

CUBE circuits

The Latest Buzz from CUBE
Contemporary Chamber Ensemble

Fall-Winter 2005



Mark your calendars for CUBE!

“Hammered CUBE: Music for pianos and percussion”

Sunday, October 23, at 3:00pm
Merit School of Music, Gottlieb Concert Hall
38 S. Peoria St., Chicago
October 22: free and open rehearsal, time TBA

Program

- Colin McPhee, *Ceremonial Music*, for two pianos
- Ted Rounds, *Viewfinder*, for two marimbas
- Janice Misurell-Mitchell, *Agitation*, for two pianos and percussion, world premiere
- Glenn Hackbarth, *Passage*, for piano, percussion and electronics
- Anthony Gilbert, *Sinfin parados*, for two vibraphones
- Astor Piazzolla, *Le Grand Tango*, for two pianos

Guest performers: Abraham Stokman, piano; Greg Beyer and Mike Truesdell, percussion; Stephen Burns, conductor

CUBE's new look!

CUBE Circuits will be published twice a year, bringing our readers information and ideas on new music from Chicago writers. The CUBE Calendar of Events can always be found on our website: <http://www.cubeensemble.com>

Footnotes for “A Running Nose,” opposite

¹ Program booklet, “Shostakovich’s The Nose” Levon Hakobian, trans. Michael Smith

² A more detailed description of the music is found at <http://www.ardani.com/AboutNose.html>

Two Nights at the Opera

A Running Nose

by Janice Misurell-Mitchell

On the weekend of May 20 in St. Petersburg I attended two concerts that will be of special interest to our CUBE Circuits readers: a performance of Shostakovich’s youthful opera, *The Nose*, and a concert presented by the Union of Composers that included four works by Chicago composers (see page 3).

The Nose, based loosely on Gogol’s story of the same name, had been staged in Russia only twice before the current production. The premiere in 1930 received sixteen performances but was later denounced by critics from the Stalin and Khrushchev era as being indicative of extreme petit bourgeois “contemporaneity” of the Soviet culture of the 1920s.¹ It was not staged again in the Soviet Union until 1974, after numerous performances throughout Europe; the latest production, at the Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg was first given in 2004.

The story revolves around the loss of the nose of a petty bureaucrat; the nose is cut off accidentally by a barber and then creates a life of its own. Written during the reign of Nicolai I, it satirizes the government of the time, but also clearly can be seen as a mocking of Soviet bureaucracy. There are numerous visual and musical puns on the loss of identity, sexual prowess, political power, all connected with the loss of the nose.

The opera, described by the composer as a “musical and theatrical symphony,” uses many innovative techniques musically and visually. Shostakovich includes both sung text and *sprechstimme* (speechsong), vocal and instrumental writing in extreme ranges, abrupt shifts from simple tonality to strong atonality and vice versa, satiric versions of traditional styles, and an action section (of a chase) using only percussion instruments (unusual for its time)².

This production was also visually striking, from the use of apartment-like structures on either side of the stage for choral sections to the presence of a large funnel-like structure in the center of the stage, reminiscent of Russian constructivism of the 1920s; each structure had many identities and uses, reflecting the different social levels of the population, all of whom interacted in imaginative comic fashion. The extraordinary cast was headed by Alexei Safiulin as Kovalev, the bureaucrat; Alexai Tanovitsky, the barber; Ekaterini Tsenter, his wife; and Sergei Semishkur, as The Nose. ■

Premiere Performance of Osvaldo Golijov’s Opera *Ainadamar* in Santa Fe

by Larry Axelrod

For seven years now in the first week of August, I have taught an opera appreciation class for Ghost Ranch Santa Fe. The class is a lively and diverse group of opera lovers from all over the country.

From its inception, the Santa Fe Opera has always presented new works. This summer it was Osvaldo Golijov’s *Ainadamar*, which had only been done twice before, in concert versions. The name of the opera comes from a spring near Granada where the poet Federico Garcia Lorca was shot at the beginning of the Spanish civil war.

From the new large works I have seen over recent years, it seems that there is a very different concept of “new music” afloat. In Golijov’s work, the music at times sounds like Flamenco, and at times sounds like Cuban music of the 1940s or 50s. There is also a recurring theme of recorded sounds in the opera—some of its most successful moments, in my opinion. There was the sound of water, either running or dripping. And then there were percussive sounds that began sounding either like gunshots or horse’s hooves and ended up in Flamenco rhythms.

