The Oblique Censor
by James Conlon

Is it justified to speak of censorship in our country, which was founded on the principle of freedom of speech and whose history, with occasional deviations, has upheld the values flowing from it?

Strictly speaking, the answer would be no. The subject of my enquiry today is not any visible authorized body of censorship that affects what classical music is played or written, but a less visible factor that strongly influences performing arts institutions on their choices of what they produce.

This less tangible factor is the economic return or the popularity generated by a particular composition or composer, better known in everyday parlance as “box office appeal.”

Whereas overt official bodies of censorship have existed (whether governmental or religious, or offshoots of political opportunism or vigilantism) they have largely disappeared or have a diminished function, only to be surreptitiously replaced by very practical economic factors.

Most performing arts organizations are habitually faced with trying to calculate which works will do well at the box office, and which will not. Gradually those that do not sell adequately are performed less often. They become so to speak, less popular. And then a vicious cycle comes into full play: the less well known a work, the more likely it will not be performed: the more rarely it is performed, the less known it will become.

For a piece of music to be played regularly, it must be popular. That is very a tidy construction, fulfilling both the Founding Fathers’ vision of democracy (the vote of the populace will rule) and our economic credo: the best product will sell the best. In other words, it is as American as apple pie.

But, viewed from the perspective of a performing artist, or a serious lover of classical music, it is simply unacceptable to confuse a work’s popularity with its inherent quality. Galileo’s vision of the universe was a minority opinion, for which he was condemned, but he was right. I refuse to believe that the works of Alban Berg, Leos Janacek and Benjamin Britten are intrinsically inferior to, for example Carl Orff.

As an insider, I see how choices of repertory are made across the spectrum of performing arts organizations in our country. Box office considerations have had, and continue to have, a profound effect on the dampening of our musical culture. There is no question that in times of economic difficulties, all institutions, intensifying their risk-averse impulses, will move toward the “tried and true,” responding to their perception of what the public will buy. Experiments, unfamiliar works, world premiers, outside-the-box projects, unknown composers—all are put on hold, sometimes indefinitely.

There is no malice. There is no authoritarian body judging the political, philosophic or religious validity or danger of a given piece of music and its suitability for performance. Is adherence to box office “values” literally censorship? Absolutely not. Does such adherence have similar results? Absolutely yes.

The problem as I see it, is that the intrinsic values of pieces of music are now being judged by their commercial viability. The number of classical music lovers in the U.S. is already a small fraction of the population; but even those with more than a passing interest are influenced by a given piece’s “popularity” or salability. Lack of familiarity, a cumbersome title or even a work’s length become confused with quality.

A somewhat amusing example from one of my early experiences might serve as an illustration. More than three decades ago, I was making a program with the artistic administrator of one of America’s leading orchestras for a program that would also feature its very fine chorus. I proposed Benjamin Britten’s Cantata Misericordium, a work I love. After several days of reflection, the administrator contacted me and said it would be best if we did not include it on the program. Any work with the word “misery” would be a “downer” at the box office. I tried in vain to explain that Misericordium came from a Latin root meaning compassion or pity, that the cantata was a retelling of the parable of the Good Samaritan, and that there was nothing “miserable” about it. The cantata went unplayed—at least on that occasion.

The word “long” has become synonymous with boredom in many minds. One hears often: “I don’t like Wagner; it’s too long.” Or “I wouldn’t go to a performance of the Matthew Passion; it’s too long.” Cultural differences

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President’s Message
by Greg A. Steinke

I hope everyone has had a lovely and productive summer or at least a little relaxation from this hectic and chaotic world that churns around all of us. Be that as it may, I believe we have made some good progress as an organization as we look forward to the coming concert season and year.

As I write this I am looking forward to knowing how the final program will come together for our upcoming national concert/conference November 14–15 in Atlanta, GA at Georgia State University hosted by Nickitas Demos. Nick is able to provide an excellent ensemble array for a concert as well as a great venue for an additional concert of composers providing their own performers. I believe the response to the score and presentations call has been very good if not excellent. Further, we hope to be entirely caught up as well with performances of our composition contest winners during this event. So, I wish all who have submitted the very best in having a piece or presentation selected. I hope that even if you are not actively participating that you will think about attending if you are close enough in the area to come for one of the events.

