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RECENTLY IN INTERVIEWS

Connections Across Time: Sholto Kynoch on the 2020 Oxford Lieder Festival
'A brief history of song' is the subtitle of the 2020 Oxford Lieder Festival (10th-17th October), which will present an ambitious, diverse and imaginative programme of 40 performances and events.

Alfredo Piatti: *The Operatic Fantasies* (Vol.2) - in conversation with Adrian Bradbury
'Signor Piatti in a fantasia on themes from *Beatrice di Tenda* had also his triumph. Difficulties, declared to be insuperable, were vanquished by him with consummate skill and precision. He certainly is amazing, his tone magnificent, and his style excellent. His resources appear to be inexhaustible; and altogether for variety, it is the greatest specimen of violoncello playing that has been heard in this country.'

Eboracum Baroque - *Heroic Handel*
Eboracum Baroque is a flexible period instrument ensemble, comprising singers and instrumentalists, which was founded in York - as its name suggests, Eboracum being the name of the Roman fort on the site of present-day York - while artistic director Chris Parsons was at York University.

***Schubert 200*: in conversation with Tom Guthrie**
'There could be no happier existence. Each morning he composed something beautiful and each evening he found the most enthusiastic admirers. We gathered in his room - he played and sang to us - we were enthusiastic and afterwards we went to the tavern. We hadn't a penny, but were blissfully happy.'

Soprano Eleanor Dennis performs Beethoven and Schubert at the 2019 Highgate International Chamber Music Festival
When soprano Eleanor Dennis was asked - by Ashok Klouda, one of the founders and co-directors of the Highgate International Chamber Music Festival - to perform some of Beethoven's *Scottish Songs Op.108* at this year's Festival, as she leafed through the score to make her selection the first thing that struck her was the beauty of the poetry.

Mark Padmore reflects on Britten's *Death in Venice*
"At the start, one knows 'bits' of it," says tenor Mark Padmore, somewhat wryly, when I meet him at the Stage Door of the Royal Opera House where the tenor has just begun rehearsals for David McVicar's new production of *Death in Venice*, which in November will return Britten's opera to the ROH stage for the first time since 1992.

An interview with Cheryl Frances-Hoad, Oxford Lieder Festival's first Associate Composer
"Trust me, I'm telling you stories …"

In conversation with Nina Brazier
When British opera director Nina Brazier tries to telephone me from Frankfurt, where she is in the middle of rehearsals for a revival of Florentine Klepper's 2015 production of Martinů's *Julietta*, she finds herself - to my embarrassment - 'blocked' by my telephone preference settings. The technical hitch is soon solved; but doors, in the UK and Europe, are certainly very much wide open for Nina, who has been described by *The Observer* as 'one of Britain's leading young directors of opera'.

Bill Bankes-Jones on the twelfth *Tête à Tête* Opera Festival
"We need to stop talking about 'diversity' and think, instead about 'inclusivity'," says Bill Bankes-Jones, when we meet to talk about the forthcoming twelfth *Tête à Tête* Opera Festival which runs from 24th July to 10th August.

An interview with composer Dani Howard
The young Hong Kong-born British composer Dani Howard is having quite a busy year.

Irish mezzo-soprano Paula Murrihy on Salzburg, Sellars and Singing
For Peter Sellars, Mozart's *Idomeneo* is a 'visionary' work, a utopian opera centred on a classic struggle between a father and a son written by an angry 25-year-old composer who wanted to show the musical establishment what a new generation could do.

London Bel Canto Festival 2019: an interview with Ken Querns-Langley
"Physiognomy, psychology and technique." These are the three things that determine the way a singer's sound is produced, so Ken Querns-Langley explains when we meet in the genteel surroundings of the National Liberal Club, where the training programmes, open masterclasses and performances which will form part the third London Bel Canto Festival will be held from 5th-24th August.

***Un ballo in maschera* at Investec Opera Holland Park: in conversation with Alison Langer**
"Sop. Page, attendant on the King." So, reads a typical character description of the loyal page Oscar, whose actions, in Verdi's Un ballo in maschera, unintentionally lead to his monarch's death. He reveals the costume that King Gustavo is wearing at the masked ball, thus enabling the monarch's secretary, Anckarstroem, to shoot him. The dying King falls into the faithful Oscar's arms.

Martin Duncan directs the first UK staging of Offenbach's *Fantasio* at Garsington
A mournful Princess forced by her father into an arranged marriage. A Prince who laments that no-one loves him for himself, and so exchanges places with his aide-de-camp. A melancholy dreamer who dons a deceased jester's motley and finds himself imprisoned for impertinence.

Thomas Larcher's *The Hunting Gun* at the Aldeburgh Festival: in conversation with Peter Schöne
'Aloneness' does not immediately seem a likely or fruitful subject for an opera. But, loneliness and isolation - an individual's inner sphere, which no other human can truly know or enter - are at the core of Yasushi Inoue's creative expression.

