



**Best of Spring For Music Press Report
2011-2014**

Amanda Ameer
First Chair Promotion
e. amanda@firstchairpromo.com
ph. [212.368.5949](tel:212.368.5949)

Table of Contents

2011	3
2012	27
2013	43
2014	52

2011 Spring For Music

Orchestras:

Oregon Symphony
Dallas Symphony
St. Paul Chamber Orchestra
Albany Symphony Orchestra
Orpheus Chamber Orchestra
Orchestre Symphonique de Montreal
Toledo Symphony

Press Quotes:

“Spring for Music shows what can happen when industry insiders act creatively.”

--*The Wall Street Journal*

“Great programs create a kind of invisible drama; they bring forth what E. T. A. Hoffmann, in his 1813 essay ‘Beethoven’s Instrumental Music,’ calls ‘an unknown realm, a world quite separate from the outer sensual world.’ Such a realm seemed to materialize...”

--*The New Yorker*

“I have long thought that in confronting the challenges of maintaining an orchestra and engaging new audiences, American ensembles should think a little less about how they play and a lot more about what they play and why they play it. This is not to suggest that the technical level of the playing does not matter. The general level of talent and technical skill in American orchestras is quite high over all, even in regional ensembles. But so much more is at stake... This is something the people behind Spring for Music especially understand.”

-- *The New York Times*



Orpheus Chamber Orchestra New Brandenburg Concertos

By Amanda Angel

May 2, 2011

Back in 2006, the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra doled out commissions to six leading contemporary composers, asking each for a musical response to one of Johann Sebastian Bach's six Brandenburg Concertos. The results were rolled out during subsequent seasons; now, on Friday 6, Orpheus will play all six of its New Brandenburg Concertos on a single program for the first time. The concert kicks off Spring for Music, a new annual series at Carnegie Hall that will showcase innovative orchestral programming. TONY spoke with all six composers about grappling with Bach.

Stephen Hartke, A Brandenburg Autumn

"Orpheus's original request was to do a companion piece to a serenade. Those aren't my favorite pieces, so I suggested doing a piece that used the instrumentation of the Brandenburgs: I had wanted to do a project like that when I was composer-in-residence at the [Los Angeles] Chamber Orchestra, but we could never get it off the ground. [Orpheus artistic director and clarinetist] Alan Kay said, 'That's interesting, because we'd been wanting to try something like that for years now – this might be the time to do it.'"

Paul Moravec, Brandenburg Gate

"I think it took me about a nanosecond to say yes when Alan Kay asked me to participate. It's Bach, for heaven's sake; if you held a gun to my head and asked me, 'Who is the greatest composer that's absolutely indispensable,' I'd say it's Bach. And the Brandenburgs, I think they're all brilliant pieces. I asked for No. 2 because that's the

instrumentation that I wanted to write for. I ended up changing it anyway; I replaced the oboe with the clarinet, and I didn't want to worry about the harpsichord for a continuo."

Christopher Theofanidis, *Muse*

"Everybody knows Bach and everybody loves Bach, almost universally. But when you get down to, 'What are the things that are the most essential part of that influence on you,' you actually have to think about it. That was one of the joys of doing this project: It really forced you to think, 'How do I see this music, why do I think this music is so great? And it lets you amplify it in this project.'"

Melinda Wagner, *Little Moonhead*

"Ultimately Orpheus was not asking us to live up to Bach or compare ourselves to him. So after the first few days of sitting down with pencil to paper, I had to just rid myself of any kind of apprehension. I decided to adopt the basic elements of the form of *Brandenburg Four*, its fundamental structure. It's a very friendly and amiable piece, so I wanted to somehow channel that. The B-A-C-H [motif] at the end — that was just a little bit of gravy."

Peter Maxwell Davies, *Sea Orpheus*

"I really do feel Bach is like a musical great uncle; the main thing was to use my own language to doff my hat to the great J.S. Bach. I didn't have any inhibitions about it, but I had never done a piece quite like this before. I think in this one it's obvious, even by looking at the score, that J.S.B., Johann Sebastian himself, is behind it. It really does look like a score by Bach, and even toward the end of the piece, where I have canons which are derived from his *Art of Fugue* and *The Musical Offering*, it has J.S. Bach written all over it."

