

Classical Music

A critic's top picks from the last 40 years

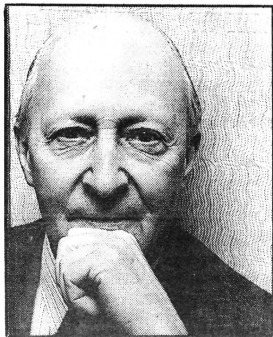
By Paul Hertelendy
Mercury News Music Writer

THE lists of "best serious music of the 20th century" are many. But in most of them the emphasis falls heavily on the first 50 years, and the second half gets short shrift.

One of the victims of such selections is Polish composer Witold Lutoslawski, who was well received conducting his own works at the San Francisco Symphony recently, including one I'd include on my own best-pieces list: his "Concerto for Orchestra." (It will be performed by the San Jose Symphony in February).

With the century rushing toward its end, this seems to be an apt time for a critic to present a best-works list for the second half. So here goes — with the hope that readers who find something else more arresting will let me know their choices. (Most of these pieces are available on audio recordings, either CDs or LPs.)

John Adams' "Nixon in China" is part of a new breed of opera combining a versatile kind of minimalism with a documentary approach to plot. The work is based on Richard Nixon's historic breakthrough in U.S.-China relations, with Mao Tse-tung in a major role. Another Adams work — "Phrygian Gates," an appealing piece for solo piano — almost makes my list, too, for its demonstration that minimalism can be varied and virtuosic.



Witold Lutoslawski
'Concerto for Orchestra'

Philip Glass' "Satyagraha" is another docu-opera, dealing with Mohandas Gandhi's early work to free the Indian masses from exploitation and discrimination. Glass' Eastern-inspired minimalism is more doctrinaire than Adams', but it fits the Indian theme hand-in-glove. Glass uses innovative approaches in both his operas and concert pieces, making the electronic synthesizer a dominant accompaniment.

A third opera, Thea Musgrave's "Mary Queen of Scots," demonstrates that an honest historical opera built around a stunning lead soprano need not revert to derivative music. Her music is fresh, vital and mildly dissonant.

Krzysztof Penderecki's "St. Luke's Passion" is a choral-orchestral work that embodies new techniques of tone clusters and micro-tones to eerie, spine-tingling effect. The texts predate J.S. Bach.

Hans-Werner Henze's "El Cimarrón," for a male singer-narrator and small percussion-dominated ensemble, is a brilliant setting for the memoirs of a freed Cuban slave. This piece — one of the most memorable works done in Spanish — came from a German who lives in Italy.

Luciano Berio's "Sinfonia," from the 1960s, was a trailblazer, using the Swingle Singers alongside the orchestra to voice evocations of Martin Luther King Jr. and wordless song. The vocal textures are well integrated into this lengthy orchestral work.

Olivier Messiaen's "From the Canyons to the Stars" was inspired by the American prairie, even though Messiaen is French. Maybe it's an American chauvinism that draws me to this work, but I can't overlook Messiaen's interest in bird calls, his powerful Christian bent, and his massive canvas, all realized in music.

Tod Machover's "Spectres Parisiens" is the best amalgam yet of live orchestra with real-time electronic sounds — a provocative medium whose surface has barely been scratched, even though the technology is all in place. The impatient Machover has moved from Paris to Cambridge, Mass., and is now composing electronic operas.

Michael McNabb's "Dream-Song," created at Stanford University's computer-music studios in the early 1980s, is a piece I'd take to a desert island to restore frazzled nerves. It conjures up fantas-

tic, restful images in its ultra-sophisticated soundscape. I lament that the recording is out of print.

George Crumb's "Black Angels" was a response to the apocalyptic side of the Vietnam War. It's a hyperactive, quote-filled string quartet, in which the players also contribute chants, percussion and whispers. The anguish is palpable.

The string instruments are amplified in this work, perhaps presaging the quartets of the 21st century.

Some late symphony of Shostakovich belongs on the list, but which? Various people will lean toward No. 10 (heard this season at the San Jose Symphony) or No. 13

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First-rate music of the century's second half

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(framing the anti-persecution poem "Babi Yar"). My own favorite, however, is Dmitri Shostakovich's Symphony No. 14. This is an inordinately compact work, which audaciously introduced to the Soviet Union poems from Western Europe, sung hauntingly by a soprano

and a bass over a chamber orchestra. It is to Shostakovich what the "Four Last Songs" are to Richard Strauss, a summing up of an entire career as an artist. A professional Bay Area performance of this work is long overdue.

Igor Stravinsky's "Variations" is a brief, brilliant orchestral foray into jagged 12-tone music. It comes

and goes in the time it takes to cook an egg, but it offers a lot of appealing seasoning.

György Ligeti's "Aventures" creates brilliant otherworldly effects. About a half-hour of this choral work was used for the ape sequence in the sound track of the film "2001: A Space Odyssey." Ligeti's tone clusters are chilling and

unforgettable.

Pierre Boulez's "Pli selon pli" (which translates roughly as "Folded Accordingly"), a work for soprano and orchestra, is the musical pinnacle of this composer, who epitomizes the austere, complex style dominant in the '50s and '60s. It has been revised so often I've lost track, but its constant metamorphosis is part of the appeal.

Benjamin Britten's "The Turn of the Screw," a ghost opera based on the Henry James novel, is a gem of conciseness from a master of economy and lyricism. A close second on my list of Britten favorites is

his "War Requiem," which speaks with eloquence about the futility and profound loss of war, while linking soldiers on opposite sides of the front through the words of British poet Wilfred Owen, who died in World War I.

For a variety of reasons, other works warrant mention.

Some are significant for their historical importance. Among them:

■ Steve Reich's "Clapping Music" and Terry Riley's "In C," for launching minimalism in the mid-1960s.

