people to understand music. Multiple problems arise in his discussion of atonal music, especially due to the lumping together of an excessively broad swath of music. Furthermore, he has a negative attitude towards this music, reflected in his question whether ‘atonal music’ will ever attract broader, ‘non-specialist’ audiences (p. 287). ‘Even classical music itself may be said to attract a ‘specialist’ audience. Beyond this, his discussion of atonal music is vague. The perceptibility of pattern varies hugely in the music that we might so label. Messiaen’s music, for example, may not be tonal, but it is has many clear narrative characteristics.

Further, the criterion that Ockelford uses to determine perceptibility of atonal music is the ability of a savant to remember and perform music s/he is exposed to. One of his gifted students, who could easily reproduce reams of tonal pieces, had great trouble with a short piece by Schoenberg, Op. 11, No. 1, even after repeated exposure. Ockelford seems to suggest that remembering a piece and being able to reproduce it verbatim represents an understanding of it. Even given this criterion, there are pianists who have memorized Op. 11. There are multiple levels of understanding, and the criterion of rote memorization is not sufficient.

I also wish Ockelford had not perpetuated the canard that Babbitt titled his 1958 article ‘Who Cares if You Listen.’ This unfortunate title was added by an editor at High Fidelity. It is true that Babbitt thought that there is progress in music analogous to that in science. This led to the idea of music created by specialists for specialists. And yet, to think of Babbitt’s ideas as being limited to this point of view is a caricature. As a student of Babbitt’s, I know that his goal was to provide a richness of music for those listeners willing to plumb its depths.

Ockelford might have made a stronger distinction between tastes and habits on the one hand, and our perceptual capabilities on the other. A great deal of music is beyond immediate comprehension. However, this is not limited to music. Multiple arts show that audiences desire to transcend the limitations of taste and habit, and that comprehension does not have immutable limits. Some want to read authors with clear narrative structure, such as Austen or Hemingway. But then there are those who are excited by writing that is more overtly complex, even convoluted, such as that of Beckett, James Joyce, Don DeLillo, or Zadie Smith. This is an important distinction, and it is in this context that Schoenberg may have meant, despite the pejorative aspect of the quote cited by Ockelford, “if it is art, it is not for all, and if it is for all, it is not art” (p. 289). I would recast this statement, to say, ‘no art is for all; but we can all experience art that moves us.’ Ockelford would have served his ideas better if he had focused more exclusively on the strong case he makes for the sonic characteristics that enable the untrained listener to make sense of tonal music, rather than disparaging music that lies outside this category. His own musical training shines through in ways that illuminate his theory, and indeed enables those who can hear his examples to say ‘aha’ to many of his keen observations and conclusions.