Aaron Jay Kernis, *Concerto with Echoes*

"Other than being by Bach, the *Brandenburgs* don't really work as a cohesive piece. They're by the same person, but they all stand alone as unique masterpieces, with unique instrumentations and sound worlds. But that's the really cool thing about this project, to keep the sound relation to Bach for each work, but to pair every one of his new orchestral sound worlds with a unique one from each composer. It

should be very stimulating to hear all six."



Spring For Music: Orchestras Bring Innovative Concerts to Carnegie Hall

By Tom Huizenga

May 5, 2011

There's that age-old question: How do you get to Carnegie Hall? The answer — at least for the upcoming Spring for Music festival — lies in creative programming for symphony orchestra.

Spring for Music, an innovative new festival debuting at Carnegie Hall May 6, features seven North American orchestras in concert over nine nights. Hosted by Fred Child and Elliott Forrest, the concerts will be webcast live at NPRMusic.org and broadcast live on New York's WQXR and via American Public Media each night at 8 p.m. EDT.

The orchestras appearing in the festival were chosen not for the size of their budgets or their status in the symphonic pantheon, but instead for their interesting musical ideas. Three years ago, when festival organizers announced their plans, they encouraged orchestras large and small not to play it safe when assembling repertoire.

There are no fusty overture-concerto-symphony programs on tap — far from it. The opening concert by the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra features a contemporary take on Bach's six Brandenburg Concertos — new pieces from the likes of Aaron Jay Kernis, Peter Maxwell Davies and Melinda Wagner. The Toledo Symphony Orchestra, making its Carnegie debut, will pair Dmitri Shostakovich's neglected Sixth Symphony with a rarely heard theater piece about Soviet dissidents called *Every Good Boy Deserves Favor*, a collaboration between

composer Andre Previn and playwright Tom Stoppard.

The Albany Symphony will also play for the first time in the storied hall; conductor David Alan Miller brings a program titled "Spirituals Re-imagined," mixing contemporary composers' reworked versions of songs like "Deep River" and "Wade in the Water" with Aaron Copland's Appalachian Spring, which contains its own embedded sacred song, the Shaker "Simple Gifts." The Dallas Symphony is presenting Steven Stucky's full-evening concert drama August 4, 1964, about a pivotal day in the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War and the Johnson administration.

The discussion of how to invigorate the classical music audience never seems to end. Do we banish Bach, Beethoven and Mozart in favor of contemporary music? Do we uphold the classics, but make the tickets cheaper? Do we engage the concertgoers with something fun?

Spring for Music may not have all the answers but it goes a long way in the right direction. The Montreal Symphony will indeed bring Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, but it's paired with Webern, Bach and Stravinsky. The St. Paul Chamber Orchestra is playing Haydn's Symphony No. 104, but also the New York premiere of a recent work by jazz bandleader and composer Maria Schneider. As far as cost goes, seats for the concerts are just \$25. There's even a plan for audience participation – hometown fans of each orchestra will be handed appropriately colored hankies (Dallas is yellow, Albany gets orange) for a little visual representation in the crowd.

So if you've grown tired of conventional classical concerts, you may want to set aside some time over the next nine days to tune in to something decidedly different. And by the way, at home, no one will know which brightly colored hankie you're waving.

WALL STREET JOURNAL

Regional Orchestras in the Spotlight

By Barbara Jepson

May 11, 2011

Orchestras in North America are in a period of soul-searching. During the last six months, the elite Philadelphia Orchestra filed for bankruptcy, orchestras in Syracuse and Honolulu shut down, and the Detroit Symphony was temporarily silenced by a 26-week musicians' strike. The problems go deeper than the economic recession. Labor agreements, music-director salaries, administrative costs, concert presentation and the nature of orchestra involvement in each city must be reconsidered and geared to what their communities can realistically support.

