Classical NEW JERSEY Society
Journal

January 30, 2003 Volume 3, Number 22

Serving New Jersey's Classical Music Community

The natural law, or code of the pipe as articulated by a Lakota (Oglala) elder:

1 - Generosity or sharing
2 - Pity and compassion
3 - Respect and honor
4 - Patience and tolerance
5 - Humility
6 - Bravery, fortitude, and principles
7 - Wisdom and understanding

— read by Curt Cacioppo before he performed his own piano work *Old Petitions*. This work is a musical response to all the treaties and petitions of the Native Americans which were ignored or broken by the U. S. government over the years.

For more on this event of the NJSO's American Roots Festival

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American Roots Festival

Part 3: Interplay: the "Indianists" Appropriation of Native American culture

Trying to seek without destroying

Saturday, January 18

Joseph Horowitz (host) with Thunderbird Indian Dancers, Louis Mofsie (dir.), Curt Cacioppo (composer/piano), Benjamin Pasternack (piano), Montclair State University Chamber Singers, Kenneth J. Hamrick (cond.), Holly Connor (art historian), with a panel discussion featuring Mofsie and Michael Taylor (Thunderbird), Cacioppo, Pasternack, Hamrick, Connor, Marla Meissner (Lenape specialist), moderated by Horowitz. Songs and dances of the Iroquois, the Taos Pueblo, Hopis, and western style warriors' dance; Charles Wakefield Cadman: From the Land of the Sky Blue Water, op. 45, no. 1 (1901); Dvorák: Allegro (finale) from American Suite, op. 98 (1894); Arthur Farwell: Pawnee Horses (1905), Navajo War Dance, nos. 1 (1905) and 2 (1904), and Four Indian Songs, op. 102 (1937); Cacioppo: from Pawnee Preludes (1981, rev. 1994), and Old Petitions (1992). Billy Johnson Auditorium, Newark Museum.

By Paul Somers

The afternoon was about cultural appropriation, mostly about white Americans observing and finally attempting to assimilate Native American arts into European-based thought patterns. The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra continued its American Roots Festival with surely the most different and thought provoking of its offerings.

Most importantly they began with the real thing: the Thunderbird American Indian Dancers, headquartered in Maywood. Three members of the much larger ensemble (reduced to fit on the small stage at the Billy Johnson Auditorium) led by director Louis Mofsie began with the "Robin Dance," a spring celebration of the People of the Long House (Iroquois). This immediately broke this listener of a few preconceptions. I have been used to hearing native chant with lines mostly made of descending scalar patterns, yet this song went up and down largely using a *major triad. There followed a "Fish Dance," this from the Taos Pueblo and generally fulfilling my preconceptions. The hoop dance was a virtuosic display by Michael Taylor using five hoops. While Mofsie beat the drum and he and Alan Scott sang, Taylor manipulated the hoops onto his body without use of his hands. Once each was around him, he then took the increasing number of hoops through a series of evolutions around his body, now using his hands. He fit his lithe frame through hoops, stepped into several at once and ultimately brought them off his body over his head to form a globe of interlocked circles. There was great applause.

Understanding the effectiveness of these native performances is important when discussing what followed, for what became increasingly clear as the afternoon was subsequently spent investigating the music of the white "Indianists" was the importance of the visual in Native American music. The songs, even those which might be only sung by a group sitting around a large drum, are inherently filled with motion. None of the instrumental or vocal pieces which followed had the same degree of visual effect, and in that respect were rendered pale by comparison.

There was another aspect which also was apparent: the rhythms within the chants are quite complicated. We know this because throughout the singing Mofsie kept a firm drumbeat as steady as that European device, the *metronome. It was obvious that the way the songs lined up with the beats was very complex, for when two sang, they were always in complete synchronization yet seemed to European ears to be far "off the beat" of the drum. Even jazz players would have been baffled if asked to duplicate some of the native rhythms without several hearings. Thus, even the most complicated works from the European tradition seemed ever so metrically simple and regularized when compared to the originals.

So the great lesson learned by this writer was that the tendency of Euro-American music is to smooth things out. We see this same tendency at work in European music itself: check out the bouncy, *syncopated rhythmic activity in Martin Luther's original tune to *Ein feste Burg*, then compare it

to the steady and ever so squared off version Bach set. Sung as pure melody the first is lively and the second nothing less than boring, desperately needing Bach's harmonic and orchestral inventiveness to make it interesting. So this ability to take the activity and life out of dancing, active music was not an invention of those bent on the cultural genocide of Native Americans; it was already ingrained in the culture.

Of the works by white composers which are called "Indianist", which is to say "based on themes or actual materials from American Indian lore and culture," it was the modern works by Curt Cacioppo (b. 1951) which achieved the most success. Cacioppo has immersed himself in Native American culture, though not Indian himself. His choice was to evoke certain stories (in this case from Pawnee history and culture) without any attempt to actually use authentic music as the basis. Instead he presents poetic evocations and musical descriptions. These are couched in a language uncompromisingly "modern." Much of the music has a feel of *serialism without being strict *post-Webernism. There is certainly an expressionist æsthetic at work. Yet it was the second of the *Pawnee Preludes*, "Beloved Emblem" which Mofsie mentioned specifically during the final panel discussion as being meaningful to him. It depicts the emotional state of an old man, whose only living relative has been killed in battle, as that person's lance is cermoniously brought back to the village. The loneliness and resignation are conveyed partly through this being a prelude for left hand alone.

