

A CRITICAL PORTFOLIO: REPORTS ON NEW MUSIC AND OPERA

A CRITICAL PORTFOLIO:
BEING CHIEFLY REPORTS ON NEW MUSIC AND OPERA (1987-88)
BY A CRITIC LIVING IN HAMILTON, ONTARIO

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Essay Accompanying a Collection of Musical Criticisms
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ABSTRACT

The critical portfolio here collected was written under the guidance of Mr. William Littler, music critic of the *Toronto Star*. It is primarily an idiosyncratic account of the new music concerts and opera productions in the Toronto and Hamilton area between June, 1987 and June, 1988. Canadian composers, performers and performing organizations are mentioned prominently, though significant concerts and operas from elsewhere lend breadth and depth to the coverage.

In an introductory essay, the thorny matter of using words to write about music is dealt with obliquely, through a discussion of the organization of the separate reports into a portfolio. The overall form of the portfolio is a literary one which alludes to traditional symphonic forms.

A short statement of the author's critical predilections serves as the critical creed in which these separate reports have a common origin. The introduction also lists the publications in which some of the critiques first appeared. A summary of the editorial practices of the different publications explains the outside influences on the writing included in this portfolio.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my internship director, Mr. William Littler, for his invaluable help in procuring complimentary tickets for the large number of concerts he encouraged me to attend. But more than that, I pay tribute to his unflaggingly cheerful spirit, which sustained me through the tedious process of facing up to what I had written. Mr. Littler's careful attention to every word I wrote on assignment for him ensured that my extravagant experiments with the language of music criticism were always subject to close readings for exact meanings. If my strangest ideas have emerged intact, credit is due to Mr. Littler for his willingness to mine outrageous paragraphs in search of the real message.

Professor Paul Rapoport, too, has been a careful reader and enthusiastic supporter. Because this portfolio grew directly from his class in practical musical criticism, much credit is due to his creative assignments and thorough reading of my material. He also has introduced me to more little-known music than I would have thought any one person could be interested in.

I am most grateful to my colleagues Mary Ann Smart, Walter Lemiski and Peter Tannenbaum, for their company at concerts and operas, their encouragement in the classrooms and their willingness to listen to verbal drafts of many of these critiques.

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Introduction to a Critical Portfolio

Genesis of the Portfolio

The following collection of critical reports is the result of a specific plan to write about musical performance in the cities of Hamilton and Toronto in southern Ontario. The reports, considered as a whole, investigate primarily new music and opera as a measure of the health of the broader musical community in this specific geographical area.

I have included critical reports here which deviate from the above-stated narrow focus, to add breadth and stature to the scope of the collection as a whole. Hearing and writing about new music and opera in major musical centres and in other locations has enabled me to judge the music of my particular locale in a wider context. By including standard repertoire works in the general discussion, I have increased my familiarity with the common heritage and historical background of musical criticism. I hope that this context has demonstrated my ability to measure contemporary works against the expectations of history as well as against the demands of the present era.

In this introduction I hope to show that these reviews and programme notes represent a coherent point of view. Both the coherence and the individual point of view can be understood more in an overview of the whole collection than in any single critical report. In addition, the very act of writing helped to form my point of view even as the finished articles demonstrate it. The separable activities of listening to concerts and operas, and writing about them in various ways, constitute a type of experiment. Learning from an experienced supervisor and re-writing the original material are another kind of experiment. The finished portfolio serves as a record of the total process, in addition to defining a critical point of view.

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Nevertheless, I do not claim my point of view to be completely original. For example, the following reports originate from a point along a continuum of arts criticism which is distinctly closer to the impatience and brashness of an American or New World style than to the steady, even pace of a European or British manner. And although British and Canadian influences intrude in specific ways, they cannot be seen as predominant. The critical work here is that of an American critic, writing in Canada, primarily about music in Canada.

This collection of critical reports cannot be justified entirely by a rational, scholarly argument. This is not to say that my tastes and musical inclinations (or those of other critics) are entirely intuitive. Previous university degrees and the courses required for a graduate degree from McMaster have instilled in me a love for some standard repertoire works and encouraged me to think rationally about music and writing.

This introduction will not bring forth any new truths, nor articulate a radical revolutionary position based on academically sound principles. Especially, there will be no conclusions drawn in any one place. As the introduction ends, the conclusion presents itself, intuitively embedded in the words of the reviews. These critical reports may be experiments, but they are also results. The introductory material which explains the mass of critical writing is analogous to the programme notes for a concert: such notes may be useful beforehand and afterwards, but do not substitute for the art work itself.

Influences

There are three magazines whose music criticism has strongly influenced my work. They differ widely in their histories and their styles, as well as the geographical areas they cover. I have read them (among other sources) to keep up to date in the forms of artistic expression and current criticism.

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Andrew Porter's weekly columns in the *New Yorker* have been my regular reading matter for almost a decade. Mr. Porter covers new music and opera thoroughly, especially the instances of these which he considers most respectable and serious. He also writes often about great concert performers and opera singers active in New York City and the United States, as well as discussing the canonical music literature and its interesting performance history. A scholarly researcher and an unobtrusively stylish writer, Mr. Porter occupies a place on the conservative side of contemporary criticism and continues a distinguished tradition of music criticism for his magazine.

On the other hand, the Los Angeles quarterly, *High Performance*, seeks to publish criticism of only the latest developments in the arts. The editor Steven Durland's elegant and simple style sheet for contributors outlines the details of a remarkable creed. He limits his definition of artistic expression, and therefore the scope of his magazine, to new works never before performed. Many performances and the critical articles about them are concerned with inter-disciplinary influences and original ways of expressing the concerns of our age. Even more broadly than the *New Yorker*, *High Performance* aims for comprehensive coverage of performing artists throughout North America. To that end the editor encourages a large number of submissions from geographically disparate free-lance writers. In addition, reviewers and writers are encouraged to develop original and idiomatic ways of discussing performances.

In comparison with the two other magazines, the Milwaukee bi-monthly arts magazine, *Art Muscle*, practices a strange brand of arts criticism. Although it is only two years old, this tabloid has tenaciously and outrageously chronicled the recent artistic renaissance of Milwaukee and, to a lesser extent, the outlying areas of the state of Wisconsin. It is common for the writers to cover experimental theatre, music-theatre, art and dance. But interspersed with these critiques are free-wheeling discussions of non-canonical art and its influence on human society. The State Fair may be discussed as an art form, or a visiting

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revivalist's spiel deconstructed as theatre performance-art. Photographs of bomber planes, or conversations with amateur artists, critics, administrators and other fringe figures compete with more standard writing.¹ The most admirable feature of the magazine is its stated intent to stimulate honest human response, rather than calculated, careful judgment. Also admirable are its localized scope, vernacular editorial style, and the interventionist attitude of its critics. All of the writers seem deeply passionate about their subjects, rather than reflective or disinterested.

The reports in this portfolio have been influenced to different degrees by each of these magazines. Reading Andrew Porter's writing has instilled in me a respect for clarity and thorough research. *Art Muscle*, although it seldom discusses serious concert music, inspired the consciously contemporary and non-reverential style of most of these reports. *High Performance* and its editorial guidelines compelled me to consider which concerts were most worthy of contemporary attention, and to write about them idiomatically.

In addition to these three magazines, another overriding influence must be acknowledged. My internship supervisor, Mr. William Littler, music critic of the Toronto Star, gave form to the group of reports by suggesting which concerts to attend and by carefully reading the finished reviews. He also assigned specific topics and angles of coverage to the different pieces. Because of his vigilance, I felt more secure in experimenting with unusual and unfamiliar goals and methods of music criticism.

Certain reviews are of the daily criticism type, written for the McMaster Silhouette to convey timely information about local concerts. Others are more personal, including information about concerts in New York City, for instance, on a trip which was entirely self-determined and self-financed.

¹ Perhaps *Art Muscle* shows its truest colours when celebrating its anniversaries. The magazine sponsors juried exhibitions of art, curated according to specific rules. The titles of the exhibitions are, to say the least, revelatory: Nude Self-Portraits, and Arf Muscle, consisting of "dog-related work."

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Mr. Littler assigned me to write standard reviews about standard concert music, while encouraging my inclinations towards new music and contemporary written expression. To cite a specific example, the first review of the Toronto Symphony was an assignment to discuss Marek Janowski as a prospective Music Director (4-5).² The other two concerts were chosen because they included premiere performances of Canadian works. In the case of the concert with Glenn Buhr's work (4-6), it was necessary to integrate the discussion of a new piece of music with the consideration of a star soloist playing standard repertoire. Surprisingly, the plan for writing about the premiere of R. Murray Schafer's Harp Concerto was strongly modified by the overwhelming excellence of Beethoven's Symphony No. 7, which on that evening spoke as new (4-7).

Mr. Littler also provided contrast in the group of opera reviews by suggesting an extended, political focus (in the manner of a weekend newspaper article) to the Shostakovich opera (2-6), recommending a discussion of operetta style for *The Merry Widow* (2-7), and setting a one-hour deadline for the review of Morton Subotnick and Joan La Barbara (1-4).

I also acknowledge a debt to other individual models. George Bernard Shaw's musical criticisms, with frequent digressions into broader cultural matters, have been of considerable interest to me. Robert Schumann's fanciful prose style and dedication to contemporary music have also made a deep impression. Schumann, Shaw and other crusading music critics have also led me to try to do some things differently than they've been done before. Writing about music in and for the current era permits, or even demands, that certain syntactical and stylistic rules of music criticism be broken or altered to fit the circumstances. For instance, the review of *Out* (1-1) includes disorienting sentences and phrases, in imitation of the work

² I have used the numbering system of the Table of Contents to refer to individual essays, both in the introduction and in the body of the portfolio. For instance, 4-5 indicates the review of the Toronto Symphony's performance under conductor Marek Janowski.

of art and its alarming effect on the beholder; the report on Paul Sperry's concert (2-13) draws attention to the visual art in the gallery, a significant element of the performance.

Publications and Editorial Policies

A list of the publications to which I submitted material, and a discussion of their editorial practices will bring to light some of the outside forces which influenced my writing, and will betray the sources of some of my critical practices.

High Performance accepted three reviews: the New Music Concerts video performances (1-1), the Opera Omaha Fall Festival (2-2), and the Kurt Vonnegut *Requiem* text (2-11). *High Performance*, a quarterly magazine, never edits against individual, original expression. Space is constrained to ensure breadth of coverage, and economy of expression is at a premium. As mentioned, I have felt encouraged by *High Performance* to respond to music idiomatically, not necessarily in the accepted manner of more standard critical reporting.

The McMaster weekly student newspaper, *The Silhouette*, printed eight reviews, mostly of live, recent performances (1-3, 1-5, 1-9, 2-8, 2-9, 4-8, 4-12 and an earlier version of 2-11). These reviews were slanted towards serving as a public record, and disseminating timely information to serve the concert-going public. Space was plentiful and the editing (by undergraduate staff members) mostly inadvertent. Learning to write to a deadline, and publishing often and painlessly were the benefits. The freedom to write about whatever interested me was paramount in choosing the risks of publication in *The Silhouette*. Where else could one publish a review of many different art forms (4-12) unified only by time and location in New York City?

Vinyl, a monthly arts magazine in Minneapolis, Minnesota, published the article on Jan Vandervelde's music for the play *The Bacchae* at the Guthrie Theatre (1-8). The magazine's editor also inspired the experimental form of the two short reviews of Moberg's *Mass* (1-7) and Rzewski's *Spots* (1-6), though he did not publish either of these. The editor

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emphasized local events and performances of local origin, discussed straightforwardly in limited space. I have held to these admirable economical strictures for some of the other reports which were not directly intended for publication (2-12, 2-13, 2-14).

The Toronto periodical *Music Magazine* accepted seven reviews of recordings (1-12, 1-13, 1-14, 1-15, 2-15, 4-3 and 4-4). The magazine's style is conservative, with regard to both content and form. *Music Magazine* reviews are strictly circumscribed in length and are edited for clarity and brevity. Original language is discouraged. I was routinely assigned to write about new music. Being a singer, I was also assigned to review the Verdi *Requiem*. In addition, since nearly every Minnesota recording published was passed on to me, I used my knowledge of the Minnesota new music community to explicate and advocate these albums in Canada, as well as to listen critically.

Opera News invited me to be its "Hamilton correspondent," beginning with the Fall, 1987 production of *La Bohème*. The report I produced (2-5) also constituted the first of Opera Hamilton's offerings to be reviewed in *Opera News*. Besides submitting a review for *Faust* (2-10), Opera Hamilton's other production that season, I also wrote reviews of *St. Carmen of the Main* from the Guelph Spring Festival (2-4), *King Roger* from Bremen (2-3), a new translation of *The Chocolate Soldier* in Evanston (2-1), and Beth Britten's biography of her brother Benjamin (4-9). *Opera News* practices an economical editing strategy, trimming reviews to a bare minimum of the facts of a particular production and brief statements of opinion. This enables broad coverage and maximum name recognition for fans of particular singers. Individual reviewers are rendered stylistically anonymous by the enforced uniformity of style.

The circumstances of the three sets of programme notes from the summer of 1987 vary somewhat. The two longer ones (3-1 and 3-5) were commissioned by Mary Ann Feldman, programme annotator for the *Minnesota Orchestra Sommerfest*, in an informal internship arrangement. Ms. Feldman encouraged thorough research and a moderate style

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which did not detract from the music at hand. She edited carefully and conservatively, removing outlandish metaphors and all other ideas which could have been interpreted as disrespectful of the Minnesota Orchestra's audience.

Both the Minnesota Orchestra and the Singing Wilderness Festival were concerned, for the most part, with standard repertory works. The Singing Wilderness conductor, Cary Franklin, however, also included a premiere and another recent work by a living composer (3-2). The freshness of the notes for the Singing Wilderness Festival results from the proximity of a living composer to the writer; the immediacy of personal acquaintance affected these notes. The conductor edited my material freely to suit his orchestra's needs.

By contrast, my programme notes for the Bach-Elgar Choir's all-Bernstein concert (3-4) were written in close consultation with Wayne Strongman, the choir's conductor. The brashness of the programming, the music, and the composer, called for a brief, dense essay about Bernstein and the music on the programme. A consequence of the research for this essay was a book review of Joan Peyser's biography of Leonard Bernstein, originally written (on speculation) for *The Hamilton Spectator*, and later expanded by the addition of reviews of two other relevant books, and published in the student newspaper (4-8).

The notes for the McMaster Symphony concert (3-3) were an exercise in writing about standard concert repertoire. Here as well, I favoured contemporary expression over informational writing about concert music. I aimed to combine scholarly responsibility with a contemporary understanding of the artistic expressions of past civilizations.

I've included two articles resulting from a single interview as a representative of a different kind of music criticism. In the course of my studies at McMaster University, I interviewed four performing musicians in the span of one year before any interview ever saw

print.³ I learned, through fruitless attempts, that a free-lance critic hardly ever gets access to the musical performers who come through a city. Partly this is due to the established publicity networks; unless a writer can guarantee to write something that will entice and inform the paying public, neither the performers nor their producers want to grant the time for an interview. In addition, the short advance time and the pressure of publication deadlines force many writers to record long-distance telephone interviews with artists, a process as distasteful to me as it is financially and technologically out of my reach.

In the summer of 1987 I discovered that Dr. Karen Wolff had recently begun her new job as Director of the University of Minnesota School of Music. As the story really was a news story -- the local music school had just hired a leader behind whom the fractious faculty members had united -- I attempted to sell an interview to the two main daily newspapers in Minneapolis and St. Paul and the two weeklies of widest distribution. These considerable efforts failed dismally. (The staff music critics did not consider the news of sufficient importance.)

After arranging the appointment for a general interview, I learned that my only hopes for publication were the University's student newspaper and a glossy personality magazine. The editor of the latter (*Twin Cities*) proved to be sensitive to the value of the personal profile, and encouraging. In the article I wrote (4-10), I aimed to blend my impressions of the Director's history and personality with information about the School of Music. Since the interview was rich with material, I worked up another article (4-11), with more news and less personal information. As far as I know, it never appeared in the *Minnesota Daily*, whose arts and entertainment editor had agreed to its publication.

³ The interviewees were: Robert Levine (violinist joining the Orford Quartet at the same time I was moving to Canada); Ivan Eröd (Austrian composer visiting the Minnesota Orchestra Sommerfest); Ron Raines (Broadway singer-actor from *Teddy and Alice*, in Minneapolis to sing a Broadway musical theatre show with the Minnesota Orchestra); and coloratura soprano Erie Mills (performing in *Ariadne auf Naxos* with the Minnesota Opera).

Besides the exercise at self-editing and audio tape transcription, another benefit of writing two different articles on the same subject was the glimpse it afforded into the protocol of publishing. (A free-lance writer must always receive permission before rewriting a subject for publication elsewhere.) Happily, since the two publications were different, and had contrasting editorial interests, the editors were accommodating.

Personal Critical Predilections and a Creed

Throughout the following critical reports, I have consciously attempted to serve my community. The common observation that J. S. Bach (for instance) achieved universal musical excellence through careful attention to the particular demands of his musical and religious community rings true. As a singer and writer living in Hamilton, Ontario, I wanted to write about local matters above all others, to stimulate discussion of musical matters which I might enjoy. I hope that my readers have been motivated by my words to form their own opinions about the music I've discussed and about other music. My notion of local community is mitigated by two factors: the benefits to a young critic of hearing world-class performers, and the mobile condition of our age which tends to render nearly the whole earth "local."

The basic division of the musical reports is into categories based on the type of music considered. This division highlights the more important and visible of the two halves of my creed -- deciding what music is important enough to warrant a review. The other half of this -- writing idiomatically about worthwhile music -- is more difficult to discuss and explain because of the variables of editorial practice and audience already mentioned.

Out of 46 reports in this collection, 32 were written to the specifications of a publication (27 were actually published, one twice but in two different forms). This may be a reasonable mean between the ideal practical expedient of having all the pieces in a portfolio published and a very different ideal of writing only in the abstract, without the strictures of publication.

New Music

New music is an obvious component of a thriving musical community. A living civilization cannot depend exclusively on the artistic ideals of a bygone age for its own expression. The masterpieces of the past alone will not fulfill our artistic needs. None of these reviews are concerned exclusively with typical symphony orchestra concerts. Those concerts, many have observed, often have more to do with museums, business, and marketing than with contemporary artistic expression. Even an orchestra which played Beethoven symphonies supremely well would betray its audiences more by playing Beethoven than by taking financial and artistic chances with music written by contemporary composers. Though Mr. Durland's above-cited views on art do not prevent the infiltration of contemporary expression by commercial concerns, they serve as a powerful hedge against the spiritually lifeless buying and selling of "culture."

However, no critic should avoid the standard symphony orchestra entirely. In this portfolio, reviews of Toronto Symphony concerts (a category I consider marginal) are grouped with reports from Early Music (which many other critics consider marginal; in much the same way, new music is marginalized in the general musical community). As mentioned earlier, I prefer to write about things other than the mainstream symphonic repertoire. But as became obvious in the Toronto Symphony concerts, (especially 4-7), even the least contemporary musical performance may glow with the spark of vital artistic expression, which may then be detected and discussed.

Besides favouring new music, I also prefer music which sounds new because it is performed differently than an accepted tradition dictates. The very motion of the individual elements of music (as implied in Hanslick's oft-quoted definition of music) suggests the idea of motion in the more global sense, changing from the accepted harmonies and techniques to new forms and concerns. One example of this is the application of scholarly discoveries in

the area of alternative performance practices to early music. These "new" old techniques serve to enliven and renew "outdated" music (whose expressive techniques are discontinuous from those of our era's music) and represent for me a desirable synthesis of intellectual and sensual enjoyment.

Opera and choral music are substantially represented in these reviews, reflecting my training and experience as a singer and conductor. Here too, local flavour and contemporary expression prevail. The premiere of Sydney Hodkinson's "pop song fantasia" (report 2-4) is important because it happened in nearby Guelph. It matters little that composer Sydney Hodkinson and playwright Michel Tremblay have achieved status in the universal artistic community. I'm more interested in their ability to make art which speaks to the society in which I live. The Opera Omaha Fall Festival review (report 2-2) resulted from a fellowship tendered by the Music Critics' Association, a community which extends beyond geographical boundaries for professional education and encouragement.

The serious, gripping production of Szymanowski's *King Roger* in Bremen (report 2-3) and the new translation of *The Chocolate Soldier*, which was merely an interesting novelty (report 2-1), were serendipitous discoveries on other travels. My reason for investigating these items in the first place (and then including the critical reports in my portfolio) was to see if my local concerns were reflected in other places, and at the same time, to compare artistic and cultural concerns, thereby becoming more aware of my locale in broader contexts.

Despite the preferences stated above, I have attempted to respond as fully to standard opera and symphonic music as to concerts closer to my chosen areas of specialization. As *Opera News* correspondent for Hamilton, I was commissioned to report on *La Bohème* (2-5) and *Faust* (2-10), repertory operas which have received much mainstream press coverage. *The Merry Widow* (2-7), also a standard repertory operetta, was part of the Canadian Opera Company regular season and therefore integral to the high-art culture of this

area. Even within the framework of the limited discussion given to these works, important qualitative judgments may be made and supported. In each of the opera productions there were outstanding performers whose gestures filled the stage or whose voices amazed the audience. The group of critical reports on opera in Hamilton and Toronto also constitutes a historical record of a minority perspective. As such, it may be interesting in comparison to the reports which were published in the mainstream press.

Words and Music: the Crux of Musical Criticism

The mixing of the intellectual, meaning-filled world of words with the sensual, free realm of music (or the mapping of the earthy, solid plain of text alongside the formal, abstract geography of music) parallels the dual organization of the separate reports in this collection. I have imposed a particular organizational scheme on this portfolio, classifying the reports by the type of music they discuss. But the outline and table of contents carefully hide literary considerations, such as how to write about music, and how to write coherently. These notions have a great deal to do with the success of music criticism, but in most criticism are enfolded, like poetry into opera, into discussions of "The Music," as if literary matters were merely mechanical.

It would be outrageous for a music critic to organize a compilation of critical reports only according to literary influences. Imagine a music critic's book with the chapter heading "Whitman and Expansive Lyricism," introducing a group of reports on Bartók, Philip Glass and Dizzy Gillespie. In this extraordinary case the *music* under consideration is not necessarily "expansively lyrical"; the writing and its influences are.

Why is this outrageous? What kind of literary organization may a writer successfully apply to reports of musical criticism?

Though outwardly this collection is organized in the usual way, the unanswered questions above will be approached tangentially, by discussing the arrangement of the

separate reports into larger overall forms. The literary organization of this portfolio will emerge and be identified. The portfolio itself, organized as it is, constitutes one human and fallible solution to the literary problem of musical criticism.

The confusion engendered by the lack of literal correspondences between music and words is often cited as the central conundrum for music critics. How indeed may a person presume to discuss the extra-literal empire of music while using words? Words are, after all, anathema to the substance of music, though they are often subsumed into it. (A corollary experiment seems doomed to failure: if real tones and rhythms were embedded into a literary creation, the literary work would cease to exist, if only for the reason that literature may be read and re-read at the discretion of the reader, while music unfolds according to the performer's wishes, in the planned, relational, but not precisely measurable passage of time.)

"Symphonic" "Poem": the Form of the Portfolio

The paragraphs which follow explain the overall form I have imposed on the separate reports in the portfolio. This rationale, according to the model suggested earlier, constitutes a "musical analysis" of the critiques themselves. Just as a programme note may delve into musical theory to delineate the form of a composition, this introduction now turns to a formal analysis to complement the historical, biographical and technical data already presented.

Let us assume that the collection of critical reports exists as a literary work separable from the introduction, and give it its own title, *Symphonic Poem: a report on music, from Hamilton, in 1988*. The two halves of the title divide the responsibility for defining form and content. In keeping with my desire to bring the problem of literary form to the fore, the main title is a definition of the form of the portfolio. "Symphonic" is admittedly loaded and poetically encoded: the implications are of broad scope, the sounding together of different elements (from the Greek etymology), and, as will soon be seen, the

specific form of the whole, a parody of a symphony in words.⁴ Combining the words "Symphonic" and "Poem" yields a title resonant of the 19th-century tone poems which attempted to encode literal and literary narrative in purely symphonic music. The subtitle, a more literal definition of the terms of discourse, indicates the content.

Symphonic Poem is organized like a symphony, in four large movements, also designated as chapters. Each chapter is concerned with its own material, although the "themes" are interrelated, as in the cyclical symphonies of Dvořák or Schumann. All the reports contribute to a single artistic statement, a lengthy discussion of the specific events which shaped the musical expression of Hamilton and Toronto in 1987 and 1988. (In this case, the duration and the geographical compass are limited, just as the length of standard symphonic works fits a certain range, and the keys of different movements relate to each other in prescribed ways.)

The first movement states the theme of the whole: contemporary musical expression. With few exceptions, the reviews in this movement are concerned with informing my community (McMaster University, a class in avant-garde music, the city of Hamilton, or readers of *High Performance* or *Music Magazine*) of recent musical events or recordings. In addition, these reviews are written idiomatically as much as possible, conforming their critical expression to the terms of the music and performances of each concert.

In imitation of the exposition of a sonata form, the reports in the first movement belong to three basic categories or themes. The most localized and contemporary critiques (1-1 to 1-5), hence the most closely linked to my inclinations, are in the first theme group. The second theme group (1-6 to 1-11), a contrast to the first by geography (Minneapolis, New York City, and Buffalo instead of Toronto and Hamilton), is closely related to the first

⁴ "Parody" is, of course, intended in the archaic sense, to mean a copy of a work of art.

in the type of music discussed. The closing theme, reviews of recordings (1-12 to 1-15), is least local, most enduring, and also most standardized according to format and style.

The second movement becomes a curious reworking of a traditional form, a set of variations on an unstated theme. The theme, my training and experience as a singer and conductor in opera and choral music, serves as the foundation and platform for most of the observations. Because of the large number of standard repertory works and the intended publications and audiences for these reports, the writing here is more traditional and straightforward than elsewhere.

The movement is divided into three groups of variations. Variations 1-4 (2-1 through 2-4) discuss the most contemporary and least standard operas. The central section, variations 5-10 (2-5 to 2-10), is framed by commissioned reviews of Opera Hamilton for *Opera News*. These two, the most succinct and direct reportage, set the tone of the section, a mostly sober and rational account of standard opera in Hamilton and Toronto. In the final group, variations 11-15 (2-11 to 2-15), the writing expands to discuss issues other than music. The music under discussion is, for the most part, less standard and localized, except in the final variation. Like a standard theme and variations which returns to the simplicity of the opening theme, this movement ends with a short, traditional review of a recording of a standard work, the Verdi *Requiem* (2-15).

Five sets of programme notes constitute the third movement Minuet and Trio. The writing style, more conservative than my usual mode of expression because of editorial biases, fits the image of the minuet movement, the Classical era's homage to the dance suites of the Baroque. The opening minuet is an essay for a major recital on the Minnesota Orchestra Sommerfest schedule. Following that is a straightforward, less scholarly "trio" (literally *three* items here) of orchestra and chorus notes for smaller-scale local concerts. To conclude, I repeat the format of the opening minuet, for the music of a different recital.

The finale, a catch-all potpourri, summarizes the previous themes, in the manner of the last movement of a cyclical symphony. Beginning with a section about early music in concert and on recordings, the movement proceeds through a set of three Toronto Symphony reviews to the final section, a miscellaneous assortment of reports (of which the ultimate "theme" is itself a summary, restating nearly all the themes of the collection).

Each individual section recalls earlier themes. The first report (4-1), for instance, discusses expressive performance practices in choral music, the province of the second movement. The second theme group combines writing about standard symphony orchestra programming with discussions of new works, either because new music was included on the concert or because it was significantly neglected (as in the case of conductor, Marek Janowski, who failed to perform any of the more modern compositions for which he is well-known -- report 4-5).

In the last movement's final section the tight organization gives way, in imitation of those admirable new compositions which stretch the limits of the conventions of their age. Totally new thematic material is introduced, amid all the recapitulation of earlier ideas. Two book reviews (4-8 and 4-9) relate to composers discussed earlier, and two articles about a music administrator (4-10 and 4-11) introduce the bureaucracy of music education, which relates intrinsically to earlier matters. The New York City package-review of seven events in three days (4-12) could hardly have been other than the extravagant conglomeration it became. Conveniently, it restates all the previous themes in a populist summary.