■ David Del Tredici's "Alice" series of nearly a dozen big orchestral pieces, for taking us to a comfy wonderland of rediscovered romanticism, with a soprano whimsically voicing Lewis Carroll on a bullhorn.

■ George Rochberg's String Quartet No. 3, for signaling an emphatic return to tonality — now the dominant style — in the early '70s.

Also, Morton Feldman made a virtue of ultra-slow music; Conlon Nancarrow did incredible rhythmic juxtapositions with hand-punched piano rolls; and Stanford's John Chowning developed both frequency-modulated synthesized sound and a phenomenal electronic simulation of the human voice.

But my last choice is straight out of Zen — a work that comments simultaneously on others' music, on excessive ritual, on musical theater and on the sonic overload of our age: John Cage's "4'33," for one or more instruments. This piece calls for exactly four minutes and 33 seconds of silence, with the "performer" theatrically simulating performance in any way desired.

The 20th has been a great, crazy, inventive century. I wouldn't trade it for any other — except the 21st. ■

MUSICAL EVENTS

Manifest

THE Juilliard School, I notice, has a new (non-credit) class, in platform deportment. So I must have been wrong in thinking for all these years that American conservatories did give platform-department classes, and that their tenor was: Never let an audience guess from the expression on your face that musicmaking might be an enjoyable business or that you actually like the work you're playing. Dour demeanor is so regular in New York that I had assumed it must be inculcated and carefully maintained. Watch *Speculum Musicae*, Parnassus, or the New Music Consort play some tricky, delightful modern composition: how often do the players' faces light up in pure pleasure at felicities in the music or in their execution of it? Watch British, French, or Italian musicians of comparable achievement play the same piece: although they may not play it any better, their manner is likely to invite the audience to share their appreciation of it.

Such reflections occurred to me, not for the first time, at the performance—a musically good performance—of Luciano Berio's "Circles" given in Carnegie Recital Hall earlier this season by the New Music Consort. "Circles," composed in 1960, is an immediately attractive modern classic. When Cathy Berberian, for whom it was written, sings and acts it, a deaf man can take pleasure in the piece. Judith Bettina, the protagonist of the Consort performance, sang the work accurately, sweetly, and brightly, but she enacted it in a deadpan fashion. At the end, the audience was enthusiastic. Miss Bettina and the two percussionists, Claire Heldrich and Gary Schall, accepted the applause gravely, almost grimly. Only the harpist, Alyssa Hess, intimated by her expression that "Circles" had been fun to play and that she was glad that we, too, had enjoyed it.

I don't want to make too much of this. "Circles" is a special case—in its composer's words, "a structure of actions, to be listened to as theatre and to be viewed as music." The singer also directs the piece, beating time, clacking her claves, ringing her little finger cymbals, jingling glass chimes and wood chimes, changing her command post. One doesn't want all music to be elaborately mopped and mowed through by its executants. A conductor who dances out an elaborate, obtrusive platform choreography can be distracting. A page-turner for Dame Myra

Hess told me that he was once surprised during rehearsal to see the words "LOOK UP!" writ large in her score over a tender second subject. Dame Myra didn't look up—not until the performance that night, when her eyes rolled soulfully to heaven. It's not really an unkind story: that soulful glance may well have helped some listeners to understand the expressiveness that she intended the melody to carry. Similarly, Lotte Lehmann's primer "More Than Singing" provides many tips about glances, gestures, and postures that can help a singer to communicate the sense of a song. Harry Plunket Greene's "Interpretation in Song" even suggests that the singer of "Er, der Herrlichste von Allen" may at the turns in the vocal line "clasp her hands or clutch at her heart or throw her arms out to the beloved image." But I'm thinking of something less carefully considered: unstudied, spontaneous communicativeness, a bond of shared enjoyment, unconcealed, between performers and audience. And I'm deploring the apparently deliberate cultivation of a stern, puritan platform manner—as if it were bad form to admit to delight. Sometimes, I think, the result "sounds": the inhibited demeanor or inhibits expression. Even when it doesn't, it is likely to inhibit an audience's response and dull its appreciation. There are phonograph records on which one can "hear" the twinkle in Elisabeth Schumann's, Horowitz's, or Gerard Schwarz's eyes.