In interview with Polly Graham, Artistic Director of Longborough Festival Opera
What links Wagner's *Das Rheingold*, Donizetti's *Anna Bolena*, Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and Cavalli's *La Calisto*? It sounds like the sort of question Paul Gambaccini might pose to contestants on BBC Radio 4's music quiz, *Counterpoint*.

***Six Charlotte Mew Settings*: in conversation with composer Kate Whitley**
Though she won praise from the literary greats of her day, including Thomas Hardy, Virginia Woolf, Ezra Pound and Siegfried Sassoon, the Victorian poet Charlotte Mew (1869-1928) was little-known among the contemporary reading public. When she visited the Poetry Bookshop of Harold Monro, the publisher of her first and only collection, *The Farmer's Bride* (1916), she was asked, "Are you Charlotte Mew?" Her reply was characteristically diffident and self-deprecatory: "I'm sorry to say I am."

"It Lives!": Mark Grey 're-animates' Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*
"It lives!" So cries Victor Frankenstein in Richard Brinsley Peake's *Presumption: or the Fate of Frankenstein* on beholding the animation of his creature for the first time. Peake might equally have been describing the novel upon which he had based his 1823 play which, staged at the English Opera House, had such a successful first run that it gave rise to fourteen further adaptations of Mary Shelley's 1818 novella in the following three years.

***Unknown, Remembered*: in conversation with Shiva Feshareki**
It sounds like a question from a BBC Radio 4 quiz show: what links Handel's cantata for solo contralto, *La Lucrezia*, Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*, and the post-punk band *Joy Division*?

Remembering and Representing Dido, Queen of Carthage: an interview with Thomas Guthrie
The first two instalments of the Academy of Ancient Music's 'Purcell trilogy' at the Barbican Hall have posed plentiful questions - creative, cultural and political.

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28 Jun 2010

Jay Reise: An Interview by Tom Moore

Jay Reise: An Interview by Tom Moore

Above: Jay Reise [Photo by Cecilia Paredes]

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Jay Reise is one of the senior musical figures in Philadelphia, serving on the composition faculty of the University of Pennsylvania since 1980.

His opera *Rasputin*, originally commissioned by Beverly Sills and the New York City Opera, was revived in 2008-09 by the Helikon Opera in Moscow. *Rasputin* will be given its Paris premiere by Opéra de Massy in November 2010. A new opera, based on the famous Strindberg play *The Ghost Sonata*, is under way. His violin concerto *The River Within* was premiered in 2008 by Maria Bachmann and Orchestra 2001 and is scheduled for release on Innova Recordings later this year. We talked by phone on January 20, 2010 with an email follow-up in June.

TM: Please talk about the musical background in your family.

JR: Both of my parents were very musical though neither was a professional musician. My mother was my first piano teacher when I was five and then my father started teaching me. He had studied with Rudolf Ganz at Chicago Musical College, and then subsequently with Eric Itor Kahn and Irma Wolpe in New York. All three were quite formidable teachers: Ganz had studied with Busoni and is the dedicatee of Ravel's *Scarbo* as well as Griffes' *The White Peacock* and piano sonata; Kahn was a student of Schoenberg and had given the world premiere of *Klavierstücke* Op. 33a; and Wolpe, one of the most celebrated teachers at that time, had worked with Cortot and was of course Stefan Wolpe's first wife. That's quite a mixture of national musical cultures to introduce to a kid from Sparks, Nevada in the late 1940s! And I was fortunate to have something of it passed down to me. My dad eventually went on in business but is still an accomplished and enthusiastic amateur pianist.

The main focus of my parents was on classical music but they were also involved in jazz in the early 1950's. My father was good friends with composer George Russell and copied music for George at the time when he was formulating what became his *Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization*. So my parents were wonderful mentors, embracing both the classical and jazz worlds.

I was, however, always most taken with classical music. I feel that I have known some of it all my life — which I guess I have since my Dad was always practicing it. I can't remember when I didn't know some pieces. They became a part of me. In a certain sense I sometimes feel like some of those composers are members of my family, like uncles. When I hear certain pieces by Schumann or, say, the Brahms B♭ minor Intermezzo (Op. 117 No. 2) it sort of feels like a dear relative is back visiting again. I was an only-child so maybe that's what gives me a peculiar sense of who my relatives are!

TM: You grew up in New York City?

JR: I grew up in Queens and then Staten Island but visited Manhattan all the time. Even though I was quite smitten with classical music as a teenager - listening constantly, studying scores and I even took a few piano lessons with Irma Wolpe — my heart was in literature. I was more interested in becoming a writer, a dramatist in particular. In high school I was especially taken with the Theater of the Absurd, which was very big in the sixties. I read all of Beckett's works, Ionesco, Pinter — the whole lot — I really thought I would go into literature at that point. I guess writing my own librettos is where that interest finally led.