It seems appropriate that a group of reports about music might be ordered in a literary way which refers to music. Though I allude to musical form, the materials of my creation are words. This conforms to my desire to take delight in wealth of meaning and poetic ambiguity, hoping more for an evocation of artistic spirit than a strictly rational analysis.

This elaborate but rather loose organizational scheme was imposed after the individual sections were complete. Within each of the sub-chapters, for instance, chronological order remains. Sections of chapters do not develop, but stand in arbitrary order like the sound events in a work by John Cage.

Because some of the critical reports include timely or locally important information, I have, where suitable, written parenthetical introductory note to explain the original context of a report. Where experiments with writing style render a report opaque I have detailed the experimental nature.

An Appraisal of the Toronto-Hamilton Area's Musical Health

My charge, as given by the McMaster Music Department in collaboration with Mr. Littler, was to assess the local musical community, concentrating especially on Toronto's new music and on opera in Hamilton and Toronto. Good fortune enabled me to travel to interesting places on other business, coinciding with worthwhile concerts in New York, and Minneapolis, and seeing operas in Evanston, Omaha, Bremen and Guelph.

It should come as no surprise that I heard outstanding performances in the major musical centres of London and New York. Toronto and Hamilton performing arts organizations also brought some quite extraordinary performers within my range. The local highlights were: the Da Capo Chamber Players' open rehearsal and concert on the McMaster University campus (1-3), Morton Subotnick and Joan La Barbara's Quay Works concert at Harbourfront (1-4), and the contributions of stage director Ken Cazan and bass Eric Halfvarson in Opera Hamilton's *Faust* (2-10).

It gives me even greater pleasure to report that my own community showed signs of excellence and health, equal to those I saw elsewhere. Three examples involve local residents who far exceeded my expectations: Lotfi Mansouri's bold staging of Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, using out-of-town singers, but a majority of Canadians (2-6); Dundas

native John Fanning's superb stage deportment and ringing voice in Opera Hamilton's *Faust* (2-10); and best of all, Ivars Taurins' exciting and refined leadership of the Tafelmusik Chorus in Handel's *Dixit Dominus* (4-1). These performances, in which local concerns were melded with universal artistic expression, epitomize musical vitality.

Chapter 1: *NEW MUSIC*

Concert Reviews of New Music in Toronto and Hamilton (Part I)

1-1 New Music Concerts -- *Out* and *Lux*

Sept. 20, 1987

(These two video-music performance pieces differed greatly in their effect on the viewer-listener. I have experimented with the style of this review, hoping that the feelings of invasion and confusion I received from *Out* would be expressed in the discontinuity and irrationality of my words. My critical style is more relaxed and informative, though still quite poetic, when describing *Lux*, an artwork of beauty.)

Out: a video opera -- by Alain Thibault (music) and Miguel Raymond (video)

"Welcome to the OUT-Reality propaganda show" -- a bombardment of loud, rhythmic electro-acoustic music, quickly-changing video and slide images, and platitudinous texts (chosen by Jean Vincent Fournier). Formed in 12 discrete sections, the piece began with still photos of hero-men dissolving into and out of each other while their famous aphorisms (on-screen) dissolved into incomprehensibility.

"The OUT-Reality Machine can simulate a new reality into your brain." -- OUT devastated the whole complex of my own ears, eyes and spirit. After intermission I couldn't remember whether anyone had been sitting next to me during the first half. The video images, music, text, and production *tout court* seemed to value shock and brutality more than beauty. This was not a solution work; it was a look-at-the-horrid-problem work.

"God's greatest gift is human life." -- In the hero section Ghandi, Shakespeare and Jesus made appearances, undifferentiated from Churchill, Freud, Hitler and other obvious war-mongers. Ronald Reagan dominated, as Anti-EveryMan. His above-quoted TV catch-phrase recurred throughout the work as a ground-variation.

"Fear fear itself!" -- The live instrumentalists, René Masino (MIDI sax) and Robert M. Leroux (MIDI percussion) were integrated into the electronic texture of the tape-score

and scarcely distinguishable from it. The more present and noticeable human voice of Pauline Vaillancourt sang wordless texts, unintelligible syllables and the Reagan media-bite. In keeping with the sheer force of the piece, her flawless high register was emphasized. Her tone was beautiful in a parody-nature scene, singing chant-like melodies and intoning single pitches in conjunction with spirals on-screen. These quieter sections were boring instead of beautiful; a reflection that our photon-bombarded society cannot hear the still, small voice of intentional beauty for the whelming flood of TV-propaganda-hype.

"Le 21e siècle sera religieux ou il ne sera pas." -- A long segment with a TV Anchorman spieling in French told me (a non-Francophone) volumes. The voice and image processing held my interest. This was not a piece to sleep through; it was horrifyingly present.

"The psychic immigration into the OUT-Realities is the ultimate solution to earth's problems." -- I'd rather stay sick than learn about my world's disease in this way. I'd rather these artists were dissuaded from their anti-utopian views and encouraged to move toward "bourgeois" ideas of beauty.

The Toronto performance of *Out* was billed as a world premiere, altered from a 1985 performance in Montreal. The additions consisted of a soprano (Vaillancourt), a more elaborate video set (some 29 monitors of various sizes and configurations), and advances in MIDI interface. A list of technical wizard-heros (as big as my fist on the page) graced the credits.

Lux: multi-media work by Renée Bourassa (concept), Marcelle Deschênes (music), Jacques Collin (multi-image processing)

The companion piece, *Lux*, is harder to classify (than video opera); it's scored for mimes, electroacoustic and computer music, computer-programmed multi-images (like slides, only more complicated), and 3-D sets. Gentle, riotously colourful, and even playful in a

rational way, it was proof positive that provocative notions can co-exist with intentional beauty.

Plot summary time-out: "Lux" was the pyramid-shaped object which emerged from mineral chaos in a blinding flash. It sat there emitting a lava-lamp red glow until an anthropomorphic cockroach gobbled its fire. Then the thief critter split in two and danced with pieces of the set, dividing them and making new constructions out of them. In the end, Lux got its light back.

The central metaphor was nuclear technology: recorded texts alluded to the code name "Trinity" of the first atomic bomb test; the white set pieces (and photographs projected on them) were triangular; the drama hinged on a blinding flash; and cockroach-like beasts were all that was left after the explosion. This piece espoused a genuinely ambivalent view of technology -- the programme noted "the political implications of nuclear light as a positive power as well as a threat for mankind."

The effort to project slides onto a mobile, sectional, 3-D set was precision work of epic proportion, in terms of timing and simple stage geography. Both the beginning (natural mineral photography on simple configurations of the blocks) and the end (increasingly complex, rationally ordered arrangements of the set with abstract colors and patterns projected thereon) were serenely beautiful.

If not funny, the middle-section mime/ballet (evolution of life) was at least not so serious that it couldn't be enjoyed simply as entertainment. The first white cockroach hatched itself from a piece of the set piece, lit up its joints at the bending points, and did a slow fission. Mimes André Fortin, Laurent Sallard and Louis-Joseph Tassé spent the first section of the show pushing white Platonic solids about the stage and generally staying out of sight. The two who then appeared onstage made their life form seem quite attractive.

Deschênes's recorded music track was less disturbing and less forceful than Thibault's. More pleasant as well. The sounds included processed speaking voices of child

and adult -- recognizable and not distorted into abstract rhythms beyond meaning. The beginning, for instance, was fragments and repetitions of the word "Desire" and its synonyms, translated into different languages. The composer mixed her electronic sound to "fill the hall", but it didn't seem over-loud.

Oddly enough, the references to Trinity and nuclear light did not leap to the cliché conclusion of sacrilege -- rather, the production appeared to preach that the impressive power of nuclear fission (or any great techno-advance) can be used carefully or foolishly.

1-2 New Music Concerts -- Duo Violas Face à Face

Nov. 1, 1987

(This essay was written for a class with Dr. Jack Behrens on the mid-20th-century avant-garde. I maintain, in spite of all advice to the contrary, that most audience members were affected by the extra-musical details I reported. The concert was densely packed with difficult music, prompting me to wonder how I'd condense so much information into a newspaper-length review.)

New Music Concerts' recital of Sunday night, November 1, featured a confrontation between the flamboyantly earthy erstwhile Torontonians, Rivka Golani and the flashily balletic Frenchman, Gérard Caussé. Together and separately they explored the fringes of modern composition for the viola.

It's a pity they didn't at least make a token gesture toward the center of the repertoire. Their efforts were explained by the most extraordinarily self-serving composers' program notes I've ever seen. To account for what might have seemed like wild irresponsibility, the majority of composers on the programme stated their intention to accomplish a genuine escape from all convention. The few fellows who didn't want to be associated with the avant-garde fell all over themselves swearing that they hadn't used any "modern" techniques.

The evening began with English composer, Douglas Young's *Bach Baroque Bratsche* (1987), one of two duets commissioned for this concert. The performers chose to reveal only the fourth movement (deliberately written as a separately-performable portion) of this as a world premiere. I, personally, am happy that I didn't have to sit through a more generous helping. The notes tell us that the first half of the movement played was a goulash of "many elements played in their entirety by one viola, with the second viola improvising on the same material in different orders and tempi." I believe that Caussé led this half and Golani improvised half-heartedly, though I couldn't be sure. What was noticeable was that in the ensuing strict canon of bowed harmonics -- where Young quite self-consciously used extended techniques -- Caussé led and Golani followed. Somewhat embarrassingly, the aggressive Canadian caught up to the Frenchman just before the big finish. Until she lapped him on the back stretch, the contrapuntal interplay was riveting, with Golani imitating Caussé's articulations and inflections quite successfully.

Following immediately was the Canadian premiere of Philippe Hersant's *Pavane* (1987) played by Caussé. Immediately demonstrating a classically refined, elevated manner of playing, the Frenchman may or may not have done justice to this piece. (I cannot remember how it sounded; the reasons for this should become obvious as the remaining six difficult works are described -- for one thing, the viola's timbre may not be able to stand up to such high-pressure scrutiny.) The graceful, lighter-than-air postures of the player stood out much more than the sound images. Perhaps the taped replay on CBC radio's "Two New Hours" will help me to discover just how the 20th-century French composer paid "homage to the Elizabethan composer Tobias Hume who entrusted to his instrument, the bass viol, many austere and melancholy pavanés." I shall have to prepare for the broadcast by checking out recordings to hear whether the "new colours and new playing techniques" Hume explored for his bass viol were as undistinguished as the experiments which Hersant, a Radio France producer, attempted for tenor viol.

When Rivka reappeared to play Naresh Sohal's *Shades IV* (1983), it became obvious that there was a down side to being memorable. Through the overuse of, for example, the articulation *lunga*, this fiery redhead seemed to overstate many of the Indian-British composer's intentions. The piece began solemnly, with open-string drones imparting a minimalist flavor, but soon opened out into great difficulties, as the composer drolly stated in the notes: "Tremendous demands are made of the performer as far as virtuosity is concerned." I heard the work as a fundamentally slow-paced melody with whopping amounts of extended technique filigree -- an apt commission for the sturdily earth-rooted methods of Ms. Golani.

During the Sohal, Gérard Caussé unwittingly sabotaged his own performance of the succeeding *Sequenza VI* (1967) -- the piece most closely approximating classic status -- by Italian composer Luciano Berio. He could distinctly be heard frantically practicing somewhere backstage, a sin perhaps more easily forgivable in a less famous player or a piece of a different character. Berio's clearly-articulated creed names this work an "essay whose subject is the relationship between the soloist and his instrument." Further, he asserts that, "to compose for a performer who deserves to be called a virtuoso is valid today only if, between the composer and the interpreter, a particular accord giving evidence of a human relationship is consecrated." Them's strong words and I, for one, believe that such a consecration could better have been celebrated with earlier preparation and a little quiet time just before performance.

After an ample intermission, Golani blazed through Heinz Holliger's *Trema* (1981). That this piece was hard to ignore was predicted by the composer's notice: "Experimental music often brings audiences into much closer contact with composers and executants." In fact, *Trema* more often than not seemed a little too close for comfort. By the evidence of Golani's playing, the score must surely indicate that as much as possible the player should seem to achieve the mystically impossible four-string simultaneous tremolo, forte. In this piece, Golani's tendency to go all out all the time was justified by all the musical materials I

could hear. If, and only if, Berio's *Sequenza* had been excellently performed, this piece might have been the second most shocking one of the evening. As it stood, Holliger achieved a blue ribbon for breaking away from conventional viola sound. I only wish it had been easier for my ears to recover. It's a mark of the strength of Lunga (whoops, Rivka) Golani's interpretation, that everything after *Trema* was sort of anticlimactic. This was not the most expressive or pleasing work, but surely the most boldly adventurous.

By this point in the program, bets were being taken in the audience as to whether the mass of oversize scores would topple off the music stand stage left, where each player had stood for the solos. (The stage hand dutifully adjusted the height each time -- between the towering Franco-Viol and the compact Bratscho-Canadian -- but left the messy pile of scores intact.) *Einspielung III* (1981), by Portuguese composer Emmanuel Nunes next received its Canadian premiere at the hands of its dedicatee, M. Caussé. Whether because of a weak performance or compositional indelicacies I cannot tell, but this work did not achieve its promise of "counterpoint and polyphonic writing," as the composer stated, "exploited to considerable limits." In the context of this tense concert, when a work did not aim to employ "contemporary techniques and effects" the audience might have been heard to sigh in anticipation of "something completely understandable," to paraphrase Monty Python. But when the stated ambition was not achieved, the piece doesn't deserve much credit simply because it was boring and inscrutable, instead of tense and frighteningly virtuosic.

And speaking of inscrutable, Bernd Alois Zimmermann's *Sonata* (1955) was a real challenge to Golani. Although the sonata was performed at Donaueschingen the year of its creation, Golani "first discovered this work in 1975, and . . . it took her 12 years to fully comprehend the logic and development of the piece before she was comfortable in playing it." She claimed to have grasped the essence of it, and it certainly seemed that she was committed to an inner vision, but I couldn't get much from it by that time in the concert: I heard neither the avowed "spiritual element" nor the promised "Bach chorale." There was

some sort of melody (as opposed to wild scratchings and harmonics and mad plucking -- all predating the excesses of the other works on the programme by 25 years or so) but it didn't bring the message home to me.

Mercifully, the concluding piece, Bruce Mather's staid, Canadianly-appellated *Viola Duet* (1987), pleased me and the whole audience greatly in its world premiere. There were points about which I have reservations: 1) Golani *lunga-ing*, without warning Caussé, in unison or homophonic passages; 2) Caussé wimping out on the quarter tones, which were, though ornamental rather than harmonically structural, nonetheless, a vital part of the work; and 3) the almost reactionary nature of the work itself. However, I'm a great fan of variety, and the Mather added a dash of it to a concert that had all too little contrast otherwise.

1-3 Da Capo Chamber Players, McMaster University

Nov. 2, 1987

(This review was written for the McMaster Silhouette during a very special event in the Music Criticism programme. The Music Department brought Andrew Porter to campus for a visit, in conjunction with the Da Capo Chamber Players concert. On the afternoon following the concert, Mr. Porter led the graduate students in a detailed discussion of all the reviews. I acknowledge gratefully the kind and constructive comments of Andrew Porter and my own colleagues.)

The Da Capo Chamber Players brought a distinctive "New York-Style" chamber music to the McMaster University campus recently. Da Capo is not your average medium-loud, medium-fast, but mighty reverent chamber music group, NOSIRREE! This talented bunch seems to believe that not all the best music has already been written. Oh, they do venerate the old masters -- Haydn and Brahms trios on Monday night's concert -- but they give pride of place to new music, including pieces written for them.

To begin with, there's the curious makeup of the group. You've heard of string quartets, woodwind quintets or chamber orchestras, but Da Capo's amalgamation of violin,

cello, flute, clarinet and piano is an odd hybrid in full, though it allows the members to regroup in useful ways. When you form a group like that, you pretty much have to commission new works, because normal chamber music is written for string quartets and the like. Another indication of the group's commitment to the continued vitality of concert music is that they support a composer-in-residence. Joan Tower, the founding pianist of the group, has recently changed allegiances, deciding to focus on composition. Da Capo opened with her blustery *Petroushskates* (1980), cleaning out the audience's ears. The composer intended to combine the rhythmic and harmonic excitement of Stravinsky's *Petroushka* with the flowing motion of the sport of figure skating. I'd say that the shrill urgency and insistent bravado of Tower's music won out over the fluidity of figure skating.

In describing the rest of the concert, scanty mention will be made of the Haydn G-Major Trio for flute, piano and cello and the Brahms Trio, Opus 114 for Clarinet, Piano and Cello. It's not that Da Capo does dead composers a disservice by playing their music, it's just that this particular chamber group lives so much more truly through the performance and advocacy of new music that it seems a shame to spread the wrong gospel. If I chose, I could go on and on about the many ways that their "standard" chamber music is brighter and more individualistic (within a tight ensemble coherence) than that of other groups; they take more chances than the star-quality musicians who record the Haydn and Brahms you buy at Sam's.

The most recent piece Da Capo played was New York composer Bruce Adolphe's *Ballade* (1986), dedicated to Sarah Rothenberg, the group's current pianist. Moving at a more deliberate pace than Tower's opening salvo, this work pits a powerfully and originally lyrical piano part against fits and starts from the other four players. Rather than an exquisite chamber music piece, this seems like a full-bodied symphonic work boiled down into quintet concentrate.

If I had one complaint about the concert, it would be Da Capo's volume control knob. I liked the bite of their music-making. It made me want to boogie, but what about all the proper chamber music fans who expected more delicate things? Da Capo certainly has a quiet side, all the more effective because they use it sparingly. Perhaps in trying to incite the audience (sadly, a small one) to more demonstrative appreciation, they pushed things a bit, overall.

The star of the evening, clarinetist Laura Flax, led a performance of Béla Bartók's mid-twentieth-century classic, *Contrasts* (originally written for Benny Goodman). The last movement's stirring chicken-yard sounds from the fiddle and clarinet, and the compulsive pounding of the folk dance in the piano were entirely appropriate. My fear, before hearing Da Capo play, was that they'd remove some of the unseemly wildness which Goodman's historic recording insists on. It's all still there, with a more refined and creepy middle movement than Goodman's as well.

Da Capo is also known for "creative programming": they not only play premieres of new works, but commit themselves to repeat performances, giving new works the same chance that most people give Haydn or Brahms. This offers both the audience and the players repeated chances to find the essence, rather than just glossing over a piece.

Da Capo's playing is much more likely to be thought of as compelling, vital or brash than elegant, refined or precious. They take chances, they play chamber music at the loud end of the spectrum, and they sometimes go a little overboard. That's probably why modern composers like to have them perform their works. When Da Capo plays, a composer knows what she's done; and it will more closely resemble lively, red-blooded music than "important" art.

1-4 Quay Works -- Subotnick/La Barbara

Jan. 25, 1988

(The abrupt ending of this piece reflects the pressure of composing a short piece under a strict time deadline. Mr. Littler assigned me a concert report, as if for a daily paper, with a one-hour deadline. I am confident that my primary function -- to inform the reader about the works of the main composers and performers on the concert -- is fulfilled, and that it is unnecessary to boost the career of John Cage.)

The Quay Works Series, a recent comer to Harbourfront, brings Toronto the very latest, up-to-datest music, theatre and performance art. Last Monday night's concert (January 25) featured a wide-ranging, yet closely and excellently focussed selection of contemporary vocal works. Joan La Barbara, the widely-acclaimed California avant-garde singer, met the varied challenges of each of eight pieces head on. Aided by Morton Subotnick's pre-programmed electro-acoustic accompaniments and Erika Duke's electric cello, she filled the du Maurier Theatre Centre with a wonderful array of vocal sounds and poetic images.

The compositions of La Barbara herself predominated, with strong competition in the first half of the evening from her husband, Subotnick's, recent pieces, *Hungers* (1987) and *Jacob's Room* (1984). Their programming, of works written since they began their musical association, revealed a fair number of stylistic similarities between pieces. It might have been easy to listen for La Barbara's characteristic loon call or in-breath-singing in each piece and pronounce them all cut from the same cloth. But the varied poetic texts and the purely musical goals toward which the performers aimed justified the unity of the concert. These performances were gripping for reasons far beyond the wide array of new techniques used.

"Celebration," an excerpt from *Hungers*, demonstrates a type of new opera which attempts a electronically-aided integration of visual images, choreography, texts and musical sounds. Scored for voice, cello and taped synthesizer programs, it seemed very much a work in progress, especially since the visual images and choreography were not yet integrated. A rhythmically vital and poetically valid exploration of human needs and wants shines forth

from the purely musical elements. *Jacob's Room*, originally conceived as a chamber opera for string quartet (the punky new-wavers, Kronos) and soprano, was presented in an arrangement, with the vaunted Yamaha Computer-Assisted Music System and cello of the opening piece providing the instrumental tracks. La Barbara's halting delivery of the texts from Virginia Woolf, Elie Wiesel, Nicholas Gage's *Eleni*, and Plato evoked the misery and the metaphysics of the drama eloquently; her ability to interpolate gasps, clucks, tweets and all manner of vocalisms between intelligible fragments of speech is nothing short of amazing.

La Barbara returned for the second half, performing mainly her own compositions for unadorned but multi-track-recorded soprano voice. *Erin* (1980) ends with a haunting folk-song-like fragment, after passing through a broad range of vocal sounds, orchestrally layered into a veritable symphony of imaginative voice techniques. And *Time(d) Trials and Unscheduled Events* (1984 -- Olympic year in L.A.) was simply magnificent, though I can hardly believe I was so fascinated by a succession of panting and grunting rhythms; her rhythmic invention built to an athletic climax which approached the poetic. The lyric voice (slightly calmer or less pointed rhythmically here than in Subotnick's work) held forth again in the concluding *Helga's Lied* (1986). This tribute to a beautiful woman's memory ended with a transcendent chorale-like segment scored in an arrangement for the ensemble mentioned earlier.

James Tenney's *Voices* (1982) used the harmonic series of La Barbara's voice to paint a jungle portrait of great complex simplicity. Two works by John Cage rounded out the programme.

1-5 Esprit Orchestra -- Olympic Concert

Feb. 17, 1988

(This concert was the best opportunity to hear Canadian new music ensembles playing a wide selection of brand-new music by Canadian composers. An absolutely essential element of a survey of new music in Canada.)

The real winter Olympics offered many more thrills and spills than the Esprit Orchestra's Olympic Concert at the Jane Mallett Theatre on February 17. To be sure, there were five brand-new "medal-winning" pieces of music on the programme, all commissioned for the 1988 Winter Olympics Arts Festival and written by Canadian men.

And there were other remarkable features as well. One could compare two real live new-music performing groups (the Société de musique contemporaine du Québec -- SMCQ -- and the Esprit Orchestra). Another spectator might marvel at the commissioned composition using both musical groups at the same time. And other fans could celebrate the first national tour of Esprit (travelling with SMCQ to Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa). Best of all, neither composers nor audience members suffered the agony of defeat -- or of the ears.

A significant point of comparison immediately suggested itself -- the visual appeal of the two musical groups. To a dedicated fan of Esprit, SMCQ's 12-member band of percussion, woodwinds and brasses must have seemed quite new-music-ghetto-like; the fact that eleven of them were middle-aged men, the majority wearing impressive nineteenth-century mustaches was just icing on the cake. Esprit, almost exactly half women, about half the age of the Québécois, and nearly all (about three dozen, total) Anglophone could hardly have proved a glitzier, more cosmopolitan foil to the earnest, provincial Easterners. What a unity in diversity is this country, Canada!

The actual audible evidence of the compositions emphasized the differences as well. The inscrutable, European flavor of Montréal prevailed in the SMCQ commissions. The first piece, John Burke's *Far Calls. Coming, far!*, (title from *Finnegans Wake*) depicted a virgin, snowy landscape -- easily a candidate for the most Canadian of archetypes. Static long

notes swelled and diminished, punctuated by little swirls of notes rising and falling as on the wind. If only I had closed my eyes while listening I could have caught the spirit of the piece. As it was, I distracted myself watching SMCQ's conductor Walter Boudreau. He led his forces as if they were charging into the grimmer battle scenes of Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture, instead of fashioning a magical snowy stillness, broken only by far-off fanfares.

Next, Boudreau divided his players into two teams -- woodwinds against brasses -- for his own composition, *Versus*, easily the most provocative item on the programme. On reading the description which follows, one may deduce that the piece was opaque and not entirely successful as music.

The programme notes claimed that *Versus* was the musical analog of a hockey game; one percussionist (the referee) had a whistle and siren; the pianist stood in for both organist and commentator; two other percussionists played goalies; and the conductor-composer led both teams very actively, though his function was not clear in the analogy.

Certain events were very clear -- both goalies playing at once meant that the national anthems (vigorous but not recognizable melodic segments) were being played or that the playing period was over. And it seemed that the brasses had to play short-handed, with mutes, a few times because they had acted like goons. I even thought I heard a slapping stick in the percussion part, signalling saves by the goalies. But it was hard to tell when the second period began and even harder to tell when, or if, someone scored a goal. I thought the brasses won because they played a major chord at the end.

I can't be sure that Boudreau intended all this to be so difficult to follow, but it is interesting to contemplate the ill fit between the aesthetic worlds of sport and art, especially when the commission is so specifically geared toward a sporting event. Given the practical construction of the concert -- one "period" of SMCQ, one of Esprit, and a final session of both groups at once, separated by two intermissions -- Boudreau's hockey game was ironically appropriate in another way as well.

After the first intermission, the city-slicker Esprit Orchestra entered to play its conductor, Alex Pauk's, *Split Seconds*. This piece was the most immediately appealing of the five -- which is to say that it sounded most like John Williams' music for Star Wars, quite grand and full and active, without being too serious. Pauk's avowed intention was to use the pop music idiom of sports broadcast and TV to commemorate the Olympics. He succeeded, creating a well-crafted piece with the most memorable and hummable tunes of the evening.

Most notable among the effects Pauk used were the repeated pop-music descending bass line, improvised trap-set rhythms to propel the piece, and a plucked double-bass jazz duet as sort of an improvised cadenza. Pauk's clever and unexpected changing-meter approach to four-square pop rhythms delighted me more than his writing for strings. The violins seemed often to scratch about ineffectively, fulfilling some intricate design which didn't contribute to the piece.

John Rea's *Time and Again* symbolized the best compromise between the two geographically contrasting Canadian styles. Rea earns English points with his Toronto origins and Québec points for his current job in Montréal as Dean of the Faculty of Music at McGill University. His composition suggested the cyclical process of breathing -- a timely approach to commemorate an athletic-event, yet musically solid and well-crafted. His phrases possessed archetypal weight rather than cliché familiarity, and their sound was elegant and full enough to be taken seriously as music, without the Olympic gimmick.

In particular, Rea's orchestral writing was idiomatic and assured (especially since it followed Pauk's, which wasn't, especially). Rea's music spoke more eloquently than his programme notes -- a statement which ought to be more of a commonplace than it turns out to be when applied to the pieces from the other composers. The swelling and diminishing of the wind instruments, sweeping at odd intervals across the orchestra, evoked a living form and process; the composer also used rapid rising and falling scale passages to achieve comparable effects for mallet instruments and strings. The tremolo-glissandi sailing up and down

in the divided violin sections proved as mesmerizing as the flicker of a flame, the motion of a waterfall or the undulating play of sunlight on waves.

The commission for combined forces, Allan Bell's *Concerto for Two Orchestras*, proved more interesting as an exercise in coordination problems between two conductors standing elbow-to-elbow than as a musical work. This is not to say that it had no interesting moments -- Bell achieved a good contrast between the contemplative first movement (Esprit tremolos interrupted by SMCQ bursts and swirls) and the more rhythmically active second movement. Throughout, he made good use of the two orchestras as separate entities. But the second movement more closely resembled a string of unrelated televised sports contests than a unified musical work.

The most interesting section was an orchestration crescendo which began with a chorus of rocks in the two percussion sections across the back of the stage; Bell followed that with wood blocks from opposite sides and then drums. To cap the segment, the composer's urgent rhythms were translated to both full orchestras.

That this lengthy concert stirred the blood seems, in itself, a fitting commemoration of the Winter Olympics. And a couple of these pieces really ought to be celebrated with repeat performances, soon -- Pauk's, after minor revisions, and Rea's as it stands. The other three composers deserve bronze medals and warm welcomes back home; I don't think I want to hear the instant replay or the video of their work unless another performance can bring out the essence of Burke's piece.