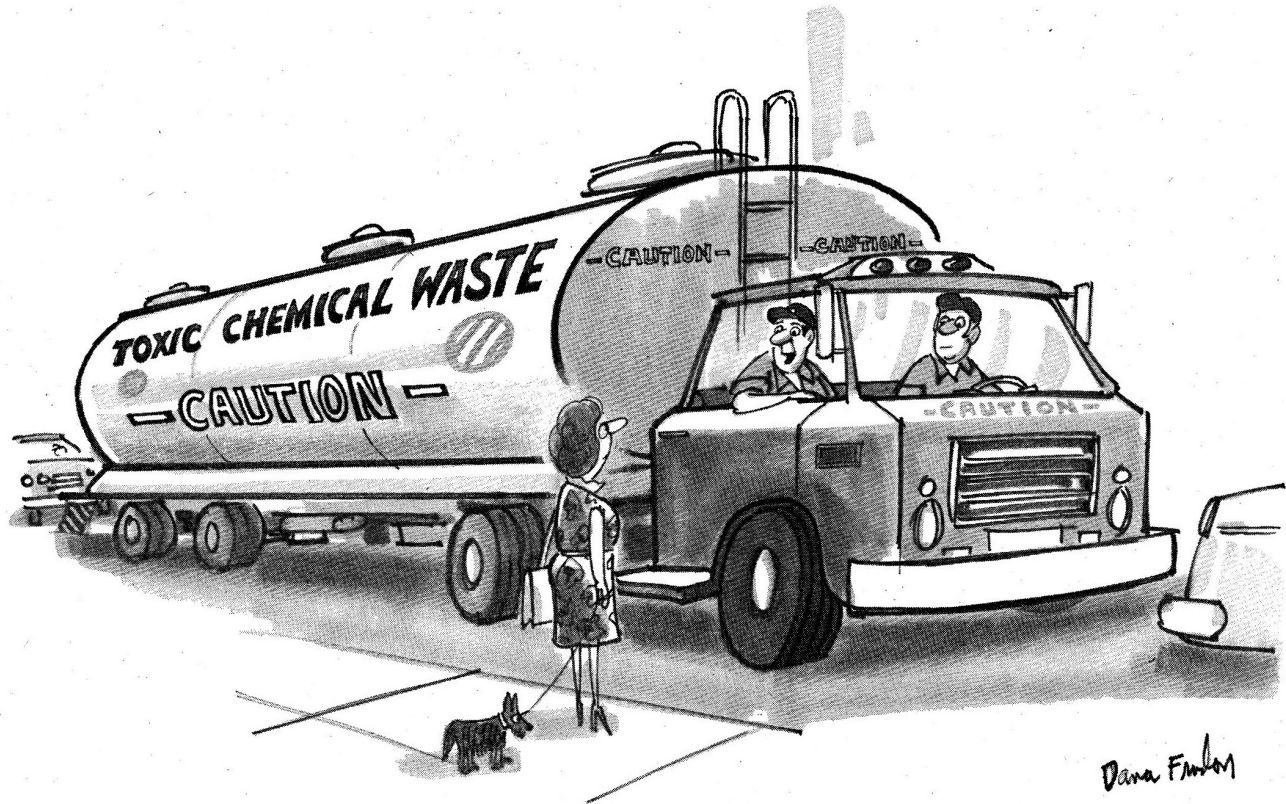
"Circles" closed the third of the three national programs (French, Austrian-and-German, Italian) that the New Music Consort gave this season. Luigi Nono's "Polifonica-Monodia-Ritmica" (1951) began it, in a delicate and beautiful performance, conducted by George Manahan. There were also Bruno Maderna's "Honeyrêves" (1961), Berio's set of folk-song arrangements (1963), which call for more diverse characterization than Miss Bettina gave them, and Luigi



Dallapiccola's exquisite "Piccola Musica Notturna" (1954). It was something of a down-memory-lane program—nothing from the last sixteen years—and that was a pity, for in this town we hear precious little of what Italian composers are up to, while all these works are on disc (and all but the folk songs in the current catalogue). But it was a coherent evening of cultivated, finely wrought, and—in the Nono and in "Circles"—inspired music, performed on a high level of accomplishment. Next season, the Consort plays three concerts of American chamber music in its Carnegie series; I hope the programs include the best of the new pieces it has been introducing at York College, in Queens.

THE League-ISCM concerts, which a few years ago I used to attend, I confess, more as a matter of duty than with any great keenness, have again become an important element in the musical life of the city—not least because the works presented come from all over the country. This season's seven programs, performed in Carnegie Recital Hall, were varied and were imaginatively, intelligently, and purposively assembled. In the course of two of them, four of the six winning works in the League-ISCM 1978 competition were done. The competition was held to choose six compositions, by six composers, to go forward as the national submission to the international jury of the World Music Days—the new name for the ISCM Festival—which this year will be held in Athens in September. (Two of the winning pieces were for large forces that would not fit a recital format, so their composers were represented by pieces that would fit.) The American judges spanned the country: John Harbison (Cambridge), Paul Lansky (Princeton), Roger Reynolds (San Diego), Ralph Shapey (Chicago), and Harvey Sollberger (New York). So did the winners: Laura Clayton (Ann Arbor), John Heiss (Auburndale, Massachusetts), Michael McNabb (Stanford), Frank Retzel (Chicago), Maurice Wright (New York), and Scott A. Wyatt (Urbana). Three of the six winning pieces use tape, and in a fourth the instruments are amplified.

I caught three of the pieces submitted to Athens and particularly liked two of them: McNabb's "Dreamsong" and Heiss's Chamber Concerto. McNabb works at Stanford University's Center for Computer Research in Music and Acoustics; his "Dreamsong" is for computer-generated stereo tape, with recorded soprano. A few weeks



"We're not dumping it anywhere, Ma'am. We're just going to keep driving it around."

later, at The Rockefeller University, I heard the computer-generated score in somewhat similar vein which McNabb and William Schottstaedt had composed to accompany Elliott Levinthal's three-dimensional film of Martian landscapes, assembled from signals that the Viking spacecraft sent back to Earth. The sounds were strange, romantic, and picturesque, evocative of an other-world landscape. They made a good soundtrack. Much electronic composition (the term is intended to cover both synthesized sounds and natural sounds recorded and electronically processed) suggests background music—accompaniment to odysseys or travelogues that call for something more special than the mock-Delius habitually added to images of familiar pastoral scenes. And I own that at the League concert, which happened before I knew about the Martian movie, "Dreamsong" at first seemed to me an invitation to roam in imagination through long, unfamiliar landscapes. But soon, or so I thought, it was revealed as music in its own right—music to attend to, not to dream through—for interesting, arresting things were happening, and the shape was making sense. When the mysterious sounds suddenly coalesced into articulate words, the effect was potent. To put it another way, McNabb is plainly a

real composer, apprehensible as such—not a stunt man or a mere dabbler in technical tricks. Heiss's Chamber Concerto was closer to common musical experience, for although it starts scampily, it then turns to ordered musical discourse, pleasing and holding the mind and the ear as voice responds to voice and theme plays upon theme. The piece is a clarification, now for four players (flute, clarinet, piano, and percussion), of the Flute Concerto, for soloist and ensemble of ten, which Speculum introduced two years ago. The flute still has the dominant role, of which Carol Wincenc was a striking interpreter. I didn't dislike the third Athens piece on this bill—Wyatt's "Menagerie," a four-channel electronic composition, in three sections entitled "Tree Clams," "Air Stones," and "Moonsheep." Indeed, "Tree Clams" began and ended captivantly. But I felt that I'd missed the point of it, that I was somehow on the wrong wavelength.