As the board agreed earlier this year, with this national event we will go on a two year cycle for a national concert/conference, so that our next one will be sometime in 2016. The board is hopeful that as this cycle goes forward that it can gradually move around the country, either further up East, the Midwest, or out West over the years. As President and on behalf of the membership, we certainly thank those chapters who have hosted this event in past years and hope that there may be other chapters, either singly or perhaps jointly that can host these future events. If this is a possibility for any of our chapters, please be in touch with me to see what can be worked out.

I want to give a big thank you to our Webmaster, John Winsor, who has been able to do some makeovers to our web site over the summer. He has made some excellent improvements that he hopes will make the site more useful and accessible for all our membership. If anyone has suggestions for other helpful improvements or functions that may have been overlooked, please be in touch with either John or myself.

I’m also happy to report that as of September 14 we are as caught up as we can be with performances of our past composition winners through the wonderful arrangements made by our Vice President, Wieslaw Rentowski. Through the auspices of the Texas chapter and local Dallas musicians Wieslaw arranged a concert to perform some but not all of our past winners - Jeffery Shivers, 2nd Prize YCC 2013, Bouquet for string quartet; Michael Lee, 1st Prize YCC 2012, Farewell… for string quartet; Bryce Cannell, 2nd Prize YCC 2012, Refractions for string quartet; and Ross Griffey, 2nd Prize YCC 2011, Dancing Shadows for solo violin. While we always hope that we can provide performances of all first and second prize winners, we were not totally successful this time around. However, we do thank Wieslaw for all of his diligent efforts in arranging for these performances and are hopeful in going forward with the competition with a few restrictions on instrumentation that we can be entirely...
successful in providing performances for all first and second prize winners in the future. Note that the call is currently out for this year’s competition. If anyone in the membership has a suggestion on further improving the competition experience, please be in touch with either Wieslaw or myself.

In closing, I look forward to our national concert/conference event in November and meeting as many of you as possible who are able to attend the festivities.

As always, I send my best wishes for a great season of composing and wonderful performances! Please do not hesitate to be in touch if I or any of the board and coordinators can help you with chapter or personal projects from our NACUSA resources.

FROM THE EDITOR
AL BENNER

As I stumble and bumble toward the end of my 20½ years tenure, the next issue will be my last as editor of ComposerUSA. The fact that I have been rather lax this year in putting out timely issues signifies it is time. Case in point is this issue that should have been out at least six weeks ago to make Greg Steinke’s President’s Message more relevant. For that I apologize but the enthusiasm that I had for issue #1 (Summer 1994) has definitely waned for this issue #58. Number 59 will go out by the end of January to start the process fresh for our new editor. So, if you have any news, articles, thoughts or general comments, please try to get them to me by early January. I expect to have some news on our recent National Conference in Atlanta and will cover any personal news about events or performances through the end of 2014.

Sylvia Constantinidis has graciously volunteered to be the new editor. I wish her the best of luck. I will mention more about this in my last issue. In the meanwhile, have a fun-filled, happy and safe holiday season. ❄

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play a role in these perceptions. German audiences are generally more capable of sitting and concentrating at a concert or opera than we are (the word Sitzleisch is testimony to this). In my years as Music Director of the Rotterdam Philharmonic, we presented the Matthew Passion every year on the Thursday and Friday preceding Easter to sold out houses; the audiences were filled by people who only went to a concert once a year. “Long” is not a value judgment in those two cases.

But unfamiliarity, either with a composer’s name or with a particular lesser-known work, is perhaps the leading culprit at the box office. The very presence of such a name on a program is deemed capable of emptying the house, even when it is shares the program with “big sellers” like Tchaikovsky or Beethoven. It takes no leap of imagination to understand why this is a major stumbling block in attempting to introduce the music of composers suppressed in Nazi Germany.

More as collateral damage than by design, the voice of many compositions is stifled by these phenomena. Although not censorship in any literal meaning of the word, the results are the same. The problem will intensify in the future, if this trend continues, because less familiar, will become unfamiliar, and unfamiliar will be unknown.

James Conlon is an American conductor and the current Music Director of the Los Angeles Opera and Ravina Festival, summer home of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. [Wikipedia]

NACUSA YOUNG COMPOSERS COMPETITION RESULTS FOR 2013 (35th ANNUAL) COMPETITION

The National Association of Composers, USA is pleased to announce the results of the 2012 Young Composers Competition.

First Prize: gone into night are all the eyes (2013) for violin, cello and piano by Thomas Mordecai Kotcheff from Beverly Hills, CA. ($400 and a possible performance on a NACUSA National Concert).