New Music Concert Reviews from Elsewhere (Part II)

(As mentioned before, the next two reviews are experiments, efforts to report on tiny increments of music with few words. Though intended for a specific place in a specific publication, *Vinyl*, they can stand alone, or together, as a matched pair. Zeitgeist is a low-profile Minneapolis group, well-liked at home and respected abroad for its aggressive commissioning of new works.)

1-6 *Spots* by Frederic Rzewski

May 28, 1987

Spots was written in 1986 for the new-music percussion group Zeitgeist, on whose program it appeared recently. It's in thirteen parts each about a minute long; a TV aesthetic is invoked both by the name (advertising "spots") and by the structure. The parts may be performed in any order and at any time in the concert. The major departure from TV rules is that the composer enjoins the performers not to intrude on the integrity of other composers' creations unless such intrusion is part of the piece's aesthetic.

It may be a difficult, major feat to write an evening-length symphonic piece; can it not also be admirable to write perfect miniatures for small groups? These spots are made up of simple melodic and harmonic materials (when has "a symmetrical, all-interval twelve-tone row" sounded so playful?). Zeitgeist's performance adds such bizarre staging touches as a percussionist hiding under his marimba (#6), a synthesizer player with a Greek fisherman's cap (#11) and hilarious contrapuntal foot-stamping (#1). Zeitgeist did 5 spots at the opening, 4 before the last piece on the first half, and 4 to open the second half, indicated by the numbers (1-13) on a music stand in a spotlight, with a Vanna-clone changing them. Throughout the antics, etc. the rhythms are fresh and the endings leave you wanting more -- maybe they really are good advertisements?

1-7 *Mass* by David Moberg

June 7, 1987

Though David Moberg's *Mass* follows the Big-C Catholic (liturgical) format in its English vernacular text, the musical materials point to the alternate meaning, an all-inclusive

diverse unity. This unaccompanied piece was sung by the Rochester Chamber Chorale in St. Michael's Lutheran Church of Roseville, which had a brand-new tracker-action Baroque organ waiting in the balcony. The Mass is idiomatic to a (semi?) professional chorus, doubtless weaned on the choral masterworks of the last 5 centuries. And it was given pride of place -- last in the first half -- on a program ranging from Sweelinck and Palestrina through Britten (*Te Deum* with organ) and Hoagy Carmichael. The composer conducted his own work and planned the programme around the styles in his Mass. His admiration for the taut, 20th-century dissonances of Knut Nystedt, the simple counterpoint of Byrd, the craftsmanship of Brahms and Hindemith, and the rhythmic vitality of jazz was evident in the sounds of his Mass -- eclectic and compelling. That this work was commissioned by personal integrity and fulfilled by the dedication of the choir and conductor is honourable; that this approach seems so fresh and original (compared to other chorus programming) is discouraging.

1-8 Vandervelde's Music for *The Bacchae*

Aug. 20, 1987

(I am proud to have performed in the premieres of two of Janika Vandervelde's works: *Voxworks*, for the experimental vocal ensemble LISTEN, and *Seven Sevens*, with Minnesota Opera. This review, concerned with an element of theatre usually rightly considered "incidental," appeared alongside the review of the play in *Vinyl*.)

One striking thing about Janika Vandervelde's musical score for *The Bacchae* is that it doesn't sound very much like her previous music. There are reasons for this, not least of which must be the strength of Liviu Ciulei's ideas as director, designer and "collaborator." Also, the music of this production is practical, the actresses singing and playing drums, and the musical phrasing often matching the articulation of the chorus's speech rhythm.

The sounds of Vandervelde's score are notable, first of all, for their integration with the dramatic activity, and not primarily for purely musical values. Nothing about this music is incidental, from the simple heartbeats of the bass drum to the folk-like articulation and

shape of the chorus parts. Just as the set design is baldly symbolic, so too is the music broadly archetypal.

The members of Zeitgeist, Joseph Holmquist and Jay Johnson, percussionists, Robert Samarotto, woodwinds, and guest synthesizer player, Tom Linker, are credited as the musical performers. But they are uncompromisingly bound both to follow and to lead the on-stage music. In the end, what they do seems a natural consequence of the actresses' singing and dancing or vice versa.

Two instances of this close fit come to mind: the first, and simpler, features the women of the cult of Dionysos (the Bacchae of the title) drumming and dancing on-stage -- their orgy of rhythmic excess builds to include the fuller musical forces and abilities of Zeitgeist almost imperceptibly and then fades to spent fatigue; the second is bound up with the director's method of using the chorus. As Ciulei has staged it, the chorus is almost echolalic in its insistent repetition and variation of words and phrases -- therefore, the folk style of heterophonic singing (a group of singers embellishing the same melody with highly individual variations all at the same time) is an ingeniously apt musical device.

This technique also has the advantage of being well suited to the talents of the performers. One might expect Vandervelde to collaborate excellently with Zeitgeist (because of past experiences), but her writing to the talents of the Guthrie's actresses is a pleasant surprise -- the throaty singing voice of the modern actress is a remarkable medium for the performance of Romanian folk song, a style model suggested by the director.

Given Ciulei's insistence on the balance spoken of in the text of the drama, it is obvious that Vandervelde, a woman composer, of a rational, ordered and formal bent, was the right choice for him; not Diamanda Galas, nor Meredith Monk, nor Pauline Oliveros could have filled the bill. Vandervelde's music, though decidedly rhythmical and visceral, has as much to do with the reason, form and order of Apollo as with the excesses of Dionysos.

1-9 North American New Music Festival

March 11-13, 1988

(In the Spring of 1987 I wrote about the North American New Music Festival for the Hamilton Spectator. This year's edition confirms the festival as a continuing, major annual event for new music, and should help to raise the image of poor, under-estimated Buffalo. My challenge was to describe as much of Carter's music as I could, without hiding the fact that it puzzles me.)

The North American New Music Festival opened with a splash last weekend. This year, the featured composer was one of America's most famous living composers, Elliott Carter, in honor of his eightieth birthday.

If I were to describe accurately and idiomatically what I heard last Saturday, a day with three concerts of chamber music by Carter, it would take a long time, I would never repeat myself, my words would be inscrutable and only a few people would understand, and even fewer would care deeply. Perhaps I should just say that Elliott Carter's music is very difficult and I can't make much sense of it, nor do I care to.

It was amazing just to hear his four string quartets (1951, 1959, 1971 and 1986) played so convincingly by the Arditti String Quartet. The melodies of each part are difficult and angular, the harmonic thicket complex, and the rhythms mathematically determined and highly evolved. I couldn't even begin to hear the formal shapes so as to know when something was over.

The most difficult quartet must surely be the third, for which the players had to use headphones and a prepared click-track to keep to the proper tempos. And yet, it has more recognizable textures than the others, because of the way it's constructed. Two players play together, revolving four different movements against the six movements of the other two players. Each movement of the one pair is combined with each movement of the second. I had to watch the score to hear the formal relationships, though other interesting things leaped out of the texture. The rhythmic precision of the foursome is quite impressive, I can say; and their pitches do not waver from where they start, though the organizational system of the music is very difficult to hear.

The first quartet also utilized musical pairing off, this time with the high-pitched violins opposing the viola and cello. And of all the quartets, it was easiest to grasp, though at the end of a three-concert day, I was in no shape to fully appreciate it. Kudos to the supreme artistry of the Arditti Quartet. What a feat of concentration just to stay on top of the small musical decisions, let alone planning to make fully articulated statements of extended musical architecture, which I assume they did, though many in the audience couldn't fully understand the methods.

My favorite work was an early one, the Piano Sonata, from 1945. As played by Stephen Manes on the middle concert Saturday afternoon, it sounded bold, fresh and powerfully lyrical. Another comprehensible piece was the Elegy from 1943 in its viola and piano version, followed by a version from 1946 for string quartet. Since Carter's work doesn't use the kind of repetitive formal structure of the Classical period this literal repetition helped to break apart the density of his compositional practice.

Friday night's two concerts showcased quite different music from Carter's. The 8 pm concert combined modern minimalism with a selection of bleak texts intoned by actor Paul Schmidt from a stationary chair inside a wading pool. The music wasn't a compelling force, efficiently deferring to the clearly articulated texts. Ranging from Rimbaud to early-20th-century Russians, the texts were overmuch the same and delivered with too little attention to contrast. At least the evening wasn't long. And it was mighty high concept. At least you could tell when the pieces were over.

One of the good aspects of the festival is the late-night cabaret idea. Mostly these bar gigs feature performers who write their own material and don't publish with respectable academic music publishing houses. James Emery, late Friday night, played wonderfully. He used many different techniques -- chopsticks on soprano guitar, slide bar, plastic strips which made his guitar sound like a kalimba -- to avoid being a bland New Ager. His music was

pleasant, but not banal. From the background of pop music, he wove a tapestry of ethno-musicological sounds, personalized techniques and free jazz rhythms and chords.

The Sunday afternoon concert was at the beautiful auditorium in the Albright-Knox Art Gallery. The Ardittis, playing their fourth concert (of five, including Sunday night in Toronto) in two days, distinguished themselves by playing American and British quartets by younger composers. Most were in the dense, Carter-style obfuscation mode. Bernadette Speech wrote a virtuously simple piece which sounded clearly against the background of such difficult music.

The festival continues this weekend at SUNY Buffalo. Thursday -- music and video with David Felder and Jon Gibson, late-night cabaret with saxophonist Gibson. Friday -- music theatre of Mauricio Kagel and Sylvano Bussotti, late-night cabaret with trumpeter Ben Neill. Ends Saturday with Gamelan Son of Lion in the afternoon and an evening of Lou Harrison's music.

1-10 Microfest!

May 21, 1988

(Obviously, yes?, this piece is part parody of left-wing Village Voice criticism and part idiomatic response to a stimulating concert.)

Microfest, "an 8-day celebration of microtonality," was the happening thing on the Greenwich Village music scene round about the middle of May. Organized by Johnny Reinhard, a dynamo, un-laid-back type of guy, the festival shifted easily among concerts, seminars and hands-on workshops. Though the concept of microtonality calls to mind little clumps of extra keys and pitches between the cracks of the twelve tones in a piano's octave, many other ways of organizing pitches have sprung up. Among the most interesting of these are various versions of just intonation, which can sound remarkably similar to the major keys of a piano's equal temperament.

The final evening featured performances in just intonation, based on Pythagorean whole-number ratios. Opening with a piece for three horns with non-functioning valves, the concert continued with Terry Riley's landmark piece, *In C* (the "world premiere" of the 1988 just intonation version), and finished with a second half comprised of La Monte Young's epic *Poem for Chairs, Tables, Benches, etc.* (1960).

The first piece, *Open Horn Fanfare* (1988, World Premiere), was more or less a bust, even by Downtown standards. Tom Varner, composer and hornist, was joined onstage by Vincent Chancey and Robert Routh for an overlong fanfare which wandered from Heldenleben-like long tones at the beginning through a sort of jazz tune in unison and into a thicket of improvisation. Other tricks trotted out by Varner included elaborate hockets and unpitched sounds as well as extremely high and low notes.

By about halfway through, the piece seemed far too long and too consistently virtuosic for even such excellent players as these. There were some interesting points though, and with revision, a solid, shorter open horn fanfare may emerge. Early-instrument players have certainly learned to work comfortably with the overtone series.

Terry Riley's infamous piece rounded out the first half, bustling with New York energy, but lacking the wolfish pitch relationships that an equal-temperament performance might bring to the fore. Though the music seemed even more harmonically placid than usual because of its unorthodox tuning, a very un-California performance style overcompensated for torpor. Reinhard conducted the performance, also playing his Zen-recorder (unheard, but evidently quite enjoyable for him) and shaping crescendos and unisons with a precision unusual for this type of music. Not all the performers were at their ease, especially the brace of rather upscale sopranos.

Young's *Poem for Chairs, Tables, Benches, etc.*, especially arranged for the New York festival by the composer (who was present), was the most striking and best performed, though a written description makes it sound silly. La Monte Young discovered what he calls

"live friction sounds" at the Berkeley laundromat when he was a grad student at the University of California there in the late 50's. When he pushed big wooden benches across the floor, he became fascinated by the sounds they produced, new worlds of noises with their own natural harmonic overtone series.

The work's premiere was in 1960, as part of what Young deems the first California happening. Its rich and varied life in that decade was due to the composer's timely use of chance operations and its adaptability for various numbers of performers in lively venues. Such legendary avant-garde figures as John Cage, Cornelius Cardew, Christian Wolff, Earle Brown, Morton Feldman, Dick Higgins and David Tudor figure prominently among the early performers.

For the 1988 performance in Greenwich House, Young dispensed with the chance operations in favor of detailed personal instructions transmitted orally. The performers were scattered throughout the house, out of sight of the audience. The lights were dimmed and the audience enjoined not to make a sound, so as to allow a recording to be made. As if that mattered; even the subway could not be heard for more than half an hour once the rumble of the assorted pieces of furniture began.

For many audience members the experience of Young's "Poem" was not at all transcendent. But it was surprising how often listeners needed to hush careless talkers near them. The loud, irregular, steadily evolving waves of noises proved to be calming. Many people stayed to the end of the piece, when the performers brought their furniture up for a bow, but very few remained seated in the usual, respectful bourgeois fashion.

This concert demonstrated the essential element of post-war American avant-garde: the active involvement of the truly inventive composer. Tom Varner was actively involved with his own piece, but proved himself really unable to invent as a composer. *In C*, by the absent Terry Riley went a bit astray because a contrary performing aesthetic was applied,

though to an interesting variant on his original work. But Young's poem worked as the intuitive, formless, fluid piece it was meant to be.

1-11 Chamber Music of Alfred Schnittke

May 22, 1988

(While in New York to perform with a Georgian (USSR) all-male folk choir, I chanced upon an important Russian cultural event. The review was intended to be an introduction to Schnittke for Hamilton readers, an exclusive news-and-review hybrid for the Hamilton Spectator. It was never published.)

Has glasnost really allowed the USSR's leading avant-garde composer to travel to New York for a premiere of his work? Last Sunday night (May 22), a piano sonata by Alfred Schnittke, the pre-eminent living Soviet composer, was heard for the first time, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The performer was none other than Vladimir Feltsman, the celebrated young pianist who left the Soviet Union last fall after many years of trying.

The political circumstances surrounding this event make for a more complex story than Billy Joel's recent Russian tour. Thankfully for those at the concert, the compelling sounds of Schnittke's music justified whatever storm of propaganda (confirming *glasnost*, for instance) may result.

Schnittke, born in 1934 and trained at the Moscow Conservatory, has been active since the early 1960's, composing film scores, opera, ballet, orchestral and choral music, as well as the chamber music on the New York concert. His initial piano studies, at twelve years of age when his father was posted in Vienna, started him on a long path of academic study and teaching which has blossomed spectacularly since 1972 when he began to concentrate exclusively on composition.

The composer has long been known, even in the West, as an energetic experimenter, composing after classical models early in his career and later eagerly writing serial music. Schnittke's most recent work combines elements of earlier musical eras with the most modern

means (including fierce dissonances and unorthodox tuning systems); his vigorous ear for fresh sounds ensures that his music will be understood as "polystylistic" or post-modern rather than just old-fashioned.

In the West Schnittke is championed by Russian émigrés such as cellist and conductor Mstislav Rostropovich and violinist Gidon Kremer as well as by the insistently avant-garde Kronos Quartet and Sarah Caldwell, who organized a Russian/American music festival in Boston recently.

Vladimir Feltsman, the prize-winning Soviet pianist born in 1952, also thinks highly of Schnittke's work and had commissioned a solo sonata years before departing for America and signing a recording contract with CBS. Schnittke's illness prevented the swift completion of the piece, and, as it turned out, a Moscow premiere.

All of this was just a history lesson when Sunday night's concert of four chamber-music works by Schnittke began in the Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium. Except that a palpable emotional intensity permeated the music. The musicians produced earnest, polished and gritty music. Furthermore, all of it was virtually new to the audience. And the composer was present, being photographed at every turn. The music was heightened, not dampened, by the festivity of the occasion.

The concert began boldly, without Feltsman, when Alexandre Brussilovsky (violin), Paul Neubauer (viola) and John Sharp (cello) played Schnittke's String Trio (1985). The work abounds in unmistakably Beethoven-like multiple-stop chords and repeated rhythms, as well as beautiful Schubertian melodies which leap from the texture momentarily, only to realign with the other instruments to form dissonant clouds. But in addition to these complexities, another theme, using Pythagorean pure tuning and slowly changing chord combinations, enabled the string players to creep around tonally outside the usual twelve tones.

The second piece, Sonata No. 2 for violin and piano, "Quasi una Sonata" (1968), represents one of the earliest examples of Schnittke's most recent style. Beginning with

crashing major chords, dramatic pauses and crunching dissonances, the duo sonata's single movement traversed a wide musical terrain. Also included was another favorite device widely used by the Romantic composers, Schumann and Brahms, namely, building a musical them on the notes signified by the letters B-A-C-H. Feltsman's brooding, ferocious attacks on the keyboard were well matched by the powerful, expressive playing of Brussilovsky. A broken violin string hampered the players somewhat; the tense surprise of the dramatic pauses at the beginning was a bit less fiery when they started over after making repairs.

The premiere of Schnittke's 1987 *Piano Sonata* showed it to be a less interesting piece than the others, though it was the centerpiece of the evening. Perhaps this is because the complex counterpoint which seems central to Schnittke's art must all be played by the same person, without the tensions and cooperations that may result when two people perform together.

The piece is twenty minutes long, in four complex, continuous movements, and in some unstated way, is based on the letters of Vladimir Feltsman's name (there are lots of possibilities). I confess to having been more interested in the theory game than in the performance. Perhaps Mr. Feltsman will bring a more polished version to life when he has memorized the work and played it repeatedly. He certainly has no obvious technical deficiencies, and his ability to make poetic music in the other pieces was prodigious. His performance was hampered most obviously by an errant page turner in this piece, for instance.

For the Piano Quintet (1972-76) the four other players were joined (and led) by violinist Dmitri Sitkovetsky. This five-movement work was permeated with clear quotations from earlier composers. The "Tempo di Valse" second movement was quite accessible and beautiful, and yet the layers of music made of these quotations were resolutely new and exciting, filled with pathos in a wholly new way. Here too, the string quartet moved in microtones, sliding from warm unisons into wrenchingly dissonant tonal regions the piano

couldn't reach. The players made much of an interesting point of imitation, for instance, when the piano played a theme immediately answered by the cello -- this time in quarter tones.

One should not be fooled into thinking lightly of Vladimir Feltsman and his musical tastes merely because his first US concert graced the Reagan White House. As the last notes of the quintet died away in a wonderful decrescendo, a deeply urgent and warmly personal performance came to an end. The concert provided an eloquent testament to the imagination of a great Soviet composer, to the bond of fellowship with his countryman, and to the industry of five young performers -- a celebrated recent émigré, two other Russians and two Americans.

Reviews of New Music on Recordings (Part III)

(The record reviews follow the format of *Music Magazine*, indicating pertinent information in a header.)

1-12 New Music from Minnesota

LARSEN: Symphony: Water Music; PAULUS: Symphony in Three Movements (Soliloquy). Minnesota Orchestra, Sir Neville Marriner, conductor. Elektra/Asylum/Nonesuch (d) LP 79147.

IVES: A Set of Three Short Pieces; LARSEN: Four on the Floor; PROTO: Quintet; TARTAGLIA: Fantasia for Viola and Bass (on themes of Marin Marais). The Minneapolis Artists Ensemble. Innova (d) LP MCF 002.

The fresh harvest of new music from Minnesota tells the story of how there happens to be a thriving community for such a product. In addition to the yearly album of the Minnesota Composers Forum (MCF), the Minnesota Orchestra has released a handsomely produced and packaged major-label album, featuring major symphonic works by the "parents" of the MCF.

Libby Larsen and Stephen Paulus founded MCF when they were students (of Dominick Argento, Paul Fetler and Eric Stokes) at the University of Minnesota in the early seventies -- hooray for progressive funding of student organizations! Significantly, neither of them is now or has ever been a music professor -- and they both work almost exclusively on commission. (I believe it's Larsen who relates that she once composed for a case of soda -- but not for free!)

It came as no surprise when Larsen and Paulus were selected joint composers-in-residence with the Minnesota Orchestra in 1983. The disk under review is the record of their tenure, but more significantly, a testament to their nearly fifteen years of vigorous composer advocacy.

As one might expect, this is establishment music, neither aesthetically adventurous nor shocking in subject matter or execution. Paulus's *Symphony* (1986) owes more to Stravinsky than merely the title -- his rhythms are infectious and his craft impeccable. The middle section of the first movement ("Unrestrained") moves from what the composer calls "anger or a feistiness" to unchecked ecstasy. Both here and in the second movement, "Impassioned," the beautifully romantic string sound which Marriner cultivated soars transparently. The third and last movement, "Volatile," shows just how deeply Paulus's emotional core runs. The rhythms and sounds of an American born in 1949 burble up from a background of sul ponticello scary movie music.

Larsen's piece is lighter in almost every way, though also well-made. Her "Water Music" (1985 -- the Handel "anniversary" year) is a cheery paean to sailing and, at 18:24, more than ten minutes shorter than Paulus's. The first movement, "Fresh Breeze," paraphrases Handel quite delightfully; she's no pedant. The shortest of her four movements, "Wafting," is a virtuoso perpetual motion spurt of muted brasses and nervous percussion. Even the concluding storm movement, "Gale," seems happy, at most a temporary blot on blue

skies. Both of these symphonies are ambitious, but accessible -- witnesses to the composers' close association with the orchestra and careful attention to its needs.

A complementary recording from the Minneapolis Artists Ensemble (MAE) can be seen as a positive by-product of modern orchestral players' disenchantment. Frank Proto toils as a bass player for Cincinnati; John Tartaglia (violist) and the MAE string players as Minnesota Orchestra stalwarts. Thank goodness they found worthwhile hobbies.

Larsen's sporty hot-rod piece is the star of this recording. *Four on the Floor* (1984) has already lived a good life; it's been premiered alone, choreographed, and made into a music video (complete with images of a red corvette, and the grand piano being played in a junkyard -- all in under five minutes). Busy in every way, this music is archetypal American bluster -- violin, cello, and bass saw madly at their strings over a stride piano ground.

In Tartaglia's *Fantasia*, a beautifully clunkety original tango theme frames four older dance tunes, the most familiar being "Le Basque." The eloquent lyricism and energetic virtuosity of Tartaglia's duo (1984) make me wonder why more composers don't write for bass and viola. Though I wouldn't buy a record just for Proto's rambling jazzy *Quintet* (1984) or the miniature Ives group (1908) -- "Hymn," "Scherzo (Practice for String Quartet in Holding Your Own)," and "The Innate" -- even they might grow on a listener. All are spiritedly-performed and recorded.

1-13 Chamber Music of Aaron Copland

COPLAND: *Sextet; Piano Variations; Piano Quartet*. Gilbert Kalish, the Boston Symphony Chamber Players. Elektra/Nonesuch (d) LP 79168-1.

This album of Aaron Copland's chamber music is an anomaly, though a pleasing one. Imagine, a recording of music by a living American which bears all the marks of honouring the masterworks of a great, dead, European composer. Demonstrations of this veneration

include a mainstream record company, a beautifully-designed jacket (an urban photograph by André Kertész), and liner notes both thorough and elegant.

And best of all, the music on the disc is played and recorded as if it were well-loved repertoire. It's wonderful to hear such attention lavished on Copland's chamber works -- which we presume to express his most powerful ideas in more distilled form than his popular symphonic and ballet scores. Justice is served by rescuing Copland from the new-music world of National Endowment grants and one-time performances with near-documentary quality recordings.

To consider the outside first, Michael Steinberg's notes are eloquent (tempting a reviewer to believe he has done a great deal of original research) and full of detail. All the pieces are carefully dated and fully described. The players -- in addition to the star pianist Gilbert Kalish -- are Malcolm Lowe (violin), Burton Fine (viola), and Jules Eskin (cello) for the quartet, with the addition of Max Hobart (violin) and Harold Wright (clarinet) for the sextet. Perhaps they have individual and collective histories, but in these notes they've generously set them aside to concentrate on Copland's music.

The sparest, most inscrutable piece on the disc is *Piano Variations* (1930), a theme, twenty variations and coda, without breaks -- the most I was able to hear was 17 sections, though a score might help a listener find more. My personal listening notes tell me I could hear "trumpet and low brass" in the piano, as well as "flute and strings," "pedal and bells" and "chorale for full orchestra." In fact, Copland orchestrated the piece for the Louisville Orchestra; the Variations are analogous to a blueprint, though they constitute an artful plan worth looking at for its own beauty.

The sound quality is amazingly rich. Compelling dynamic changes swell up from spare textures all the way to the fullness of Copland's grandest gestures. The close miking, though, catches one of the string players breathing audibly in the quartet.

Piano Quartet (1950) is Copland's first serially conceived work, though it is deliberately tonal sounding. Lyrical melodies, even at the contrapuntal beginning of the first movement, are most characteristic of this peaceful work (two slow movements sandwiching an Allegro giusto). Even the ending of the comparatively energetic 2nd movement Scherzo peters out to a gentle, calm shadow of the dance as it began. One indication of Copland's playful approach to serial music is that the final movement's passionate string introduction leads to a simple main theme in the piano -- a tune suspiciously more like "Three Blind Mice" than most strictly serial composers would allow themselves.

The liner notes, elegant and spare, but rich in detail (like the music described), make extensive use of Copland's own lucid prose. An especially useful bit of information is Steinberg's downplaying of the "critical cliché" that one Aaron Copland wrote the immensely popular ballets, and another the spiky chamber music. More is made of the fusion of those two opposing qualities, as well as two others -- urgent, compelling jazz rhythms, contrasting with "a shall we say Hebraic idea of the grandiose, of the dramatic and the tragic" (in the composer's words).

Sextet (1937) is the most telling and distilled exposition of Copland on this record. It's literally a boiled down *Short Symphony* (1932). That work proved difficult for conductors of the 30s. Though the three movements are played without pause, they are fully comprehensible as separate entities. And except for the simplicity and slow tempo of the middle movement, I could have been fooled into thinking I was listening to jazz played by an unorthodox array of instruments.

All in all, this is an eloquent album, both danceable and serious. The players don't play as if they're funded under a Homage to High Art grant, but rather as if they love the stuff. And it's no great penance to have to listen to it either.

1-14 Minnesota Composers Forum Jazz

TIBBETTS: Four Letters; OLSON: Three Days in the Arrowhead; GWIAZDA: Sinfony; DEVINE: Stop Thinking or Get Out of the Way; MORIARTY: Out of Touch/Albert. The composers w/ assisting artists. Minnesota Composers Forum, Innova (d) CD MN106.

Free Fall, the latest album from the Minnesota Composers Forum (MCF), is a compilation of works by several composers, as was each of their previous recordings. But this one differs from the rest in more ways than just being available on CD. The composers are young men, born in the fifties; Henry Gwiazda, a '52 model, heads the list, with Mike Olson ('58) the baby brother.

It's not too surprising either that all of them have been influenced by jazz and popular music, but it is enlivening to hear the work of five young composers, all performing their own music. Coming from the town that spawned Prince, the basement-tape phenom, this might amount to a trend or something. Ssshh ... Don't tell the folks, this is just a little something we dreamed up in the basement. And produced with the help of the McKnight Foundation.

For being a harbinger of middle-class self-expression, though, these composers range wide in search of materials. The oddest sounds come from Steve Tibbetts's trip to Kathmandu (figurative homage to Bob Seger not intended). It sounds implausible that a Midwesterner's mix of ethnomusicology and musique concrète might amount to a compelling sound structure, but that's just what happens in the lead track. *Four Letters*, a four-movement suite (if you must) of ambient Nepalese sounds, guitar and kalimba, aided by Marc Anderson's percussion, is a fresh, lively composition. The Tibbetts studio mix of all these strange gatherings reflects a curious mind; the third letter, a song from "the Yak and Yeti hotel," is perfect ethno-pop, complete with infectious tabla rhythms and a sinuous, compelling guitar melody.

Devine's *Stop Thinking or Get Out of the Way* is the shortest (5:38) piece, besides its other superlative features. Premiered in 1978, it is polished to high sheen by the John

Devine Saxophone Quartet for this recording. The piece starts with a unison tune, like a jazz chart and blossoms into fevered improvisation. Devine's note, explaining the "nasty habit on the part of some humans to stop dead in their tracks ... to think 'great thoughts,'" is not only amusing in itself, it has sparked this group to make a fluid bit of music.

