

the transbay

Creative Music Calendar

APRIL 2008

CONCERT REVIEW BY MATTHEW GOODHEART

Lachenmann at Mills

In January of 2008, German composer Helmut Lachenmann visited Mills College as the Jean Macduff Vaux visiting composer-in-residence. In addition to lecturing in music classes, he gave a public lecture on Thursday, January 24th, and a concert of his works was performed on Saturday, January 26th. The following is the second installment of an article which began in the March issue of the Transbay Music Calendar.

Part II – Concert

Saturday night; the concert. There are a couple online reviews, a blog by Richard Friedman and the webzine San Francisco Classical Voice, by Jules Langert. It is telling that there are no paper reviews, that the SF Chronicle was absent at this sole Bay Area concert during this residency of the winner of the Kulturpreis für Musik, the Kompositionpreis, the Bach-Preis Hamburg, the Ernst von Siemens Musikpreis, and the Royal Philharmonic Society Music Award. Nobody here but us chickens.

Langert is quite positive about the evening, specifically mentioning that *Allegro Sostenuto*, for clarinet, cello and piano, was an “exhilarating performance” (which also received a standing ovation). He describes each work in with a certain amount of detail, and even raises the possibility that there are humorous elements in Lachenmann’s work. Friedman disliked the concert, saying he found *Allegro Sostenuto* “really tedious, devoid of any sustaining interest beyond a few ‘nice sounds’ here and there.” Friedman, actually, went to so far as to respond to Langert’s review, writing in the comments section:

... the concert was a big big disappointment for me. I was hoping to hear some recent music by this composer. . . all the music played was from 20 to 45 years ago. Nothing new here. . . The style of cataloging bizarre things you can do with acoustic instruments was the rage in the 70’s and 80’s. When you run out of ideas just drag the bow below

the bridge for no reason. . . And, I failed to see any tongue-in-cheekiness in any of it. In fact, this was no laughing matter. It was all very sad.”

Matt Ingalls, the clarinetist who performed *Allegro Sostenuto*, then responded to Friedman’s comment:

On the contrary, Lachenmann has been constantly developing his own way of **making** music with “extended” instrumental sounds, combining a modern, “acousmatic” compositional approach with “classical” techniques. Indeed, a good example is *Allegro Sostenuto* — it is almost Beethoven-like in that the entire composition is spun out of the handful of motives introduced in the first few bars of the piece, with timbre being an extra dimension in which these motives can mutate.

And so it goes. The question becomes; how do we listen to what is presented to us? What is the framework? Friedman, for example, states “It’s hard to tell from the listener’s seat what compositional processes were involved. . . much of it sounded as if it could have been improvised” which supports his later statement “there must have been some organizational thread holding it all together, but I couldn’t find it.” Yet Ingalls clearly sees the connection implied by Lachenmann’s lecture. But he is intimately familiar with the work, and the familiarity creates the framework for his experience. He knows *Allegro Sostenuto* better than most people know the Harp quartet.

I must admit that from my own “listener’s seat” at the Mills concert, the developmental nature of Lachenmann’s work seemed evident to me, though this was the first time I’d heard both *Allegro Sostenuto* and the string quartet *Gran Torso*. In fact, I began to wonder if his selection of the Harp quartet in his lecture was chosen with *Gran Torso* in mind.

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Michael Bach
Photo: Renate Hoffleit

CONCERT REVIEW BY TOM DUFF

other minds 13

San Francisco, March 7, 2008. The Friday concert of this year’s Other Minds Festival covered a lot of stylistic ground, ranging from minimalism to European modernism to American experimentalism to musique concrete to theatrical sound poetry, among others. The results were mixed, but that’s the expected result of any enterprise that tries to leap outside conventional boundaries.

First on the program was “*Dreaming in Darkness*” (2005) by Åke Parmerud, a 6-channel fixed-media piece, composed mostly of lightly manipulated field recordings of urban sounds, footsteps, water splashing, bells, clocks and snores. Apparently Parmerud’s dreams are about getting up in the morning: the alarm going off while his wife snores, then walking down the hall for his morning ablutions. Mine, when they’re worth my attention, are about endless staircases, improbable sex, fantasy mathematics and being chased by monstrous bears (and being thin, but I never mention that.)