Third Prize: Sonata for Oboe and Piano (2012) by Cody D. Brookshire from Athens, GA. ($200 and a possible performance on a NACUSA National Concert).

Honorable Mentions: Angel (2013) for baritone saxophone, trumpet, violin, viola and piano by Stephen M. Feigenbaum from Winchester, MA; and Noir (2013) for soprano saxophone, electric guitar, electric bass and drums by Jennifer Bello from Rochester, NY. (A possible performance on a NACUSA National Concert).

The judges were Charles Ditto from Texas State University, John R. McGinn from Austin College and Wieslaw Rentowski, NACUSA Vice-President.

MEMBER NEWS

Dinos Constantinides’ music, Lazy Jack and His Fiddle, LRC 199: II. Sad Day, has been used for the documentary, Paycheck to Paycheck: The Life and Times of Katrina Gilbert, with Executive Producer, Maria Shriver. The piece was performed by the Greek violinist, Georgios Demertzis, and was published by Centaur Records, Inc., and was recently aired by HBO. It has also been performed by the concertmaster of the Louisiana Sinfonietta, Kelly Smith Toney, in an earlier recording, and has been presented at Carnegie Hall by the LSU violin professor and former concertmaster of the Bergen Symphony in Norway. Espen Lilleslatten. The score is published by Magni Publications.

On May 5, Max Lifchitz celebrated the Cinco de Mayo Holiday performing works by three generations of composers music by 20th and 21st century Mexican composers including Carlos Chavez, Manuel Enriquez, Maria Teresa Prieto, Manuel M. Ponce and Silvestre Revueltas. The program also featured his recently completed Piano Silhouettes and the premiere of a new work by Brian Banks, the American composer who lives in the Mexican city of Puebla who was on hand to introduce his music.

Deon Nielsen Price was the guest speaker at A Concert of Contemporary American Classical Music hosted by the Texas Chapter of NACUSA on Sept. 14 at the Richardson Public Library, Richardson, TX.

Dues became entirely online as of July 1st. If that’s an insurmountable problem for anyone, then contact Joe Alexander directly (via email) to work out arrangements with him. We will be transitioning after this newsletter to an entirely online distribution of the newsletter either via an email with a PDF attachment or for download from NACUSA web site.

All changes to membership status, address changes, or delivery of ComposerUSA should be sent via the internet to the NACUSA website or mailed to the National Office in California, P.O. Box 49256, Barrington Station, Los Angeles, CA 90049.
PERFORMANCES

Daniel Adams: Apr. 10—Premiere of Cryptic Antiphon for trombone choir with two percussionists by the Trombone Choir conducted by Raimundo Morales, West Texas A&M University, Canyon.

Mar. 29—Diffusion One for marimba quintet by the University of South Florida Percussion Ensemble conducted by Robert McCormick as part of the Florida Day of Percussion at Florida Southern College, Lakeland, FL.

Mar.—Premiere of Recombinant for percussion ensemble by Hamiruge, the Louisiana State University Percussion Ensemble, LSU School of Music Recital Hall, Baton Rouge, LA.

Al Benner: June 11—Into the Jungle: An Interval Exploration (string quartet), by Kelly Smith Toney, Stefka Madere, violins, Maria Alexander, viola, Susannah Montandon, cello. Louisiana Sinfonietta's Summer Library Concerts, Music Magic, Greenwell Spring Library, Baton Rouge, LA. Also on June 9 at the Fairwood Library, Baton Rouge, LA; June 5 at the Jones Creek Library, Baton Rouge, LA; June 4 at the Main Library, Baton Rouge, LA; and on June 2 at the Bluebonnet Library, Baton Rouge, LA. Apr. 14—3 C’s for Two by Joshua Poche and Mason Soudeller, alto saxophones. Etude on 3-Tones by Marika Buchholz, clarinet, Chase and Parallels by Charles Jones, piano, on the Louisiana Composers Consortium Concert #49, Recital Hall, CPT Building, Louisiana School for Math, Science and the Arts, Natchitoches.

Apr. 7—Open Ayre by Paul Christopher, cello, Guest Recital Blue and Gold Activities, Recital Hall, CPT Building, Louisiana School for Math, Science and the Arts, Natchitoches.