The Pat Moriarty Ensemble is a less standard configuration; the eponymous composer (get the picture?) plays alto sax and bass clarinet, with sidemen on trumpet, trombone and piano. His four-part suite, *Out of Touch/Albert*, begins in tonal and rhythmic freedom (the graphic notation mentioned in the liner notes?) and moves toward firm tonality. These four players are tight throughout the opening disarray, as well as in the third section's antiphonal jazz and the final lament, no mean feat.

The two remaining pieces are virtually self-produced. Olson uses synthesizer, sampler, drum machine and electric piano in his own studio (Intuitive Music) to invoke natural images -- "In the Forest", "Beyond the River" and "Among the Cliffs" -- in a pop idiom. Gwiazda plays electric guitar, bass and electronic gizmos to combine inscrutable "hey nonny nonino's" from Shakespeare with twisted Mozart (KV 100?) and his own ideas; the mix was engineered at Moorhead State University where Gwiazda teaches.

MCF deserves praise for its commitment to collaborative, improvisatory art, even when the product is not earthshaking. Besides the Devine and Moriarty quartets, they've fostered IMP ORK, a 25-member improvising orchestra, as well as the collaborative poetry-dance-music group, Ancestor Energy. The fertile improvisation scene in the Twin Cities has been well supported by funding agencies; Devine and his IMP ORK co-founder, cellist/composer Michele Kinney, for instance, applied their McKnight Foundation funds to the dicey business of organizing a standing improvising orchestra, instead of for the more traditional commissioning of individual works. This CD gives eloquent testimony to that artistic vision and its bureaucratic support system.

1-15 Isaac Stern: Two New Violin Concertos

DUTILLEUX: L'Arbre des songes (Orchestre National de France, Lorin Maazel); *DAVIES: Concerto for Violin and Orchestra* (Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, André Previn). Isaac Stern. CBS Masterworks (d) CDMK 42449

It's not immediately obvious looking at this CD that Isaac Stern is playing the premiere recording of Henri Dutilleux's recent violin concerto, *The Tree of Dreams* (1985). But the idea kind of grows on you, enchanting you bit by bit.

In fact, Dutilleux plans for his music to creep up on the listener in just the same way. He deliberately obscures formal outlines, writing four movements with connecting interludes, so that no dead air intervenes to break the spell. This works itself out pleasantly in the music; it seems not the obscuring activity of an emperor with no clothes but rather the artful smoothing away of rough edges and visible joints which a furniture maker might employ.

Patient rather than prolific, Dutilleux (b. 1916) has earned a reputation for high quality parallel to that of his teacher Ravel. His music is highly evolved though, and does not borrow from other idioms as was his mentor's wont. In the first movement, "Librement," lyrical solo passages float above clouds of string tones and muted brassy. The violin's melodies are neither overtly tonal nor threateningly atonal. His originality sounds natural and regular except that it offers surprises at every turn.

In the fast second movement ("Vif") we hear fiddle sounds from the soloist in a jig rhythm, more or less, with none of the predictable melodic constructions or phrase lengths that a dance implies. Buzzing clouds of string tremolos and upward-arching phrases keep the amorphous tree and dream images close to the fore.

Later, Dutilleux's refined and leisurely duet passages between English Horn and violin threaten to make all previous antiphonal passages seem like crude call-and-answer games. Mystical bell-ringing from the piano, harp and percussion intervenes, and the finish is a great accelerating rush. Radio France commissioned the work for a Paris premiere. Their

recording for CBS Masterworks gives great prominence to Stern, unduly veiling the orchestral palette.

Peter Maxwell Davies (b. 1934) has written a complementary concerto (also 1985), contrasting its sister in many ways. Though both composers wrote continuous works, and neither catered to empty virtuosity, Davies' Concerto is longer, more obviously rooted in historical models, and formally less adventurous.

Davies, renowned as the composer of avant-garde vocal music, has apparently turned his back on *The Fires of London* and that stage of his life to become Associate Conductor of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, "for which he is writing a series of ten concertos."

Davies professes a great love for the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto and designed his own first concerto (for a Royal Philharmonic Commission) after that model. In the notes he writes of the three movements without a pause, of the tonality, F-sharp modal, of the dominant preparation before the recapitulation, and of the cadenzas. But these are not his only attempts to reach back through history. A long-time resident of the Orkney Islands, and an admirer of harsh, solitary North Sea life, Davies wrote his concerto with the acoustics of the 12th-century Cathedral of St. Magnus in mind, though the recording was made elsewhere.

In the cadenza of the first movement, an acoustic backdrop was sorely needed: though the segment is expertly shaped by Mr. Stern to build from spacious double-stops and quiet tones into a frenzy, the rich reverberation of a medieval room was absent. The recording captures another aspect of the cadenza quite well, though. As the soloist sails up to high harmonics and pianissimo tones, the orchestral strings steal in and take over the continuation of selected pitches, gradually forming the dominant chord which leads out of the cadenza.

Davies writes that his slow middle movement, "conjur[es] up the near-silent expanses of still, lonely moorland with its characteristic sea-reflected silver northern light,

where cries of moor and sea bird, wind in heather and the distant wash and boom of the Atlantic are the only sounds." Giving due credit to the author, it may suffice to note that in this matter, Mr. Davies conclusively proves himself a better composer than he is a writer. The first minute and a half of the movement consist of a delicate, filmy solo line over a bagpipe-like drone. After a stormy blast from the brasses, the arch form is completed when, just before the final movement, the drone returns, overlaid this time by duet for violin and English Horn. Isaac Stern's beautiful intimate playing captures far more of the spirit of the music than its composer was able to do in words.

The recording brings you right up close and personal. The only intrusions into this wonderful, still sound world seem to be the squeak of Mr. Stern's sea shoes and the distant wash and boom of the violinist's breathing.

On this CD Stern demonstrates clearly the formal and aesthetic differences between the two works. He leads (or opposes) the orchestra in the Davies Concerto, his tone majestic and expansive, though he misses no opportunity for tenderness or sharpness when they are called for. Conversely, he has also captured the essence of Dutilleux's piece, which is to grow his solo part out of the orchestral texture organically, like a magical branch on the Tree of Dreams.

Chapter 2: *REVIEWS OF OPERA, CHORAL AND VOCAL MUSIC*

New or Rare Opera (Part I)

2-1 *The Chocolate Soldier* (newly translated)

Aug. 30, 1987

Evanston, Illinois

Light Opera Works performed a new/old version of Oscar Straus's *The Chocolate Soldier* on August 30 in Cahn Auditorium. The singing and acting were not up to industry standards, perhaps because of the scanty amount of time allotted between completion of the performing edition and mounting fully-staged and costumed performances.

This production was touted as the American premiere of the original Viennese version of *Der tapfere Soldat* (1908), based on G. B. Shaw's *Arms and the Man*. (The movie and other subsequent productions have been blotted by "Broadway" sins.) A collaboration between translators Philip A. Kraus (who also directed) and Gregory Opelka gave us a charmingly rhymed singing translation, while Doblinger, the original publisher, produced the orchestral parts.

The most stylish acting and singing came from two secondary characters, Alexius (David T. Troiano) and Captain Massakroff (Peter E. Pohlhammer). Troiano distinguished himself with his clear tenor voice and uppity-ramrod comic timing and Pohlhammer with an aptly booming voice and rambunctious manner.

Peter Lipari conducted well, only occasionally mis-timing transitions from dialogue to music. His tempos were sprightly and the playing was clean. Patricia M. Prus, in her solo debut as Mascha, approached excellence displaying sure vocalism and charming poutiness. Russell Jones's sets were vividly Victorian, except for some odd garage-sale furniture.

Bonita Suzanne Hyman (Aurelia Popoff) swallowed words, both singing and speaking,

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though her voice satisfied. Playing her Colonel husband, John Holland was pleasant vocally but not as convincing dramatically.

Unfortunately, Kraus's staging made the deficiencies of the principals all too evident. Hollace A. Emrich as Nadina sang well and could be understood, but she was uncomfortable as an air-headed light-opera heroine. The central character, David Huneryager, floundered at times -- I suppose his awkward deportment may have been an intentional part of the role. He spanned the wide vocal range of Lieutenant Bumerli adequately but his style sins (over-hamming and inept chocolate bon-bon palming among them) distracted from his whimpery diction.

2-2 Opera Omaha Fall Festival

Sept. 25-27, 1987

OMAHA

The Turn of the Screw Benjamin Britten/Myfanwy Piper

The Juniper Tree Philip Glass & Robert Moran/Arthur Yorinks

Where's Dick? Stewart Wallace/Michael Korie

Opera Omaha's Fall Festival 1987 was notably vigorous and ambitious -- not to mention well-planned and marketed. This regional opera company 1) produced a major 20th-century classic; 2) reiterated an up-to-the-minute new minimalist opera; and 3) worked the kinks out of an original music-drama in a pre-premiere "hands on" workshop. What's more, they sold lots of tickets and even organized a convention of out-of-town critics!

The Britten opera offered no surprises, excepting sheer excellence throughout. The company's Artistic Co-Directors, John DeMain and Stephen Wadsworth, polished *The Turn of the Screw* to high sheen: the orchestra of mostly local players supported a cast of singing actors (mostly **not** local) which worked as one unit. Beautiful period costumes, powerful

lighting effects, doll-house movable set pieces and deeply moving drama obscured the thriftiness of the scenic design. Peter Kazaras in the double role of ghost and narrator and Wendy Hill as the governess sang, enunciated and, in every way available to them, burned impressions of their characters into a hearer/watcher's soul.

Not to dwell overmuch on *The Juniper Tree*, but . . . it seems that there's more to the re-mounting of a trendy new work than just doing it. The repetitive, patterned music was not tight; the style escaped singers and players both. And certain of the director's personal choices (Ken Cazan favors method-acting) intruded uncomfortably into an essentially archetypal fairy tale; there was pacing about, there was overstated womb angst, and there was a happy ending.

The hot ticket was the comic-strip "New Vaudeville" opera, *Where's Dick?*, even though it's not yet a done story. Librettist Korie and composer Wallace read the news one morning and realized they were living in a comic-book world -- but without heroes. The story of their opera hinged on (the bungler detective) Junior's vain search for his Dick (meaning, of course, the detective hero who roots out corruption).

The idea was to use the morality and stereotype names of the comic pages, specifically from *Dick Tracy*, along with lively American vernacular music "to hoist America on its own petard." Fate Spritely, Reverend J. J. Newright, and Stump Tower are a few of the more hilarious monikers.

And gosh, kids, this was a funky, off-the-wall, high-energy "American" opera-to-be. The music really cooked. After all the gospel trio screaming, huge rocking ensemble numbers, the blues, and even a patter song, the image that sticks is the pianist/conductor (one of two keyboards in this imaginatively semi-staged workshop) shaking it, the fifteen-member cast (they all had both operatic voices and pizzazz) shaking it, and the audience shaking it in their seats.

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There was a wide range of stage activity (not yet fully realized): audience participation in "Slap Your Neighbor's Face", magic tricks of sawing bodies in half and switching bottoms, wacky parodies of real-life crook-evangelists and megalomaniac real-estate developers -- this script had it all. And it's got rhythm and a pun-filled frenetic style that could make me forget the double entendres of Cole Porter.

One example from the Finale of Act III says it all. "There's a little Dick in all of us, standing tall," transformed itself from the wistful cliché of the debauched hero to a finger-snapping whiz-bang ensemble finish. The notes were the same and the rhythms likewise, but the accretion of voices completely changed the character of the song from its beginning, in a search for Truth, to a jingoistic false happy ending. Let's hope this "opera" makes it to a real premiere.

2-3 Szymanowski's *King Roger* in Bremen

May 13, 1988

The Bremen premiere of Karol Szymanowski's opera *King Roger*, directed by Polish filmmaker Krzysztof Zanussi, brought forth several provocative dramatic ideas. In Zanussi's added prologue (German by Wolfgang Jöhling) two actors portrayed the composer, Szymanowski, and his librettist, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz; the role of the Shepherd was both sung and danced, by a sort of tag-team; and the chorus of shepherd followers in the final act were variously dressed, some in period costume like the dancer-shepherd and others like the tenor-shepherd in business clothes.

Produced by the Theater der Freien Hansestadt Bremen, the drama opened May 1, 1988 for a run of five performances. The third of these (May 13) embodied an excellent music drama in which the symbolic elements of singing, staging, instrumental scoring and lighting opened up a beautiful story. Though the actual performances were flawed in all of

the areas, the whole of the drama was gripping, immediately understandable and wonderful to behold.

American baritone Monte Pederson, in the title role, outshone the others by far. His amazingly bright and powerful voice, regal bearing and impeccable German (Rudolf Stefan Hoffmann's translation) were matched by expressive vocal variation, lyric beauty and a remarkably vivid portrait of a man wrestling with difficult matters.

Kristine Ciesinski, as his Queen Roxane, equalled him with her portrayal of religious ecstasy and the fervor and speed of her conversion to the Dionysian cult. Her singing, especially in the wordless melisma of the second act, was bewitching, powerful and sweet, though she lacked the precision in German enunciation of her colleague.

The role of the shepherd was problematic in both incarnations. James McCray, the Heldentenor, moved with grace and strength within the limits set for him by this production, and he sang powerfully and dramatically, if not always as sweetly as certain parts of the score demand. The dancer Jerzy Topolski, stunning at his first appearance, later failed to coordinate his movements with the sung phrases or to complement them meaningfully. A dancer more adept at facial expression and gestural detail could have made the production much more stunning. As it was, he got caught between stage deportment and dance technique, his command of his character being compromised by poor details. The two Shepherds exchanged places gracefully, though, even when the timing seemed awkward or arbitrary.

The lighting designer made a dramatic difference in the staging of the Shepherd's entrance, but failed to help the opera's dramatic shape in other portions of the drama. In particular, the lighting failed to delineate the dual role with subtlety. Pinchas Steinberg's conducting gave form to the drama and supported the singing surely and unobtrusively. Theo Wiedebusch prepared the choirs, and Ioan Micu (Edrisi), Kurt Mentzel (Archbishop), Maria Sandulesco (Deaconess), and Michael Schüler and Janos Radacs (dancers) completed the cast.

2-4 *St. Carmen of the Main* -- Guelph

May 19, 1988

Sydney Hodkinson's new opera, *St. Carmen of the Main*, received its premiere May 19, 1988 at the Guelph Spring Festival. The subject matter, the lowlife characters of playwright Michel Tremblay's native Montreal, was as timely, classically inspired and suited for opera as say, *The Magic Flute*, *Mahagonny* or *West Side Story*.

Hodkinson's score (subtitled "a pop song fantasia") utilized a sort of counterpoint vérité, in which the chorus sang together a great deal, but mostly with different music and words. The dialogue and exposition proceeded without pause for the most part -- with bows to the formal traditions of opera and musical comedy -- set in the language of 20th-century American popular music. Most often, duets and soloists could be understood, but the complexity of the accompaniment and the working out of the vocal parts rendered huge chunks of the libretto unintelligible.

Lee Devin fashioned the libretto from the English translation of Tremblay's play, producing country-music style lyrics such as might be sung by the title character, a singer recently returned from a successful stint in Nashville. Some of his choices were inspired, easily translating the poetry of the original to lyric form, but many were mysteriously inscrutable, hidden behind the veil of the music.

Deborah Milsom, the tragic, briefly-empowering Antigone figure, played and sang the part of Carmen convincingly, developing from a shy returnee into a progressive leader who could not escape martyrdom when her vision of hope threatened the seedy status quo. As her dresser (Harelip), Kimberley Barber exuded a lost puppy love and sang most affectingly and beautifully.

Christopher Cameron, Carmen's menacing manager Maurice, performed a basic gruff character, though his singing survived intact and expressive. More convincing was the performance of Barry Stilwell as the evil punk Toothpick; his voice

sneered and swerved in a deliberately horrible and virtuosic manner. Riki Turofsky, as the washed-up nightclub singer, Gloria, was uncomfortably real and inept.

Provocative staging by Billie Bridgman included choosing the University of Guelph Hockey Rink as the venue, complete with vast reaches of empty space behind the set, boomy sound and uncomfortable seating. Her plans for moving the chorus of whores and transvestites about the space resulted in a few powerful, challenging moments surrounded by many stock solutions and ritual enactments. Many of the principals were less capably dealt with than the large group.

The real-life costumes and evocative, surreal set by Reg Bronskill solved the problems of visual style imaginatively. These folks looked like real whores and transvestites in a real place. The opera itself might succeed with musical revisions and in a more congenial staging. It certainly shows promise, and certainly parallels the fighter its title character aims for, singing "my own music and my own words."

Repertory Operas in Hamilton and Toronto (Part II)

2-5 *La Bohème* -- Opera Hamilton

Sept. 19, 1987

The peak moments of Opera Hamilton's *La Bohème* were provided by the 3 M's: Mimi, Musetta, and the Music. The remainder of the production soared and swooped adequately, but without the romantic delirium of Puccini's garret heroes and heroines.

Romanian soprano Eva Baraian, making her Canadian debut, excelled as Mimi; her sweet/strong voice was heard even in the most intimate moments. She clung and cloyed and lived and died quite passionately, singing beautifully all the while. Her portrayal was distinguished by gestures both small and grand which rang true and larger than life -- others did not fare so well.

Katherine Terrell "acted" ferociously in the melodramatic style evidently called for by Director Irving Guttman. Her Musetta was vocally equal to the task, but she triumphed more on the basis of fiery stage presence.

The quartet of Bohemian artists all had troubles with romantic gestures. Mark Pedrotti (as Marcello) sang well but fretted poorly. Antony Barasorda's voice disappointed in the mid-range and did not shine at the heights nor pierce at the finish, while his portrayal of Rodolfo was stiff. Bruce Kelly's (Schaunard) voice sounded fine despite his jumping around; and gangly James Patterson's philosopher Colline looked the best but sounded fuzzy. Napoleon Bisson's cameos (Benoit and Alcindoro) were appropriately differentiated, even vocally.

Sets were from Portland Opera and rented costumes from Malabar. Neither the stage direction nor George Jenkins's lighting could clear up the busy crowd scene in Act II, but the Surtitles from San Francisco were a help all evening.

Daniel Lipton's conducting was vital -- central to the production's success. He accompanied confidently and drew rich playing from the Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra; just below that standard was the enthusiastic singing of the chorus and the Hamilton Children's Choir.

2-6 Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth* -- COC:
explicit sexuality or extreme hype?

Jan. 29, 1988

Is Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* a scandalous, "dirty" opera, or a 20th-century classic? The occasion of the Canadian Opera Company's current production seems a good time to consider whether music may ever be explicitly sexual. If it can be, the titters of the Toronto audience at the opera's Canadian premiere might soon turn to a sterile silence when the dreaded anti-pornography Bill C-54 becomes law.

The political life of Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth* is already very rich, regardless of what happens to it in Canada. Stalin's pronouncement in a *Pravda* article of 1936 not only completely removed the widely popular 2-year old opera from Soviet stages, it also virtually silenced the operatic voice of the composer.

The opera's performance chronicle constitutes a peculiar chapter in the history of musical composition. Shostakovich, still in his twenties at the time he composed *Lady Macbeth*, had planned to create a four-opera cycle, tracing the history of Russian women from the mid-nineteenth century through to the Revolution and beyond. The direct, stark emotional power of *Lady Macbeth* quickly proved successful not only in the major Russian opera houses of 1934 and 1935, but as far away as Cleveland, the site of the American premiere. In fact, the opera's New York concert premiere (1935) was widely discussed; an article written by Shostakovich himself (in 1934) appeared in the prominent journal, *Modern Music*.

Nothing came of the projected tetralogy however, once *Pravda* began the revolution against Shostakovich's music. It was nearly thirty years before *Lady Macbeth* returned to Soviet opera houses. Even then, the opera was renamed (*Katerina Ismailova*, after the title character), considerable changes were effected in the libretto, and some particularly objectionable portions of the music were excised. The whole sordid story shows that the issue of ideology in music is not an empty or insignificant one.

It may be fruitful to reflect upon the notion of exactly what manner of external narrative can really be expressed in music. Writers as modern and rational as Susanne K. Langer and as romantically excessive as E. T. A. Hoffmann, have argued over music's ability to portray anything explicitly, or whether music is always abstract and can only imply a narrative or a recognizable life process. Many hard-liners believe in the purity of music itself and insist that the words, staging, scenery and costumes of opera, for instance, are intrusions into the non-representational nature of music. I prefer to include as music anything which is unfolded in musical time, thus taking the view that the whole melange of opera is

music, simply because it cannot be laid out in any other way than according to the formal plan and time scheme of the music.

There are several positive factors, both purely musical and dramatic, in the current COC production which are a tribute to the artistic vision of the company. They also serve as points of interest either for Communist party ideologues of the 1930s or for modern audiences. The most important ones are the strength of the orchestra's playing, a veristic acting approach which highlights the sarcastic moments with ruthless intensity, and towering above these, the outstanding performance of Mary Jane Johnson as Katerina, the title character.

Maestro Richard Buckley led the orchestra brilliantly, most notably serving the composer by preserving the shocking, dissonant sonorities (even by today's standards!) and powerfully integrating the abstract scene-change music with the drama itself. In the most nearly explicitly sexual moment of the score (the violent bedroom scene), the trombones' urgent upward slides and languorous downward glissandos certainly stood out in relief, causing an almost universal reaction of nervous giggles in the audience. This is a boldly orchestrated piece, not for cowardly orchestral players, and the assembled masses could hardly pretend that what they heard was just pure, well-played music.

The naturalistic portrayal of the characters brings to a head another issue in opera, which is certainly a populist branch of high art. Lotfi Mansouri's clear production concept allows the deeper unspoken logic of the music to sneak up as if it were as normal and everyday as the action on stage. Though the story is easily understood and the musical rhetoric is bold and simple, it isn't difficult to divine what stood the Communists on their heads in the 1930's. The sarcasm flows freely: one recalls the old father-in-law whipping the illicit lover to within an inch of his life and then ludicrously proclaiming his weariness. It's difficult to realize the insidious power of the repeated musical patterns which accompany and animate the whipping scene and the two rape scenes. Today's audience was offered a style

of performance which brought back to life the time before minimalism rendered ostinato rhythms impotent and stylized.

Mary Jane Johnson's Katerina was many-splendoured: her diction was crisp, her voice powerfully emotive and beautiful, and her dramatic portrayal detailed and affecting. The English translation which she sang so effectively seems simple-minded (as does the German version in the published score). I can only assume that the Russian words have similar intent. The contrast of Shostakovich's emphatically lyrical vocal line with that text becomes particularly poignant when the performance is so strong; the composer's desire that Katerina be portrayed sympathetically (and therefore ambivalently) was quite fulfilled.

This COC production was powerful because it combined the elements of opera virtuosically, and raised provocative questions by its ideological boldness. I can't remember when I've heard an audience respond so spontaneously to high art music, operatic or otherwise. The political and poetic voice of the composer spoke clearly through the music. In the end, it didn't matter if sexual activity was too nearly explicit in the music and on stage. Nor did yesterday's dissonances, still spiky and loud in 1988. They were only portions of a greater matter, a masterly and bold human drama in music.

2-7 *The Merry Widow* -- COC

Jan. 15, 1988

The Canadian Opera Company turned itself out nicely on Friday last for the opening of Lehar's *The Merry Widow*. While not a perfect success, the show demonstrated moments of high sheen, when the pure, light-hearted style of the Viennese operetta was transformed into something like real, nourishing musical theatre.

It's a pity there weren't more such moments, and that they didn't begin until the entrance of Richard Stilwell as Prince Danilo. But what's worse is that the whole operetta wasn't unified by a consistent, appropriate style.

Theodore Pappas directed the action, and much blame for the dull moments must be laid at his door. Even so, some of his ensemble work was outstanding -- he produced an actively prancing, amusing and captivating "Girls, Girls, Girls" septet in Act II; fashioned a stylishly cartooned parade of greedy suitors in the First Act; and in general used the extra rim around the front of the orchestra pit to good effect. However, many of the more interesting moments of the evening resulted from individual performances which didn't seem to fit into any grand plan.

Early in the evening, for instance, Baron Zeta (Phil Stark) lumbered about the stage jabbering glibly in the only "foreign" accent to be heard. Many other characters came to life rather amusingly -- the darkly brooding Christopher Coyea and blustery Patrick Timney as the irrepressible pair of suitors, Cascada and St. Brioché, were appropriately differentiated and quite stylish. Gordon Masten's Chaplin-walking Kromow was also a delight to watch and hear.

Other characters were not so lucky. Leigh Munro sang well enough as the title character, but I think I can hardly be blamed for wanting her to make a glamorous, breathtaking entrance. The damning evidence against her performance is simply that I lusted for the sort of sweeping grandeur and overblown melodrama which I expect from Katherine Terrell, the Merry Widow on alternate nights. I would also have preferred Munro's bright voice to be adorned with sufficient consonants to make her words clear. And she seemed to breathe more loudly than is necessary or healthy between sung phrases of her arias.

Mark DuBois, as the love interest, was a more easily identified disaster. He couldn't find anything at all graceful to do with his hands, which made him appear totally at sea in the operetta style. And his rake-thin physical appearance was matched by his easily-overwhelmed tenor voice. (His singing and deportment reminded me of the infamous Joseph Papp Broadway production of *La Bohème* from Christmas of 1984, starring Linda Ronstadt and

country singer Gary Morris -- except that the pop singers inhabited the stage with more assurance, both individually and in ensemble.)

At Prince Danilo's entrance though, something coagulated into an almost palpable elegance. It wasn't that Richard Stilwell's singing voice was overpoweringly sweet (not even so pleasing as Munro's, though superior in clarity of text) or that his dialogue or music was more attractively written, but that his body filled a bigger part of the stage with grace and panache than any combination of characters had done previously. He was the definitive catalyst.

From that moment on, things became much more interesting. And momentary lapses in style weren't nearly as dispiriting. While he was on stage, Stilwell coaxed alternately lively and tender performances from his fellows . . . and from his girls. Even the Third Act Can-Can sequence in Maxim's, which has taken on a life totally unrelated to the action of the (dare I say it?) drama, was pulled from the brink of frantic decadence to a benevolent cheeriness by Danilo's ease and warmth.

Another strong element was Robert Ray's choreography, especially for the dances of the waiters and the lovers at Maxim's. The dancers embodied a seeming effortlessness which could have made the show come alive physically, as well as vocally and dramatically if everyone else had caught on. And the singers shouldn't have had so far to go. They were supported by Murray Laufer's marvelously opulent sets and (after some coordination hitches at the opening) a fine orchestral accompaniment led by conductor Richard Bradshaw.

Two small incidents shall stand for the quality of the whole. First comes the elegantly-timed but awkward joke about absent surtitles, which seemed unintentionally ironic, given the unintelligibility of so many of the spoken and sung words. I could have used surtitles.

Second was the waltz just after Danilo declared his love for the Merry Widow near the finish. I swear I could hear faint voices humming along with the lovers from behind me

and from my right, almost out of hearing. It seemed that eager romantics all over the O'Keefe Centre were happily engaged in a rapture of memory and living in a gracious present.

How I wish there had been more of those magic moments and fewer unintentional funny bits. I could have fallen for the whole thing.

2-8 *The Turn Of the Screw* -- COC

Feb. 26, 1988

"It really is an odd story. I heard it sung by the Canadian Opera Company (COC) Friday night in a pretty good production." With just such a paraphrase of the opening lines of Henry James' ghost story and Benjamin Britten's opera, *The Turn of the Screw*, might one begin to review the plot.

In fact, though it pales beside the realistic gore of contemporary mutilation horror movies, Britten's *Screw* is a creepy ghost story, and the combination of the lyricism of his vocal writing with the psycho-drama of the plot has made it a twentieth-century classic (of which there are precious few in opera).

Britten wrote the opera in the mid-50s; this year Canada's foremost opera company has mounted its first production. COC has done Britten's *Peter Grimes* and *Death in Venice* previously on the main stage, but has waited for a smaller hall in which to produce *Screw*. The warehouse-like Tanenbaum Centre, though not exactly built for chamber opera, can be adjusted to fit almost anything.

Vladimir Vukovic's set consisted of a drawing room where most of the action took place. The outdoor scenes were sung in bright light on the aprons and the ghost scenes with fog and light streaming up from beneath the boardwalk-like raked stage. A thirteen member chamber orchestra sat at floor level in front of the raised stage platform -- not the greatest compromise, since their playing often seemed loud, distracting one from the singers.