I went to Hamilton College in upstate New York and was an English major, still pursuing the literary idea. At that time, again through my parents, I also became very good friends with jazz clarinetist and composer Jimmy Giuffre. Jimmy is of course one of the great legends of jazz — he passed on about two years ago. He was a remarkable fellow — candid and subtle, kind, complex, a splendid teacher and mentor, and a musician whose lyrical voice I think is unsurpassed.

It was in my junior year in college, during summer vacations and holidays that I began to study composition with Jimmy at his loft on West 15th street. Though I continued to be quite passionate about literature, I was spending more and more time on music. When I told Jimmy about this, he said in his quiet wise way, "Well...music chooses you." It's an insightful statement, one that I have passed on to many aspiring-but-not-quite-certain student composers. I studied with him for about two years, mainly doing counterpoint.

In my senior year at Hamilton I met Canadian composer Hugh Hartwell who was newly appointed to the faculty at sister school Kirkland College. He became a very significant mentor. He had studied with George Crumb, George Rochberg and Richard Wernick at the University of Pennsylvania and is also an excellent jazz pianist. We had many fascinating discussions on all sorts of things ranging from voice leading in Monteverdi to harmonic rhythm in Debussy to melodic development in Miles Davis. My musical horizons kept expanding. Hugh introduced me to George Crumb and Neva Pilgrim. Neva is a wonderful soprano who is a major champion of new music. She was a founder of the Syracuse Society for new Music, a leading new music ensemble which was just honored with an American Music Center Founders Award. Neva later sang the vocal part in my *Symphony of Voices* which was premiered at the Monadnock Festival in 1978.

After I graduated Hamilton I turned my goals towards a career in composition and went to McGill University in Canada. I worked with some really superb musicians at McGill — Bengt Hambraeus, a Swedish composer who was newly appointed, and Bruce Mather, who is a splendid composer and pianist. In 1973 I headed to the University of Pennsylvania and studied composition with Richard Wernick and George Crumb. I also studied harmony with George Rochberg who had gone into his "radical" tonal period with the Third String Quartet about two years before.

TM: Could you say a little more about theater in the sixties? Beckett is an enduring cultural influence, but Ionesco has somewhat faded from the public eye. What was it particularly that appealed to you about those playwrights?

JR: I agree with your assessment though I have not really kept up with current developments in theater. I am very fond of Ionesco — the whole business of the disintegration of meaning in language through clichés, anti-theatre, and his aggressive ridiculousness is to me quite different from Beckett's world. They are both labeled as Theater of the Absurd although to me they have relatively little to do with each other. There are a few Ionesco plays that have a sort of Beckett loneliness to them like *The Chairs* and *Exit the King*. And I guess the torrent of words in *The Unnamable* and Lucky's speech in *Godot* have a Ionesco-like quality. I was sorry to miss the Broadway production of *Exit the King* last year, which was a rare revival. I saw the New York premiere. It has always been my favorite of Ionesco's plays — in some ways it is the most Beckett-like, with the main character eventually disappearing into the void — an even more minimal precinct than that of *Godot*. Both authors are very dramatic in their own ways. Beckett, to my mind, is a literary giant who probes to the deepest regions of human expression. I cannot think of anyone in the history of literature who is more imaginative than Beckett — greater perhaps, but not more original.

TM: Ionesco is in a sense more like Moliere — not so serious, more entertainment, more farce, closer to the questions of day-to-day.

JR: I think that's generally true. But Ionesco can certainly deliver a powerful humanistic message — the swastika armband in *La Leçon*, the mute orator in *Les Chaises*.

TM: Could you talk about other formative musical experiences in the sixties in New York?

JR: I guess my first big breakthrough composer was Mahler in 1960 when I was 10 years old. That was the centenary of Mahler's birth and Leonard Bernstein single-handedly brought about a Mahler renaissance. I saw the famous Young People's Concert on Mahler and heard Bernstein conduct the Second Symphony. I also heard Dimitri Mitropoulos conduct the Ninth as well as Bruno Walter's legendary *Das Lied von der Erde* with Maureen Forrester and Richard Lewis. All were at Carnegie Hall. I met Bruno Walter backstage after the performance and then wrote to him. He sent me back an autographed picture with a note which I still treasure. Another big childhood experience occurred somewhat earlier when I heard Russell Sherman play the Brahms d-minor concerto with Bernstein and the Philharmonic. I got both their autographs. All pretty heady experiences for a pre-teener!

I discovered Scriabin when I was about fifteen. This was when scores of his works were not easy to obtain, especially the later ones. I used to haunt a music warehouse in the Brill Building in Manhattan where I found ragged copies of early editions of Scriabin in rusty file cabinets. I brought them home like treasures, which indeed they were. Then Dover reprinted everything and now it's all available online — what a wonderful thing that is!