(continued on page 4)

Bill Karlins (1932–2005)

Tributes from friends and former students



M. William Karlins 1932 – 2005

The members of CUBE were deeply saddened by the death of M. William Karlins on May 11. Bill Karlins was one of the ensemble's primary supporters, composer and Northwestern University professor emeritus. Bill was a member of our Advisory Board and, with his wife Mickey, a frequent attendee at CUBE concerts. During his many years with us he served as a competition judge, a networker, a critic and a dear friend.

M. William Karlins was the Harry N. and Ruth F. Wyatt Professor of Music Theory and Composition Emeritus at Northwestern University, where he had been on the faculty since 1967.

There will be an annual award in his name to be given to a composition graduate at commencement at the Northwestern University School of Music. A memorial concert will be presented at Northwestern later this year.

Howard Sandroff,

Composer, member of Music Department faculty, The University of Chicago

This is an excerpt from the eulogy I delivered at Bill Karlins' memorial service, Sunday, May 15, 2005.

Since that awful moment Wednesday afternoon when Mickey called to tell me that Bill suddenly and inexplicably died, my mind has been racing through the last 30 years to find some meaning or explanation for this great loss. As the scenes from my memory played

out, a recurring pattern emerged. At every important event, life changing experience or rite of passage, Bill and Mickey were there to help shoulder the burden, celebrate the achievement or just share a meal and a laugh. An indelible picture of Bill's face and hand is fused along with the memory of those events, which shaped the progression of my life from youth to middle years.

When I wrote a new piece, Bill was always one of the first to listen; voice praise and support or well deserved criticism. When I felt dispirited by my work, Bill supplied much needed encouragement. We spent hundreds of evenings in their den or our kitchen arguing the merits of some composer or composition, telling funny stories, watching old WC Fields movies, or debating the fine points of the current incarnation of yet another Star Trek series.

Bill was my brother. Knowing that all of the events to come and memories to create will happen without Bill's touch saddens me more than I can say.

(To Bill) "Friends are those people who know the words to the song in your heart and sing them back to you when you have forgotten the words."

You were my friend as well.

Robert Lombardo,

Composer, visual artist, Professor Emeritus of Music Composition, Roosevelt University

What can one say when a close friend dies suddenly and unexpectedly? Bill was a kind, thoughtful and generous person—never mean-spirited. He was a special friend that one could depend on for just about anything.

Bill loved teaching and when he "retired," he still kept his hand in it,

spending time at school with his students. I felt that he was having a difficult time leaving academe. Composing helped make the transition to "civilian life" a little less painful. I had the pleasure of hearing one of Bill's last pieces, a duo for violin and piano. I felt that the work was one of his best and it showed me that he was continuing to develop his compositional skills and that he had a lot more to express with his music.

Mickey was so fortunate to have been married to Bill for so many years. She shared with Kathleen and me how affectionate and thoughtful he always was. She has an abundance of special memories of him to keep her company—and so do we.

Marilyn Shrude,

Composer, Professor of Music Composition, College of Musical Arts, Bowling Green State University

A message from Bill Karlins was always a bright spot in my day. We managed to stay in touch quite often in the last 30 years—exchanging email, phone calls, letters. His love for music was contagious and I never ceased to marvel at his appetite for new works, my own among them. He was a great sounding board for me, and that is rare in our field. I appreciated his honesty and the loving support he so generously offered. I was always touched that he cared enough to send me his new pieces and found his recent works to have extraordinary emotional depth. I will miss my dear friend, my treasured teacher.

Augusta Read Thomas

Composer-in-Residence, Chicago Symphony, 1997–2006 Professor of Music Composition, Northwestern University School of Music

Bill Karlins... A Memorial Moment. Elegant, refined, elusive, beautiful and profound are terms repeatedly

used by commentators in attempts to describe Bill's music and evoke its spirit. It inhabits a sound-world which indeed is refined yet bold; elusive but precise; beautiful in its complexity. It is unique. His excellent sense of pitch and harmonic relationships was one of Bill's many ways of describing a music and the compositional processes and aesthetic which assured a distinctive, individual character. In short, he was a great teacher! I can still hear his voice in my ears.

Bill's genuine modesty belied an inner conviction about his own artistic vision. He knew who he was and trusted his formidable intelligence and sensitive intuition. I was privileged, uplifted and inspired by our relationship as were our colleagues and hundreds of other students. His modesty, coupled with his artistic conviction made Bill a formidable composer and teacher – throughout his life.