Closing out the first half was Michael Bach

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the transbay

Creative Music Calendar

Wednesday April 2

CNMAT • 8pm

Pedro Rebelo

current work from the Sonic Arts Research Centre in the areas of fixed media, audiovisuals and network performance.

Thursday April 3

Bottom of the Hill • 9pm \$8

Record Label Records Live showcase

Fluorescent Grey, Nommo Ogo, Kush Arora, Anon Day

CNMAT • 8pm \$10 / \$5

Memory of our HANDS – MINDS

Michal Rataj - live electronics
Heather Frasch - flute

Friday April 4

Mills College Lisser Hall • 8pm FREE

X Sound Festival

A Festival of New Works by Mills Undergraduate Senior Composers

Saturday April 5

Community Music Center • 8pm Free

Daive Verotta

piano works from the 18th to 21st century.

Wednesday April 9

Meridian Gallery • 8pm \$10 / \$5

Meridian Music: Composers in Performance Country Western by Zachary James Watkins

with Shayna Dunkelman (percussion), Kanoko Nishi (koto), Noah Phillips (prepared guitar), Marielle Jakobsons (violin/electronics), Emily Packard (violin), Theresa Wong (cello), Aram Shelton (woodwinds/electronics), Jen Baker (trombone), Dennis Somera (voice/poetry), Zachary James Watkins (laptop/network), and Joe Gray (video/network).

Thursday April 10

1510 8th St Performance Space • 8pm \$5-10

Music for Sightseeing, Cope and The Sophisticuffs

Punk rock, lounge, free jazz, spontaneous skronk and a little bit of madness meet up for one fun night!! snax likely.

Luggage Store Gallery • 8pm \$6-10

Outsound Presents New Music Series

8pm Ross Hammond trio with Phillip Greenlief & Lisa Mezzacappa

9pm Phillip Greenlief & Jon Raskin's 2+2 with Liz Allbee - trumpet, Jen Baker - trombone, Greenlief & Raskin - saxophones, composers

21 Grand • 9pm \$6-10

International Noise Conference Tour

Pigs In The Ground, Rubber O Cement, Weasel Walter, Dojenkem, 200yearoldwolfpussy, Violince, Antiear, Ozmadawn, Head Boggle Dia, Hora Flora, Cellblock, Double Trouble, Wiggam, Soft Creatures, Nero's Day At Disneyland, Laundry Room Squelchers

Friday April 11

Meridian Gallery • 7pm \$10 / \$5

OF + OM + OR

Meridian Gallery presents a concert in conjunction with its current exhibition, Form +, organized by Dean Smith. An evening of sound with Aero-Mic'd, Joshua Churchill (with light by Paul Clipson), and Gregg Kowalsky.

venue information

111 Minna Gallery

111 Minna Street, San Francisco

1510 8th St Performance Space

1510 8th Street, Oakland [West Oakland BART]

21 Grand

416 25th Street, Oakland [at Broadway]

24th Street Theater Works

2405 24th Street, San Francisco [at Vermont]

Slowershop

992 Peralta Avenue, San Francisco

Anno Domini Gallery

366 S. 1st Street, San Jose

artSF

110 Capp Street, 5th Floor, San Francisco [at 16th]
Black Gate Code 500

Artists Television Access

992 Valencia, San Francisco [at 21st]

Avonova Studios

417 Avon Street, Oakland

Berkeley Arts Festival

2213 Shattuck Avenue, Berkeley

Berkeley Piano Club

2427 Haste Street, Berkeley [at Dana]

Bottom of the Hill

1233 17th Street, San Francisco [at Missouri]

Chapel of the Chimes

4499 Piedmont Avenue, Oakland

Climate Theater

285 9th Street, San Francisco [at Folsom]

CNMAT

1750 Arch Street, Berkeley

Community Music Center

544 Capp Street, San Francisco

CounterPULSE

1310 Mission Street, San Francisco

The Exploratorium

3601 Lyon Street, San Francisco

First Church of the Buzzard

2601 26th Street #150, Oakland [at Adeline]