"Spring for Music," an intriguing new festival that continues at Carnegie Hall through Saturday, offers no panaceas; indeed, the Atlanta Symphony, originally scheduled as festival opener, withdrew for financial reasons. But in its structure and concept, "Spring for Music" shows what can happen when industry insiders act creatively.

The festival is presenting seven North American orchestras chosen, from 25 applicants, for their imaginative programming habits. Participants range from the Albany Symphony Orchestra, with 76 mostly part-time members and an annual budget of about \$2 million, to the 89-member Dallas Symphony Orchestra, which has annual expenditures of \$28 million, an extensive discography and a world-class concert hall.

Most of the concert offerings assembled by the orchestras are truly inventive, forging intriguing thematic links or presenting works

considered dicey at the box office. On Wednesday, the Dallas Symphony will give the New York premiere of "August 4, 1964" for chorus, soloists and orchestra, a 70-minute concert drama by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Steven Stucky. The piece revisits two fateful events during the Lyndon Johnson presidency – one affecting the civil-rights movement, the other, the Vietnam War. On Thursday, the 76-member Oregon Symphony Orchestra will make its Carnegie debut with an intelligently conceived, war-themed program of John Adams, Benjamin Britten, Charles Ives and Ralph Vaughan Williams. Subsequent performances by the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra and the 92-member Montreal Symphony Orchestra should prove equally stimulating.

So far, the results have been instructive. The superbly played opening-night concert by Orpheus, the renowned conductorless chamber orchestra, demonstrated that low admission prices alone will not fill a hall. Despite egalitarian tickets for only \$25 each throughout Carnegie's 2800-seat Stern auditorium (save for some cheaper partial-view seats), the hall was less than half full. The program, six commissioned "Brandenburg" concertos inspired by Bach's originals, may have seemed too daunting. Or perhaps ticket buyers were prescient. By the end of the evening, it felt like too much of a good thing.

Saturday's concert by the Toledo Symphony Orchestra fared better, attracting more than 2,000 listeners, including some 1,400 Ohioans who arrived by chartered bus or plane to cheer the Carnegie debut of their "home team." The program was ingenious. It coupled the sixth symphony of Dmitri Shostakovich – written after the composer was officially censured in Pravda articles – with "Every Good Boy Deserves Favour," a gripping collaboration for six actors and orchestra by playwright Tom Stoppard and conductor-composer André Previn that movingly depicts the plight of political dissidents in Soviet-era mental hospital-prisons, with the orchestra as part of the action. Rising maestro Stefan Sanderling conceived and insightfully conducted the program. Despite occasional ensemble glitches in both works, the performances were engaging.

"Spring for Music" was organized by three industry veterans: originator David Foster, president of Opus 3 Artists, a talent agency; Mary Lou Falcone, a public-relations executive; and Thomas W. Morris, artistic director of the Ojai Festival and a former executive director of the Cleveland Orchestra. They obtained funding of \$3.5 million for three initial seasons from the Mellon Foundation and other sponsors. Mr. Morris, artistic director of "Spring for Music," evaluated each applicant's festival proposal and last three years of concerts. "We wanted to see if their hometown programming reflected their stated artistic philosophy," he said. Festival organizers rented Carnegie Hall, taking on the role of concert impresario. Carnegie contributed staff and promotional support.

Self-produced symphonic concerts at Carnegie, a traditional rite of passage for regional orchestras, now cost an untenable \$400,000 to \$500,000. "Spring for Music" mitigates some of the risk involved in such outings. Each orchestra is responsible for trip expenses and production "extras." And each shares equally in the box office proceeds, with a guaranteed minimum of \$50,000. Toledo Symphony president Kathleen Carroll said she expects to see a "positive benefit" from the festival appearance. Next year, festival organizers will showcase one less orchestra, enabling them to raise the guarantee to a more attractive \$65,000.

While many regional orchestras lack the distinctive musical identity, cohesiveness and rich string sound of their world-class counterparts, their performance standards have been rising for decades. Mr. Morris attributes this to several factors, including longer playing seasons introduced via union negotiations, higher expectations raised by widespread availability of note-perfect recorded music, and training in a broader swath of repertory in conservatories. Since openings in the most prestigious North American orchestras occur infrequently and attract fierce competition, there is a spillover of conservatory talent into regional orchestras.