Bill generously acknowledged his indebtedness to his teachers and was animated when he spoke of them and their music. I now strongly acknowledge my indebtedness to Bill for being my beloved teacher. He was a profoundly generous gentleman. Creative and imaginative, he was inspired.

Kathleen Ginther

Composer, faculty, School of Music, Southern Illinois University

The first time I met Bill Karlins he completely blew me away. I was applying to the doctoral program at NU and went to campus for pre-admission interviews. My meeting with Bill was a revelation. Although couched in the outward appearance of a meeting, it was really a comp lesson in disguise. In what seemed like mere seconds, he penetrated to the very heart of what I was trying to do. I felt that he had revealed my own music to me.

When I think about Bill, of course I think of the generous, supportive

person he was. He was incredibly encouraging to his students, a mentor in the best sense of the word to an enormous collection of composers, and in that capacity his impact upon the world of contemporary music has been profound indeed. His impact as a composer, I believe, will be even more profound and will continue to grow as younger ears discover his work in years to come. He laid out a template for me of what it means to be a composer and a teacher, a phenomenal gift that is more meaningful to me than I can express.

Janice Misurell-Mitchell

Composer, Artistic Co-director, CUBE, member of Music Department faculty, The University of Chicago

A few words I wrote on May 11...

A mooring has come undone, and we are out to sea. Hard to fathom this loss, so sudden—a voice so real as to have listened to it just yesterday (to Partners), to have written back and forth just yesterday, and now to have this sudden void, this ghostly emptiness. A presence in our lives, in our music—a father questioning, approving, disapproving—we thought he'd go on for many more years... He was my Jewish uncle, my friend from the East dealing, as was I, with life in the Heartland. With each composition I wrote, as his student and later as his colleague, I would think about what he would hear, what he would say. He was always there for us, always befriending people, always meeting new writers, poets and musicians, keeping us all in contact with each other. It will be hard to imagine musical life in Chicago without him. Yet he has left a legacy, and it is large—it comes in many forms—the sound of his music, his years of teaching, and the composers, performers and colleagues who will always remember him.

New Music Chicago

New Music Chicago, which was established last winter, continues in this concert season as a collective of new music groups in the city, from the smallest to the largest, working together to expand interest in the performance of music of our time. Watch for the New Music Chicago Calendar and web site, coming soon! ■

Chicago in St. Petersburg

Irina Feoktistova, a pianist who teaches and performs in Chicago, arranged a concert of new music by American and Russian composers that was performed at the concert hall of the Union of Composers on May 22, 2005. The Americans featured were all from Chicago: M. William Karlins, Ralph Shapey and William Jason Raynovich.

Feoktistova introduced the concert: "The first part of the concert was dedicated to the memory of M. William Karlins. I always will be very grateful to him for his support and help with the project of Contemporary Music exchange between St. Petersburg and Chicago. As the result of three years of work, we made the CD, *Musical Bridge—Chicago-St. Petersburg*, which includes two live performances: American Contemporary Music on the Festival in St. Petersburg, and Russian Contemporary Music at Middlebury College, VT."

The pieces performed on the festival "St. Petersburg Musical Spring" were *Three Songs* for soprano, flute and piano and *A Suite of Preludes* for solo piano by M. William Karlins; *Into a truly...* for soprano and cello by William Jason Raynovich; and *Songs of Ecstasy* for soprano, piano, percussion and tape by Ralph Shapey. Performers: Elena Antonenko, soprano, Ilya Kartashov, cello and Irina Feoktistova, piano. ■

Randspiele XII in Berlin

The RANDSPIELE Contemporary Music Festival, directed by Helmut and Karin Zapf, runs for several days each year in the town of Zepernick, on the outskirts of Berlin. Our readers might recognize the name, Zapf: Helmut, an inventive and prolific composer, had a piece, *Albedo VII*, performed on our CUBE "Europe Now" concert this past April. I was tremendously impressed with the Festival, both in its programming and in the quality of its performances. The publicity was extensive and effective, drawing full houses for two and sometimes three concerts each evening for a four-night period.

The music was chosen from a large body of recent works by European composers, primarily, with an emphasis on young composers and those from the former East Germany. As its title implies, "randspiele"; or "playing on the edge" presented music that frequently ventured into areas of extended techniques, theatrical elements, and sound installations. At the same time, the pieces were well-crafted and used contemporary ideas effectively.