Apr. 1—Premiere of 3 C’s for Two by Joshua Poche and Mason Soudeller, alto saxophones, LSMSA Arts Gala, Mansion Theatre, Shaw Center for the Arts, Baton Rouge, LA. An audio recording was played on March 22 at the LSMSA Arts Gala Preview, Recital Hall, CPT Building, Louisiana School for Math, Science and the Arts, Natchitoches, LA.

Mar. 10—Chase and Parallels by Charles Jones, piano, Charles Jones Faculty Recital, Recital Hall, CPT Building, Louisiana School for Math, Science and the Arts, Natchitoches, LA.

Dinos Constantinides: Jun. 4—Marcha de Galvez, LRC 44, (cantata) by the Th Symphony Orchestra of Malaga, Spain, the chorus Santa Maria de la Victoria, and soloists in celebration of Bernardo de Galvez, famed former governor of Louisiana, in La Santa Iglesia Catedral Basílica. June 11—Trio for violin, viola and cello by Stefka Madere, violin, Maria Alexander, viola, and Susannah Montandon, cello, Ballade for John and Samantha by Kelly Smith Toney, violin, and Porridge by Judy Constantinides, reader, and string quartet, Kelly Smith Toney, Stefka Madere, violins, Maria Alexander, viola, Susannah Montandon, cello, and John Madere, string bass, Louisiana Sinfonietta's Summer Library Concerts, Music Magic, Greenwell Spring Library, Baton Rouge, LA. Also on June 9 at the Fairwood Library, Baton Rouge, LA; June 5 at the Jones Creek Library, Baton Rouge, LA; June 4 at the Main Library, Baton Rouge, LA; and June 2 at the Bluebonnet Library, Baton Rouge, LA. Apr. 13—Mountains of Epirus for Violin and Orchestra, LRC 72 by Lin He, violin, and the Louisiana Sinfonietta under the direction of the composer, LSU School of Music Recital Hall, Baton Rouge, LA. Apr. 7—Ballade for the Hellenic Land by Paul Christopher, cello, Guest Recital Blue and Gold Activities, Recital Hall, CPT Building, Louisiana School for Math, Science and the Arts, Natchitoches. Mar. 26—Kafantaris Violin Concerto, Yova Milanova as soloist, LSU Philharmonia conducted by Carlos Riazuelo, LSU School of Music Recital Hall, Baton Rouge, LA.

Mar. 15—Premiere of Landscape III for Tuba and Strings, LRC 203 by Joseph Skillen, tuba, and the Louisiana Sinfonietta under the direction of the composer, LSU School of Music Recital Hall, Baton Rouge, LA.

The following reflects performances that took place through Sept. 2014.

PUBLICATIONS

Daniel Kessner: Sept. 18—Sonata for Violin and Piano by Nancy Roth and Dolly Eugenio Kessner, CSUN Emeritus Comspition Faculty Concert, Los Angeles, CA.

Sept. 14—Genera for flute/alto flute/bass flute and clarinet/bass clarinet by rarescale: Carla Rees, flutes, and Sarah Watts, clarinets, in MünchenGladbach, Germany. Also on Sept. 13 by the same performers in Düsseldorf, Germany.

Aug. 23—Canto for flute quartet by the rarescale Flute Academy, British Flute Society Convention, Warwick Arts Centre, University of Warwick, Coventry.

Aug. 10—Premiere of Symphony in Silver by the NFA Professional Flute Choir, National Flute Association Convention, Chicago, IL.


Jun. 7 & 8—Premieres of three works for guitar ensembles: Suite variée, Chorals variés, and Suite de chorals variés, at the École Municipale de Musique Carquefou, France, June 7 and at the Maison des Arts, Saint-Herblain, France, June 8; Ensemble de Guitares de l’Agglomération Nantaise and the Ensemble Départemental de Guitares de l’Aisne (around 65 players all together), conducted by the composer.

Jun. 3—Reverberance, for four guitars, and Suite for Four Guitars by the Kharkov Guitar Quartet at the Kharkov International Contemporary Festival, Ukraine. Also on May 16 by the Kharkov Guitar Quartet, Kharkov, Ukraine. On Mar. 22 by the Quartetto Aperoni in Umag, Croatia.


Apr. 26—Premiere of Ballade No. 1, for wind ensemble, by the Band de Musica de la Cidade de Espinho, Portugal, at their 175th Anniversary Concert; Helder Tavares - conductor.

Apr. 22—Trio for Violin, Cello & Guitar performed by the New Music Ensemble of the University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT.