For a young person who had explored only tonal music, it was very exciting to investigate this strange music at the edges of tonality — not yet the dissonant landscapes of Schoenberg and the Viennese, but still mysteriously tonal, a style that had evolved from tonality.... All that was a huge influence. What I later understood to be the evolution of the symmetrical French sixth chord in Scriabin's *Poèmes* Op. 32 to its use as a component of the famous "mystic chord" in the late works considerably expanded my music theory horizons and compositional imagination. Later I wrote an article on Scriabin's approach to symmetrical scales.[1] His late works really spoke to me when I was a teenager, and continue to. In some ways that musical mystical ambience he created — I don't mean his own mysticism, but the aura of his sound world— is certainly one of the reasons that I pursued music. There was an other-worldliness to his music, and I was powerfully attracted to it. I have enjoyed discussing this with Gunther Schuller who as a teen had a similar experience with Scriabin's music and also for whom Scriabin has remained a passion.

So I guess altogether my artistic tastes at the time had something in common: I was drawn to music and literature that were classically based but challenged the boundaries of classical convention and at the same time had a powerful emotional impact.

TM: It's gotten to be a long time ago, and people who may be reading this may have no personal memories of the nineties, let alone the sixties....one of the notable phenomena was the sort of musical event with a theatrical edge, what one might call "happenings"...were there events, or composers working in the avant-garde that were notable for you from that period?

JR: It's interesting that you mention "happenings" since it was actually at a happening that I met Jimmy Giuffre. In about 1965 or '66, when I was in high school, I went to the Avant Garde Festival which was a series of happenings organized annually by cellist Charlotte Moorman that took place that year on the Staten Island Ferry. Moorman was quite famous — or infamous — at the time for having performed on the cello topless as part of a happening. A posse of police cars and the riot squad had showed up. She was arrested and eventually given a suspended sentence. The "piece" — the happening — therefore extended from the announcement of the performance itself, to the courthouse, to the coverage in the *New York Times* and the subsequent fallout. It was all pretty funny but it was obvious that the happening was about the theater of the event rather than anything to do with music. I remember Charlotte as an exceptionally nice person. She was totally committed to what she was doing and had great fun doing it. And since joy is something that can be hard to come by in 20th century art, I guess she was on to something.

With regard to happenings themselves, well, that brings up the whole topic of John Cage, Nam June Paik and all of those folks who were taking a radically different approach to music at the time. That path seemed to me at the time more Dada or anti-music and not headed in a direction I was personally interested in. I have little patience for Dada and its derivatives in general - the joke seems to me stale. On the other hand I recognize now that happenings were also the beginning of performance art which is of course a very important medium.

So anyway, among all the unusual, bizarre and crazy things going on that Saturday on the Staten Island Ferry was a performance by a jazz trio led by a superb clarinet player surrounded by a large audience. That's when I first met Jimmy. He was moving past his very *avant garde* "free jazz" period at the time which culminated with the album *Free Fall*.

TM: Were there jazz idioms that particularly appealed to you in the sixties and seventies?

JR: I was very interested in Jimmy Giuffre's music of course, especially in terms of his unique lyricism and special instrumental voicings. Also George Russell. Jazz piano always interested me, although I don't play very much jazz piano and don't write in a jazz style. I always liked Bill Evans a lot, Art Tatum, Bud Powell, Nat "King" Cole, Paul Bley, Monk. And of course all the great instrumentalists — Davis, Mulligan, Sonny Rollins, Clifford Brown. I could go on — but my list would not be news to anyone. Maybe some somewhat lesser known names, like pianists Jimmy Rowles, Denny Zeitlin.... My mother plays wonderful jazz piano with some of the most exquisite chord changes I have ever heard.

When I was three or four my parents used to go to sessions in George Russell's apartment — I would sleep in the bedroom on the coats while the music making went on 'til the wee hours. What I would give to have a second chance to hear that!

I attended a memorial service for George a few weeks ago. The music was phenomenal and was played by some of today's best jazz musicians covering his work from the '50s to just a few years ago. Almost sixty years of music of tremendous variety but George Russell always sounded like himself and no other.

TM: Please talk a little about the musical atmosphere at McGill. These days we have a facility in having access to music from Estonia, or Latvia, or Russia that is just astonishing, but at that time to have a new composer from Sweden at McGill must have been unusual.

JR: I guess so though it did not occur to me, maybe because in Canada I was an outsider as well. Montreal is a five-hour car ride to New York or Boston but its closest cultural connections are with Paris. The McGill music faculty was very French-oriented, and France's most well known composers at the time were of course Messiaen and Boulez.

During my undergraduate years I had become very interested in the music of Messiaen — probably my primary passion after my Scriabin period. I was blown away by *Et Exspecto Resurrectionem Mortuorum* which remains my favorite Messiaen multi-instrument work. I subsequently heard Yvonne Loriod perform the *Vingt Regards sur L'Enfant Jésus* at Hunter College as well as Messiaen and Loriod together playing his *Visions de l'Amen*. These were incredible experiences. Loriod was a magnificent pianist and her interpretation of standard literature like the Debussy Etudes was also a revelation.