The Wright work that went to Athens was "Stellae," for orchestra and tape. At the League concert, his Chamber Symphony, for piano and electronic sound, was played—an animated and cogent, and eventually witty, dialogue. Robert Miller was brilliant in the live role. The concert began with Eric Stokes's "Eldey Island, In

Memoriam Homo Sapiens," for flute and tape. The title may be dog Latin, but the piece is surefire, partly because it must be almost impossible to write an unattractive work for solo flute, or even for solo flute with tape effects, and partly because the subject (the subtitle is "An elegy on the extinction of the Great Auk at the hand of man through greed, folly and arrogance") has listeners on its side as soon as they have read the program note. It tells how, in 1844, three men spotted the last surviving pair of auks. As the men approached, the birds "ran along under the high cliff, their heads erect, their little wings somewhat extended. They uttered no cry of alarm, and moved with their short steps as quickly as a man could run." But they were caught, and strangled, and then their egg, the last egg of the great auks, was wantonly smashed. Given that matter, who could fail to write an effective and moving composition? Stokes has done it skillfully. The New York premiere of Jean Eichelberger Ivey's "Prospero," for bass, horn, percussion, and tape, completed the program. This struck me as a dull piece—"Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves," the epilogue, and some other scraps of "The Tempest" declaimed to pitches against sound effects.

—ANDREW PORTER

MUSICAL EVENTS

Bay Laurels

AROUND San Francisco Bay, composers are clustered, it seems, more densely than anywhere else in the country but New York. And their works are played. During six months I spent in Berkeley, I could probably have heard new music every night—given nothing else to do, 'satisfiable curiosity, and readiness to motor often to Mills, Stanford, and points between or to cross the bridge to the city. Or so it seemed, and an occasional check on a week's programs confirmed it. There were two festivals: a week-end entitled New Sounds San



Jose, at which three of four concerts were devoted to "the Bay Area scene," and a wider-ranging week in San Francisco, New Music America 81, with up to eight events a day. Those were special. What impressed me still more was the large part contemporary music plays in what might be called everyday musical life. The San Francisco Opera mounted John Eaton's "Cry of Clytaemnestra" and Aribert Reimann's "Lear." The San Francisco Symphony gave the American premières of Tôru Takemitsu's "Far Calls. Coming, Far!" and Bruno Maderna's Oboe Concerto No. 3, the local première of Witold Lutoslawski's Variations on a Theme of Paganini, and the first performance of John Adams' "Harmonium." (Edo de Waart, the Symphony's conductor, describes his commitment to contemporary music as "gigantic;" I arrived in California too late for the Symphony's all-modern concert series, in the Galleria, and its Davies Hall performances of Richard Felciano's "Orchestra," and Otto Ketting's First Symphony.) The Oakland Symphony season included Lou Harrison's Concerto for Violin and Percussion, Adams' "Common Tones in Simple Time," and (a commission) Olly Wilson's "Trilogy." The Berkeley Symphony played Olivier Messiaen's "Transfiguration;" Messiaen came over to give his blessing, and Yvonne Loriod to play the piano part. The Boston Symphony, on a visit, played Maxwell Davies' Second Symphony.

Berkeley-based, I did not even have to leave the campus to hear some of these: the San Francisco and Oakland orchestras brought them to the big

university auditorium. To a smaller university auditorium, Hertz Hall, the Audubon Quartet, the pianist Robert Miller, the duo pianists Karl and Margaret Kohn, the baritone William Parker, and the Berkeley Contemporary Chamber Players brought other new music. The University Chorus sang David Ellis's "Sequentia IV;" the University Symphony played Seymour Shifrin's Three Pieces for Orchestra. There was plentiful new music from student ensembles. Mills and Stanford were also busy. At Mills, for example, the soprano Jane Manning, muse of many British composers, gave her first American recital, introducing, amid Warlock, Boulez, and Berio, works written for her by Richard Rodney Bennett, Anthony Payne, and Judith Weir ("King Harald's Saga," a three-act opera, lasting less than ten minutes, in which, unaccompanied, she plays eight characters and the chorus). Other ensembles—the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, the Arch Ensemble, the New Music Ensemble—play regular series. Many of the concerts are broadcast.

A long string of one-sentence, two-epithet reviews would make dull reading, and not everything I heard was worth writing about. Let me record the general impression of vitality and of new music's looming larger, relatively, than it does in New York. We probably have no less of it here, but round the Bay they do not submerge it in quite so full a flood of standard repertory and standard big-name performers. There must be various, mutually supporting reasons for the happy state. The composer Charles Boone, introducing the San Jose festival, suggested as one that the heritage of two great teachers, Sessions at Berkeley and Milhaud at Mills, was still bearing fruit. The concentration of universities certainly plays its part, packing the area with composers, performers, and educated listeners. (At the San Jose festival, composers from six Bay campuses and from the San Francisco Conservatory were heard.) Further, there is, Boone said, no "established hierarchy" into which new works must fit; indeed, old-style-Princetonian orthodoxy from Berke-

ley, disciplined electronics from Stanford's Center for Computer Research in Music and Acoustics, undisciplined, messy neo-expressionism ground out in the Mills of today, and romantic minimalism from the Conservatory were on display cheek-by-jowl. One expects to hear a composer's music played on the campus where he teaches; here off-campus performances were also common. To mention only composers on the Berkeley faculty: I heard music by Andrew Imbrie in San Francisco, and by Felciano, Wilson, and Robert Stine in San Jose. Works by Edwin Dugger and Walter Winslow were brought back to Berkeley by visiting artists. The daily papers and the weeklies kept this activity before the public, for every newspaper—there are many of them around the Bay—seems to employ a team of busy critics, and editors must believe that modern music matters. Alfred Frankenstein, the music critic of the *San Francisco Chronicle* from 1934 to 1965, helped to plant the belief; his last piece of writing before he died, in June, was a letter to his old paper exhorting the Symphony to make fuller use of local performers and composers.