The first night we were treated to two new music concerts—both of which were performed in a newly constructed modern Parish House, and in a very old, traditional small town church, with wonderful acoustics. The audience was "instructed" to move along a short path from one to the other for groups of pieces—sometimes ushered by a performer (still playing). Then there was a break for Greek dinners and a concert of "classical" Greek folk music. Following this, since it was opening night, there were fireworks in the churchyard!

Some of the more remarkable performers, among the uniformly excellent ones, were Eiko Morikawa (from Japan, with degrees from Germany), a soprano with a huge range, power and accuracy; Sonsoles Alonso (from Spain,

with degrees from the US), a pianist who specializes in extended techniques; and Matthias Badczong, a German clarinetist of tremendous range and flexibility who performs regularly in new music concerts in Berlin. Of the many fine pieces performed, I would like to mention the powerful work, *don't forget!*, for soprano, trombones, percussion and electronics and by Lothar Voigtländer, which had a collage of poems about war and death; *Psycho*, for soprano and Eb clarinet, by Peter Kőszeghy, a breathtaking intertwining of voice and instrument; and ...*wo jetzt hingehen...* for four percussionists, a piece with intricate connections, by Helmut Zapf.

The second night of the Festival opened at the local market: an idea of Helmut Zapf, à la John Cage. Regular patrons of the market shopped unaware, at first, but they gradually realized that the cabbages were calling out, "Kaufen Sie mich!" ("Buy me!") The milk cartons said, "Moo", and there were people creating rhythms on the wine bottles with plastic forks. Concert-goers exchanged secret smiles and walked along the aisles in a Zen-like state. Most audience members bought some groceries. It was quite magical. ■



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For CUBE news, information, the CUBE Calendar, forms for ticket purchase, and the CUBE Store, please join CUBE on the Internet at: <http://www.cubeensemble.com>

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CUBE

18th Season 2005-2006

Winter and Spring Concerts

"Sounding the Sacred II", Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, Sunday afternoon, February 19. Music by Larry Axelrod, Ralph Shapey, Margaret Bonds, others. More details on our website.

Annual Spring Festival Concert I, "Facets of CUBE", Sunday, March 12, 3:00pm, Merit School of Music, Gottlieb Concert Hall. The many sides of American music, with works by Rands, Druckman, Eicher, Brush.

New Music Chicago Marathon, CUBE and other members, Sunday, March 26, 2:00pm, Green Mill.

Spring Festival Concert II, "Essential CUBE", Friday, April 7, 7:30pm, Columbia College Concert Hall. World premieres by Ilya Levinson, Doug Lofstrom and Patricia Morehead.

"Live from WFMT", Monday, April 10, 8:00pm. Works by Pulitzer Prize winning composers: Piston, Copland, Dello Joio, Kirchner, Carter, Druckman, Walker and Spratlan.

Spring Festival Concert III, "American Songbook III", Sunday, May 21, 3:00pm, Merit School of Music, Gottlieb Concert Hall. Guest artist, soprano Alicia Berneche. World premiere by Robert Lombardo, featured work by Dominick Argento.

→ Circuits newsletter design, layout and production by Eda Warren, 773/248-8211

Golijov's Opera *Ainadamar* (continued from page 1)

The story is a conceptual one. It ties together three historical personages—Mariana Piñeda, a Spanish version of Betsy Ross who was shot during civil strife in Spain in the 1830's for revolutionary activity (and about whom Lorca wrote a play), the poet Federico Garcia Lorca, and Margarita Xirgu, a Spanish actress who starred in Lorca's leading roles and kept Lorca's work alive in Latin America when she was barred from returning to Spain after the onset of the Spanish civil war.

Peter Sellars directed the production; the cast was mostly women—even the role of Lorca is a "pants role". The three men in the cast were all soldiers and that was their sole function. The largest role is that of Margarita Xirgu, played by Dawn Upshaw, who was in excellent voice, as were all the cast members. There was also a small women's chorus that participated

vigorously, much as a Greek chorus. They had choreography and ritualized movement to underscore the drama.

The entire stage—walls and floor—were painted by the Los Angeles-based Chicano artist Gronk. It was moody, bold, and evocative, filled with military drab colors highlighted with deep reds and oranges.

For me the most powerful aspect of the opera was its unflinching political commentary. In the opera it was the repression of Franco's policies most directly, but the relationship to our own time was lost on no one. I also must admit that my opinion on the music was a minority one—that the opera, while dramatically intense, well-sung and well-acted, was musically dull and repetitive, although my class of 34 opera die-hards enjoyed it thoroughly. ■



CUBE

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