Freight & Salvage

1111 Addison Street, Berkeley

Heco's Palace

705 Peralta Street, Oakland

Hemlock Tavern

1131 Polk Street, San Francisco [near Post]

Hotel Utah

500 Fourth Street, San Francisco [at Bryant]

Hunter's Point Shipyard

Innes Street Terminus, San Francisco

Jazzschool

2087 Addison Street, Berkeley

Jewish Community Center of the East Bay

1414 Walnut Street, Berkeley

Johansson Projects Gallery

2300 Telegraph Avenue, Oakland

Kimo's

1351 Polk Street, San Francisco

The LAB

2948 16th Street, San Francisco [at Capp]

Luggage Store Gallery

1007 Market Street, San Francisco [at 6th]

Mama Buzz Cafe

2318 Telegraph Avenue, Oakland [at 23rd]

Maybeck Studio

email gm@handprintseries for location

Memorial Auditorium

551 Serra Mall Stanford

Meridian Gallery

535 Powell Street, San Francisco

Mills College

5000 MacArthur Boulevard, Oakland

Musicians Union Hall

116 9th Street, San Francisco [at Mission]

Noe Valley Ministry

1021 Sanchez Street, San Francisco

NOHspace

2840 Mariposa Street, San Francisco

ODC Dance Theatre

3153 17th Street, San Francisco [at Shotwell]

Monday April 14

Mills College Ensemble Room • 7:30pm
Screening of Ellen Fullman's "Event Locations No. 1"

Tuesday April 15

Climate Theater • 8pm \$10-15
David Slusser & Rubber City with Ralph Carney; guitarist Clarke

Wednesday April 16

The Marsh • 7:30pm \$10
Rova:Arts presents Improv:21
Mark Dresser = Spectral Delivery
The excavation of musical possibilities from the double bass is the subject of Mark Dresser's informance. Exploring the micro details of string vibration through improvisation, recording, analysis, codification, and composition has led to the development of a custom made electro-acoustic pick-up system and a rich body of music. Mark Dresser will join Derk Richardson and you, the audience, in an improvised discussion and informance. Co-sponsored by The Marsh in association with Other Minds.

Pearl Alley Studios

120 Pearl Alley, Santa Cruz

Piedmont Piano Company

660 Third Street, San Francisco

Project Artaud Theatre

450 Florida Street, San Francisco

Recombinant Labs Compound

1070 Van Dyke Avenue, San Francisco

Root Division

3175 17th Street, San Francisco [at Shotwell]

RX Gallery

132 Eddy Street San Francisco

San Francisco Conservatory of Music

50 Oak Street San Francisco

Starry Plough

3101 Shattuck Avenue, Berkeley [at Prince]

Temescal Arts Center

511 48th Street, Oakland [at Telegraph]

Trinity Chapel

2320 Dana Street, Berkeley

University of the Pacific - Recital Hall Conservatory

3601 Pacific Avenue Stockton

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts

700 Howard Street, San Francisco [at 3rd]

Yoshi's Oakland

510 Embarcadero West, Oakland

Thursday April 18

Freight & Salvage • 8pm \$18
Vladimir Tarazov (Lithuania) - Mark Dresser - Larry Ochs

Vladimir Tarazov, legendary percussionist of The Ganelin Trio, the first USSR jazz band to tour in USA, visits the West Coast to join bassist Mark Dresser (Anthony Braxton Quartet) and Larry Ochs (Rova Sax Quartet etc.) for an evening of sublime music: "Thinking of Morton Feldman."