What stood out? Or, rather, what stands out in memory now? I was in California to talk and teach, not to review, and kept no mental or pencilled notes to enlarge on soon after the event. In an odd way, the impressions that remain with me are not always of what seemed most important or enjoyable at the time. Here is a short list: the elegant workmanship of two trios, Frank Larocca's for violin, viola, and cello and Wilson's for violin, cello, and piano; the refined strength of Imbrie's new cycle, "Roethke Songs," sung by Nina Hanson (as I listened, I thought the vocal line angular, but I reread the poems now and find that it etched poetic images); the sound of Heinz Holliger's oboe winding and winging through Maderna's rhapsodic, loose-knit concerto; the puzzling but arresting inventions in two precursors—one a dramatic scene and one a piano suite—of the opera after Marcel Duchamp's "La Mariée Mise à Nu par Ses Céliataires, Mème" that Charles Shere has been working on for years; the romance of Michael McNabb's electronic "Dreamsong," described in these pages after its New York performance two years ago; the swift, delicate trceries of Felciano's "from and to, with," for violin and piano (the rich, beautiful

ideas of his choral piece "The Captives," which I heard on tape, moved me still more); and three compositions by Adams, who teaches at the San Francisco Conservatory, directs its New Music Ensemble, and is contemporary-music adviser to the Symphony.

One of the Adams pieces, "Phrygian Gates," for piano, was already familiar. (It was played in New York in 1979, and is now recorded, along with his "Shaker Loops," by 1750 Arch Records, a Berkeley label.) "Common Tones in Simple Time" (1979), taken up by the Oakland Symphony, is a fresh, very pretty, shimmering piece, aptly described by its composer as "a pastoral with a pulse." With his latest and largest work, "Harmonium," the San Francisco Symphony commission, Adams takes a big step forward. He has said, "Minimalism really can be a bore—you get those Great Prairies of non-event—but that highly polished, perfectly resonant sound is wonderful." In the earlier, attractive, and strongly fashioned pieces, he could be said to be working out and acquiring mastery of a musical language frankly, avowedly, derived from the sounds and moto-perpetuo patterns of Steve Reich but more copious in thematic incident, swifter in color shifts, and more varied in moods. A program note tells of his citing Charles Rosen's observation that Schoenberg created a "universe coherent and rich enough to offer possibilities beyond the development of an individual manner" and of his suggesting that he stands to Reich rather as the other members of the Second Viennese School did to their founder. In "Harmonium" (the title refers to a concord of sounds, not a cottage organ), Adams uses his flexible new language to compose large-scale settings of Donne's "Negative Love" and Emily Dickinson's "Because I could not stop for Death" and "Wild Nights." His "highly polished, perfectly resonant sound" is wonderful. So is the large, long control of harmonic tension and resolution. "Harmonium," for large choir and orchestra, lasts thirty-four minutes. The orchestra should record it.

NOT all the Bay music I heard was modern. At midnight on Holy Saturday, in the little St. Joseph of Arimathea Chapel of Berkeley, where ancient rites are revived, I attended the Paschal Vigil Mass, one of the great dramatic services of Christendom—a symbolic enactment of death

conquered by the Resurrection, a literal enactment of darkness yielding to light, and fast to feast. The opera critic within me murmured that the production and the lighting effects needed more rehearsal and that some of the words (the intercession of saints seldom called upon by Anglicans—Agatha, Anastasia—is invoked) should have been more fervently uttered. But the chant, chanted here in English translation by a small (mixed) choir directed by Richard Crocker, was sensitively shaped. Plainchant, the foundation of all Western music, should be heard in a liturgical setting.

St. Joseph's has a good German organ, built by Jürgen Ahrend and tuned to Werckmeister III, a temperament that makes all keys available but gives to each a distinct character. (Not all the pipes were perfectly in tune, however.) On Fridays at noon, Larry Archbold, an accomplished player and cogent interpreter, gave a long, ambitious series of recitals entitled "Organ Music of J. S. Bach and his Predecessors—German, Dutch, Italian, French, Spanish, or English groups with a big Bach work as finale. Too often at organ recitals one tends to listen to the instrument; here one quickly discovered what the little two-manual, twelve-stop instrument could do, and began to listen only to the music.

Eighteenth-century sounds I now

miss in New York are those of domestic keyboards. The house that I rented in Berkeley held five instruments, the oldest in date—but most modern in timbre—being a Walter fortepiano of the kind that Mozart favored, the others reproductions of more ancient instruments. Only the abundance—not, in Berkeley, the presence—of old instruments was exceptional. Almost every day there, my conviction that the modern Steinway is an unsuitable medium for Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert grew deeper as I listened to sounds the composers themselves would have recognized. The nineteenth-century highlight was two impassioned performances of Verdi's Requiem, in Hertz Hall, conducted by Richard Bradshaw, with the University Chorus and Orchestra and professional soloists. Here, again, an accurate feeling for style brought music of the past to new life. Mr. Bradshaw showed an instinctive command—it is rare today—of the natural movement, the dynamic surge and ebb and flow, the unwritten but essential rubato of Verdi lines. (It was all in high contrast to a polished, driven performance, on television, conducted by Riccardo Muti, which eschewed rubato, portamento, expressive molding of the phrases.) David Rosen, who is editing the Requiem for the new Verdi edition, had made significant, audible corrections to the usual printed

text. The soloists phrased freely and emotionally. Rebecca Cook, a young soprano with the San Francisco Opera, floated warm, full lines and rose to a thrilling high C. Timothy Noble, the bass, was urgent and vivid.