Kathleen Brett sang the central role, portraying the governess whose idyllic job caring for a boy and girl in a country manor turns into a nightmare of former servants haunting the children even unto death. Her vocal and dramatic portrayal of the young woman slipping from naive happiness into despairing paranoia was convincing and technically assured. The second act found her beautiful operatic voice and correct 19th-century manners decayed into hoarse whispers and groans as well as tortured grasping and fluttering.

Brett was aided and hindered variously by the other singers, and, for the most part, complemented by the small orchestra. The instrumentalists (conducted by Martin Isepp) seemed not to find their focus until the second act, when the drama took hold of them.

Jesse Clark (the boy Miles) and Valerie Gonzalez (his sister Flora) sang well together, especially in the children's songs, "Lavender's Blue" and "Tom, Tom the Piper's Son." And they looked good together too, though Gonzalez was an adult, perhaps twice the age of the boy soprano, and didn't look as much like a puppet as he. Their trance scenes were quite convincing -- faithful to Director Lotfi Mansouri's clearly articulated decision that the ghosts were horrible, imaginary nightmare people, instead of "real ghosts."

The ghosts were a mixed pair; Gabrielle Prata's Miss Jessel sang beautifully and slithered about threateningly, but Dennis Giesebrecht as Peter Quint disappointed. His mid-range failed him and he passed too lightly over the seductive lyrical melodies -- the part wants to sound like beautiful languorous echoing sometimes, and not at all like speedy sixteenth notes. He looked sinister, though in a still, black-and-white photo way.

Lilian Kilianski, playing the old housekeeper, Mrs. Grose, fell furthest short. Her voice seemed manufactured to sound old and cranky instead of clear and pure, and she tarted up her character with an astonishing array of mannerisms -- continual wide-mouthed amazement, excessive eyelid batting, and graceless, annoying hands and arms. Gary Rideout introduced the narrative in clear, focussed tones -- I could understand every word. His "old-making" beard and makeup didn't quite fit his young-man body.

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Overall, the production reproduced Britten's music-drama as he wrote it, the second half growing in mounting horror after a calmer first half. If it was the inexperience of the young singers which caused the opening to lag, though, this week's performances ought to be more commanding as cast members grow more closely into their roles.

The production continues this weekend, Friday and Saturday nights, 4 & 5 March, 8 PM at the Joey & Toby Tanenbaum Opera Centre, 227 Front Street East in Toronto. Call 363-2348 for tickets -- only \$10 for students.

2-9 *Riders to the Sea/Marriage Contract* -- UT Opera

March 4, 1988

The U of T Opera Division opened a bel canto 19th-century opera Friday night, featuring a naive Canadian getting snookered in a business deal with a wily foreigner. Sounds like one of these up-to-the-minute postmodern adaptations, right? Well . . . not exactly.

The opera in question, *The Marriage Contract*, was actually written in 1810 by Rossini. At the time, Canada served handily as a joke, a colony far removed from the intricacies of European civilization and culture. Today, the Canadian content would draw smiles anywhere in the world. But to a Toronto audience, the rich merchant Slook, stomping and bumbling about, was a real hoot.

It didn't hurt that Robert Longo's voice managed the early Romantic opera style a bit more closely than most of the other singers could. His innocent, overblown gestures also fit the part nicely.

Jane Leibel, playing Fanny, the young lover (you don't want to know the whole plot, trust me) also pleased the opening night crowd greatly with a clever assortment of comic techniques. Her timing was wonderful, physically, more than making up for the tonal harshness in her coloratura singing.

Constance Fisher directed cleanly and inventively, including a succession of slapstick entrances during the overture. Brian Jackson's set was beautiful and sharp, as well as having some funny trick pieces which worked flawlessly.

Regan Grant excelled vocally and dramatically as the butler. The others fulfilled their roles admirably. The orchestra played spiritedly, though sometimes out of tune, under the direction of Michael Evans. Stephen Ralls' recitative accompaniment was quite too much though; he played the piano, using wild flourishes more appropriate to a harpsichord.

One good one-act opera is quite a fine thing, but the evening also included *Riders to the Sea* by Ralph Vaughan Williams. This second helping consisted of an almost word-for-word setting of J.M. Synge's one-act tragedy.

The concluding performance was much more dramatically satisfying than the opening farce, perhaps because the ideas were simpler and more powerful. The music seemed all of the same cloth, and James Fraser Craig's orchestra supported the drama nigh perfectly. Michael Albano directed, Martin Johnson designed the set, Diane McCann-Davis the costumes and Fred Perruzza the lighting. Individually, each contributed excellently and tellingly to a very well coordinated effort.

Gordon MacLeod sang the role of the ill-fated, proud, young son. His noble performance, however, was completely overshadowed by a wonderfully matched trio of women, Lisa Gaasenbeek, Adrienne Pieczonka and Jo-Anne Bergeron, singing the roles of Maurya, the bereaved mother, and her two daughters.

Each of the three sang clearly and musically, with perfectly understandable words. And they all possessed a mournful dark tone colour which suited the subject matter, but did not hinder their beautiful singing in the slightest. Of the three, Pieczonka distinguished herself with a carefully schooled attention to the Irish dialect of the libretto. The drama was gripping, in large part because of the ensemble effort.

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The two shows continue (with different casts) this Friday and Saturday, 11 and 12 March, at 8 PM in the MacMillan Theatre in the Faculty of Music's Edward Johnson building, just off Bloor Street. Call 978-3746 for reservations.

2-10 *Faust* -- Opera Hamilton

April 28, 1988

Opera Hamilton's *Faust* was thoughtful, energetic and a worthy music drama, in spite of the merely adequate contributions of the two principals, Faust (John Fowler) and Marguerite (Stephanie Bogle). The whole was exciting and many parts were excellent.

Eric Halfvarson's Mephistopheles blustered about, finding many pleasing points on the dramatic continuum between comical and threatening. His voice and excellent deportment led the performance from the very first round bass notes. Odette Beaupré (Siebel) had the most powerful and pleasing tone of all the singers, as well as a perky, original fraternal approach to the pants role. Her comic turns as a golden calf made wonderful counterpoint to Halfvarson's voice and swirling malevolence. The dashing Dundas (Ont.) native, John Fanning (Valentin), thrilled the crowd with the palpable, vinegary substance of his voice; he shone most darkly as he lay dying and cursing his sister.

Director Ken Cazan and his Lighting Designer, Stephen Ross, conspired to create a seemingly new set from the Canadian Opera Company scenery by Walfram Skalicki. Their ideas were inspired and lively, creating effective theatre. The opening featured the inert chorus members scattered like rocks in a pasture, becoming recognizable only in response to Faust's monologue. Cazan's vividly human vision worked best with full chorus and the wonderful, spacious sets, failing most obviously in Act II, when Gounod serves up a string of arias.

Anne McWatt (Marthe) performed admirably, with restraint, and Peter Barnes

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produced a ham-handed and anachronistic Wagner. Both sang clearly and well. Daniel Lipton's elegant, assured conducting tended the singers and the drama nicely.

John Fowler's Faust was dashing and courtly but neither vocally ravishing nor dramatically individuated. Stephanie Bogle had flashes of vocal brilliance and segments of sustained artistry but her "Jewel Song," for instance, started and finished thrillingly, with only an underdeveloped, often inaudible gap between. The climactic Act II seduction scene in the garden was a struggle of stage technique rather than emotions for these two singers, though their electric union nearly overcame its flaws. The opera's end was saved by inspired stagecraft which helped the two principals greatly; a gloomy cross-hatched jail projection transformed itself into pure light as Bogle sang full forward for what seemed the first time of the opera.

The chorus singers worked remarkably well, comporting themselves as individuals in crowds and presenting the strong ideas of the director with assurance. The women were spellbinding at the beginning; the men were musically less alert throughout, tending toward anxious accelerando and general rhythmic sloppiness. The Soldiers' Chorus of Act III was staged chillingly, though the vocal sound resembled the ragtag wounded men more than was necessary for the drama.

Choral and Vocal Music (Part III)

2-11 Kurt Vonnegut's *Requiem* Text
BUFFALO

March 13, 1988

After hearing the premiere of Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Requiem* Kurt Vonnegut decided to write his own. He says Webber's text is "as junky in its sequence of ideas as the by-laws of a volunteer fire department" and wanted to bring it out of the Middle Ages and

up to date. Just lately, his revision has been translated into Latin by John Collins and set to music by Edgar D. Grana.

In all fairness to composer, performers and conductor Barbara Wagner, there's no doubt that Vonnegut was the main attraction. His name drew the crowds, his ideas initiated the whole affair, he charmed the expectant audience beforehand, and his imaginative reworking of an old familiar text made the performance a success.

In a lengthy programme note (excerpted from his *North American Review* article "The Hocus Pocus Laundromat"), Vonnegut objected to the obsequious servility of the usual Requiem text, as well as to its inhumane and sadistic piety. The author believes that if it were not in beautiful, incomprehensible Latin, the usual Requiem text would be unacceptable to all literate humans.

The author assures us though, that he 1) found many portions of the original text "unobjectionable" and 2) did not attempt to retell a sacred text humorously or satirically. This is a serious act of worship, though Vonnegut never wanders far from a deep, humane comedy. Unlike that of his play *Happy Birthday Wanda June*, though, the humor here is mature and elegant. There is no heaven, only a profound, everlasting darkness undisturbed by earthly concerns and imperfections.

Shouting his Requiem to the forces of nature and the planets hurtling through space, Vonnegut refers to Christian concepts in a literary, respectful manner:

Gambler with flesh,
Thou art the reason for my journey:
Do not cast the dice again on that day.
My wild and loving brother
Did try to redeem me by suffering death on the Cross:
Let not such toil have been in vain.

Vonnegut's vision suggests that the destructive weapons of mankind will have brought about the end of life on this earth. In such a circumstance, he argues that it makes

no difference whether the remains of faithful Christians are separated from those believed to be heathen:

Give me a place among the sheep
And the goats, separating none from none,
Leaving our mingled ashes where they fall.

In sum, Vonnegut's text is caring and loving. His alterations elevate the less appetizing notions to the level of humane, elegant and provocative discourse. The rhetoric of the English version (which Grana insisted on knowing before he would set the Latin) is full of mystery and awe.

Edgar Grana's music nicely paralleled the text. The singing was lyrical, chant-like and timeless, rather than fiercely energetic or rule-bound. The style was heavily influenced by popular music. Played by a timid ensemble of synthesizers, the accompaniment often moved in rhythms independent of the choir and soloists. Playful ostinatos leapt out of the textures sometimes, and firm choral chords, but most impressive was the final "Amen." As comforting as the voice of one's mother at bedtime and yet as chilling as the thought of death, the full choir's collective whisper stays with me.

The performance was slightly flawed; the piece cries out for a bold orchestration and a full-voiced choir. The Anglicans of Webber's *Requiem* may very well have been accustomed to "bellowing bullshit in public places" (in Vonnegut's terms), but they were highly evolved musicians. I certainly don't wish to condemn the Unitarians though, for a noble effort.

After all:

That day will be one of comical disappointment
To any who hoped to see the guilty rise again
From the embers to be judged.

2-12 Nederlands Kamerkoor -- Peace and Freedom Concert

May 8, 1988

The Netherlands Chamber Choir's "*Vrede & vrijheid*" [Peace and Freedom] concert offered a trio of rarely-performed leftist choral works. The combinations of music and words proved stimulating both politically and musically. Performing substantial 20th-century works by Eisler, Martin and Shostakovich, the small, versatile choir filled the furthest reaches of the famed Concertgebouw with equal measures of conviction and vocal sound, if not with paying customers.

They strode out on their firmest footing, beginning with Hanns Eisler's cantata *Gegen den Krieg* (1936), to a Bertolt Brecht text. This sectional work for unrelenting four-voice *a cappella* choir exhibited close parallels between the strong, simple images of the text and the ideologically bold music. Eisler's word-setting and the choir's excellent diction presented the text more powerfully than if it had simply been declaimed. The musical setting and the performance seemed compact and terse, and not at all overblown.

In a piece ranging from dispersed counterpoint to full, rich unisons, John Alldis shaped a taut, controlled, fully alive performance. The choir's practice of performing three big projects annually, hiring a different conductor for each affair, justified itself hugely. In the fourth day of a week-long Dutch tour, the singers had become sure-footed and confident with their material, showing no signs of strain or boredom. The final unison "*Dieser Krieg ist nicht unser Krieg*" (This war is not our war!), an important parallel with Dutch sentiment throughout WW II, rang out with conviction. Using a stark tonal and compositional language here, Eisler managed to express Brecht's words just as completely as his fellow countryman Kurt Weill did in *Mahagonny* and *Threepenny Opera*.

Frank Martin's *Mass for double chorus* (1922/26), which followed, was no less ambitious than the Eisler, though a good deal more refined. The not-quite-two-dozen singers

were forced to sing in eight parts, leading to an unimpressive vocal blend. In addition, they stretched themselves out in a single long line; it's a wonder they were able to blend at all.

But what a pleasure to hear yet another neglected choral gem; few choral conductors are inclined to such adventurous material, and even fewer choirs are technically able to perform it. This ensemble makes the eclectic style of Martin's *Mass* sound like common practice harmony.

Martin follows time-honored liturgical divisions of the text but applies thoroughly modern coloratura to the Creed when the Holy Spirit is mentioned, and vigorous jazz rhythms to the "Gloria," the "et resurrexit" and the "Hosanna," all of which were sung stylishly by the Kamerkoor.

The simple, deeply spiritual settings of the "Sanctus" and the "Domine Deus" prevent the listener from dismissing Martin's efforts as a modern formalistic exercise. The choir had the expressive resources for these sections as well, including some extremely low bass notes. They finished the *Mass* with a heartfelt, beautiful plea for peace, which acknowledged the liturgical roots of the "Dona nobis pacem," while it applied a richly contemporary feeling. They expressed a completely modern desire, both for the 20's in the composer's Switzerland and for the nuclear 80's in Holland.

Shostakovich's *Ten Poems* (1951) for four-voice mixed choir, replaced the originally scheduled *Figure humaine* by Poulenc. Sung in Russian, and constituting the entire second half of the concert, these settings were the most challenging of the programme. The texts, including one anonymous pamphlet distributed in Odessa in 1902, were chosen from *Revolutionary Poetry (1890-1917)*, a collection published in 1950.

The choir's diction was French-sounding, not quite weighty enough for Russian (odd, since Dutch is such a guttural language), and they hit some cadences a bit out of tune, showing their human imperfection most clearly. But even through a double-Dutch language blur (Russian in our ears, Dutch before our eyes), the thunderous shout of the pamphlet

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(poem #3) called the audience to be "*kameraden-strijders*", and the vocal trumpet-sounds of #9 hailed the international workers' holiday, "*de Eerste mei*!" In the final poem, Vladimir Tan-Bogoraz's words, modelled "*naar Walt Whitman*," proved the internationality of music: the Kamerkoor certainly sang the nobility of the free inhabitants of the fatherland, though the individual words of the text escaped translation.

Congratulations and gratitude to the Nederlands Kamerkoor and John Alldis for a provocative, wide-ranging evening of choral music. I haven't been challenged like this for quite a while. Here's hoping for more such socially conscious and musically adept mixtures -- soon.

2-13 Paul Sperry -- Sounds From the Left Bank

May 22, 1988

Sounds From the Left Bank features modern music and frequent premieres in its three-concert spring season. Organized by the Queens Symphony Orchestra, the Sunday afternoon series happens in PS #1 in Long Island City, a former schoolhouse given over to brightly-colored, whimsical modern visual art exhibits.

The concert of May 22 was comprised of a short string quartet fragment by Charles Ives, two recent chamber pieces by living New York composers (both present), and two humorous vocal "cantatas" for chamber players with tenor Paul Sperry. Though the sung pieces were silly and light-hearted, Sperry's excellent performances complemented the visual art exhibits perfectly. The other performers seemed oblivious to their surroundings, content to play music blandly in an aggressively bright art gallery.

Ives's "Scherzo: Holding Your Own," a recently fashionable bit of Americana, was performed in an ordinary way, but for the astonishing loudness of the sound in the small, starkly white room with wooden floors. It didn't help Ives or the quartet much that the art on the walls, by Adir Sodré, consisted of a series of pop-art, parodic pastels, all with cute

little penises sprouting in unlikely places. Picasso II (1988), for instance, looked harmless enough, a cheerful red and orange rectangle which might have advertised a retrospective art exhibit, except that each of the letters of Picasso's name was a gracefully curved, primitive, anatomically correct you-know-what, with two whatchamacallits at one end and a thingamajig at the other.

For the second piece the strings were joined by clarinetist Edward Gilmore for two movements of Stefania de Kennessey's *Quintet*. Kindly put, Ms. de Kennessey's technique reflected reverent homage to Schubert and other Classical masters, combining easily understandable melodic and rhythmic materials in the forms of a bygone age. More honestly, the stuff reminded me of P.D.Q. Bach's as-yet unknown Romantic counterpart, K.O. Schubert, or would have, had it been played with the irreverent gusto proper to that composer's work.

When Mr. Sperry arrived to perform Richard Wilson's *The Ballad of Longwood Glen* (1978), he challenged the room's brash visual display with his spiffy pink jacket and checked pants. He also spoke eloquently and extemporaneously about the piece's origins (it was written for Peter Pears, but Sperry sang the premiere). His singing of the ironic, humorous and understated poem by Nabokov was even more elegant than either his speaking or his dress. Sperry led harpist Susan Jolles graciously and effortlessly through a droll reading of Wilson's song of suburban American foibles. His diction was crisp, his high notes floating and clear, and his voice powerful or humorous when required. Sperry has what the music requires, a beautiful voice first, and an elegant comic ability in reserve.

After intermission a septet encompassing the quartet with added flute, clarinet and harp played Jerome Jolles's *One Word More*, explained by its composer to be a musical analog to tourist shapshots. The work's four movements resemble Virgil Thomson's portraits in their simplicity, brevity and evocative accessibility. Jolles is particularly adept at giving new life to jazzy dance rhythms. In the slow (3rd) movement Edward Gilmore brought forth an elegant and refined clarinet solo from the composer's other, more romantic side.

For the finish, Sperry returned, minus his spiffy clothes, done up as a rumpled academic. Larry Alan Smith's *The Scrolls* sets Woody Allen's hilarious text as a spoken prologue with a sung cantata following. Sperry shuffled in, all disorganized, delivered the preamble with excellent comic timing and then put his glasses on and started singing. The story concerns a shirt manufacturer who has hit a bad spell and is kvetching to God. Sperry used his voice imaginatively, whether as the whiner, as the voice of God or finally as the merchant rejoicing because his alligator shirts have proved a success. Because his technique is so sure, Sperry was unafraid to wander into non-standard vocalism just for comic effect.

As the star of the concert, Sperry more than justified the series' investment in him, despite the almost trivial repertoire he sang. He is a consummate performer, elegant, completely understandable and entertaining. It's no wonder that composers have frequently chosen him to perform the premieres of their more complex works.

2-14 Kevin McMillan at the Guelph Spring Festival

May 25, 1988

Wednesday night, baritone Kevin McMillan charted a safe path through the waters of the vocal repertoire in his Guelph Spring Festival recital. His clear, strong, light baritone voice sailed easily through a programme of standard works by Schubert, Duparc, Wolf, Britten and Ravel. In fact, the only surprising composer, 20th-century Canadian Pierre Mercure, was represented by a conservative little song cycle, *Dissidence*.

Perhaps a critic ought to be circumspect at this point, considering McMillan's announcement before singing the final Wolf Lied, "Abschied." The song tells of a man alone in his garrett who, having received an uninvited visitor, is then regaled with a litany of his faults. The young baritone, winner of the Guelph National Vocal Competition, directed his audience's attention to the song's vilification of uninvited criticism, and then proceeded to sing with a heightened sense of urgency.

Which is not to say that Mr. McMillan performed any of his songs less than tastefully or stylishly. Only that this one song's immediacy and vehemence seemed a bit overstated and out of context. Overall, and in particular in the German repertoire, McMillan sang with a clear, focussed tone and impeccable, high unbelievable, consonants. And I shouldn't have been disappointed; he didn't promise to move me to the very depths of my soul by his compelling delivery, nor to deliver an astonishing abundance of vocal colors into the dry acoustic of the War Memorial Hall.

The poetry of the Mercure songs was by Gabriel Charpentier, also a Canadian, though you couldn't have proved it by the scanty programme notes. The texts were laid out nicely in very small print, some paraphrased and some translated word for word. Too bad that the house lights were down all during the first half. It wasn't so important for the standard works, but Mercure's cycle was certainly unfamiliar to the audience and in a language foreign to Guelph. *The Songs and Proverbs of William Blake*, every vernacular word perfectly enunciated, emerged as shining examples of how a song recital might need no printed texts. Would that I heard German as fluently as English; McMillan's ability in that language is prodigious for a Canadian (maybe even for a German).

McMillan's encore, Benjamin Britten's setting of the folk song "The Foggy Dew," stands as proxy for his total performance, as well as his accompanist's. Sung at a fairly slow pace, the song sounded careful, almost too perfect. Each word could be understood, the story was told well, all vocal tones were clear and ringing (with hardly any color variance), and the song about a compassionate, chance-taking weaver was pretty, but not overwhelming. John Greer played the piano as if he were "accompanying" sensitively, instead of making beautiful, vital music. He tended toward the soft pedal and a mushy tone, without rhythmic drive, though he plays all the notes easily. I want more fervent commitment from these two excellent musicians, who are certainly capable of excellent music making.

Perhaps a paraphrase of one of Blake's Proverbs could encourage them to increase the level of expression without, I should hope, harming their career chances. "The tygers of passion are wiser than the horses of instruction."

2-15 Muti's Verdi *Requiem*:
Dead or Alive?

VERDI: *Messa da Requiem* ("live"). Studer, Zajic, Pavarotti, Ramey, Muti, Chorus and Orchestra of La Scala. EMI (d) CD (2) 749390 2.

This new live recording of Verdi's great choral masterpiece has been weighed in the balances and found wanting. It is crude and overbearing, almost lacking in delicate, tender elegance. It seems to be devoid of refinement . . . Hey, wait a minute, this isn't some Mozart quartet we're discussing. It's *supposed* to be bold and hard to miss. I must have started writing the wrong review.

So let's begin again by figuring out what's right. The programme notes (of which more in a bit) remind us that Verdi intended to write a piece of nationalistic bombast. This recording, using the forces of the most famous Italian opera house, fulfills that requirement nicely. The sound is really thrilling and impossible to ignore. It's even vulgar in a dramatic and compelling way.

The CD format captures a dynamic range unheard in recordings of the same work from, say, 20 years ago. The hushed whispers of the opening are beautifully still, and volume and intensity of the "Dies Irae" are mind-blowing. The hair-raising moments quite justify the technical advances in sound reproduction.

Another big thrill from the original production of the Requiem (conducted by Verdi in 1874) must have been the sound of four famous opera singers bursting the seams of the solo parts. Here too, this CD distinguishes itself. Who would argue with the choice of Samuel Ramey as the bass soloist? His fully mature, but still young and fresh voice comes

closest to embodying the burnished gold of the color photograph on the enclosed pamphlet cover.

The soprano, Cheryl Studer, and mezzo, Dolora Zajic, also sound like star singers. Though their publicists haven't yet succeeded in making them instantly recognizable by their last names, they each have wonderful, rich voices and sing passionately and musically. Their "Recordare" duet is a model of good ensemble singing.

The anomaly among the soloists is the tenor. Pavarotti's voice sounded better, of course, more than 20 years ago, when he recorded the same role with less discerning equipment. Still and all, for sheer adrenalin rush (his and mine both), he fills the bill, though he's different musically, vocally and emotionally from the three younger singers. His "Ingemisco" isn't much fun to listen to, for all the holes in the vocal fabric. However, the unmistakable first entry of the tenor soloist, "Kyrie Eleison," is a shining moment. Pavarotti's voice still thrills me.

Muti has recorded a mighty exciting, individual performance, though he has not defined the Requiem for all time. The chorus might be inexact sometimes, and the orchestra's brassy occasionally blatty, but the performance is by turns lovingly done and visceral.

However, if the following list of drawbacks would bother you, don't spend your money on these two disks: 1) an emphasis on the physical thrills of loud choral singing and brass playing; 2) three sets of liner notes that don't say much new or interesting (the English is translated into Italian, but the German and French are "original"); 3) unmusical track divisions which not only ignore musical form most of the time, but occasionally even clip the first word of the soloist's lick; 4) shoddy indexing of the tracks which makes moving around a tedious business of page-flipping; and 5) a shady definition of live recording which includes takes from June 26 and 29, 1987, as well as studio retakes on the days in between, but no dates after the last performance (think about it).

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This recording is designed to be marketed to an audience susceptible to the charms of famous opera singers and the conductor Riccardo Muti with the name of La Scala behind him. It also offers a thrilling Verdi Requiem which is sometimes sloppy but ultimately an individual interpretation, and a committed performance.

Chapter 3: PROGRAMME NOTES

3-1 Elmar Oliveira Recital:
Violin Sonatas by Mozart, Prokofiev and Brahms

Aug. 9, 1987

(Commissioned by Mary Ann Feldman, programme annotator for the Minnesota Orchestra, this essay was written for the Sommerfest recital of Elmar Oliveira & Jeffrey Siegel)

Sonata in E-minor for Piano and Violin, Opus I, #4, K. 304
by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

The sonata in E-minor (K. 304) is one of a set of six, Opus 1, which Mozart published in Paris in 1778. He wrote them as part of a program he and his father Leopold carried out to find for him a prestigious position which would assure him a modicum of fame and fortune.

The young composer travelled with his mother during 1778: first to Mannheim (where Wolfgang met and fell in love with Aloysia Weber, a young opera singer -- sister of Constanze whom he would later marry); then to Paris, center of the musical world (where his mother died); and on to Munich, home of the Bavarian Electress Marie Elisabeth to whom Mozart hoped to present his Opus 1.

A letter to Leopold from Mannheim at the end of February gives a progress report on the sonatas: Mozart writes that the engraver he might use in Mannheim is stingy and insists that he put up half the money for the publication himself. Perhaps the charms of Aloysia or other distractions of Mannheim were really responsible, but Mozart claims that he has finished four of the six and wishes to postpone writing the last two until he arrives in Paris "where the engravers are delighted to get something new and pay handsomely."

These six sonatas are less a musically coherent whole than a convenient set, designed after a customary model. In the dozen and a half extant letters between Mozart and his father which mention the compositions, scarcely ever is an individual sonata con-

sidered -- always the set of six. From the obsessive attention paid these sonatas, we can infer that they were to be an important public statement, his first publication, in Paris.

The set was also dedicated to Marie Elisabeth, the Electress in Munich, with the hope that when Mozart presented her with bound copies of the publication, she'd reward him with a cash gift in encouragement of his industry and accomplishment. The E-minor sonata is, however, a piece all of its own, and notable in Mozart's catalogue. It is Mozart's only composition in E-minor and represents the pathos newly evident in this only-just-mature composer's musical vocabulary.

The death of his mother and his father's stern advice against following his heart in the Aloysia Weber matter are certainly causes of sadness in Mozart's life which we read of in his letters. But over and above all this talk, curiously, runs a correspondence trail of trivial discussion about the politics of publishing a set of six violin sonatas in Paris (or Mannheim, whichever would turn out to be more profitable and prestigious). So, it could be argued that the demands of a professional composer's life were as great a source of stress for Mozart as other, emotional matters.

In the format of his debut publication, Mozart followed the lead of two other composers, J. C. Bach (1735-1782) and Joseph Schuster (1748-1812) by writing a set of six sonatas of two movements each. (Schuster's set of six sonatas were thought to be Mozart's K. 55-60 until Alfred Einstein unmasked them earlier in this century.)

Mozart thought of his own piano/violin sonatas though, as a bold departure: he intended more of a dialogue between the two instruments than was previously the custom -- his own earlier sonatas resembled more a violin obligato solo grafted to a piano piece.

If Mozart's activities in Paris centered on publishing a worthy Opus 1 to make his name known in the world, he also wrote lighter music (e.g. the concerto for flute and harp) which could be engraved for profit. It seems that between times, he paid scant attention to the level of comfort he and his ailing mother needed to maintain their health.

After the death of his mother, once Mozart had surveyed Paris's musical life without making a suitable impression, it was time to move on. But instead of hurrying home to Salzburg, where Leopold had procured a post as organist for his son, the wayward composer chose to go to Munich, where the Electress was . . . and where Aloysia Weber had just been hired as soprano in the opera company.