Like Scriabin, Messaien used symmetrical scales and so inhabited a similar place at the edge of tonality. Both also had color-graphemic synesthesia as well as a strong dose of mysticism. When I had master classes with Messiaen at Tanglewood, I asked him about Scriabin's harmony. He said that unlike Scriabin, he treated harmony only as a matter of taking down the music in the colors before him.

Both Bruce Mather and Bengt Hambraeus had studied with Messiaen. I didn't go to McGill specifically for that reason, but the connection was certainly a plus. With Hambraeus I mainly studied orchestration. He was encyclopedic on contemporary techniques and a multitude of other things. He introduced me to such diverse things as the first version of Boulez's *Le Marteau sans maître* and the unpublished *Poésie pour pouvoir* as well as the work of the great Russian conductor Nikolai Golovanov. Mather and I shared a love of Scriabin and his class in 20th-century harmony was truly extraordinary. We studied Scriabin, Debussy, late Fauré, Berg and wrote pieces in their styles, which is something I do in my own classes. But the first assignment was to write a Bach chorale: if you could not do that, you could forget the rest!

I had several pieces done at McGill as well as at a festival in Toronto; they were influenced by what I would now describe as French atonality along with some Berg. They were not serial — it was the time when serialism was beginning to lose its grip.

TM: Messiaen seems far more productive in the results that are evident in the composers that follow him than Boulez.

JR: Messiaen had such a wide scope — he was so all-encompassing and eclectic but incredibly original. Like Berg, he absorbed and transformed the 19th century musical phenomenon into his own inimitable style — and then took on bird song, plainchant, the Catholic faith, tonality and modality, symmetrical scales, atonality, fixed registers, Asian music and plainchant as well as other elements!

I have also always been a great admirer of Boulez, both his music and his writings. His style — in terms of his gestures and vocabulary — has expanded over the years but his "sound-print" is always unmistakable. One piece I recall from my formative years was *Rituel*. I saw the American premiere at Tanglewood and it stimulated much of my interest in rhythm which is a dominant feature in my music.

TM: Let's move from Montreal to Philadelphia. Who was your primary teacher at Penn?

JR: I worked primarily with Richard Wernick who is a remarkable and eloquent composer and tremendously inspiring teacher. His extraordinary recent String Quartet No. 7 contains a 10-minute mensuration canon that is truly virtuosic and is of especial interest to me because of its rhythmic aspects. I also worked with George Crumb, who is of course a living legend — an incredible composer and a wonderful person — warm, witty, highly supportive and knowledgeable about many off-the-beaten-track kinds of things. I am the president *emeritus* of Orchestra 2001, a Philadelphia based ensemble specializing in contemporary music. George has composed a number of pieces for the group, most recently his extraordinary *American Songbooks* based on American folk tunes. I also studied harmony with George Rochberg — I never studied composition with him, unfortunately. The timing never worked out. His was one of the great musical minds I have encountered. These three composers wrote very different kinds of music. George Rochberg had just turned to writing a very traditional kind of tonal music about which I subsequently wrote an article for *Perspectives of New Music*[2]. But as different as they were they seemed to share something, in the sense that if you compared them to anybody else who was writing, they had more in common philosophically than just about any other composers you could put together. For example, George Crumb's music is primarily tonally based but not in the same way as George Rochberg's. All three were absolutely fantastic teachers, again very different from one another with each offering his own special musical vision based on supreme knowledge of the literature and superb technical mastery.

Also I have to say I have undoubtedly learned more about music from exchanging ideas with my many wonderful students over the last 35 years than any other single source.

TM: How would you have described your own style when you moved from Montreal to Philadelphia?

JR: I was studying all the great composers from the first half of the 20th century — especially Berg — and all the contemporary music I could get my hands on. The first half of the twentieth century is like a mini-century in itself, with an incredible roster of composers — there must be twenty-five from that period who are in the standard repertoire today. I was trying to write music that had the searing qualities and expressive qualities of serialism but could still evoke the wonderful moods of warmth and nobility that tonality brought.

TM: Could you say something about what it is that produces an "American" voice for composers? Is this something that is important?

JR: That's a tricky issue, since this country exists as it is because of many immigrations and cultural importations. There were and are so many influences in this country — our American culture has been seeded by the heritages of the world and the result is something like a multi-colored mosaic. It's interesting that in the second half of the 20th century America reversed the trend and is undoubtedly the leading exporter of culture.