THE acoustics of Davies Hall, the home of the San Francisco Symphony, have been improved by the provision of new reflecting "saucers" above the orchestra—the old ones were warped—but the sound can still not be called warm or "living." In standard repertory, Mr. de Waart seemed a decent but dull conductor—which is at least preferable to a musically indecorous flamboyant conductor. The Oakland Symphony plays in a 1931 *art moderne* palace lovingly restored, the Paramount, of such splendor that the setting almost steals the show. Calvin Simmons, its conductor, puzzles me. He is gifted and musical, but in performances of Mozart, Schubert, Richard Strauss, Prokofiev, Vaughan Williams he put precision before phrasing, energy before expression, to an extent that made one want to lock him in a library of Mengelberg, Furtwängler, and Beecham records, where he might learn that making music means more than playing the right notes, crisply, elegantly, in strict tempo. Then he led an account of Britten's "Spring Symphony" so fresh and *felt* that one's heart went out to him.

BACK in New York, the plazas of Lincoln Center come to life with open-air summer music. The first strains I heard on return were those of the newly discovered Mozart symphony, K. 19a, in F major, composed in London when Mozart was nine; the Mostly Mozart Festival gave a run-through of its opening concert out in the open, playing to a happy throng under the trees of the north plaza, beside the pool. The symphony is a delightful piece, fashioned in the manner of John Christian Bach, with inspired Mozartian touches in its first movement. Most evenings, the Guggenheim Concert Band has been playing in Damrosch Park, at the southwest corner of the Center. J. C. Bach composed for Vauxhall Gardens; Mozart played in Ranelagh Gardens. Damrosch Park and the summer café and kiosks on the main plaza provide between them a rough modern suggestion of those musical pleasure places. The bandshell, a soaring concrete mihrab, seems to carry an echo

of Vauxhall's "Moorish-Gothick" bandstand. An evening of Leonard Bernstein's show music, given by the National Chorale, reminded us of his wit, metrical vivacity, and melodiousness. The band concerts reached their climax in a "festival" devoted to John Philip Sousa and Victor Herbert. Both men, near-contemporaries, were bandmasters. Herbert conducted the famous Twenty-second Regiment Band of the New York National Guard before he went to the Pittsburgh Symphony. He is remembered mainly for his operettas, and Sousa for his marches, but both composers were prolific in both veins. The "festival" designation was earned by the planning: successive programs explored influences (Offenbach, Wagner, Johann Strauss), pièces d'occasion (for Pittsburgh, Atlanta, Buffalo expositions, President Garfield's Inauguration), "connections and legacies" (outstanding was "A Chant from the Great Plains," a symphonic episode, of 1919, treating an Omaha Indian theme in amplest "Rheingold" manner, by Carl Busch, conductor of the Kansas City Symphony and a composer unknown to Grove), exotica ("The Kaffir of Karoo," from Sousa's "Tales of a Traveler"), theatre music. In Lincoln Center Library, there were related morning "seminars." The performances, however, did not always attain festival standard. Several pieces sounded underrehearsed. Ainslee Cox, the Guggenheim Concert Band's music director and conductor, was an unobservant accompanist to his soloists. I preferred the dapper, traditional style of the guest conductor, Leonard B. Smith, music director of the Detroit Concert Band.

Brass bands and military bands (the latter term not necessarily implying anything more bellicose than the addition of woodwinds to the brasses) have their part to play in serious music. In American houses, I have only twice heard *banda* music excitingly performed: in San Antonio's production of "Rienzi," and, by West Point players, in the Sacred Music Society's performance of Meyerbeer's "Il Crociato." (Records of that stirring performance, by the way, have just been released on the Voce label.) I hope Beverly Sills has engaged a crack marching band for the City Opera's "Nabucco" next season. At the first "Nabucco," according to Verdi's memoir, the audience burst into applause when the *banda* came marching in.

—ANDREW PORTER

MUSICAL EVENTS

Sound-Houses

IN 1624, Francis Bacon, in "The New Atlantis," predicted with some accuracy what would be happening at IRCAM and in the computer-music studios of San Diego, Stanford, Murray Hill, and elsewhere three and a half centuries later:

We have also sound-houses, where we practise and demonstrate all sounds, and their generation. We have harmonies which you have not, of quarter-sounds, and lesser slides of sounds. Divers instruments of music likewise to you unknown, some sweeter than any you have; together with bells and rings that are dainty and sweet. We represent small sounds as great and deep; likewise great sounds extenuate and sharp; we make divers tremblings and warblings of sounds, which in their original are entire. We represent and imitate all articulate sounds and letters, and the voices and notes of beasts and birds. We have certain helps which set to the ear do further the hearing greatly. We have also divers strange and artificial echoes, reflecting the voice many times, and as it were tossing it: and some that give back the voice louder than it came; some shriller, and some deeper; yea, some rendering the voice differing in the letters or articulate sound from that they receive. We have also

means to convey sounds in trunks and pipes, in strange lines and distances.

In 1906, Thaddeus Cahill demonstrated his two-hundred-ton Telharmonium, which generated sound by electricity, and which led Busoni, in his "Sketch for a New Aesthetic of Music," to ask "In what direction does the next step lead?" and answer "To abstract sound, to unhampered technique, to unlimited tonal material." The development of the valve oscillator, a decade later, and the inventions of the Theremin, the Ondes Martenot, and the Trautonium made new sounds less cumbrously achievable. But only the advent of the tape recorder (which composers began to compose with in the fifties—Cage's "Imaginary Landscape No. 5," Varèse's "Déserts"), then the electronic sound synthesizer (which Stockhausen used, together with tape-manipulated natural song, to create "Gesang der Junglinge"), and now the computer has made possible that complete control of sound which Bacon described: anal-

ysis, dissection, whole or partial metamorphosis, and reassembly, as required, of all existing sounds; the invention of sounds unheard before, precisely formulated, in precisely determined structures; the ability to make sounds walk or dart or whirl through space along plotted paths.