Alas, after months of postponements and fretting over the details, and then waiting for the printed product to be delivered, Mozart finally presented his Opus 1 to Marie Elisabeth, only to receive another elegant watch instead of money.

The violin and piano carry on a dialogue in the first movement: sometimes with different themes and sometimes by contrapuntal treatment of the same material. The nervous, quirky, opening motive gives way to a repeated note idea wherein lies most of the fateful, agonizing quality for which this sonata is renowned.

The minuet is graceful, but not at all the cheerful, light stuff of Haydn's minuets, nor yet the furious Scherzi of Beethoven: it resembles the simplicity of a *sotto voce* music box. Its contrasting central section (B) resembles a sung chorale, full of down-turning appoggiaturas. The gently moving harmonic rhythm of this middle segment and the outline of its melody seem to be the skeleton of the more-involved opening section (A). When the A Section sounds again it becomes more of a variation than a return to the original material.

Sonata in D major for Violin and Piano, Op. 94a
by Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953)

The identity of Prokofiev's Sonata in D major, Op. 94a as a genuine part of the modern violinist's repertoire is an interesting chapter in music history.

Let's begin with the Flute Sonata Op. 94 from which it was transcribed: the composer had removed to the relatively peaceful Ural mountains where he could escape war-torn Moscow for the summer of 1943. Having just finished the orchestration of his Tolstoy opera *War and Peace*, he was at work on the ballet *Cinderella*, as well as the flute sonata.

Perhaps Prokofiev's fond memories of the playing of the French flautist Barrere, from his days of living in the West, motivated his composition of the flute sonata.

Richter and Kharkovsky played the flute sonata in Moscow in the December of 1943; the violin virtuoso David Oistrakh heard it in that version and he soon pressed Prokofiev to allow him to edit the solo part in a transcription for violin. Oistrakh's memoir on Prokofiev gives prominent mention to his thought that the flute sonata "ought to live a fuller and richer life on the concert stage" (i.e. as a violin sonata).

It is a wonder that Oistrakh was able to be so charitable -- his memoir also recalls how he had been reamed out by Prokofiev years before, when the famous composer had to sit through a "sub-standard" performance of the Scherzo from his Violin concerto at the hands of the teen-aged violinist. Oistrakh's anecdote notes that after enough time had passed that the two were more artistically equal, he reminded Prokofiev of the incident. The composer remembered almost every detail of the concert including the dressing-down he had given a young man. He was, however, embarrassed to find that the famous violin virtuoso, Oistrakh, had been the victim of his own infelicitous behavior.

After the revamped work's performance at the 1947 Festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music in Copenhagen, the elderly sometime music critic, George Bernard Shaw, hailed it as "a humorous masterpiece of authentic violin music." This bit of history, dug up by inveterate "musico-lectioner" Nicholas Slonimsky, gives credence to the notion that Oistrakh's editing of the piece for violin has been successful from the start.

In fact, the keyboard part remains the same throughout, and all the notes of the flute version are retained in the edition for violin. The actual changes are few, consisting of added double stops and bowing articulation.

How this affects the sound of the sonata is quite another matter though. The relatively white and cool tone of the flute is well suited to the ironic qualities of the music. This music is, after all, more in the vein of *Peter and the Wolf* or the *Classical Symphony*

than it is the serious, iconoclastic, ultra-modern Prokofiev. The easily apparent phrase structures and consonant melodic/harmonic language jibe with the image of the flute as an uncomplicated "classical" instrument.

The lyricism and playfulness in the music of the flute sonata are increased by the adaptation to the more voluptuous violin tone. In particular, the tender moments are more highly contrasted with the antic elements in the violin's sound. Though Prokofiev was an innovative orchestrator, he seems to have written not only an excellent flute sonata -- the violin sonata also seems right and expressive.

Part of this is due to problems of range; the melodic instrument has to carry important rhythmic beats in the range just below the treble clef where a flute cannot be heard as well as a violin.

Musical events to listen for: transition material which sounds like fiddle music, and the contrast between the lyrical and rhythmic themes in the opening movement; the furiously fast dance of the Scherzo as opposed to the calm duple meter of its middle section; and the concluding Rondo, which alternates between a "Peter and the Wolf" type cheerful march and something that sounds suspiciously like Czerny finger-strengthening exercises.

Sonata No. 1 in G major for Violin and Piano, Opus 78
by Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Donald Tovey, surveying the chamber music of Brahms in *Cobbett's*, writes that "as he took extraordinary pains ... to destroy all unfinished and unpublished manuscripts, we are almost reduced to guess-work as to his methods of composition."

Disregarding for the moment the question of *why* one needs to know what made Brahms tick, we can rejoice with Sir Donald Francis that musical detective work is unnecessary in the study of Brahms's "Regenlied" Sonata, Opus 78 (1879) for violin and piano. The sonata owes its nickname to Brahms's self-quotation of melodies and characteristic rhythms

from "Regenlied" and "Nachklang", two songs from Op. 59 of 1873. And besides the obvious quotations, there are other melodic ideas derived from the songs' fertile accompaniment patterns.

The two songs are nearly indivisible, using the same melodic material and poetic images. The first, "Regenlied," is longer and more complicated musically; "Nachklang" (a literal "echo" of the first song's melody) is a more compressed composition, comparing the rain to tears of deep grief.

The melody of the songs (and the emotion behind it) must have been deeply important and personal for Brahms. His compositional method relied on the concept of seeds which were planted, some of which would be more fertile later. Opus 78 was not his first attempt at a violin sonata; over twenty years earlier, Robert Schumann had encouraged him to compose one. But the perfectionist Brahms was not the kind of composer to whip something off lightly and it was his fourth attempt that produced a completed piece.

The introductory accompaniment figure from the first of the two songs is a thrice-repeated note followed by portentous staccato tones descending the octave in a minor key. This becomes the main theme of the first movement of the sonata by retaining the halting repetitions and the descending octave compass. The differences are: it now appears in G-major and the octave fall is quicker and more sustained. The main theme of the last movement Rondo is the melody of the songs, intact, but in a major key.

In March 1879 Brahms had received an honorary degree from the University of Breslau for which he was to compose the *Academic Festival Overture*, Op. 80. The university's citation lauded him as "First among contemporary masters of serious music," a statement which drew the (f)ire of his rival Richard Wagner.

Completed early in the summer of 1879, the sonata was copied out and sent to his three trusted friends, Joseph Joachim, Clara Schumann, and Elizabeth Herzogenberg, all of whom recognized the beautiful melody of the earlier song. This recognition of such a

poignant grieving music prompted the composer's surgeon friend Theodor Billroth to declare that the intimacy of Op. 78 would be desecrated by concert performance. Let us hope not.

3-2 Singing Wilderness Festival Concert

Aug. 1, 1987

(A set of notes commissioned by Cary John Franklin, conductor of the Singing Wilderness Festival Chamber Orchestra.)

Vivaldi (1678-1741) *Concerto for Flute, Oboe, Bassoon and Strings*, Op. 44 #16 (RV 570) "La tempesta di mare"

Because little of Vivaldi's music was published in his lifetime, it wasn't until the 1920's, when two important hoards of Vivaldi manuscripts were discovered, that he became known as an important Baroque composer. The works which were published belong to standard instrumental genres: solo and multiple concertos, trio sonatas and solo keyboard sonatas. The church music, cantatas and operas all lay fallow, awaiting this century's appetite for early music.

Among the most famous of his compositions is a group of four concerto grossos (alternating between full orchestra and a small group) depicting the seasons of the year. Though it is neither the earliest instance of programme music nor the most evocative, *The Four Seasons* has captured the imagination of scholars and amateurs alike, pointing the way to Schubert's "The Trout," Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*, Berlioz's *Fantastic Symphony* and the tone poems of Richard Strauss -- all, significantly, arising from the Romantic 19th century. The recording techniques of our century have both drastically increased a composer's ability to recreate sounds of nature and trivialized earlier attempts.

Despite the popularity of *The Four Seasons*, music with extramusical titles is rare in Vivaldi's catalogue. He did, however, compose no less than three concertos with the same title as tonight's triple concerto, one for solo violin and another for solo flute. The violin concerto is unrelated to the other two, but the flute concerto is an earlier version of the

triple, with added parts for oboe and bassoon solos. The flute remains the most prominent of the three soloists. The bassoonist ornaments the basso continuo, and the oboe plays a double reed adjunct to the violin section.

The Baroque concerto format of three movements -- fast, slow, fast -- served Vivaldi's pictorial needs well, regardless of whether it works for our modern era. The stormy sea is invoked in two different moods, a turbulent opening and a dramatic finish. The slow middle movement provides musical contrast, a bit of repose and a calmer face of the sea.

The first movement's 4/4 romp of octave-spanning scale passages and bumpy repeated notes is made of simple musical materials executed at high speed and in combinations of varying complexity. The waves of rising pitches and a violin solo featuring unexpectedly chromatic repeated notes set an appropriately tempestuous mood. The second movement calm of dotted rhythms and lighter orchestration is broken by passages of arpeggios in unison. To close, using the same tactics as in the opening, Vivaldi speeds up the tempo to a fast waltz in one beat to the bar, a ploy which keeps the turgid bustling and thumping repeated notes fresh.

Mozart (1759-1791) *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* (K. 525)

One of Mozart's letters from 1787 tells how the people of Prague embraced his opera *The Marriage of Figaro* by adapting it to their social needs. He writes:

I looked on with the greatest pleasure while all these people flew about in sheer delight to the music of my 'Figaro,' arranged for quadrilles and waltzes.

In fact, Leopold Mozart had encouraged his son to write lighter pieces all along, to make money. During his trip to Paris in 1778 (for the purpose of publishing Opus 1, a serious group of violin and piano sonatas) young Mozart read a letter from his father

exhorting him to write "something short, easy and popular . . . what is slight can still be great if it is written in a natural, flowing and easy style."

So it should come as no surprise that he composed the light-hearted "serenade," *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*, in the same year as *Don Giovanni*. (He might as well get in on the action of composing new stuff for the public as to stand by unpaid while his "serious" works were arranged by others.) Earlier in the year Mozart had been discouraged by his father from accompanying his "Figaro" singers (Nancy Storace and Michael Kelly) back to London. Then in May (during the composition of *Don Giovanni*, as all who have seen the movie *Amadeus* will remember) he suffered the death of his father and the sorting out of the estate.

There were originally five movements (the second has been lost) to this familiar work, dated 10 August 1787 in Vienna. The remaining four correspond to the standard classical symphony, slightly miniaturized: 1) a sonata-form allegro; 2) a slower variations or A-B-A movement (combined in this case); 3) a minuet and trio; and 4) a rollicking Rondo to conclude.

Randall Davidson (1953-) *The Land Where One Never Dies*

The Land Where One Never Dies was commissioned by the Composer's Commissioning Project for St. Anthony Park's Music in the Park Series, and premiered in June, 1982. Written after the composer's divorce in 1980 and a difficult two-year compositional silence, the piece was a long time coming and many months in the making. Its story symbolizes Davidson's own reawakening to life after a time of emotional distress.

The parable for narrator and piano trio is based on an Italian folktale and consciously modelled on Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* as a work for both children and grown-ups. Throughout the journey into regions where time moves at varying speeds, the piano represents a clock-like regularity, its cyclical musical ideas repeating over and over at different

speeds and intensities. The violin and cello portray time in a more dramatic, incident-oriented way: their statements grow less musically metrical as the boy of the story passes from a mountain to a forest to an ocean, until he reaches the land of eternity, where dramatic events cease and only the monotony of regular time passing remains. Notable is a passage in which the cello (Davidson's instrument) bursts free of metrical constraints to mimic the speech of the boy in the story.

Copland (1900-)

Appalachian Spring Suite (original instrumentation)

Aaron Copland, the elder statesman among living American composers, led a veritable parade of young musicians who studied in Paris with Nadia Boulanger. The young man who so eagerly pressed his educational program on his colleagues, grew to be an articulate spokesman, writing and speaking on behalf of an American school of composition both vital and non-derivative of European models.

An excellent example of his efforts on behalf of fellow composers is a collection of songs he edited in the late 1920's, *The Cos Cob Song Volume*. All the songs are settings of English-language poetry (mostly American); and the fact that we know so few of the composers today is shameful, for the songs are of almost uniformly high quality.

Copland's own contribution to the songbook is an uncompromisingly modern ("atonal") setting of an e e cummings poem. One might glibly suggest that the political forces accompanying America's swing into wartime pushed Copland toward the composition of such "popular" works from the early 40's as *Fanfare for the Common Man*, *Lincoln Portrait*, *Rodeo*, and *Appalachian Spring*. However, it would be more accurate to note that terse modernisms have continued to crop up in his work alongside more accessible methods. Like Mozart, Copland had more than one weapon in his musical arsenal.

The fifth of Copland's six ballets, *Appalachian Spring* was premiered on October 30, 1944, with choreography by Martha Graham. The ballet music was soon edited to form

tonight's suite and later reconfigured for larger orchestral forces, in the version which is most familiar. An eager music lover might consult the *New Grove's Dictionary* article on Copland for a lengthy illustration of the composer's orchestration and composition techniques. The more relaxed among us will listen quietly for the variations on "Simple Gifts," one of Copland's very few completely verbatim musical quotations of folk material.

Davidson *Mexico-Bolivar Tango* (world premiere)

This tango was commissioned as part of a larger work for Ensemble Capriccio and first performed in March of this year.

The composer, by this time a Managing Composer of the Minnesota Composers Forum and staff composer for Actors Theatre of St. Paul, has written a light-hearted dance piece named for two towns in central Missouri.

Ostentatious Mexico is represented by overtly, archly Romantic music, and unprepossessing Bolivar by a Country-Western-inspired theme. The two themes intertwine near the end. "Mexico-Bolivar Tango" has been arranged especially for this Singing Wilderness Festival concert by Mr. Davidson.

3-3 McMaster Symphony Concert

Nov. 1, 1987

Overture from The Flying Dutchman by Richard Wagner (1813-1883)

In 1838 Richard Wagner read Heinrich Heine's account of the myth of a sailor condemned to wander the seas in search of the redemptive love of a woman. The idea for a seafaring opera on that subject was made real to him, however, in the following year. The young composer and his wife endured a harrowing sea voyage (after Wagner was fired from his conducting job at Riga) en route to Paris to conquer the musical world.

When Wagner arrived in Paris, though, not everything fell into place immediately. While he was creating the libretto and music for *The Flying Dutchman*, his poverty compelled him to the tedious work of extracting cornet and piano arrangements from Donizetti's opera *La favorita* for publisher Maurice Schlesinger.

Dutchman clearly demonstrates the revolutionary differences between Donizetti's style and Wagner's. It differs even from Wagner's successful opera, *Rienzi* (produced in Dresden in 1842). For instance, the method of unifying characters and ideas with musical mottos (leit-motifs) which was to become so important in Wagner's later work, makes its appearance.

Musical unity is significant to the overture on tonight's program. This overture was the last part of the opera to be composed (5 November 1841). Into it Wagner wove the important musical ideas: the Dutchman's theme at the beginning (in horns and bassoons), the stormy ocean, the serene "Redemption" motto in English horn, and Senta's love theme. It's like having the whole opera compacted into purely instrumental form.

Violoncello Concerto in C Major by Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Franz Joseph Haydn's C Major Cello Concerto was composed in 1765, according to the best scholarly estimates. One method of dating the piece is a catalogue of compositions which the young composer drew up to save his job. His employer, Prince Nikolaus the Magnificent, officially scolded him about his lack of industry in that year.

It has been surmised that the concerto was written for Joseph Weigl, a cellist friend of Haydn's and one of the first of the young virtuoso players to arrive at Eisenstadt at about the same time as Haydn in 1761. Haydn later stood as godfather to Weigl's son Joseph (who became a composer of German singspiel).

In any event, it wasn't until 1961 that the C Major Concerto was rediscovered in the Prague National Museum. Mstislav Rostropovich was the first cellist to record it in the West -- with the English Chamber Orchestra under Benjamin Britten. To complement the Haydn

concerto, Britten composed the *Symphony for Cello and Orchestra* as well as new cadenzas for the Concerto.

Haydn, in effect, standardized Classical concerto form as he went along. The C Major Concerto, from the beginning of his career, features a ritornello-rondo form (the full orchestra plays a section which is immediately repeated by the soloist). The first movement's tempo allows a moderately paced tutti passage to be decorated by the virtuoso cellist. In each of the last two movements the soloist begins with a long-held note. The middle movement moves on to a passionate singing melody and the Allegro molto to a jittery perpetual motion.

Symphony No. 8 in G Major, Op. 88 by Antonin Dvořák (1841-1904)

Dvořák's 8th Symphony is sometimes called the "English" Symphony, a label as misleading as it is informative. It does, for instance, remind us that the piece was first published in England, by Novello. In 1889 the composer was feuding with his regular publisher, Fritz Simrock, during the composition of the G Major Symphony. Simrock wanted smaller, cheaper (mass-marketable) items, but Dvořák's muse was serving up massive symphonies, Te Deums and Requiems. As a result, the English publisher got the nod.

To be perfectly scrupulous, Dvořák's 7th Symphony (D Minor) should be labelled "English" because it was written on commission from the London Philharmonic Society in 1885. It was perhaps a *quid pro quo* for the honorary membership the society had conferred on the eminent foreigner a year earlier. The composer had replied in his own quaint English to accept the honor:

I take my the liberty to beg you mine greatest thankfulness to express to the directory of the celebrated Philharmonic Society.

In fact, the G Major Symphony was first performed in February 1890 in Prague (for a Czech honorary degree). It was, of course, later played in London, both in July of that

same year and in June of 1891 when Dvořák received his honorary doctorate from Cambridge University.

Fortunately for us, Dvořák's grasp of musical language is more direct and simple than his command of English. There are no awkward surprises in the G Major Symphony, just memorably delightful sounds: the delicate flute melody of the slow movement, the Trio of the third movement (a reworking from his opera *The Stubborn Lovers*), and the bold trumpet call which begins the final movement.

3-4 Burst of Bernstein, Bach-Elgar Choir

Nov. 21, 1987

(Written for the Bach-Elgar Choir concert, Burst of Bernstein, an early 70th birthday celebration for Bernstein.)

Leonard Bernstein (b. 1918) has had an indescribably large effect on 20th-century musical life. A made-for-TV star to rival his hero, President John F. Kennedy, Bernstein is a true American success story, with triumphs as conductor, composer and television *bon vivant*. Springing from a middle-class Jewish immigrant family and a Harvard education, he became the first American conductor to lead a major American orchestra, as well as the first to conduct opera at the famed La Scala. By 1971 Bernstein was *Conductor Emeritus* of the New York Philharmonic and had celebrated his 1000th concert on their podium. (He was even considered a candidate to portray Tchaikovsky and Gershwin on the silver screen, though a film career has, thus far, eluded him.)

The musical *Candide* (1956), adapted by Lillian Hellman from Voltaire's classic drama, began life as an overtly political work, commenting on the right-wing fanaticism of the McCarthy era. However, the lasting value of the work lies in Bernstein's musical gestures, which constitute a veritable catalogue of loving operatic parody. The often-excerpted overture employs themes from several important moments of the opera, but its main impetus

is a jittery skittery tune (an echo of Mozart's *Figaro* overture, perhaps?) which appears as soon as the opening fanfare has sounded. The composer's undeniable lyric gift is exploited in the final chorus, "Make Your Garden Grow."

West Side Story (1957), completed just after *Candide*, needs hardly any introduction. Bernstein's adaptation (in collaboration with Stephen Sondheim, Arthur Laurents, and Jerome Robbins) of the ultimate love story (Romeo & Juliet) never faltered in its journey from hit musical to critical success to enduring classic of American musical life. Many's the commentator who earnestly believes that Bernstein could have saved American musical theatre single-handedly had he not chosen to be a serious orchestral conductor.

Coincidentally, the other works on tonight's program are also consecutive opuses. *Kaddish* (1963), is Bernstein's third symphonic work (though it is like oratorio), and demonstrates again his refusal to be satisfied with the European ideal of pure symphonic music foisted on him by his conducting mentor Serge Koussevitsky. Couched in the language of a contemporary man railing at his God, Bernstein's own text (layered on traditional Hebrew prayers) might be thought of as a blasphemous rant, but, heard more charitably, represents the modern analog to an Old Testament prophet's direct and familiar relationship with the deity. Joan Peyser, who has chronicled the composer's life and works in a dictionary entry for *American Grove* and a gossipy new biography, characterizes this work as Bernstein at his most serial (or perhaps freely atonal). Though many parts of the work seem tonally ambiguous, difficult or thorny, the vigorous rhythmic motion and the quiet beauty of the lullaby section are but two of this symphony's redeeming elements. It is dedicated to the memory of John F. Kennedy.

Chichester Psalms (1965) is a more immediately gratifying work. In fact, Peyser states that Bernstein used his 1964 sabbatical from conducting to reject the validity of atonal music. The psalms (in Hebrew) are treated sympathetically, without the angst of *Kaddish*. The opening movement is a hymn of praise filled with the irregular meters (5's or 7's) that

permeate Bernstein's jazz-influenced style. The central setting of the 23rd Psalm is sung by the male alto soloist -- a simple, achingly beautiful melody, underlaid with a momentary tremor from the tenors and basses. Peace prevails in the closing psalm.

Bernstein has long been judged too serious for jazz and too frivolous for symphonic music. To solve the mystery of his ability to balance the contradictory elements of modern musical life, let's eavesdrop on "Lenny" at the close of the Norton Lectures he gave at his alma mater, Harvard University, and published in 1976. Perhaps unwittingly naming himself the vital force in American music, his lengthy, ebullient creed ends thus:

And finally, I believe that . . . Ives' "Unanswered Question" has an answer. I'm no longer quite sure what the question is, but I do know that the answer is *Yes*.

3-5 Emanuel Ax Recital:
Piano Music of Haydn, Brahms and Chopin

July 26, 1987

(This set of notes was also commissioned by Mary Ann Feldman, for Emanuel Ax's recital at Sommerfest.)

Haydn (1732-1809)

Sonata 16 in A-flat major, Hob. XVI:46

Around 1767 Haydn began to compose keyboard works of increased complexity and expressiveness -- a maturation process which may be due to three factors: 1) his well-documented scolding in 1765 at the hands of his employer (more baryton trios were called for, greater industry from Haydn as composer, and tidier working habits from his band of musicians); 2) his move (with the rest of the court) to the fabulously excessive Esterhazy palace in 1766; and 3) the death of Ober-Kapellmeister Werner in 1766 which promoted Haydn to first-string composer and, more importantly, allowed him to resume writing church music.

Dating from that significant period in the latter 1860's, Haydn's Sonata in A-flat major (a Divertimento, by his own labelling) comes from a shadowy world which current musicological scholarship cannot penetrate with certainty. To demonstrate the lack of stan-

standardization one need only examine this sonata in its various printed editions: besides the official Hoboken catalogue number, this piece is also known as Sonata # 31 (Wiener Urtext); Sonata # 8 (Peters and Schirmer); and Sonata #5, Vol. I, 7 *Sonaten 1765-1772* (Henle). The scolding spoken of above led Haydn to fire off his "Entwurf Katalog", listing all his compositions to date in defence of his industry -- the document was revised periodically in later life and has become important in tracing the official chronology.

One accounting for the sonatas' lack of official documentation is that their performance purpose is unknown. Haydn's church music, operas, symphonies and baryton trios are all traceable either to performance for official court functions or to satisfy the whim of his employer, Prince Nikolaus the Magnificent, the only notable baryton player in recorded musical history. Even the late oratorios, which have no compelling origin in immediate usefulness, grow naturally out of Haydn's visits to London and his brush with Handel's *Israel in Egypt* and *Messiah*. The keyboard music, however, can be seen as perhaps a more ideal (and less practical) genre -- hence its absence from contemporary documents.

Paradoxically, Haydn's fabled insularity from the outside musical world led to his being the virtual standardizer/inventor of the string quartet and keyboard sonata. Haydn's famous statement, included in a biography by his contemporary Griesinger, indicates that he knew of his position as an experimenter:

My Prince was satisfied with all my works; I received approval; as head of an orchestra, I could undertake experiments, could observe that which enhanced an effect and that which weakened it, thus improving, adding to it, taking away from it, taking risks. I was cut off from the world; there was no one in my vicinity to make me unsure of myself or to persecute me; and so I had to become original.

(tr. H. C. R. Landon)

Alas, the contemporary notices which do exist may have skewed public opinion away from his more experimental works. J. A. Hiller had this to say in one of his *Weekly Reports* from 1768:

Herr Haydn, a famous and worthy composer in another genre, has also written various items for the clavier, but this instrument does not seem to

suit him as well as the other [instruments] which he uses in the most fiery and galant symphonies.

(tr. H. C. R. Landon)

Of Haydn's more than 60 sonatas, this one is among the more fully expressive and difficult -- not, however, at the same level of virtuosity which became standard in 19th-century Romantic composers' works written for a more highly-developed and versatile class of pianos and performers. Unlike the history, the music is transparent and can speak for itself -- the middle Adagio providing a link between the 18th-century Romanticism of C. P. E. Bach and the cantabile pianistic style of Mozart and of Beethoven's "*Moonlight*" Sonata. Haydn's pre-cursor, itself a well-known movement, is a simple, elegant three-part counterpoint in D-flat major, full of the yearning of abundant suspensions and adventurous harmonic excursions. The frame for this exquisite middle movement is two other well-known classical types: the opening a soft-spoken galant movement and the conclusion a spree of fast scale passages with an insistent forward motion.

Haydn scholars have pointed to the limited range and lack of dynamic markings in autograph score of certain sonatas (tonight's among them) as indications that the work was intended for harpsichord rather than piano, but many musicians recommend piano where there is any doubt as to performing medium. Certainly the possibility for articulation is just as great on piano as harpsichord, and the opportunity to influence tone and volume compels one to choose a modern piano -- or an early fortepiano when available.

Brahms (1833-1897)

Fantasias, Opus 116

Brahms's title for this group of pieces published in 1892 reflects his admiration for, and debt to, Robert Schumann, the most Romantic of composers -- the composer's widow Clara asked Brahms to help edit Schumann's complete works in the 1890's. Brahms had got his start nearly forty years earlier with a famous visit to Schumann's house and the succeeding critical attention.

Though his style and method of working may have been diametrically opposed to Schumann's own, the Capriccios and Intermezzos of Opus 116 are a paradigm of the Romantic piano piece -- short, simple in form and full of feeling. Brahms's own music was usually shaped by attention to form, perfectionism and high seriousness (in a word, classical) than it was by the fiery romanticism of Robert Schumann. Brahms was a serious musical craftsman who earned his living at composition -- fundamentally different from Schumann who lived for Art in a wild and impassioned way.

Denis Mathews, in the BBC Guide to the piano music of Brahms, gets at the essential character of Brahms:

In reviewing all Brahms's piano works I have occasionally felt embarrassment at the recurrence of such descriptive words as hemiola, ternary form and double counterpoint; or even more subjective ones like passionate and reflective. On the other hand no one is presumably likely to sort out all Brahms's pieces of a kind and to play them all at one sitting.

Jonathan Dunsby, aiming to legitimize this collection as a unified whole, declines to label the group of Fantasias a well-modulated whole comprised of key-related parts, nor yet an unrelated group of perfect, but discrete, miniatures. His solution labels the Opus 116 Fantasias a "multi-piece", preserving Brahms's reputation as the master craftsman among Romantic composers.

Brahms achieves contrast in this group of Fantasias by alternating two dissimilar types of pieces: the capriccios are fast, relatively light-hearted and lively pieces (keep in mind this is the serious Johannes Brahms) while the intermezzos are slower and more reticent, avoiding vivid contrasts. Despite the alternation between types it is not certain whether Brahms intended them to be linked, or performed separately.

No. 1 is a Capriccio, dark and foreboding but in a very compelling, rushing rhythm. No. 2 barely moves, its triple meter and minor mode combining to be quite comforting. The middle section of this three-part form is a little more lively. The following Capriccio finished off the first set of three to be published. Here the downward swooping arpeggios

seem to be reaching up futilely in the A section until the hopeful, major-key middle section achieves a momentary triumph, only to be vanquished.

The composer published the four concluding pieces separately -- three Intermezzos in a row followed by a Capriccio. The opening section of #4 relates to the stillness of #2. To achieve maximum contrast between successive slow movements Brahms places an Intermezzo with a bit of a lilt next. The penultimate Intermezzo, though in a major key, has enough suspensions and dissonances to keep it from sounding too joyful. The last Capriccio is another short piece full of downward swooping arpeggios in its short A section, only temporarily interrupted by a soothing middle section.