I tend to divide the music of this country into two categories: music that has been influenced by European music and music has not been (or has been minimally). Jazz certainly fits that non-European bill. George Gershwin is the perfect hybrid of the two categories — he absorbed jazz and Gullah elements into his style as Bartok assimilated Eastern European folk music. American serial music on the other hand never sounds to me very American — even Copland's *Inscape*, which sounds very Copland, does not come across as necessarily American. To me the most quintessentially American piece is Ives' *Concord Sonata*, especially the introverted last movement "Thoreau". Even the quotation of the Beethoven Fifth Symphony comes across like an imitation or memory of the Beethoven the ancestral European. Ives delves deeply and convincingly into our historic, literary and musical pasts as well as employing the most modernistic techniques. But of course he too had strong European academic musical credentials through his study with Horatio Parker who in turn had been trained in Munich.

My own music is more Western than particularly American or global. When I say I am influenced by jazz or Indian music, I don't mean that I have swinging saxophone solos or improvisations in the manner of Charlie Parker or *tabla* solos like Zakir Hussain's. Rather I am influenced by the management of the technical elements — the theory if you will — on which these musics are founded and generated. I utilize elements of their systems but my music remains clearly of the Western classical tradition. This incorporation of the techniques of other classical musical traditions is for me the most productive kind of "fusion". What do I mean by "classical"? Not necessarily Western classical music, though obviously it's one of those major traditions — but rather any music that has developed around a praxis whether it's *tala*, blues, Western harmony, modal counterpoint or raga.

TM: Carnatic music, even more so than north Indian music, seems to be little-known to American listeners. What was your path into this music?

JR: It has often been remarked that of the parameters in Western music, rhythm seems to be the one that is least studied. I would suggest that that's because rhythm is the least codified. There is little in the way of a particular method for Western rhythm as there is for harmony and counterpoint, except perhaps for Paul Creston's *Principles of Rhythm*. Western rhythm seemed to be dependent on elements of harmony and voice-leading, especially in tonal music. I was always very interested in trying to discover a rhythmic method that was as powerful and flexible as that of tonal harmony. Messiaen did a lot of work with rhythm, so I studied Messiaen's own rhythms and the Indian sources that inspired him so powerfully. I was fortunate enough to be invited to study at Tanglewood in 1975 when Messiaen was there — the first summer that he had been there in twenty-five years. He was actually writing his treatise on rhythm at the time, which I was very excited to see — it was left unpublished at his passing, and came out a few years ago. He was probably the first composer I encountered who showed me that musical riches were to be found in other classical traditions.

I had long been very interested in rhythm and had amassed many file folders, read books on African rhythm, studied the 120 *deśītālas* of Śārṅgadeva (one of Messiaen's sources) — all of that kind of thing. But I always felt that my use of these materials was limited. If I found a particularly interesting African rhythm in, say, three layers, putting an oboe, bassoon and clarinet on each part wasn't really using the rhythm — it was rather a kind of cut and paste approach. What I wanted to do find a way to "work" rhythms in the same way that you could develop a melody or modulate.

Then in the early 1990s, I was fortunate enough to meet Adrian L'Armand, an Australian violinist who specialized in Carnatic music. I was living in Swarthmore Pennsylvania at the time, and he lived around the block from me. How fortunate is that?! We were discussing Berio's *Circles* one day and then he started talking about rhythm. In less than a minute I realized that he knew more about rhythm than anyone I had ever met. He talked about rhythmic displacement, variation and development — the very things that I was looking for. I immediately began to study rhythm with him, and continued for several years. It's interesting how things quickly opened up compositionally for me.

In Western music, the cadence is implied by the unfolding harmony and voice leading. The basic gist of this rhythmic approach is that at least two layers of rhythmic motives (often based on 5's and 7's) are developed within a phrase. By making their total individual values equal (ie 7 groups of 5 = 5 groups of 7) the unfolding of the phrase will be such that the cadence point is implied by the rhythms alone. I call this technique "rhythmic polyphony". Superimposing other regular and irregular rhythms (such as bembé and the like) leads to still more interesting and complex results. Traditional Baroque devices like augmentation and diminution produce wonderful effects, especially in tuplets. All this gave my counterpoint greater depth. Also, unlike Indian music in which a *tala* is used for a whole piece or at least a major portion, I change *talas* and rhythmic groups often, from whole sections to single measures. I think of this approach to rhythm as being somewhat analogous to Western harmonic rhythm where the rate of chord-change varies within the phrase.

TM: What is the source or sources of your pitch material?

JR: I am often asked that. I use an approach I think of as "chromatic modality". This involves the full vocabulary of traditional scales and modes in which notes outside the set (non-diatonic tones) are introduced and are either subsumed by the diatonicism surrounding them, or "resolved" into the diatonic set. (Like my rhythmic procedures, a given set of pitches can be quite prolonged or shift quickly by phrase, by measure or even by chord.) I think this may be similar to Ives' strategy in the *Concord* and some of the songs. Scriabin certainly used chromaticism in octatonic and whole tone contexts as I point out in my article. Debussy's style may also have some similarities. It is characterized by a mixture of pentatonic, whole tone and modal scales tempered with a highly effective but unpredictable dose of Wagnerian chromaticism.