The medieval theorists related music to mathematics: 4:5:6 represents a perfect major triad. Today, any sound or combination of sounds, however intricate, can be represented by numbers—digital recording depends on this. Time, expense, and the composers' technological skills are the only impediments to composition. When IRCAM was conceived, in 1970—readers of the June *Ambassador*, T.W.A.'s flight magazine, discover—"even the most powerful musical computers, or 'signal processors,' could take a week to produce a sound after receiving a direction, months for an entire short composition." And in the program book of Horizons '84—the Philharmonic's contemporary-music festival, at which three concerts were devoted to music in whose making computers played a part—Richard Moore, the director of the San Diego Center for Music Experiment and of its Computer Audio Research Laboratory, writes:

A ten-minute musical composition done in stereophonic sound . . . might require about one hundred twenty million eight-bit bytes of computer memory just to hold the sound itself, exclusive of the computer program. Simple musical sounds might require about a hundred computer operations to calculate each number. Assuming that a good-sized modern computer can execute a million operations per second, it would take about seventeen hours to compute that ten-minute piece of music. More complex sounds might require ten or a hundred times more computation.

It's a far cry from a composer who, pen or pencil in hand, sets down on staff paper notes that indicate pitch and relative durations but cannot with precision define timbre, changes of timbre, changes of speed. And a farther cry from the composers who would turn out a long opera in weeks, in days, and count upon its executants to add the necessary "finishing touches"—different at every performance—to the music.

The Horizons concerts were prefaced by a two-session symposium on computers and art in which famous figures in the field, their names familiar from the textbooks—Richard Moore, Max Mathews, Benoit Man-



"I think you'll find me listed under plumbing contractors."

delbrot, Harold Cohen—took part, along with the two composers, Charles Wuorinen and Roger Reynolds, who had planned the concerts. The participants stressed that full-scale computer composing was an expensive business and that only the well-equipped and generously supported studios can provide an ambitious composer with complete control of all sound. (IRCAM is subsidized to the tune of about four million dollars a year; I don't know what the San Diego, Stanford, Bell Labs budgets are.) They also stressed that the instruments of electronic music are still developing very fast, and that computers are one of the few things in the world that become cheaper. (Xenakis, in a program note for his "Khal Perr," given its American première at a Horizons concert, looked forward to a time when all would be able to compose freely on their home computers, linked into immense sonic and system resources held at "university centers, conservatories, and all cultural centers.") Many musicians have had mixed feelings about electronic music. Boulez, after composing his electronic *Études*, in 1952, wrote, "Everything that was limited becomes unlimited; everything that was 'imponderable' can now be subjected to precise measurement." But in 1969 he told the *Times*:

This same frenzy for technology began in Europe about 1953. By 1958 it had all died down. The idea of electronics as the big future of music is just an American trick of fashion. Next year they'll discover the viola da gamba.

Boulez now heads IRCAM, and his "Répons" (1981)—unheard so far in America but being considered for a Philharmonic performance—is, to judge from what a tape recording can capture of it, a dazzling sonic adventure that makes full use of IRCAM's technological wizardry.

"Répons" is a "realtime" composition: it uses live players, and none of the sound is prerecorded. A CRI album, SD 268, celebrating ten years of composition at the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center, 1960-1970, presents a rich survey of the different ways natural or traditional sounds, those sounds transformed, synthesized sounds, and living performers have been used, separately or in combinations. It includes Varèse's "Déserts," for orchestra and tape (in its 1961 recension); Milton Babbitt's "Vision and Prayer" (1961), for soprano and synthesized accompaniment; Mario Davidovsky's "Synchronisms

No. 5" (1969), for percussionists and tape; and two purely electronic pieces by Vladimir Ussachevsky (1968 and 1971) in which, the composer says, "it is likely that all known methods of generating sounds with the digital computer are illustrated." Paul Griffiths' "A Guide to Electronic Music" (a Thames & Hudson paperback) is a handy and readable survey of the subject, with a useful discography. But, written five years ago, it stops short of the latest computer developments. The Beatles', Frank Zappa's, the Grateful Dead's recourse to electronics is considered. Since then, Michael Jackson's "Thriller," product in part of a Baconian sound-house, has become the best-selling record of all time.

THE Horizons concerts illustrated many of the different ways in which computers can be used. The first piece heard was Michael McNabb's very attractive "Dreamsong" (1978), which has become something like a classic of the genre. McNabb used digital processing to achieve transitions from unaltered natural sounds to synthesized sounds—"more poetically, from the real world to the realm of the imagination," as he put it in a program note. A movement of Laurie Spiegel's "Music for Dance" (1975), composed on Mathews and Moore's GROOVE system, seemed musically unimaginative. Charles Dodge's "The Waves" (1984) is an eloquent, shapely composition—a setting, for the soprano Joan La Barbara, of the opening sentences of the Woolf novel, accompanied by a tape in which Miss La Barbara's reading of the passage and examples of her remarkable vocal techniques served, the composer said in his note, "as a sound-source for computer extension and enhancement, and also as a model for the frequency and amplitude of computer-synthesized sounds."