Luggage Store Gallery • 8pm \$6-10

Outsound Presents New Music Series

8pm Ghost in the Reel Change - will perform live soundtracks to experimental films w/Kyle Bruckmann, Karen Stackpole, Tom Nunn, Andrew Voigt, David Michalak
9pm Wigwaum - 16mm and Super8 Avant Garde Film & Sound Original film from the past 40 years with Douglas Katelus, Loren Means, Randylee Sutherland

Tuesday April 22

21 Grand • 9pm \$6-10

Pre + The Mae Shi + Triangle + Robin Williams on Fire

Climate Theater • 8pm \$10-15

John William Gordon (Mutant Jazz) w/ Go Van Gogh

Wednesday April 23

Memorial Auditorium • 8pm \$26-50

Evelyn Glennie & Fred Frith in an evening of improvisation on traditional and unconventional instruments.

21 Grand • 8pm \$10-\$75

Grosse Abfahrt, or the Art of Gigantic International Improvisations Carried Out With Extreme Sensitivity
with The Acme House Band and guest artists from France Mathieu Werchowski (violin) and David Chiesa (contrabass). Gino Robair, Kyle Bruckmann, Theresa Wong, Matt Ingalls, John Shiurba, Tim Perkis, and Tom Djll.

Thursday April 24

Luggage Store Gallery • 8pm \$6-10
Outsound Presents New Music Series

8pm: Andrew Kaluzynski solo electroics
9pm: Mathieu Werchowski - violin & David Chiesa - double bass (France)

Friday April 26

1510 8th St Performance Space • 8pm \$6-\$10

Jus CD Release Concert

Jacob Lindsay - Clarinets, Ava Mendoza -Guitar, Damon Smith - 7-string ergo bass, Iloop, Weasel Walter - Drums.
Featuring Music and Food from the new CD on Balance Point Acoustics.

Tuesday April 29

Climate Theater • 8pm \$10-15
Michael Straus

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fecalface.com • foopee.com/punk/the-list/ • [outsound \(yahoo group\)](http://outsound.yahoo.com)

music.mills.edu/mailman/listinfo/newmusicerevents

transbaycalendar.org • zumonline.com/shows/

Lachenmann at mills

As explored in Part I, the Harp begins with a subversion of the tonic, and that troublesome pause. . . and thereby hangs the tail. In *Gran Torso* the opening is capped by a 10 second pause at bar 15. Within that first minute of the piece, the fundamental elements of the work come in to play. The second violin begins the piece with a strong gesture, moving the bow at the frog in jagged shifts on the III string along the fingerboard toward the bridge, which then moves into a fingered B-flat, while the bow is more lightly drawn across the strings at a vertical motion from the fingerboard to the bridge. As it approaches the bridge, the IV string is added as a double stop (fingered on G, though it would “sound” as an F since the quartet is tuned scordatura). The effect of this gesture is to leap immediately from a somewhat aggressive buzzing sound, into the half-tone of the B-flat, which quickly dissolves into a filter-sweep white noise effect as the bow is drawn toward the bridge. This movement in and out of degrees of tone is one of the essential elements of *Gran Torso*. Additionally, this initial gesture in the second violin is quickly jumped upon by variations in the other instruments: more aggressive bowing movements up and down the fingerboard in the viola and cello; a flautando half-harmonic played near the bridge on the viola, a noisy sounding B-flat (fingered B), which then drops a 9th and glisses up, against which is juxtaposed an aggressive scratch-tone from the first violin.

So these elements show themselves right from the start: a spectrum from white noise to tone to aggressive “scratch-tone” like sounds. This becomes explicit in the second violin in bars 5-7; a *balzando* (gentle bouncing of the bow on the string,

producing an accelerating rhythm) brings us into a clear F-sharp, which then shifts down a thick vibrato *largissimo* (sounding approximately A-flat to B-flat) as the bow moves from fingerboard toward the bridge. A second pitch increases the density as the bow is drawn back toward the fingerboard for a crescendo, which evolves into a scratch-tone.