Chopin (1810-1849)

Four Scherzos

The Chopin Scherzos certainly do not belong to the realm of pieces written at the same time and intended to be played together. Written over a span of 11 years, these are another type of Romantic miniature piano piece, too small to be major sonatas or individual pieces, and yet too large to fit into another work.

The name too is other than standard-- we expect a Scherzo ("joke," in Italian) to be a fun-filled movement in triple meter with a contrasting middle section, returning to the original material. From Beethoven, we learned to exchange the stately Minuet and Trio movement in a larger work for a romping Scherzo and Trio. Chopin, however, uses "Scherzo" to name a piece that is longer and more substantial than a normal Scherzo and Trio. If it is a joke, then it's a very morose one, as all the works are in minor keys except the last. The significant characteristics of the Classical Scherzo which Chopin retains are compound ternary form and triple meter.

Scholarly attempts to track down definitive autograph scores for these works have been stymied for different reasons than in Haydn research. Chopin was a popular composer, and solo piano works were certainly his preferred medium, but the thoroughness with which

Chopin marketed his works leads to other problems: he submitted "definitive" scores (sometimes in a copyist's hand) simultaneously to publishers in Leipzig, London and Paris to achieve maximum coverage and recompense. And the difficulty is that these scores do not always match each other in matters of dynamics, articulation, voicing, nor sometimes in the actual musical notes. Perhaps this suffices (especially for Chopin, and in an age of recorded music) to justify the Romantic principle of learning interpretations from a teacher of established lineage, rather than by a scholarly approach.

About the music of Chopin, Alan Walker's essay "Chopin and Musical Structure" makes the important point that Chopin composed no music without the piano in it. Dr. Walker believes that Chopin's music embodies the "creative principle of *identity between idea and medium*." Walker buttresses his argument that Chopin's music is formally and technically totally idiomatic to the piano by citing Scherzo #3, which contains a chorale with highly figurative interpolations at the cadential points of the chorale tune. Between such varied textures is an interval of time which cannot be measured (and is not notated exactly in Chopin's score). The amount of time needed to move the hands from tenor and bass range chordal homophony to high soprano tinkling rushes of eighth-notes is exactly the amount of time needed for the ear and the mind to process the contrasting textures musically.

Generally one can say that these four Scherzos share turbulent opening and closing sections and more reserved middle sections. For instance, in the first (1831-32), the agitated swirls and thumping rhythm of the A section give way to the "otherworldly" peacefulness of the Polish cradle carol, "Lulajze Jezuniu". Yet when the crashing chords of the A section return, a poignancy is achieved by continuing snatches of the carol until the "earthly" anxiety cannot be denied.

The second Scherzo (1837), one of the most popular of Chopin's works, features a question and response motive at the beginning of the A section, in which a small, pleading

question is answered gruffly in a martial tone. The middle section is a happier and more tender waltz that spins nearly out of control with glee.

Scherzo #3 (1839) is dedicated to Chopin's pupil Gutman, who was purportedly so strong he could bang holes in a table with his bare hands -- a sufficient strength for playing the opening chords but not, one hopes, necessary. Chopin obscures both the tonality and the rhythm of the opening by not settling in a key for the introductory measures and by notating quadruplets in the expected triple meter. His tonal obscurity is thought by some to be a progressive longing for 20th-century atonality.

The last Scherzo dates from 1842 and was dedicated both to Jeanne de Caraman (in the German edition) and to her sister Clothilde (in the French) -- piano students of the composer. Again the A section is more vigorous than the middle -- here the martial, dotted rhythms make the only major key of the four sound a little ominous. The tranquil B section makes up for the anxiety with its transparent beauty.

Chapter 4: *EARLY MUSIC, TORONTO SYMPHONY, AND MISCELLANEOUS*

Early Music (Part I)

4-1 Tafelmusik -- Music from Rome

April 8, 1988

Tafelmusik's "Music from Rome" concert of Friday night exhibited an obvious personality split between the instrumental and choral halves. With the playing of 3 Concertos by Arcangelo Corelli in the first half, the Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra achieved the status of a modern symphony orchestra (i.e. they played, got paid and no one in the audience cared deeply). But following the intermission, Ivars Taurins led the Chamber Choir and orchestra in Handel's *Dixit Dominus*, a performance which captivated all present and resulted in great waves of honest, spontaneous applause at the finish.

Much fuss was made about the entire concert being played at "Rome pitch," a full tone below the modern $a = 440$. Allowing for the legitimacy of that one decision, it seems that many other decisions remained unmade, else the three Corelli concertos would not have become such dull, undifferentiated stuff.

Several questions nag at me, indicating that the performers left more things open-ended than they settled. First of all, what makes the Opus 6 Concertos interesting music, and why didn't Tafelmusik emphasize that in performance or in the programme notes? And isn't there more difference between a Church Concerto and a Chamber Concerto than that the former uses a portable organ and harpsichord for its continuo section and the latter requires two harpsichords? (Even more than the difference between choosing tempo titles for the church sonata movements and dance titles for those of the secular sonata?)

And what about the temperament? If the pitch difference is so significant, could not the Dance Concerto in the key of B-flat have been intended to sound different than the

two Church Concertos in D-Major? One presumes that 20th-century equal temperament did not prevail in Corelli's day. For God's sake, what kind of composition is a Concerto Grosso and why did I spend so much time scouring the program for readable evidence that the orchestra knew, when I'd have preferred listening to well-played music?

Believe me, this is too much effort in the service of redeeming such lackluster playing as I heard. The next Tafelmusik concert, according to the notice in the programme, is apparently a magic show with early music, as it features a "*voila da gamba* trio."

The second half of the concert was an entirely different matter. The chorus and soloists proved themselves aces at Handel. The counterpoint was shaped perfectly; each section of the chorus could be heard making accurate entrances, and almost every musical line was paired with a perfectly intelligible text. I'd dare to say that any words not understood were hidden by Handel's ambitious polyphony. The overall shapes, of the sections and of the whole, were expertly handled by Mr. Taurins, so that the choir never simply began loud and got louder. The singers shaped each section from beginning to end to show the integral relationship of the counterpoint to the text. In particular, the chorale melodies in the soprano section soared beautifully above the rest of the chorus, possibly a happy consequence of the lowered pitch.

The soloists were a mixed lot. Male alto Peter Mahon held up least well: his extended solo "The Lord shall send the rod of thy power," had no distinct shape except that of surviving the technical challenges to his voice. Taurins did not conduct the continuo and soloists, but allowed singers and instrumentalists to react to each other.

This worked rather better with Danielle Forget, the soprano soloist, than with the alto. Soprano and violin moved in unison, or imitation, augmenting their individual contributions with cooperative ventures. Here too, there were problems, though minor: Forget's excellent word-shaping and phrasing had no discernible effect on the violinist's articulations. Later, Forget and the other soprano, Laura Pudwell, sang perfectly matched still tones and

tense, aching suspensions; when the suspension passages were repeated in the alto and tenor lines, Martin Spencer's clear tenor voice overpowered Mahon's alto, and the two did not collaborate as pleasingly as the matched sopranos.

Hannibal Hamlin's unpolished but fiery bass solos point me toward my conclusion: the consistent, vital force behind all this singing, whether or not the solo voices were overwhelmingly delightful, remained the words and their accents. Taurins must be the guiding force behind all this, because the vibrant, lively rhythms and articulations of the words in the chorus were much more interesting than the orchestral articulations. Even the orchestra picked up its pace when the players followed the choir's lead.

4-2 The English Baroque Soloists and Malcolm Bilson

May 5, 1988

The English Baroque Soloists concert of May 5 in Queen Elizabeth Hall fit the South Bank *END-games* concept -- late works of composers, poets, playwrights, filmmakers, etc. -- beautifully. Not only did John Eliot Gardiner conduct Mozart's "*Prague*" *Symphony*, he invited Malcolm Bilson to perform the late Haydn Sonata in E-flat (Hob XVI 52) on fortepiano. Coincidentally, the last of Bilson and Gardiner's chronological recording project of the Mozart Piano concertos on original instruments was scheduled for the following weekend, and the live audience was also favored with Mozart's final Concerto, No. 27, K595.

These players render the cynical question, "Will it be 'authentic,' or exciting?," a moot point. Their careful attention to pitch, articulation and choice of instruments never obscures their ability to make lively, full-bodied music. Gardiner, Bilson and the orchestra often seem to be making the music up as they go along, just for the fun of it. When Mozart and Haydn are played with that infectious improvisatory energy they become brand new, and ear-opening.

At first hearing, the fortepiano alone sounded too small for the large hall, but after the audience settled into the seats, Haydn's vibrant music and lively humor rang out easily to the very back rows. Bilson made much of the sonata's abundant contrasts, exploiting the unrelated themes of the first movement with widely varied use of his instrument's available tone colors (he played Derek Adlam's copy of a Viennese instrument). His sharp sense of timing aided him in presenting the wild harmonic progressions, harp swirls and marimba-like repetitions of the slow middle movement, as well as playing up the comic, "wrong-key" beginning and ambiguous rhythm of the final Allegro romp.

A prime attraction in the Mozart Concerto which followed was the interplay between orchestra and soloist. Bilson's unobtrusive continuo playing, scarcely noticeable in the sound of the work, highlights his exhaustive knowledge of Mozart's concertos. He listened to the horn call and its answer the first time, then played it in imitation with the string section, recreating the same echo-balance in a new mode.

Another distinctive characteristic of Bilson's playing is his bold use of the moderator lever. Besides diminishing the volume of the second theme of the first movement, his method alters the tone colour significantly, transporting the listeners to hushed regions, instead of just relying on the contrast of musical materials. In the final rondo as well, Bilson's sparing use of the moderator added a great deal to the prevailing jolliness by emphasizing contrasting tone colours.

It is no small measure of Bilson's disregard for the "star" system of piano soloists, and his thirst for information on period performance, that he returned to the hall after intermission. In his short black corduroy jacket and anti-ostentatious pipestem pants, he blended in with other eager audience members while his associates played the "*Prague*" *Symphony*. (A significant group of the orchestra players had previously heard his sonata from front-row seats.) Surely his liveliness and broad knowledge of Mozart style do not result only from sequestering himself with early models of fortepianos for hours each day.

This orchestra played Mozart's symphony as a whole composition, and not merely as a sequence of remarkable technical accomplishments. Still, many of the parts were astonishing in themselves, before one figured out how pleasingly the whole was constructed. The chains of still-tone suspensions and the extended syncopation motive of the first movement were enlightening, especially as Gardiner conducted fluid, larger beats, trusting the ensemble to carry out its share of the music-making. In the slow movement, his technique and the orchestra's musical response yielded a serpentine first theme which stretched forever, ebbing and urging. As with Bilson's solo playing, the large formal outlines of the music remained distinct, even as details crowded the ears for attention.

These three stirring Classical works sent a different message than many of the *END-games* events promise to do. The last compositions of Haydn and Mozart emerged as full, ripe and mature, by no means morbid or tragic. And the performances lived fully too, both athletically thrilling, and at the highest level of artistic expression.

4-3 Mozart *Serenade* on Original Instruments

MOZART: *Serenade, "Gran Partita" (KV 361)*. Collegium Aureum. EMI (d) CD CDC 747 8182.

Collegium Aureum's recording of the *Gran Partita* by Mozart is a bad advertisement for original-instrument performance. If their version could be accepted as "authentic," it's hard to hear why anyone would bother with Mozart's music at all. The recording techniques, articulations and tempos all conspire toward deadly dullness. Instead of propulsive rhythms, startling contrasts in orchestration among widely varied winds, and the delight of Mozart's melodic invention, we get endless repetitions, plodding tempos, careful playing on dull-sounding instruments, and mush, mush more.

The CD release of this 1981 Harmonia Mundi recording must be the triumph of the basset-horn lobby. The same group recorded the same piece for the same label in the early 70's, by the look of the cover photos. Since then, Collegium Aureum has changed personnel entirely, but for one oboist; they've also made a less exciting recording this time around.

Actually the music is all correct, according to the New Mozart Edition of the score. They use 4 natural horns, 2 oboes, 2 real basset-horns, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons and double bass instead of the contrabassoon once thought proper. In fact, this performance might be an objectively perfect "incarnation" of the music, except that there's no "bodily" involvement. In the quest for objective truths, the producers have even showed an obvious chink in their scholarly armor. The copies of old instruments are all documented in the liner notes: all the models are either dated after the Serenade's date or from an unspecified time in the 18th century.

It seems there's no shortage of recordings of this fairly ordinary woodwind serenade. If your tastes don't run to the falsely objective, you might burrow backwards in the record bins of time to find the bustle of Stokowski's shortened version on a Vanguard record, "The Best of Stokowski." Or you might consult the brisk version propagated by the Marlboro Music Festival, conducted by Marcel Moyse. They may be doing it all wrong, but it sounds like delightful music, nonetheless.

4-4 Beethoven "Nickname" Sonatas Recording

BEETHOVEN: Middle Period Sonatas (Les Adieux, #26; Waldstein, #21; Appassionata, #23); Melvyn Tan, fortepiano. EMI CD CDC 7493302

Melvyn Tan's new Beethoven album makes no claim of "authenticity," at least, not explicitly. He performs the sonatas on a fortepiano made by Derek Adlam modelled after Nannette Streicher's extant instrument from 1814. So far so good. But ... Tan hasn't used

his instrument's special capabilities to illuminate Beethoven's music. It is as if a man acquired a sports car which could stop on a dime, corner like a dream and maneuver through the tightest places, only to drive it very fast through the middle of a city, ignoring all the traffic rules. Which is to say that Melvyn Tan sins two different ways: he does some things which he ought not to have done and he fails to do some things which could serve Beethoven.

Tan's choice of pianos is itself problematic. Nannette Streicher developed her instruments according to Beethoven's specifications, as Tan writes in the liner notes. But the performer and writer pinpoints the time when the composer began to harbor "a special preference" for Streichers as "since 1809." This is no horrible anachronism. It could in fact be argued that when Beethoven wrote these heroic sonatas in the first decade of the new century, he dreamt of the wonderful unheard sounds pianos might make in about ten years. This hypothetical case is a *reductio ad absurdum* of the argument made by those who always prefer modern pianos to period instruments.

But that's not the major flaw of this recording. Nor is it a mortal sin to play these sonatas with a less magical tone than Daniel Barenboim, less formal clarity than Charles Rosen or less pure quirkiness than Anton Kuerti. The simple fact that Beethoven sonatas on fortepiano have hit the big time is welcome news.

It would have been a good thing if Melvyn Tan had reinvented these "nickname" sonatas willfully, in his own manner, with careful attention to articulation, tone and tempo of course, and with a revolutionary spirit. The painting of Napoleon reproduced on the cover, the notes concerning the "new heroic phase in Beethoven's work" and the considerable speed and power of Tan's playing all conform to a sinewy, robust reading. The audible evidence also demonstrates a skittish and lean Beethoven, in fighting trim.

But I, personally, have reservations, of which the following are representative samples: 1) Why is the sustain pedal activated, the harmonic content swamped, in the coda

of the first movement of the "Les Adieux"? Will this fool people into thinking that a fortepiano has as much carrying power as a Steinway? Hardly, and who'd want to? 2) Why such a twisted rhythm for the octave runs in the coda of the last movement of the "Waldstein"? Is not the fortepiano lighter of touch and more amenable to correctly rhythmical performance than a conventional piano? 3) In the slow variations middle movement of the "Appassionata," what of the muddy suspensions in the bass notes? Couldn't this Streicher play thinner, clearer bass tones? Is this a voicing problem for the technician, or that unruly sustain pedal again?

Melvyn Tan has recorded a spunky Beethoven, but not as revolutionary as it could have been. He has made a good beginning, but *caveat emptor*. Tan does not seem to realize the magnitude of the differences he might make with his marvelous sounding fortepiano.

Toronto Symphony Reviews (Part II)

4-5 Marek Janowski -- Guest Conductor

Dec. 9, 1987

(The aim of this review was to write about the fit between the skills and inclinations of the visiting conductor and the orchestra. The way that an orchestra decides to hire its new resident conductor may be more understated than it seemed to me at the time. Maestro Janowski was not, in the end, hired as Music Director of the Toronto Symphony.)

The Polish conductor Marek Janowski "came preachin' for a call" (as a friend quaintly put it) last Wednesday at Roy Thomson Hall. He proved himself an excellent conductor, though the programme was disappointing.

In his visit to the Thomson Temple of High Musical Art Janowski altered the status quo significantly: 1) unlike a TV evangelist, Maestro Janowski peddles his services in a seller's market (these days there aren't enough conductors to go around); 2) the conductor's "oration" (standard Beethoven and Brahms) was carefully tailored to the tastes of the congregation rather than dear to his own fire and brimstone heart (Penderecki and

R. Strauss, among other early moderns); and 3) putting the best possible face on things, Maestro Janowski's attentions were divided -- the Metropolitan Opera House hired him for his Mozart opera sermons during the same week of his Toronto Symphony concerts. But it might be worthwhile to convene a meeting of the search committee to consider the Toronto Symphony's reactions anyway . . .

In fairness to Janowski, the TS may have been hampered in its responses to his gestures during Beethoven's *Fourth Piano Concerto*, the second piece on the program. For whatever combination of reasons (short rehearsal time, over-familiar piece, star pianist's interpretation, etc), the G-Major concerto wasn't imprinted with the conductor's stamp of excellence as were the Brahms Fourth and the Egmont Overture which framed it. In fact, when Janowski deferred his solo bow after the concerto to the soloist, Horacio Gutierrez, he spoke an eloquent symbolism.

Gutierrez proved to be a lightweight in nearly every department. Though he played all the notes of the fast scale passages and chromatic runs which abound in the concerto, the pianist didn't really shape the work -- he phrased indifferently, and articulated nothing very original or forceful, either in the smallest melodic fragments or the largest formal structures. Even Gutierrez's short walking journeys from backstage to the piano bench suffered by comparison with the measured tread of the conductor. Perhaps no more ought to be said.

Opening with the *Overture to Egmont*, however, Janowski shone. He conducted without a score, cueing the players efficiently and clearly. The economy of his gestures was hardly most important though: from the broad, bold solemnity of the opening bars through to the whirl of the Allegro and the bustle of the final section, his interpretation was well-planned and excellently played. Tempo relationships were easy and natural and contrasting musical materials argued eloquently. Janowski's concluding work, the Brahms Fourth Symphony, was also finely drawn. In contrast to the rhythmic urgency of the Beethoven, the

conductor emphasized the expansive melodic lines and graceful syncopations of the *E-Minor Symphony*. Confident that his gestures were clear, Janowski used the slower, wider-spaced beat patterns which contribute to a ponderous majesty characteristic of the best Brahms performances. This is especially essential to the moments when Brahms writes 2-against-3 rhythmic patterns: in those cases, smaller, faster beats may ensure exactitude of rhythm, but at the expense of style.

Janowski's economical podium style does not preclude careful attention to both ends of the volume spectrum -- indeed, the conductor bent willingly toward his players for tender emotive passages as well as (literally) hopping to attention for exciting surprises.

So, what do you think? Should the TS management hire Marek Janowski as Music Director? And if it did, would it tie his hands by insisting on Beethoven and Brahms? Why hire someone with eclectic tastes to conduct such retrograde music?

And does the TS need an exclusive relationship with its resident conductor? For instance, would they feel jealous about the pleasure Janowski takes from the company of the Metropolitan Opera?

Marek Janowski is, by the available evidence, a mature and exciting conductor who could stretch an orchestra's repertoire in interesting ways. He is masterful on the podium and well-prepared. I wonder if he's tempted by the Toronto job at all, given his activities in the American market and his creative tastes? Let's hope so.

4-6 Buhr's "*Lure*" Premiere/Anne-Sophie Mutter

March 30, 1988

Last Wednesday's Toronto Symphony concert was a triumph of inspired programme planning. Conductor Andrew Davis placed a new Canadian work, Glenn Buhr's *Lure of the Fallen Seraphim*, directly at the heart of the concert; the piece was premiered just before intermission, and Maestro Davis led the players in a clean, inspiring performance. Debussy's

Nocturnes began the evening and the Brahms Violin Concerto completed it. How wonderful it is to hear "Canadian content" played lovingly and held in such high esteem.

At the start, Davis led the orchestra in a nearly magical performance of the trio of dream-like fantasies. He often abandoned his baton, allowing his beat patterns to become softer and less exact, encouraging more tender and expressive playing.

The wispy, surreal stillness of the first movement, *Nuages*, proceeded motionlessly onward like the sky it describes, marred only by a poignant, but rather perfunctory, English Horn solo. The middle movement, *Fêtes*, captured the whirl and thrill of dancing at carnival time quite energetically, leaving the final movement, *Sirènes*, a minor disappointment.

From where I sat, the most evident flaw of the Debussy was the sound of the women of the Elmer Iseler Singers, recruited to embody the wordless Sirens of the score. The eternal undulating waves of the sea could be heard in the vocal parts, but this particular group of women proved a poor selection for this piece. They sang well, but a bit too distinctly for a properly idiomatic performance. If the choir of less than 20 singers had been larger or less audibly prominent, the effect might have been more mystical and therefore better. They sounded most appropriate when the score called for closed-lips humming.

Buhr seems to have learned much from Debussy. His work is an excellent companion to Debussy's, and Buhr advances toward present-day musical concerns with vital rhythms and a sure hand at orchestration. Not only is the entire tonal range of the full orchestra used efficiently; much musical interest is also derived from difficult solo work for flute and harp, as well as many exotic-sounding percussion instruments. The piece is described accurately by the composer as a concerto for orchestra.

The poem by James Joyce on which *Lure* is based (from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*) laments the "ardent ways" of a decadent culture, while glorying in the beauty of its legacy. Buhr echoes the musical cultures of the past (Debussy, Strauss, etc.) but speaks in his own fresh, modern voice. The orchestra did justice to his work in most regards,

playing the abundant solos with zest and assurance, though they will doubtless play more in tune the more familiar they become with the music. I hope this work enters the symphonic repertory; I'd like to have another chance to hear it and appreciate better its length and extended form.

The second half of the evening consisted of Brahms's Violin Concerto, with Anne-Sophie Mutter as featured soloist. I can only defend my stilted account of the performance by emphasizing that I believe that tight red dresses, red high heels and a smolderingly passionate demeanour during orchestral passages are all basically immaterial to a vivid and worthy performance of Brahms. Mutter's playing did have both exciting and tender moments, but it also showed gaps -- she did not always sustain her beautiful tone (or alter it to significant expressive effect), and the orchestral accompaniment proved an ill fit.

At times when Mutter attained a pure, soft, high note, for instance, the woodwinds would enter more forcefully than was desirable; or variously, a rousing cadence would slip a hitch, the soloist arriving at full tilt, slightly out of adjustment with the orchestra's rhythm. It could have been much better. For those who keep track of such things, I'm told that Mutter wore a green dress on Saturday night. Maybe on the third go-round she managed to co-operate more with the orchestra.

4-7 R. Murray Schafer's *Harp Concerto*

April 6, 1988

The Toronto Symphony's concert Wednesday night proved a veritable crescendo of musical excellence, each piece performed better than the last. Conductor Andrew Davis, at the end of his career as Music Director in Toronto, offered a neat parallel to a conductor's tenure in a new position: he began somewhat roughly with Prokofiev's *Classical Symphony*; he found a good solid relationship with the players in Murray Schafer's new harp concerto;

and he finished in a transcendent blaze, leading the orchestra through a unified rendition of Beethoven's *Seventh Symphony*.

Prokofiev is said to have composed his 1st Symphony (the Classical) without recourse to the piano, relying on his extensive knowledge of classical forms and harmonic structures rather than by experimental noodling. Of course I didn't know this as I was growing up, listening to the Russian bad boy's opening flourish as it heralded the news on the local radio station. I just heard an effervescent snippet of music promising exciting revelations from the outside world. The Toronto Symphony didn't live up to my memory of Prokofiev at all; their version of the first few bars was dumpy and unbrilliant, hardly rousing enough to announce the arrival of a mug of hot milk.

The first three movements of the symphony moved consistently at paces a tad too slow, yet even at reduced speed, the ensemble lacked cohesion and coherence. And the final movement, while not lacking in the exhilaration of athletic thrill, caught the players with their roller skates off. Perhaps the orchestra sought solidarity with Prokofiev in silent communion instead of audible rehearsal.

Just before intermission, the symphony premiered its second large-scale Canadian composition in as many weeks, when Maestro Davis led the players in a sturdy, competent reading of R. Murray Schafer's *Harp Concerto*. Unlike their nearly magical performance of Glenn Buhr's work last week, the players seemed satisfied to play only the notes, and the conductor to proceed point by point from start to finish.

The danger of allowing an articulate composer like Schafer to write his own programme note is that the premiere will fly obviously wide of the mark: the second movement's "one, unchangeable very fast tempo" may plod a bit and vary a lot, forcing the listener to some unpleasant conclusions.

The harp soloist, Judy Loman, played her part with great assurance and spark. Whether realizing the idomatic harp writing pervading this concerto or rising to Schafer's

new technical challenges, Loman played superbly, giving larger direction to her individual musical decisions and accomplishing details with great precision and style.

Schafer's work was rather a conservative effort (for him), excepting the finale in which the solo harp was amplified louder than the full orchestra -- one assumes this was a gentle tweak and not a last-ditch effort to achieve proper balance.

There were some inventive surprises. In the first movement the strings played delicate pizzicato passages in imitation of the harp, as well as joining the woodwinds in harp-like glissandos. The second movement, a perpetual motion scherzo using Herb Alpert style Latin rhythms, brought a couple of romantic guitar sections forth from the thumbnail articulations of Ms. Loman. One quiet moment stood out before the electric harpist (a mad harpy?) overwhelmed the orchestra: a section of semitone pedal shifts, flawlessly and sensitively executed by the harpist.

As important as it is to stick with a commissioned work through to a well-played premiere, the Symphony and Davis showed their best side in the concluding performance, Beethoven's *Seventh Symphony*. It pains my contemporary soul to have heard more musical expression and vitality in the TS Beethoven than in the Schafer, but it was unmistakeable.

Just let me count the ways I loved this Seventh Symphony: all rhythms were sharp and lively; the players used "standard" vibrato only for expressive purposes, playing mostly with a still sound; Davis, freed from his score, tamed the players for quiet passages and stirred them up when Beethoven called for that; the silence after the first movement and before the funeral procession was tense and integral to the music; in general, the loud-soft, lyrical-bustling, short-long contrasts were emphasized; each movement grew vitally from beginning to end.

I pine for a Schafer *Harp Concerto* as well-tended as this Beethoven. If the Toronto Symphony will repeat it enough times they'll probably get the feeling.

Book Reviews, Portrait, Travel Compilation (Part III)

4-8 Three Books About Bernstein

BERNSTEIN: A Biography
by Joan Peyser
Beech Tree Books, New York, 1987, 481 p.

LEONARD BERNSTEIN: The Infinite Variety of a Musician
by Peter Gradenwitz
Berg Publishers, Limited, Leamington Spa (UK), 1987, 303 p.

THE TRIUMPH OF VULGARITY: Rock Music in the Mirror of Romanticism
by Robert Pattison
Oxford University Press, New York, 1987, 257 p.

PEYSER

After reading Joan Peyser's new biographical fantasy on the life of Bernstein, I'm really steamed. This book reads more like a *People Magazine* account of a flamboyantly bisexual American conductor/composer or a tabloid screamer of Princess Di's "troubled marriage" than a serious hardcover historical record.

If space and my conscience allowed (not to mention copyright restrictions), I'd print a long list of annoying paragraphs and let Peyser's writing speak for itself. The forest of pink slips marking her indiscretions in my copy of the book doesn't even begin to represent the damage, just the most poisonous and insipid remarks. For instance, twice in one paragraph on page 357, Peyser employs the notion of a "probabl[e] . . . unconscious act of revenge." Trust me, you don't want to know the full extent of the political intrigues which prompted her to delve that deeply into Bernstein's mind.

As it stands, you'll have to believe that only two passages contributed to my knowledge of and appreciation for Bernstein's tremendous effect on the classical music industry of this era. (And the best of those two efforts was a piece on composer Milton Babbitt reprinted in its entirety from the *New York Times*, circa 1969.) If you went to a

hockey game which ended 20-2, you'd be pretty embarrassed for the losers, especially if one goal had been scored in a game nearly twenty years ago.