The second concert was played by the Group for Contemporary Music, conducted by Harvey Sollberger. It opened with Xenakis's "Khal Perr" (1983), for brass quintet and percus-

sion—live players of a score in part freely composed, in part computer-calculated. It's a bright, exciting stretch of music. Jean-Claude Risset's "Profiles" (1982), for seven players and computer-synthesized tape, proved fascinating in its sound effects—in the interplay, especially, of bell timbres and gong timbres both natural and synthesized (Bacon's bells and rings that are dainty and sweet)—but it seemed more a demonstration of possibilities than a satisfying piece of music. So did York Hoeller's "Arcus" (1978), for seventeen players and tape—a pioneering work in IRCAM history. On the other hand, Paul Lansky's "As If" (1982), for string trio and computer-synthesized tape, was an elegant and arresting composition.

The third concert, played by the American Composers Orchestra, conducted by Mr. Wuorinen, began with Babbitt's "Correspondences" (1967), for string orchestra and synthesized tape (not a computer piece). The tape sets standards of accuracy in pitch, rhythms, and dynamics which players find hard to keep up with. Like most of Babbitt's music, the piece is fiendishly difficult to perform, and this seemed to be a skin-of-the-teeth performance, with little dynamic nuance. Babbitt's music, so cogent and convincing in masterly, confident, high-spirited, colorful performances, easily disintegrates if the players seem to be still wrestling with the notes instead of enjoying them; then the lines don't hold. Earlier this season, there were at least four very enjoyable Babbitt performances: "My Ends Are My Beginnings" (1978), a long clarinet monologue, poetically played by Charles Neidich at a Parnassus concert in Merkin Hall; "Images" (1979), for saxophone and tape, played with brio by John Sampen at a New Music Consort program in Carnegie Recital Hall devoted to music with tape; "Sextets" (1966), for piano and violin, in a spirited, dazzling performance by Alan Feinberg and Rolf Schulte at a League-ISCM concert in Carnegie Recital Hall; and "Groupwise," given its première at a Group concert at the Y honoring Harvey Sollberger—flutist, composer, and, with Wuorinen, co-founder of the Group. In "Groupwise," a flute is the protagonist, and violin, viola, cello, and piano are his companions in adventures sometimes lyrical, more often tense.

At the Horizons computer symposium, Mandelbrot showed pictures of beautiful landscapes, seascapes, and



cloudscapes which his computer, instructed by him in the characteristics and the characteristic irregularities of the natural world, had invented, composed, and set down. Idealized, almost Platonic scenes they seemed to be. Wuorinen, whose "Bamboula Squared," for orchestra and quadraphonic tape, had its première at the third concert, was influenced by Mandelbrot's work to use computers, he said in a program note, in a way that "creates situations in which—most emphatically according to *my* rules, taste, and judgment—a 'music of nature' emerges from the mingling of traditional compositional values and approaches with numerical models of certain processes in the natural world." I grope to understand the procedure, which seems to be a subtle extension of the basic mathematical harmonic relationships mentioned earlier, but I had no difficulty at all in responding to the composition that resulted: sixteen minutes of energetic, exhilarating music, starting and ending on a fundamental C, ranging through timbres and rhythms and harmonies—from the orchestra and from the loudspeakers—of uncommon eventfulness. There's something sunlike about Wuorinen's best works: he cometh forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a giant to run his course.

There followed the première of Reynolds' "Transfigured Wind II," for solo flute (Mr. Sollberger), computer-processed sound, and orchestra. If Wuorinen had used the computer as a form of artificial intelligence, Reynolds had used it first as an instrument of analysis and dissection—rather as one uses field glasses to scan and marvel at details of drawing and paint in the Sistine ceiling—and then as a projector. Computers, he wrote in his program note, "allow us to recast musical materials, to transform them in ways that are intriguing and let one retain that delicious and mysterious *sense* with which a fine performer imbues a musical line." "Transfigured Wind II" began with flute solos played by a live performer and recorded; that way, composer and performer together provided material that "once inside the computer . . . could undergo a host of transformations before reëmerging on the tape." With computers, one can view musical gestures as if in slow motion. One can dissect and examine them both "horizontally," in time, separating attack—of breath upon mouthpiece, string upon bow—from

the note that follows, and "vertically," in their timbre structures. One can then prolong, emphasize, transform, or remove any of the elements. The sounds that music is made of, we have learned, are far more complicated than once was thought. There were sounds in Reynolds' piece—the soft sizzle of the player's breath seemed to be one—that have long been a part of music although not before prominently heard. New sounds can in themselves be eloquent, and the discovery of new instruments and of new sounds is important. But what matters more is the use that composers then make of them. The eighteenth-century clarinet with downward extension would be forgotten today had Mozart not composed a quintet for it. Reynolds is at once an explorer and a visionary composer, whose works can lead listeners to follow him into new regions of emotion and imagination.

I've not had much experience of computers under my own fingers. (I'm writing this piece with a fountain pen, not on a word processor.) As Boulez prophesied, I've discovered the viola da gamba—as being the only instrument on which music written for the viola da gamba can be executed with the kind of accuracy that Boulez himself (if he has any use for such music) would admire. It seems to me oddly arrogant to view the present as all-important or as more than a speck on the long stream of time. Yet even someone who lives his imaginative life in a continuum where Bach and Babbitt, Monteverdi, Mozart, and Messiaen are living musical presences can appreciate the artistic importance of the computer and of what it renders possible. These Horizons concerts made it clear that—like the viola da gamba, the fortepiano, the pianoforte, the tape recorder, Wagnerian harmony, Schoenberg's twelve-note method, Elliott Carter's metric modulations, and so much else—it has enormously increased the range of musical adventures on which a composer, and then his listeners, can embark.

—ANDREW PORTER

Of the three photographs submitted, one was an early morning foggy scene of a local Coast Guard vessel. The second was a scene of a young boy silhouetted in the riggings of a tall ship. The last was a photo of a white herring in the Everglades, taking off as a boat approached.—*Key West (Fla.) Citizen.*

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