But this development in the second violin is not in isolation: true to the “interconnected” part writing tradition of the string quartet, we can see the influence of each instrument on the other in this passage. The identity of the first violin up until this point has been aggressive scratch-tone like noise: as the second violin moves toward clear tone from *balzando* into the vibrato, the first violin interrupts it, spurring the second violin into its own aggressive noise. As the second violin moves to its scratch tone, the first violin reasserts itself, effectively cutting off the second. Yet beneath this, the cello does not allow the tone to be completely let go, holding on to a wavering flautando half-harmonic. The elaboration of this flautando into a *saltando* at bar 8 then pushes the cello in bar 9 onto bowing on the right side of the body of the instrument; a dissolution into white noise. White noise elements (mostly) continue to develop through the bows sweeping between finger board and bridge, interspersed with the occasional *sforzandi*, disparate reminders of the disruptive nature of the first violin. A moment’s pause in bar

13, and an aggressive reassertion of scratch-tone sounds, in a rather elegant cadential decrescendo from the cello to the first violin; perhaps harnessing some of the first violin’s disruptive energy?

Then we stop, for a full 10 seconds.

I spend so much time on this analysis because Lachenmann himself marks it off as something very important. 10 seconds is a long time for silence, at least in music that is as active as this is. But then, this presents a problem as well; is it a use of silence from the WWBD school, marking off formal sections. But if we remember our audience here at Mills, folks born and bred on Cage’s 4’33,” silence may have a different meaning, and would itself be a motivic element, rather than a formal demarcation. So, there, all of us in the audience; how do we approach that 10 seconds? Do we reflect on what we heard before, and understand that what is to come will emanate from it? Or do we listen to that dissolution of sound as bringing us into closer contact with our environment, with that “living music” which surrounds us? Or is it, as Brian Kane suggested to me, a torso: a “truncated or unfinished thing.”¹

Our answer to that question deeply affects our experience with this piece, and with the performance at Mills in particular. If we answer with the first notion, then we listen for developmental, organicist structures; we look for design, and the piece is non-linear,

Lachenmann places himself in the former camp: turn off the dishwasher so we can hear the music. Cage would probably say to always listen with the dishwasher on.

other minds 13

Bachtischa and his Bach bow. This gadget is a heavily curved bow that allows him to slacken the tension on its horsehair so that he can wrap it around the strings of his cello and play triple and quadruple stops without arpeggiating. The two pieces he played (his own 18-7-92 and *One*¹³, a collaboration between Bach and John Cage) both had the live Bach playing along with an ensemble of pre-recorded ones, and in both cases, the material was exclusively multiple-stop long tones.

The impression they left couldn’t be more

different. 18-7-92 was all high pitches except for some difference tones in the recording, and the unrelenting long tones just bored me.

*One*¹³ was a simple 8 note melody (F# G G# F# D# D# A# Eb), according to the program) but with each note repeated about 20 times with a wide gamut of timbral variations. It was the perfect illustration of the Cage aphorism about transcending boredom (“If something is boring for 30 seconds, do it for a minute ...”) Cage’s humor does not often rise to the surface in

the number pieces. But here, in a piece for a specially-rigged cello designed with 3 and 4-part harmony in mind, the multiple-stops are all unisons!

The second half was mostly forgettable:

It was the perfect illustration of the Cage aphorism about transcending boredom

self referential; there is an idealized version of it to explore and study. If we answer with the latter post-Cagean conception, then the piece is linear, sound flows into the real world, and then back on to stage; this postulate of a “piece of music” is a fiction; what happens before and after some mental construct of “silence” matters not.

Lachenmann places himself in the former camp: turn off the dishwasher so we can hear the music. Cage would probably say to always listen with the dishwasher on.

The lynch pin in the choice for many listeners, I suspect, is the language of “extended technique” that Lachenmann uses. The unconventional sounds (if we can still call them unconventional in 2008) might suggest, to many, an equation with that post-Cage school of experimentation. It is about exploring sound, or perhaps according to Friedman: “cataloging bizarre things you can do with acoustic instruments.”

But if the expectation is for formal development and motivic transformation, no matter what the technique, then our experience of the work is different; we are looking for familiar grammar in an unfamiliar language.