Max Lifchitz: Jul. 17—Forget Me Not by the North/South Chamber Orchestra, the composer conducting, Christ and St. Stephen’s Church, New York, NY.

Jun. 10—Yello Ribbons No. 50 by the North/South Chamber Orchestra, the composer conducting, Christ and St. Stephen’s Church, New York, NY.

AWARDS

Thomas Kotcheff received the Hermitage Prize given by the Hermitage Artist Retreat and its partner the Aspen Music Festival and School during this renowned summer event.
NACUSA CONCERTS

Cascadia Chapter

From Oregon to Venice, With Love
featuring Winslow Brothers
Monday, March 10, 2014, 7:30 PM
The Old Church, Portland, OR

Alone on the Prairie .......................... JEFF WINSLOW
lyrics by Hermann Allmers
Catherine Olson, soprano; Jeff Winslow, piano

Ghosts and Machines .......................... JEFF WINSLOW
I. Hijiinks II. Dirge – Wake-Vortex
Mitchell Falconer, piano

III. Scherzo
Jeff Winslow, piano

IV. Dirge – Vigil - Totentanz
Dianne Davies, piano

Cat Tale .......................... JEFF WINSLOW
lyrics by Nancy Wood
Nancy Wood, soprano; Jeff Winslow, piano

Concertati Veneziani .......................... WALTER WINSLOW
I. Briosio II. Intermezzo III. Scherzo – Danza Macabra – Scherzo

IV. Finale: Tranquillo – Adagio molto con profondo espressione
DTO Ensemble

Tatiana Kolchanova, Joy Fabos, Nelly Kovalev, Sarah Roth, violins
Angelika Furtwangler, viola; Erin Winemiller, cello

Cascadia Chapter

Piano Bizarro
featuring an array of alternative keyboard instruments,
odd approaches, unusual sounds & errant tunings
dueling toy pianos, amplified harpsichord, prepared, detuned &
electrified pianos & the world’s only “Skeleton Piano”
Wednesday, March 12, 2014, 7:30 PM
Michelle’s Piano Company, Portland, OR

Mirabella .......................... STEPHEN MONTAQUE
Jennifer Wright

Child’s Play .......................... TED CLIFFORD
Jennifer Wright and Ted Clifford

Improvisation, op. 9000 .......................... ART RESNICK
Art Resnick

Arrivals .......................... ART RESNICK
Jennifer Wright and Art Resnick

Dark Train Comin (2012) .......................... STEPHEN MONTAQUE
Jennifer Wright

Looper .......................... JENNIFER WRIGHT
Jennifer Wright, Ted Clifford, Paul Safar and Oliver Barr

Spaghetti Western: Showdown at Low Noon . . ART RESNICK
Jennifer Wright and Art Resnick

Obscure Terrain .......................... JENNIFER WRIGHT
Jennifer Wright

Evil N’gger .......................... JULIUS EASTMAN
Jennifer Wright, Ted Clifford, Paul Safar and Art Resnick

Cascadia Chapter

Oregon Composers Watch

Surrender Me Endless .......................... BONNIE MIKSCH
poetry by Zayra Yves

Sonata in D .......................... CHRISTOPHER CORBELL
Christopher Corbell, guitar

Guitar Sonata #1 .......................... CHRISTOPHER CORBELL
Christopher Corbell, guitar

Portland Journal .......................... JEDADIAH BERNARDS
Jedadiah Bernards, piano

Cascadia Chapter

Watermark
Friday, April 11, 2014, 7:30 PM
Central Lutheran Church, Eugene, OR

Southern Oregon Chapter

Spring Concert
featuring the Syzygy Ensemble
Suzanne Barnes, Jeffer Carrington, soprano;
Dan Gibbs, tenor; Lisa Nichols, flute; Lori Calhoun, clarinet;
Chris Matthews, mallet percussion; Christopher Bingham,
Walter Granger, Iiana Cotton, piano
Saturday, May 24, 2014, 7:30 PM
Congregational United Church of Christ, Ashland, OR

Inquietude .......................... KENNETH DEVENEY
flute, clarinet, percussion and piano (Bingham)

Four Songs .......................... GREG A. STEINKE
words by Robin Knight
tenor and piano (Granger)

Two Movements .......................... R. BARRY ULRICH
flute, clarinet and piano (Bingham)

Temporary Landscapes .......................... I’LANA S. COTTON
clarinet and piano (Cotton)