TM: What are some pieces in which these elements are particularly important in generating the musical fabric?

JR: Any of my pieces written after 1990 — after I had written *Rasputin* and my three symphonies. The first major work was *Rhythmic Garlands*, a piano piece that I wrote for and has been recorded by Jerome Lowenthal. That was followed by *Duo Rhythmikosmos* for violin and piano, a piano trio entitled *Trio Rhythmikosmos*, and *Yellowstone*. I also used these techniques in other major pieces — the choreographic tone poem *The Selfish Giant* based on Oscar Wilde's fairy tale, *Satori* for voice and piano (also in several ensemble arrangements), the string quartet *Memory Refrain, Across the Horizons* for clarinet, violin cello and piano, *Concerto for Horn and 7 Instruments*, and the violin concerto *The River Within* among others. My website as well as the webpage at my publisher, Theodore Presser, contain full listings.

TM: Please talk about your opera *Rasputin*, which was premiered in New York in 1988, with a recent performance in Russia. Were there some revisions for the more recent performance?

JR: The genesis of *Rasputin* began when I taught at my *alma mater*, Hamilton College in upstate New York in the 70's. Christopher Keene was the artistic director of the Syracuse Symphony and premiered my Second Symphony in 1980 which I wrote with the support of a Guggenheim. Keene later conducted the piece with the Philadelphia Orchestra as well as my *Third Symphony* with the Long Island Philharmonic.

In the mid-80s, Keene introduced me to Beverly Sills who was the Executive Director of the New York City Opera and *Rasputin* was commissioned. Frank Corsaro was the stage director. My longtime interest in theater and ensuing close relationship with Frank — a tremendously imaginative and stimulating colleague — prompted me to write the libretto. The wonderful bass-baritone John Cheek sang the title role.

The Helikon production premiered in 2008-09 and was included in the "Helikon Opera of the Twentieth Century" retrospective series in April 2010. This production contains some revisions and a few cuts that I think makes the opera more effective dramatically. Lenin was moved exclusively to the end, for example.

My association with Helikon began when I met the artistic director and founder of the company, Dmitry Bertman, in 1994 on my first trip to Russia. Bertman was just starting the company and had only two or three people working for him. He wanted to produce *Rasputin* right away and actually scheduled it for 1996 but eventually didn't have the forces or the finances to put it together at that time.

I am very excited about the Helikon production and think it has everything a composer could hope for. The cast, chorus, musicians, set and costume designers are superb. Bertman is a brilliant director with a vision that is vibrant and original but always within the boundaries of the material as I have conceived it. He brings out every element of turbulence and lyricism in the opera. Bertman captures the spirit and timing of both my music and libretto and infuses it with many bold gestures as well as thousands of wonderful details. The set consisted of gigantic Fabergé eggs nestled in egg crates highlighting the contrast between the exquisite world of the aristocracy and the rough-hewn lives of the working class that overthrew it in 1918. The topic of Rasputin and the murder of the royal family is still widely discussed in Russia. There was a court ruling on it even as the premiere of the opera was happening — the killing was judged to be a political act and the Tsar's family were considered to be victims of Bolshevism. Of course Nicholas, Alexandra and their children were canonized about 30 years ago. There was also a recent campaign by a religious faction to canonize Rasputin and Ivan the Terrible. It failed.

Opera Massy in Paris has scheduled *Rasputin* for November-December 2010 utilizing the Helikon production.

TM: Will there be a CD or DVD from the production?

JR: I am working on making a commercial DVD. We have a filming company in Moscow ready to go and are now seeking financing and a distributor for the US and Europe. Excerpts of the Helikon production (recorded in-house) can be seen online here.

TM: Do you have plans for future stage works?

JR: I am currently working on an opera based on Strindberg's play *The Ghost Sonata*, which is a work I have loved since I was in high school. I remember an extraordinary performance of it on television in the '60s with Robert Helpmann and Jeremy Brett — and have sought a video recording in vain. I started working on the opera about six months ago and have written about a third of it. Also, though *The Selfish Giant* was given a wonderful premiere performance by the Philharmonia Orchestra under Djong Victorin Yu and has been performed in the States, it has never been choreographed. So I am also pursuing that.

TM: Will *The Ghost Sonata* be a full-length evening?

JR: Yes — it's in three scenes, each about forty minutes.

TM: What is about this play that grabs you?