For this writer the separate work, *Old Petitions* (1992), effectively uncovered the anger of the Indian in the face of all the broken treaties, but also in the face of being forced to break with the code of living in order to survive in a white society. This was bitter music all the more powerful a means for reaching white audiences because it did not attempt to integrate actual native materials. Instead it appropriated an underlying modern Indian ethos into Euro-American music.

The music of Arthur Farwell (1872-1952) makes a point of using native melodic material and, in the choral music, Native American vocables. Far from the *monodic chant of Indians, the choral *Four Indian Songs* (1937) is very difficult *a cappella music which at times goes into 11 parts. The Montclair State University Chamber Singers and their conductor Kenneth J. Hamrick are to be congratulated for putting it all together.

Both Mofsie and Taylor mentioned these songs, the former acknowledging the familiarity of the vocables and the latter admiring the sheer effort by the students in expanding their world view.

We must praise student soprano

Lesley Friend for her expressive solo in "The Mother's Vow". But we must also express concern that such a young singer should already be developing a wobble. Perhaps she is trying to push her good-sized voice into larger proportions too soon rather than let it evolve into its natural size.

Pianist Benjamin Pasternack played three of Farwell's Indianist works. These are from the turn of the last century, composed at the same time as Bartók was beginning to compose ethno-musicologically based works. And they have the same vigor of melodic expression placed into harmonies which were certainly foreign to Indians and were probably considered quite odd to the average white American. They were, in fact, quite Bartókian, more interesting for their coexistence with Ives, whose mavericksms it is usually suggested are the only instance of "modernism" in America at the time. The "Indianism" of the music was quite important to Farwell, but less to the modern hearer, for whom it is merely the hook upon which the composer hangs his Euro-American music.

Antonin Dvorák's Finale to his *American Suite* (piano version — the complete orchestral version will be played on the final orchestral concerts of the Festival) uses a native melody which through a clever transition he turns into a minstrel tune. The merging of the two ideas of the Native and the minstrel evoke the kind of medicine show Dvorák saw during his summers in Spillville, Iowa.

We can only commend professor Hamrick for giving a solo song to student Jesús M. Rodriguez, Jr., a young baritone. He was asked to sing a piece which was incredibly popular 100 years ago: *From the Land of the Sky Blue Water* by Charles Wakefield Cadman (1881-1946). It seemed quite sentimental. Its placement in the program, immediately following the Thunderbird Indian Dancers, was no doubt calculated to draw a stark contrast, but also stacked the deck heavily against the poor wan work having any chance at all for success. With full respect for young Rodriguez, I have to wonder what a veteran singer with a much more developed expressive vocabulary might have done with the song. Yet I doubt that even Thomas Hampson could have salvaged it immediately after Taylor had wowed the audience with the Hoop Dance — the real thing.

The *Sonata* by Griffes came a little later in the program and Mayer's reading of the piece was as brilliant as the piece was virtuosic. Horowitz questioned why this "great American piano piece is ignored" by American pianists — perhaps, because it is not so great? The sonata is filled with dramatic, but muddled or unfinished, ideas. Griffes's writing reaches across a vast plain of style from nineteenth-century romanticism and impressionism to twentieth-century primitivism. The strongest movement was the third, "Allegro vivace", similar to Farwell's *Navajo War Dance No. 2.* The musical ideas were lean and focused and were treated with a rhythmically-infused and brittle percussiveness.

It wasn't until 9:30 p.m. (2 hours into the concert) that we heard a truly gifted musician interpret and compose at the piano. Marcus Roberts has been graced with an extra dose of musical talent. Opening his set with Joplin's *Maple Leaf Rag*, it was clear from the beginning this wasn't going to be by the book. Roberts's playing reminded me of recordings of Harlem-style pianists like Jelly Roll Morton, whose interpretation of Joplin always included a bit of improvisation, but Roberts went even further. His improvisational bag of tools included the usual, such as, stride bass, walking bass, rhythm and blues and gospel, but he also tinged his interpretations with impressionism, romanticism, metric displacement, and complex flights of harmonic fancy. The final piece, his own arrangment of "Just a closer walk with Thee" was a clearly structured piece with a wide range of affects. He included ragtime and pentatonic stylings, followed by a dissonant section that reflected the tradition of Schoenberg's atonalism. This lead to a "raindrop" passage that was reminiscent of both Chopin and Debussy. Roberts finished the piece with a gospel rendition of the tune that brought the house down.

The only pianist that could follow Marcus Roberts was Steven Mayer playing Art Tatum (*Tatum Pole Boogie* and *Tiger Rag*). However, the audience was so enamored with Marcus Roberts it would surely be impossible for any one else to take the stage back. Yet Mayer came out and won the hearts of the audience all over again. This is the second time I have heard him play Tatum and it is a special treat. Mayer plays with his body; he nearly boogie-woogied off the keys, but never lost control.