The Cloths of Heaven .......................... WILLIAM ASHWORTH
words by W. B. Yeats
soprano (Carrington), flute, clarinet, percussion and piano (Bingham)

Careless Love Songs .......................... THEODORE DOLLARHIDE
words by Emily Dickinson
soprano (Barnes)
Forfest  Continued from back page

Percussion dominated the first Monday of the festival in Kroměříž. Students from a nearby music school gave a performance at the Kroměříž Museum, led by their teacher Ludmila Daňková. Regular, found, and specially crafted percussion instruments figured prominently in my lecture on 20th century experimental American composers. The evening Assembly Hall concert featured the OK Percussion Duo of Martin Opršál and Martin Kleibl from Brno in a concert of works written for them, including ones by Karel Husa and Vít Zouhar. The two gave a stunning display of virtuosity on an amalgamation of instruments centered around marimba and vibraphone. Opršál performed again the next evening with organist Irena Chříbková in the Church of St. Maurice.

During Forfest 2014, many of the featured composers were in attendance, and several gave public explications of their works. These included Daniel Kessner, Nicolas Zourabichvili de Pelken, Jan Grossman, and Vojtěch Mojišíz. Kessner, Zourabichvili and Grossman all spoke on the day of the flute and piano concert by Kessner and his wife Dolly that comprised works by these three composers. At that Assembly Hall event, the two performers alternated in solo works by Kessner, and combined in his Alto Rhapsody, an effective and engaging dialogue between the two instruments. The delicate voice of the bass flute, a favorite instrument of Kessner’s, was excellently enhanced by the resonance of the hall in his solo work for that not often heard instrument. For me, the standout composition of all that I heard at Forfest 2014 was the premiere of Zourabichvili’s Fači. An upward sweep of notes in the piano served as the opening gesture and unifying element in the uniquely colored sound universe Zourabichvili created. Grossman’s suite Natalis Solis Invicti, like the other works on the program, benefited from the expert and highly sympathetic interpretation by the Kessners. The relationships between the Kessners and the composers were established by mutual participation in previous Forfest festivals, and nurtured by many years of subsequent Forfest interactions. More about this phenomenon below.

The Czech clarinet, viola and piano group Trio Actaeon appeared the following evening in the Assembly Hall, presenting a concert in which all but one of the works were Czech or world premieres created by Austrian, Italian, German, and Canadian composers. A number of the works had been written for the trio; the concert thus displayed the group’s commitment to music of our time, and to living composers. The works on the program displayed a variety of avant-garde styles, which were handled with aplomb by the fine players in the group. In the trio by Michele Trenti, spans of high, loud, and dissonant playing provided an unrelenting intensity that were emphasized by the more than ample resonance in the hall. A surprising twist came at the beginning of Maximilian Kreuz’s work, where a blues-inflected line was taken up by each of the instruments in imitation; this recurred later in the work. The Canadian creators of the final two works, who had traveled to Kroměříž for the concert, introduced their compositions. In one case, Alexander Rapoport explained how his work made reference to Mozart’s Kegelstatt Trio, ostensibly the best-known historical work for the peculiar combination of clarinet, viola, and piano. Like many titles added by publishers or others, Kegelstatt Trio has come to identify the work even though Mozart apparently was not making reference to the bowling game named by this title. In response, Rapoport explained how his work included embedded signifiers of bowling in each of the movements.

A number of listening sessions punctuated Forfest’s main week in Kroměříž, leading to further musical discoveries. For this writer, one such find was Czech composer Miloslav Kaveláč’s 30-minute orchestral work Mýtěrům Času (The Mystery of Time). As the work unfolds, a clarinet and string texture is punctuated by timpani, the effect being the demarcation of segments of time that become more condensed as the work reaches its animated central section, followed by a reversal of the process as the piece returns to more calm and spacious textures. Skillfully orchestrated and compelling, the work made a strong impression.

Two concerts were offered on the second Friday evening of the 10-day festival in Kroměříž. The first featured Slovakian pianist Elena Letňanová and festival co-director Zdenka Vaculovičová on violin. Vaculovičová opened with an apt performance of Křižka’s Preludio a Fughetta, reminiscent of Bach’s solo violin sonatas. Both solos and duos followed, including the world premiere of Pavel Zemek’s Ukolebačky for violin and piano. This minimal and serene work let us hear another side of this highly active Czech composer, who was present for the performance, and whose contrasting works were heard throughout the festival. The highlight of the concert was a solo piano work by Slovakian composer Juraj Benes, whimsically titled Alice Was Beginning To Get Very Tired of Sitting Next to Her Sister on the Bench and Having Nothing to Do. The opening theme undergoes continuous metamorphosis that gives a sense of the unfolding of geologic time. It received a sensitive and deftly tactile interpretation from Letňanová, who had interacted with the composer before his passing.