JR: It's a very mystical, frightful, zany and yet poetic play — a strange mix, and yet everything works. It has all of the elements of opera — drama, other worldliness, striking characters. Every opera has some sort of other-worldly facet about it which is what its music deals with. The music is in an imaginary domain which gives the characters a means to express their inner sensibilities beyond words. They are unaware that they are singing unless it's a specific song in the opera such as Walther's Prize Song. On the psycho-dramatic side, Strindberg's play is about people who gleefully reveal the fatal inner weaknesses of their opponents and in so doing expose their own. And of course there's a love story, and a very unusual one at that. The play inhabits what I think of as a world of realistic fantasy. Most of the actions are normal and the setting is middle class. But with the creation of bizarre elements such as a ghost of the Milkmaid and a "mummy" in the closet, Strindberg creates a mood of penetrating psychological dread. The setting and general tone of the dialogue are like Chekhov or Ibsen but by the end we are not sure what plane of reality we are on. And at the last moment a *coup de théâtre* occurs as the scene disappears completely, rather like *Exit the King*….

TM: I was interested to hear Howard Shore describe his music for *The Lord of the Rings* as his only chance to write a Wagnerian opera.

JR: To compose in the epic manner must be a wonderful challenge.

TM: Perhaps you might talk about your piano music.

JR: I mentioned *Rhythmic Garlands*, my first extended piano work. Before *Garlands* I had written very little piano music though I am an ardent pianophile. I learned much about counterpoint listening to how pianists like Horowitz brought out inner voices. But I had not composed an extended piano piece before I studied rhythm closely. Studying the piano music of Nicholas Medtner was also a revelation. Medtner, who died in 1951, seems to me the most rhythmically sophisticated of the completely tonal composers.

After *Rhythmic Garlands* I wrote *Sonata Rhythmikosmos* which was commissioned by Mari Akagi, a wonderful Japanese pianist who premiered it in Tokyo when I was on a US-Japan Creative Arts Fellowship. That was followed by the violin *Duo* and *Yellowstone Rhythms* for bassoon and piano, both of which have extended piano parts. *Yellowstone* is a 15-minute lyrical rhapsody with bubbly and energetic contrasts. The *Six Pictures from the Devil in the Flesh* piano suite came from another opera project, one that eventually did not materialize. In the late '90s I was contacted by Vincent Malle, the brother of the late film director Louis Malle, about the possibility of writing an opera-film based on the novel *Le Diable au Corps* by Raymond Radiguet. I worked on this with Gude Lavitz, a wonderful film director who had made a documentary on the student uprisings and strikes in Paris in the 1960s. The project didn't get the financing it needed so never came to fruition, but I composed some pilot music which I used in my *Concerto for Cello and 13 Instruments* (which has been recorded by Ulrich Boeckheler and Orchestra 2001 on CRI) and the *Six Pictures*. Each picture is a mood piece. I thought of them like the Debussy Preludes, each of which evokes a suggestive expressive atmosphere. So even though the opera project didn't materialize, there were many good things that resulted from it. Marc-André Hamelin made a splendid recording of the *Six Pictures* as well as *Yellowstone* with bassoonist Charles Ullery.

TM: Hamelin is an astounding pianist.

JR: Yes, he really is — just incredible. He also recorded *Sonata Rhythmikosmos* and played the piano part in the premiere of my piano quintet *Powers That Be* with the Cassatt Quartet. Working with him is a wonderful experience — he is so often able to go beyond what you think is the limit of what can be done, especially in terms of clarity, detail and concentration of effects. His highly expressive delicacy is superb as well.

TM: Could you talk about future projects that you may have coming up? There's the opera, of course.

JR: I don't have a production yet for *The Ghost Sonata*, and I must admit have been somewhat slow to pursue that matter because as soon as I do I will be facing a deadline. I am enjoying composing this piece on my own time. Exciting as it was to compose *Rasputin*, I had to write the whole opera including the libretto in two years as well as teach. Sometimes you want to linger a little more than a deadline will permit. But I will begin to seek a production for *The Ghost Sonata* this year.

On the instrumental front, my new piece *Lunahuaná* for two percussionists will receive its premiere this coming fall.

TM: with a Latin American connection?

JR: Yes — my wife, Cecilia Paredes, is a visual artist from Perú. We spend summers and the winter holidays there. *Lunahuaná* is a town about sixty miles south of Lima, in a very unusual location where the cloud cover that continually hovers over the greater Lima area abruptly stops. I mean very abruptly — you can see the blue sky seemingly buttressed up against a wall of clouds. My piece evokes the atmosphere of the town, from its haunted history to a fiesta with fireworks and whistles.

I am now working on several new pieces: a rhapsody for violin and orchestra for Maria Bachmann who premiered my violin concerto *The River Within*; an extended piano piece for Konstantinos Papadakis; and a new version of *The Selfish Giant* for narrator and chamber orchestra.

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[1] Reise, Jay "Late Skriabin: Some Principles Behind the Style," 19th Century Music, Sp.1983, pp. 220-231; reprinted in *The Journal of the Scriabin Society of America*, Winter 1996-97 pp. 29-46

[2] Reise, Jay "Rochberg the Progressive", *Perspectives of New Music*, 1980-81, pp. 395-407

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