This is where the concert should have ended, but there were still two pieces on the program. This is also where Alan Feinberg showed his intelligence, musicianship and appreciation to the audience. The next scheduled piece was Gottschalk's *Souvenir of Porto Rico* to be played by Feinberg. Instead, the stagehands moved a second grand piano out for the final piece, Gottschalk's *A Night in the Tropics* (transcribed for two pianos by Nicolas Ruiz Escudero). It was obviously Feinberg's decision not to play his last solo and for all of us in the audience we thank him for his generous decision. Even with this deletion, the Gottschalk suffered from its placement late in the evening after the raucous ragtime. The playing by Feinberg and Mayer was great, and after a rather long opening section, with a static melody and very slow harmonic progression, the piece opened up into a "fiesta criolla". This energetic music, with its syncopated rhythms, helped to bring the long concert to an exciting conclusion.

Part 6: The Melting Pot

Appropriating each others' ideas

Friday, January 24

New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, Gerhard Zimmermann (conductor), Benjamin Pasternack (piano), André Watts (piano). Dvorák: American Suite; Busoni: Indian Fantasy for piano and orchestra; Chadwick: Jubilee; MacDowell: Piano Concerto no. 2. Prudential Hall, Newark.

By Paul Somers

Joseph Horowitz, host of the American Roots Festival, made the point that much of the festival was about appropriation, and nowhere was this point better made than in the final orchestral concert. Dvorák and Busoni could be heard consciously appropriating American influences into their European styles, and Chadwick and MacDowell quite evidently were using European models to wrap around their often home-grown ideas. Chadwick's *Jubilee* has an "Indianist" passage, and the MacDowell piano concerto has the catchy syncopations of early ragtime, Creole music, and minstrel tunes. Since all four composers had the abil-

ity to blend these disparate influences, the concert as a whole was the most satisfying of the festival. There were no "weak links," as it were.

The two large works for piano and orchestra were the audience favorites. Busoni was quite busy being Busoni in his *Indian Fantasy* — quirky harmonies and dark colorations abounded. But his use of Native-American materials was so integrated into his own style that it worked without being patronizing or Hollywoodish — which may be the same thing. Just as in the "Indianist" Saturday afternoon, where Curt Caciappo's music was about the Indian ethos without ever quoting Native-American melodies and was the stronger for it, so here Busoni in quoting real native material found the spirit behind the mere notes.

He draws an often dark and brooding picture, not at all the "noble savage" but a person beset by persecution and change. But he also, in the European manner, often leaves that portrait to embark on his intellectual explorations of the material. It was made clear that Busoni is not so much the *German*-Italian that he is made out to be; this is "Italian Impressionism", a worthy predecessor to Respighi, with orchestral and pianistic colors swirling, with pictures created out of immediate sound like Debussy instead of structure like Strauss.

Pianist Benjamin Pasternack was brilliant. The evening was like "duelling pianists", sort of a Super Bowl theme, with the lesser-known artist going up against the revered veteran André Watts. Let's call it a draw. Pasternack played the dense, though hardly opaque, score from memory with assurance. Busoni is still considered one of the greatest pianists of any age, and he wrote the *Fantasy* for himself. Far from daunted, Pasternack met the challenge fully and most expressively.

The MacDowell concerto is a piece I hadn't heard since the early '60s. There is a reason for that: MacDowell has fallen out of favor in the American music field. "Too German" is the rap he takes. Perhaps because he and others of his style have to go up against mavericks like Ives, Cowell, and Ruggles, they all get short shrift. But far from the expected, the "warmed-over-German" canard proved to be balderdash. Well, there is a lovely accompaniment figure to the *"B" section of the first movement which bears a resemblance to Wagner's "Forest Murmurs" from *Siegfried*. But generally the concerto is filled with American touches. At one *syncopated point, the flutes and the piano at one point nearly break into ragtime. Minstrel-show idioms also inform a fair amount of the score. The fast second movement is, if anything non-American, French, reminding one of Saint-Saëns' technical dashes and jovial swipes at the keyboard.

Watts was at his best, fully into the piece with technique on display. But he is often sold short on the depth of his musicality, and here it was exactly that which made the piece work so well. He played the syncopations like an American with a hint of jazz phrasing instead of the metronomic way it might come out in Brahms. It was, note for note, as fine playing as Pasternack had given to Busoni, except of course that the latter had written many more notes than MacDowell.

Watts profited from the splashy ending he was given, whereas Busoni gave his soloist a very peculiar ending which comes out of the blue and in a completely unprepared key. Watts got a standing ovation which went on for many returns to the stage. Pasternack got cheers and sustained applause, but not the standing ovation. Had their roles been reversed, the result might have been reversed as well.

Watts jumped up at the conclusion of the MacDowell and embraced conductor Gerhard Zimmermann for good reason. Zimmermann (his name is German, but he is from heartland America) was first-rate.