The second concert was a multi-media event featuring voices, acoustic and electronic instruments, found objects, recorded layers, and, in the darkened Assembly Hall, a large, visually engaging projection that eventually covered a large section of the wall behind the usual performance space. The single work was Soundscape, created by the Czech composer/performer collective Ensemble Marijan. Both the visual and audio components started minimally, and evolved to greater complexity as the piece progressed. The rotating 3-D image during the final section of the work was skillfully realized and manipulated.

I regretted that I did not get to hear the final Saturday–Tuesday events. Two unique ensembles appeared on Saturday, an orchestra of found objects, and a harp quartet from Italy. The former featured world premieres of new works by Petr Vaculovič, whose noted scores were realized by the Industrial Philharmony of Hodonín. For the latter event, the Adria Harp Quartet presented an entire concert of world premieres, including works by two Italian composers in attendance, Massimiliano Messieri and Nicola Baroni. The premieres of new works by Messieri and Zemek punctuated the Sunday performance by Opera Diversa from Brno. On the program were also string
Premiere of Zenobia Powell Perry’s Opera
by Deon Nielsen Price

The opera was thrilling – the very first time I have ever been to an opera!” responded a young woman of color as we left the theater when I asked how she enjoyed Tawawa House. I had, myself, eagerly anticipated attending this premiere fully staged production of Zenobia Powell Perry’s opera, reconstructed and orchestrated by Jeannie Gayle Pool and produced on May 2 and 4, 2014 by the Townsend Opera at the elegant Gallo Performing Arts Center in Modesto, California.

Throughout the opera the words and musical style reflect the social and geographical setting—a site on the Underground Railroad in the 1850’s. The libretto and song titles include symbols of slavery—Jumping over the Broom” (getting married), and escaping to freedom—Follow the Drinkin’ Gourd (big dipper with north star). The historical Tawawa House was a hotel resort in Xenia Springs, Ohio, where freed and runaway slaves lived and worked, and white slave owners vacationed with their slave mistresses and children. The success of the resort was a result of the unusually collaborative relationship of whites and blacks. Disrupted and closed during the Civil War, it became Wilberforce College, the first African-American owned and managed university in the United States. Its graduates became key personnel and teachers in the establishment of colleges throughout the nation.

The powerful choral and production numbers caused many audience members to tear up. The marvelous voices of the soloists were superior and breathtaking. Each character sang with authority and deeply soulful understanding. I envision the same leading artists bringing this opera to receptive audiences through triumphant national and international tours.

The staging and musical direction, costumes, sets, and all dimensions of the production were professional and delightful. The orchestra sounded convincing and the orchestration supportive and colorful. The total length of the thirty-three titles performed was audience friendly but I would like to attend an indulgent future production that includes all forty-seven titles.

The composer, Zenobia Powell Perry, was born in 1908 to a well-educated family—her father a black physician and her mother Creek Indian. Many innovative and advanced musical passages in the opera reveal the influence of her extensive studies and assistantships with R. Nathaniel Dett, William L. Dawson, and Darius Milhaud. Perhaps her most poignant heritage was from her grandfather, a former slave who sang the Spirituals to her that she later wrote down and that are sprinkled throughout the opera, such as the stirring Sinner Man and Hallelujah to the Lamb. Zenobia’s daughter, soprano Janis Peri, who sang in the amateur, shoe-string production in 1985, attended the Townsend Opera production and called it her mother’s dream come true.

Jeannie Gayle Pool, a Los Angeles composer, historian and musicologist, met Ms. Perry in 1979 and became her biographer and publisher, and maintains a web site about her: zenobiapowelliversary.org. From a large box of penciled manuscript, Dr. Pool in the last year, rewrote and streamlined the libretto, created 300 pages of piano-vocal score, orchestrated the entire two-hour work, and prepared 360 pages of score and 1400 pages of instrumental parts for performance, a loving but astounding task! It is rare to find such a variety of requisite musical skills in one person.