Leonard Bernstein is, perhaps unavoidably and unarguably, a troubled man. Still, 'tis a far better thing to have him around, flawed and terribly human, than to imagine having come this far without the irrepressible hope and yearning of his compositions and recordings, to say nothing of the real, but ephemeral value of his live performances.

Joan Peyser's book is flawed, but in a way different from (and more deeply than) Bernstein's life. Her book has structural problems, not cosmetic blemishes. Her concerns seem petty and gossipy; her writing is cheap, ineffective and overblown; and her rhetoric is often speculative and wrong-headed. She takes the gossip many people already knew and makes of it a public record, an enduring account.

If Peyser's were the only bio existing, I'd read it quickly and hate myself after. But Bernstein himself has written reams about his musical ideals, and his brother has also written a family memoir, so Peyser's book is extraneous. Wait for a real biographer, or follow Bernstein's own trail, but don't just trust Peyser's geyser blindly.

GRADENWITZ

Peter Gradenwitz's story of the meteoric rise and fantastic career of Leonard Bernstein is also not the complete biography I wanted to read. Unlike Peyser's tale, it starts from a position close to the subject of its inquiry and sticks close to him throughout. Gradenwitz fails in the opposite way: his loving attention to Leonard Bernstein doesn't admit that there are any flaws at all. He doesn't even mention some gossipy things which might be interpreted by others as flaws.

Though its weaknesses seem most obvious, Gradenwitz's approach has strengths, too. For one, the subject of the book has cooperated extensively in interviews, correspondence and a long-standing friendship. As noted before, Leonard Bernstein is his own best witness and defender.

His professional associates and close friends have also volunteered their time as accomplices. The title page lists fifteen recognizable contributors, ranging from Bernstein's brother, and Stephen Wadsworth, the librettist for his only full opera, to Virgil Thomson, the giant of 20th-century American criticism and composition. The trouble with these personal memoirs is that they are often as chatty and familiar as they are uncritically accepting of Bernstein's talents. Those talents are considerable, but a genuinely critical approach to delineating them might offer true epiphany instead of a string of deeply felt memories.

Another flaw in the book is its origins as a German text. The author has translated his own book into English and it reads that way, slightly awkward and full of convoluted clauses. Perhaps just one quote, intended to show the author's familiarity with Bernstein's father, will suffice:

There was an opportunity to get to know Samuel Bernstein when, with his children Leonard and Shirley, he visited Jewish Palestine in 1947. Leonard then for the first time conducted the Palestine Orchestra, later to become the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra.

The language is forgivable though, for the insight Gradenwitz offers into *Kaddish*, Bernstein's Third Symphony, to mention one prominent example. Unlike other writers who gloss over the work without explaining it, Gradenwitz details the religious background, biographical connections and dramatic structure of the work, as well as giving a passable explanation of the musical development. This kind of careful attention is much appreciated with lesser-known works, but quickly cloyes when applied to *West Side Story*. Perhaps the German readership needed to be told a great deal more about that classic of American theatrical history than English language readers do.

Gradenwitz divides his book into three unequal sections; one third is spent discussing the chronological development of Bernstein, about half on the various facets of Bernstein's career(s), and the rest is a short hymn to the person and his magnetism. It's worth reading if you're not too style-conscious.

PATTISON

Ironically, Robert Pattison's Rock music apology might be a more fitting tribute to Leonard Bernstein than any of the biographies which exist. And he doesn't even mention Bernstein's name, though it seems that must be the one name from the whole of the History of Western Civilization he doesn't drop in defense of Rock music.

The style and content of this book are delightfully infra-academic, which is to say that Pattison has read a lot of stuff but presents it all in a readable, even extravagant and post-rational manner. His thesis is that beginning with the 19th-century romantic poets and composers, one might trace a course through the individualist-heroic stance of Walt Whitman and arrive, kicking and protesting, at Rock music. He claims no causal connections, but convinces the reader utterly, through his genealogy of myth and archetype.

Pattison says that to a romantic soul, rational connections don't matter at all in the face of inescapable beliefs and the conclusions and actions which depend on them. He alludes to religion as easily as to Rock mythology: just as the manger is not necessarily a true fact but is a mythic truth, so is Elvis Presley not factually a white man who can sing like a black man, though the myth lives on. Bruce Springsteen's album cover for *Born to Run*, with Bruce leaning on Clarence Clemons is pictorial support for this notion.

The methodology of the book is striking. Pattison analyzes Rock music only as a poetic genre, refusing to attempt a musical analysis. But he notices literary allusions and visual evidence almost obsessively.

This book is striking for its intelligence, compassion and for the strength of its argument. Pattison tells us that Rock is vulgar and romantic because it's authentically American, and Whitman's vision of a vulgar, romantic nation shines forth in Rock music most clearly. Shockingly, "Romantic" and "Vulgar" are found to be honourable words, with distinguished pedigrees.

Just how all this relates to Leonard Bernstein should be clear when one thinks how his well-informed romantic vision has been sold successfully to the American public. Time and time again, in recordings, in the symphony-orchestra hall and on Broadway, Leonard Bernstein has demonstrated that he is a spiritual descendent of Whitman, sharing a benevolent, active creativity with his native land, the United States of America,

4-9 *My Brother Benjamin* -- by Beth Britten

200 p. + (16 p. b/w photos, 5 p. genealogy, 3 p. index), 1986, The Kensal Press, Buckinghamshire, £10.50, Publication date 20 November 1987.

This sisterly memoir of Benjamin Britten delivers everything a reader could expect from the title -- and more. The narrative, often unintentionally humorous and ill-organized, illumines in sharp detail the insular, provincial, middle-class upbringing of this century's most skilled and successful opera composer. A sentence from the first page of the prologue demonstrates the modus perfectly:

I can see Ben now, walking past the house in the school crocodile, then gradually moving backwards, until as captain of school and captain of cricket at thirteen years old, he was walking at the rear with the master in charge, the pale blue colour-cap won for excelling at games, perched on his fair, unruly hair, which always stuck up however short it was cut.

I'm told that the crocodile is a British method of linking hands in a long line to walk schoolchildren home, and I think I can deduce that the older kids walked in back. The preceding excerpt, a candidate for the New Yorker's "There'll Always Be An England" column-enders, is unfortunately only one of many passages which tell overmuch of intimate memories while neglecting relevant data.

The book uses letters and human memory (mostly Beth's, with the aid of others close to the source) to fashion a picture of brother Ben, from his birth in 1913 through the production of *Albert Herring*, his third opera. At the end of the story, the now-famous

composer and his friend Peter Pears have joined the Music Club of Aldeburgh in May of 1952. True to this portrait, Ben and Peter have forsaken their customary instruments (piano and voice) to join the eager locals as an unprepossessing violist and his recorder-playing friend.

It would be unfair to pretend, however, that Britten was made smaller by his upbringing. His identification with the sea, his horror of war and firm commitment to pacifism, his unmistakable Britishness and his supreme humanity as an artistic creator can clearly be traced to the experiences unfolded in this book. A tendency toward isolation kept him from faddishness and overly facile musical solutions to compositional problems. He composed music for individual performers -- often hand-picked acquaintances -- and yet his work approaches the universal because of his close association with cosmopolitan performers, artists and literati. The tendency to grow from provincial, disciplined beginnings toward a deeply moving expression of whole-world concerns is at the heart of Britten's compositions.

The major success of the book is the portion (six chapters -- 68 pages) which consists of a bare thread of story connecting a group of letters from Benjamin to his relatives in Britain during the war years between May of 1939 and March of 1942. Not only useful for displaying Britten's discerning views of Los Angeles and New York, or the evidence of his newly bustling international career, these letters show something else important. The boy who was born into a War To End All Wars, and whose fanciful Nanny encouraged elaborate kiddie pageants, had grown up to take on his mature life-work, writing masterly operas.

4-10 A Personality Profile of Karen Wolff, *Twin Cities*

(This article, published in December 1987, was begun in July of that year. But its origins run deeper than that, to my years of study in the University of Minnesota graduate school, and to my understanding of the School of Music's lack of charismatic leadership and low community morale.)

Dr. Karen Wolff, 49, the newly-hired Director of the University of Minnesota School of Music, intends to lead the School to national prominence, make no mistake about it. Her soft-spoken and pleasant manner aside, she has definite ideas about how to bring a first-class School of Music to the prominence it deserves.

But hard-boiled efficiency isn't what you notice when you walk into her office on the second floor of Ferguson Hall. A prominent clue to her humane nature is a colorful, bustling 2- by-3-foot photograph of the Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music (CCM) Children's Choir, which she founded in 1982 and conducted until she began her job at the University of Minnesota last July.

This large splash of colorful singing children on the wall illustrates a central point of Wolff's educational doctrine, both in the CCM Preparatory Division and in general: "You don't start at the age of eighteen the way you might begin the study of history or something in college," she says, audibly underlining the important words. "So any musician who cares about the profession has to have an interest in training young people." The Children's Choir seemed to be a perfect way to use her talents as a Music Education Professor in a Conservatory School which is deeply committed to the performance of music as its highest goal. That's one difference between the University's School of Music and CCM which Dr. Wolff would like to lessen: "We want to make this entire enterprise more visible to the community and to the country at large. And performance is the obvious way to do it. It's what is at the heart of music."

Wolff has already persuaded the College of Liberal Arts (CLA) to restore a voice teaching position this fall, and has been promised six additional performing faculty within the

next two years. This is a significant difference from the retrenchment mentality of the late 70's and early 80's, when the CLA gobbled up music faculty positions as soon as they were vacated. It's often difficult to justify in dollars and cents the one-on-one commitment to music lessons necessary for a performing arts faculty.

The new Director freely acknowledges that the traditional strengths of this School of Music, composition and musicology, befit its status as a part of a major research University. And she's also aware that the brand-new Ferguson Hall facility on the West Bank of the Mississippi doesn't have a proper concert hall -- making it impossible for the faculty to prepare student performers properly. University musical organizations have been performing in churches and concert halls all over the metro area for years. This state of affairs does nothing to raise the profile of the University or its Music School -- especially in comparison with its neighbor on the West Bank campus, the Theatre Department, which boasts four different stages.

In consideration of this situation, Dr. Wolff budgets "a good share of every day of my life" implementing the fund-raising campaign necessary to build an already-planned, eight-and-a-half million dollar, 1000-seat auditorium. The School of Music now has only the barn-like Northrop Auditorium and a couple of smaller "recital" halls -- nothing at all designed for orchestras, bands, opera productions and choirs.

It was actually the very **existence** of the new and well-designed Ferguson Hall that impressed Dr. Wolff when she visited it in July of 1986. She'd been brought to Minneapolis to give a workshop in Choral and General music for teachers of adolescents, and she discovered a brand-new building on the banks of the Mississippi which far outstripped the reputation of the School. "There's much work to be done at the School of Music," she emphasizes, "and if I had not had this rich artistic climate in the city I don't know whether I would have been as interested in the position."

Karen Wolff won't quit when she sees that new concert hall, either. Her firm belief that, "the faculty appointments that will be made are even more important than the concert hall," ensures that many nights will be spent lying awake in anticipation of the tasks to come. She says of the responsibility of recruiting and hiring quality teachers (one musicology and two education positions, in addition to the six additional performers): "Their effect will last much longer than that of a new concert hall." And then there's the scholarship endowment fund, collaborations with local arts organizations and, possibly, a return to active teaching...

Karen Wolff's career as a major administrator began almost overnight when CCM's Dean, Joseph Polisi, left suddenly to become President of Juilliard in 1984. She became Acting Dean "for what we hoped would be six months while we underwent a search. It turned out to be a little over a year." It is a measure of how she coped with having greatness thrust upon her that the administration created the position of Associate Dean for Administrative Affairs expressly for her. They did this when they hired a new Dean, so that he wouldn't have to join battle on all fronts at once. And to hear Dr. Wolff's gracious version of the tale, there's no sense of bitterness that she didn't get the job, or that a man did when a woman had proven herself capable.

When sacrifice is called for, Dr. Wolff recognizes the greater good and goes for it. Besides leaving a vital, well-known Conservatory of Music, she abandoned her children's choir. Given the glut of such groups locally, as well as demands on her time, she holds no hope that another will take its place here. She also moved from a year-old, personally-designed house, with special facilities for music listening and chamber music playing (her husband is a violinist with conservatory training now working in another field), to a condominium at The Falls in Riverplace.

Dr. Wolff's PhD thesis, "The Effects of General Music Education on the Academic Achievement, Perceptual-Motor Development, Creative Thinking, and School Attendance of

First-Grade Children," sounds like some kind of super-relevant Education manifesto, right? Guess again! According to her research, there are no extra-musical effects of music instruction.

In this document and several lectures and papers since, Dr. Wolff preaches the gospel that "the outcome of teaching music to children, the most potent outcome, is that they learn more about music." Period. "A lot of people try to justify the teaching of music and the other arts for what else it will do -- cure flat feet and baldness and things like that. And I think that there are a number of us who believe that we don't need to use those extraneous reasons for justifying the teaching of music. We teach music because of its intrinsic value."

As we finished the interview, the articulate administrator summed things up for me:

There's a message that I want to get to Minnesota and the Twin Cities area; and that is that we have this beautiful new facility in Ferguson Hall, we have an allocation of resources from within the University which will allow us to increase the size of our faculty and to put a renewed emphasis on the performance aspects of our business, and now as the final ingredient, we need to raise the funds so we can make the performance hall a reality. Then we will have all the ingredients in place to push ourselves onto the national horizon as far as a comprehensive School of Music within a major university. Now that's an exciting prospect, don't you think?

4-11 New Director of School of Music:
a Wolff in Sheep's Clothing

Rumours are flying thick and fast about Dr. Karen Wolff, the new Director of the University's School of Music. "I heard she got special permission from the Deans to evaluate all the faculty and fire whoever isn't good enough," goes one. And another says, "Well, I heard that all the string and brass players from the two big orchestras [part-time teachers] have to go, so she can hire a few full-time teachers instead."

But on the plus side of the ledger, a voice says, "I heard her husband's a big fundraiser who's been put in charge of gathering the money to build the concert hall." And

there's some loose talk about a Minnesota professor who "was offered the Music Department Chairmanship at a big school out East, and turned it down!"

This last one is actually true, sort of. Lawrence Weller, Associate Professor of Voice, was recruited heavily -- with offers of a raise and "ill-defined administrative clout" -- to join the faculty of Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh, whose high-profile music-theatre department held a certain attraction for him. He acknowledges that, "a very strong factor in my not accepting that [faculty position] was that there are exciting possibilities here, due to our new Director."

Another reason for Weller's decision is that this School is a full-service School of Music in a major metro area. And Dr. Karen Wolff certainly sounds like she intends to exploit the resources of the Twin Cities to the fullest: "[The musical/artistic community is] absolutely the first thing that attracted me. There's much work to be done at the School of Music, and if I had not had this rich artistic climate in the city I don't know whether I would have been as interested in the position." She continues, even more enthusiastically, "it seemed to me that here we are, situated in a major university in a major city with this wonderful, lively, dynamic artistic climate. And if you can't make an exciting School of Music out of that, I don't know what it would take."

To correct another rumor, it should be noted that Dr. Wolff has actively sought out the leaders of the Minnesota Orchestra, St. Paul Chamber Orchestra and Minnesota Opera regarding future collaborative ventures. She emphasizes her adherence to current practice: "We already involve a number of the players in both orchestras as faculty members here and I want them as faculty members to know that I'm interested in them and I want them to be interested in the School of Music."

A possible source of misunderstanding with regard to the part-time faculty issue is an exciting departure from recent policies in the College of Liberal Arts (CLA). The School of Music has been promised six new full-time tenure-track performance teachers. These will

not replace all the part-time teachers from the local orchestras, but will offer more guidance and continuity to student performance majors than a virtuoso player (who is a part-time teacher) can or would want to.

Dr. Wolff recognizes differences between the University of Minnesota School of Music -- which has always been an academic entity in the CLA -- and her former employer, the Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music (CCM) -- an autonomous performance-based conservatory which merged with a University. But she definitely wishes to make performing a much stronger part of this School of Music.

At CCM, although she was a Music Education Professor and Associate Dean, she also conducted the CCM Children's Choir. This served the Conservatory's performance needs better than a strict regimen of academic work might have. Karen Wolff believes that bringing attention to the School of Music can best be done through well-publicized, well-attended performances. She asserts that "performance is the obvious way . . . to make this entire enterprise more visible to the community and to the country at large. It's what is at the heart of music."

When asked whether she plans to fire a slew of incompetent professors, the customarily soft-spoken Director replies heatedly, "I have **never** made any statements to that effect. It is not my style, nor would it be permitted for me to make those kinds of decisions." She pauses, then goes on, "I expect to engage our faculty in a discussion of the many objectives of this school and **together** we will make our plans for how we're going to address the future. I emphasize the word 'together'."

CLA Dean Fred Lukermann is "jubilant" when he considers Director Wolff's impact in the local arts community. Her application and interview showed her to be "far and away the top candidate." And in the first couple months of her appointment, Wolff has made a very good impression on such people as Edo de Waart, conductor of the Minnesota Orchestra, as well as a special advisory board of community leaders. Delighted, the Dean jokes, "I'm just a

little worried because **everybody** seems so charmed." In a more serious vein, he also applauds the close fit between her intentions and the University's Commitment to Focus. Her analysis of the School of Music's strengths and needs comes at a good time, because the Plan for Focus is right in line with many of her ideas and will give the new leader a context in which to build her program's quality.

On the topic of raising the funds necessary to build a planned eight-and-a-half-million-dollar concert hall, Dr. Wolff's views are consistent with those of the faculty and administration. She's completely committed to the task at hand, stating matter-of-factly: "It takes up a good share of every day of my life, as a matter of fact. This building is not complete. No one can think seriously about the training of musicians without providing them a space in which to practice what they do."

4-12 A Musical Critic's New York City Odyssey

March 7-9, 1988

HIGH-BROW (serious music your professors would endorse)

Joy in Singing

My musical mystery tour began unexpectedly early last Monday in the New York Public Library branch at Lincoln Center, with something called "Joy in Singing," at 6 PM. For free! Celebrated American tenor and voice coach, Paul Sperry, gave a public master class to 3 young singers pre-selected by audition.

The songs they chose were nicely esoteric -- by Haydn, Wolf, Mahler, Strauss, Copland, Ravel -- and generally well done. Sperry attended lovingly to the singers as well as to the songs they performed. It's wonderful to hear and see such care lavished upon the neglected and delicate art of recital singing.

Merkin Hall

The main event of the evening -- indeed, of the entire trip -- took place a few blocks away at Merkin Hall, where Malcolm Bilson worked his magic on the music of Beethoven. Known as a leading "original-instrument" performer of Classical fortepiano music, Bilson performed a rather short, but dense program, comprised of Beethoven's "Les Adieux" Sonata and the song cycle "An die ferne Geliebte" in the first half, rounded off by the same composer's Piano and Wind Quintet. And everything neatly tied up by 9:20 PM.

It's well known that author Mark Twain had a passion for gadgets like the typewriter. So too, does Bilson hanker for new, improved fortepianos. His latest instrument (acquired only a week before the New York concert!), fashioned by Derek Adlam after an example by the Viennese builder Nannette Streicher, is slim and graceful, like Mr. Bilson. But its beautiful appearance is only half the pleasure. What it does to Beethoven's music is another matter entirely.

In the opening sonata, gentle swirls of notes, chillingly hushed sections using the moderator pedal, and the clanging impetuosity of a fortepiano crescendo competed for first place on the list of things I like best about Bilson's new-old Beethoven. I absolutely adore the tone colours his machine produces in the different registers, especially because the action enables fast passages in the bass notes to speak clearly. Perhaps time and experience with this new toy will allow Bilson to clear up a few flaws in the mechanical works; he seemed to be chuffing with his mouth to urge the keyboard along, and the new strings sounded like cardboard on the extreme high notes as well as predictably failing to hold their tuning.

Before intermission, Bilson collaborated with tenor Daniel Pincus to render a beautiful, but disappointing "An die ferne Geliebte." The light touch of the fortepiano enabled the unforced voice of the tenor to be heard without holding back any of the active keyboard part. Unfortunately, Bilson contributed many more truly inventive musical moments than did

the tenor's ordinary *bel canto* version. And Pincus *ausgefrittered* the German words in a couple of places.

To finish the concert, Bilson was joined by a distinguished foursome of original-instrument winds, whose playing of Beethoven's quintet excited me. William Purvis's natural valveless horn barked out its energetic themes, never shying away from exposed phrases. Dennis Godburn urged his flamboyantly rattling bassoon on to some great bass licks. Most surprising to me was my delight in the clarinetist (Lawrence McDonald), whose tone was bright and trumpet-like and not at all raucous or displeasing, the way you read about in music history books. The oboist, alone among the quintet, phrased his music in an uninteresting fashion, and his instrument also sounded plain. Not bad, mind, but not extraordinary.

Metropolitan Opera

Tuesday night might have been very fine: the Metropolitan Opera production of *Ariadne auf Naxos* featured Jessye Norman, Kathleen Battle and Tatiana Troyanos. Norman's powerful voice and regal manner and Battle's pert singing and acting were numbered among the strengths. Troyanos, though, sang out of tune and seemed to sleep-walk her blocking. The commedia troupe entertained me if only because of its infectious music; and the trio of nymphs did its bit, singing beautifully, but I wished I hadn't gone. Dull staging overall did little to justify the opulence of the costumes, scenery, the hall itself and the orchestral sound.

The opera itself is partially at fault. The classical drama fails to win me over and there doesn't seem to be enough interesting action. This production certainly was not distinguished in its pulling together of the separate elements that make up good opera. To mention a couple more disparate performances, Nico Castel, in the non-singing role of the Major-Domo "impresarioed" his way about the stage wonderfully and James Levine conducted competently.

Carnegie Hall

Wednesday night was a mighty busy last night in the big city. I heard only half of a Carnegie Hall recital by a couple of Georgians, soprano Alice Hopper and pianist Edward Eikner, who teach and perform at Wesleyan College, in Macon. Ms. Hopper possesses a powerful voice which serves her better when she reins it in. She sang the mad scene from Bellini's *I Puritani* quite well in the moments when she was forced by the quickness of the coloratura to cut the volume back. And though Hopper's French was far from impeccable (no true nasal tones at all, for starters), she offered some exquisite moments in Debussy's *Quatre Chansons de Jeunesse*. In describing a dream or evoking the calm, sad beauty of moonlight, the soprano captured me, only to squander my interest by investing in wide, spreading crescendos that might have been thrilling from inside her head but were less than that from my seat in the hall.

Mr. Eikner encouraged Ms. Hopper in oversinging with his eager, attentive and musically adept accompaniment. Not that she couldn't have been heard over anything he played, but if he and his partner had discussed vocal production, the results would have been happier for all. His solo playing exploited the power and rhythmic drive of the *Three Spanish Dances* by Granados, without sacrificing the lyric quality of the music. Especially in the muted, slower middle dance, the "Andante Orientale," Eikner's tone and sensitivity compelled me to sit forward in my chair.

I'm not sad to have missed the second half, especially since it included a set of Strauss songs, one of which ("Amor") the young Rebecca Sherburn had sung so transparently and thrillingly in the master class only two nights previously. I'm certain that it would have been overpowering.

LOW-BROW (but what thrills)

School-Daze

Interestingly enough, my decision to see Spike Lee's new movie musical was not motivated so much by esthetic decisions as by tired sore feet and a general confusion. *School-Daze* hit me on Tuesday afternoon, right before taking the subway north to the Met; its plot had quite a lot in common with *Ariadne auf Naxos*, as it turns out, and seems a better effort in some ways. You'd probably never believe it, so I s'pose I'll have to explain.

The story concerns two opposing groups of students at an American black college, wryly named Mission College. The one group believes in divestment of the college's investments from South Africa, natural hairdos, and a liberal black solidarity with all other black people; these populists are labelled "pickaninnies" by their foes. The more classical "wannabe's," on the other hand, favor straightened hair, good business connections and getting rich.

The tension of this movie arises from the battle between high comedy and social consciousness. If you could imagine a cross-breed video combining the best of Paul Simon's live Graceland concert with the antics of Animal House, you'd have an idea of the general flavor. The right wingers get all the slinky music and the outrageous fraternity tricks -- they have to bark like dogs and do group push-ups and all sorts of hilarious choreography. But the frantic, goofball movie-musical pace (which the director counts on for ticket sales, I'm sure) keeps getting interrupted by little segments preaching about doing good in the world.

I found myself drawn in by both ridiculous postures. I like the seeming disjunction, because it keeps you thinking all the time. And in the end the moviemaker isn't so much encouraging the world toward the virtues of knee-jerk liberalism or the sophisticated pleasures of a developed culture. He simply wants to encourage black people, and by extension all living humans, to "WAKE UP" to life itself. It was a lot more fun than *Ariadne*, and quite a bit more meaningful to most people I know.

Martin Beck Theatre

The Wednesday matinee of Stephen Sondheim's new musical, *Into the Woods*, suffered only a little from the absence of its star, Bernadette Peters. Her part, the Witch in the fairy tales, was played quite fetchingly by Betsy Joslyn. And having an excellent actress singing the pivotal role (instead of a show-stopping star) helped me to evaluate the show on its own merits.

Three fairy tales -- "Little Red Riding Hood," "Cinderella" and "Jack and the Beanstalk" -- are intertwined, with an invented, central one which ties them all together. The message is pretty banal after all: to better yourself, you must take chances and then accept the consequences of your ambitious actions. But, as always, the tuneful energy of Sondheim's music elevates the simple moral to a palatable state.

One of the disappointing things about the production is that it seems so middle-class ordinary. The princes and beautiful people are unfailingly white, though nothing in the libretto suggests that they must be. The only concession Sondheim makes to taking real chances is in casting kids in big shows. Jack is winningly sung by Ben Wright, a college freshman; and Jean Kelly (Rapunzel) is still in high school. Pamela Winslow, the wonderfully naive, sympathetic and clear-voiced Cinderella, has just graduated from Carnegie-Mellon. It seemed a little too perfect sometimes, like a toothpaste commercial.

However, it seems that Sondheim has actually embedded some regrets or misgivings about the morality within his own scheme. One of the most striking numbers is the duet "Agony," for the two Princes (Rapunzel's and Cinderella's), about the just-out-of-reach-ness of transcendent experience and achievement. Even in the happily ever after world, the two princes feel the pain of wanting more. And they sing in unison at the top of their vocal range throughout the song, an infinitely more tantalizing dream of perfection than close harmony.

Another symbolic construction is the practice of doubled roles, one more like Dr. Jekyll and the other a sort of scary Mr. Hyde. Cinderella's prince is the most obvious example of this: he plays Red Riding Hood's wolf (with fur and a mask), but changes to Cinderella's prince. The prince degenerates to compulsive philandering by the second act, demonstrating the true nature of the cast doublings.

Music-Theatre Group

The last show I saw was the most striking, the seediest looking, the shortest and the most problematic. Actually, *Juan Darién* isn't officially opened yet, though they charged fifteen dollars to regular customers and sold good houses at both 7 pm and 9:30 (when I went). I received a press pass on the condition that I not write about it.

So what follows ought to be considered a fantastic dream of what I might have said if I had written a review of a new music-theatre piece based on a short story by Horacio Quiroga. Imagine, if you will . . .

A jungle descends from the ceiling, flies buzz and snakes squirm, big tigers mate and a little tiger is born into a beautiful world. A hunter kills the baby tiger's family, then chases him into the house of a beautiful woman who suckles him. When the hunter bursts into the woman's room and rips away her clothing, he finds a baby at her breast. It's quite a miracle for her too. Tiger-boy goes to school, joins the circus tigers by instinct and dies when the humans discover he was a tiger.

Now imagine that it's all done with puppets and oversize masks. And that the texts are minimal, using the Catholic Requiem in Latin and excerpts from Quiroga in Spanish. And that the music is like nothing you've ever heard before, the death rattle of Mr. Bones, buzzing of insects, the singing of a boy soprano, all manner of strange invented whistles and flutes. See the huge cast scurrying about all in black, like Hasidic Jews with face cloths, shadowing the puppet tigers and skeletons and such.

And imagine that it's a work of process in which the composer (Elliot Goldenthal) and the director (Julie Taymor) conspire to create by allowing the cast members freedom to learn idiomatic actions and expressions to tell an allegorical and fantastic story with hardly any literal text. Where will it all end? I don't know, but I would pay to see it again when it becomes enough a finished product to be officially opened.

Juan Darién was a beautiful fantasy way to end my stay in New York. I hadn't even known of its existence when I arrived there.

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