This issue of chosen paths arose in a very particular way at the Mills performance. About a third of *Gran Torso* deals with development of the white-noise end of the sound spectrum, from mm. 82 – 177. When listening to a recording of the work, one

¹ The question of “torso” is an important one, though not one addressed the reaction I found to the Mills performance. A case could be made for the “grand pause” of ms. 14 to be a truncation of the forward motion of the piece. My own feeling is that the actions which precede the pause are cadential material, though that interpretation is, of course, subjective. Additionally, the short, burst-like nature of the “cadential material” reflect the final moments of the piece, which is a series of pizzicati. The final moments, however, do not have the same cadential feel to me, and the final gesture; a cello pizzicato which resolves into a harmonic, leaves me with a semi-cadential feeling of interrupted motion. This “resolution” which undermines itself would therefore be a “gran torso” – the piece is finished, but implies that it is not. Secondly, the “classical quartet” quality of this work leads us to speculation about the body of classical string quartet music- is the classical string quartet an unfinished body of work, which the language of this piece is a continuation? Or, since this piece deals with more fundamental aspects of sound production, does *Gran Torso* in some way precede tonal language, so that the canon of classical string quartet work emanates like limbs from this trunk?

a couple of Dieter Schnebel pieces for 4 singers (one with piano and a lot of quartal harmonies), a completely undistinguished sextet from Ishmael Wadada Leo Smith (purportedly with a pre-recorded gamelan, but I didn’t hear any non-live sounds) and a newly commissioned minimalist piece by Dan Becker (also full of quartal harmonies — is this a trend?) I remember, back in the ‘60s, thinking of quartal harmony as a musical gateway drug: if we can lure you away from your father’s structural harmony, maybe we hook you on pure, uncut Darmstadt. ❖

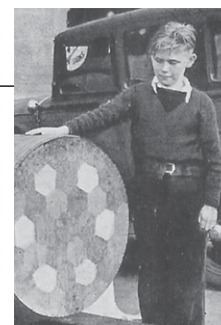
can clearly hear that many subtle variations and developments are taking place; the whole section moves from flautandi and filter-sweep movements of the bow up and down the fingerboard, to a barely perceptible extended Tonlos passage in the viola, to balzandi and saltandi; the whole group working slowly and hesitantly back toward tone. The problem with the performance arose from the nature of the Lissner Hall, the performance space. Built in 1903, and remodeled a couple times, but is poorly insulated from outside sound. This night, it was raining, the sound of which masked this significant section. So we could look at what the players were doing onstage, but we couldn’t hear it. Langert, in a section entitled Sounds of Silence, says: “At one point in *Gran Torso* the instruments start to bow thin air, as if silence has temporarily taken over, only to be gradually displaced by the return of sound.”

While the score certainly calls for a greatly different intent here, Langert is not wrong: this is actually what it looked like to us. So Langert, whose experience with *Gran Torso* seems to lie solely with the Mills performance, understandably states “Lachenmann seems intrigued by the interaction between sound and silence.” Langert’s “torso” is the truncation of sound.

And so we come here to another cross-roads. “Nature’s dishwasher” has changed our experience, and therefore the meaning, of the work. Which leads one, of course, to wonder what other factors affect that understanding. Does sitting at my desk plowing through the opening moments with a microscope really give me a better insight into *Gran Torso*? Is this really an extrapolation of my intuition about the Mills performance? The recording is not necessarily a fair representation either; from what I can tell, it is closely miced, so that the full presence of the quieter sounds is really a product of the recording studio. The subtle elements, the degrees of white noise, would vary significantly depending upon the intimacy and resonance of the performance space and distance of the “listener’s seat.” And then there is my expectation of how the piece is to function, of who Lachenmann is.

There is a place where all of these lines become blurred, where we cannot extricate our own experience of a work from the work itself; a “listener dependence,” if you will. We project our own certainty into and onto the music itself. I know the sounds aren’t really that loud, but I love it that way.

We have met the dishwasher, and he is us. ❖



about this thing

The Transbay Creative Music Calendar is a volunteer-produced free monthly journal for non-commercial creative new music in the San Francisco Bay Area. In addition to our comprehensive listing of upcoming events, we publish articles and reviews about local music and the people who create it. We talk about a wide range of modern music, including: experimental, improvised, noise, electronic, free-jazz, outrock, 21st century compositions, and sonic art.

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april 2008

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