Bringing a new opera into the repertoire for the first time is a challenging and noble venture for any opera company. The General and Artistic Director, Matthew Buckman, writes that the Townsend Opera is particularly proud to introduce an opera with such powerful cultural and historical themes that look beyond well-established racial and cultural divides. He says, “If people did it 150 years ago at Tawawa House to secure the freedom of their fellow man, then people all over the world can do it to solve the challenges we face today.”
Forfest
A Second Impression
by Laurence Sherr

In June 2014, I arrived for the second time in Kroměříž, a Moravian town in the eastern Czech Republic, for the arts festival known as Forfest. It is the 25th anniversary of this annual festival organized by Vaclav and Zdenka Vaculovič. My article about the festival and colloquium last year included background about the history, architecture, art, and performance spaces here, and since it is available online www.forfest.cz/?id=1&action=seznam&presenter=Review, this article will focus on selected performances and exhibitions that I attended this year.

All but two Forfest events this season were concentrated into 12 consecutive days in late June and early July in Kroměříž and the regional city of Olomouc. The concerts that were not part of this cluster were also separated geographically; the first took place in mid-June in Prague, and the last will occur in September in Bratislava. That first concert featured the Austrian Duo Polyzoïdes, a brothersister violin and piano grouping whose familial affinity extended to tight ensemble playing even in extremely challenging passages from contemporary literature. The programming of mostly 20th century works included an adventurous solo violin work by the Czech conductor and composer Karel Reiner, one of the few composers who survived Nazi imprisonment in Terezín, the ghetto/camp near Prague that served as a propaganda vehicle during the Holocaust. Even more complex were Lieder Ohne Worte of Heinz Holliger, which the Duo handled with aplomb. Two living Czech composers, Vojtěch Mojžíš and Jan Grossman, were in attendance for the performance of their works, and, as the concert took place in the Smetana Museum on the banks of the Vltava (Moldau) River, a work by that paragon of Czech musical culture rounded out the program. Full program listings for all 2014 Forfest events can be seen at the festival website: www.forfest.cz/data/doc/programy/forfest_2014.pdf.

The opening concert in Kroměříž featured the violin-piano duo of Pavel Burdych and Zuzana Berešová performing in the gilded Assembly Hall of Chateau Kroměříž, one of the main concert venues of the festival. The highly reverberant acoustics of this cavernous Rococo hall can work to advantage for quiet and delicate passage, but to disadvantage for thick, loud textures and fast passages. Burdych and Berešová adjusted their performances to these acoustics for their varied program of works by 20th and 21st century composers that included two world premieres and one Czech premiere, the latter being my Four Short Pieces for solo violin.

There were three events the following day, including a vocal and organ concert in the Church of St. Maurice, and an Assembly Hall performance by Ensemble Damian from Olomouc. Ensemble Damian gave an uninterrupted concert, a continuous performance of the compositional work of its apparent leader Vit Zouhar. Zouhar performed mainly on a very small keyboard, as did the other players in various segments of the work. These keyboards were sounded by air blown by the player through a mouthpiece and tube. All the players sang in certain sections, so that sections of homogeneous timbres alternated with heterogeneous ones. The instruments in the ensemble included viola, trombone, and percussion, and the audience was treated to effective spatial modulation when the players sang/played while moving through the space and around the audience. The composition seemed to have sections with precise relationships of pitches and rhythms, and others where the players improvised within rhythmic or melodic structures suggested by the composer. Repeated and evolving musical cells were representative of a tonal, minimalist style, but with a particular Czech twist.

Over the next few days’ openings of art exhibitions alternated with concert events. On a pleasant Sunday afternoon, guests gathered at the Rotunda of the Flower Garden for a display of the large-scale triptychs of Vaclav Vaculovič along with the glass sculptures of Marek Trizuljak. The covered space under the Baroque dome provides shelter in the middle of the large formal gardens, and space for about a dozen of Vaculovič’s three-paneled paintings in rooms radiating out from the central space. Descriptions of the works by the artist revealed his concern with the human psyche, spirituality in music and art, and monumental themes. Soprano Stella Maris, who sang superbly in the Church of St. Maurice organ concert the evening before, joined violinist Zdenka Vaculovičová for several short works to kick off the event. On a smaller scale, and appropriate to the intimate display space at the Gallery Artuš Kroměříž, were two types of work by Czech artist Hana Stehliková Babýrádová—etchings and ceramic containers filled with plant life.

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