The orchestras in Albany, Toledo and Oregon exemplify what Jesse Rosen, head of the League of American Orchestras, calls "the uniqueness of the smaller-budget orchestras – they're not fixated on

an international or even a national reputation. They're looking to be special in their communities." Those who do so adventurously now have an opportunity to make a broader impact through "Spring for Music." "By creating a showcase in this way," said Clive Gillinson, Carnegie's executive and artistic director, "the festival gives a sense of the quality of work going on . . . and it helps orchestras realize that what they're doing can be valued on a national stage."

The New York Times

A Bracing Breath of Spring Air From All Directions

By Anthony Tommasini

April 29, 2011

For many American orchestras, especially those in smaller cities with regional reputations, a concert at Carnegie Hall is only a dream. When such ensembles decide to take the financial risk of renting Carnegie Hall for a concert, their conductors often let their marketing departments talk them into playing it safe. The idea of performing a new work by a hometown composer or Schoenberg's Five Pieces for Orchestra or an overlooked piece like Prokofiev's Fifth Piano Concerto is vetoed in favor of a program that will show New York audiences and critics how well the visitors can play Beethoven's Seventh Symphony or Tchaikovsky's "Pathétique." With no real news happening, these concerts often attract negligible audiences and are given a pass by critics.

Spring for Music, a festival that makes its debut on Friday evening at Carnegie Hall and offers seven concerts over nine days, hopes to change this pattern. When the festival was announced in 2008, the organizers invited North American orchestras large and small to dream, to take chances, to make news. Those taking part, selected from 25 applicants, were chosen on the basis of the creativity and artistic merit of their proposed programs.

The participants include four ensembles that have played Carnegie regularly over the years: the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, the Montreal Symphony Orchestra, the Dallas Symphony Orchestra and the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra. Three orchestras are making long-awaited Carnegie Hall debuts: the Toledo Symphony, the Albany Symphony and the Oregon Symphony. The festival has significant foundation and corporate support, and tickets for each concert are \$25, with some balcony seats at \$15. Given the imagination and

content of the programs, the concerts should attract audiences and critics alike.

Orpheus, the conductorless ensemble that opens the festival, is presenting “The New Brandenburgs,” the fulfillment of a multiyear project involving six composers, each commissioned to write an orchestral work inspired by one of Bach’s six “Brandenburg” Concertos. The pieces, by Aaron Jay Kernis, Melinda Wagner, Peter Maxwell Davies, Christopher Theofanidis, Stephen Hartke and Paul Moravec, were introduced individually in Orpheus programs and will be played as a group for the first time. So here is a fresh Bach-infused program without a single Bach work on it.

The organizers of Spring for Music are David V. Foster, president of the management firm Opus 3 Artists; Thomas W. Morris, the artistic director of the Ojai Music Festival in California and a former executive director of the Cleveland Orchestra; and Mary Lou Falcone, a veteran public relations consultant. From the start this team made clear that both major orchestras and fledgling ensembles were invited to apply, and that choices would be based on the intrinsic merits of the programs, not the clout of the institutions.

Several top-tier orchestras — including renowned ensembles often recruited by Carnegie for its regular season offerings — chose not to get involved with Spring for Music. Evidently they did not like the appearance of competing with, and perhaps losing to, regional orchestras. They will not be missed, given the richness and variety of the festival programs.

Take the one the Toledo Symphony, conducted by Stefan Sanderling, presents on Saturday night. It pairs Shostakovich’s Sixth Symphony with André Previn’s “Every Good Boy Deserves Favor,” a musical-theater work for actors and instrumental ensemble on a text by the playwright Tom Stoppard. The story is set in a Russian gulag, and the orchestra portrays a mysterious character who could be, the music suggests, a mentally unstable prisoner. This piece should complement the moody, dark and, by its last movement, quite boisterous Sixth Symphony, an intriguing and ungainly work, not

that often heard, composed in 1939 when Shostakovich was under scrutiny by the Soviet state.

Another thematic program is "Spirituals Reimagined," which the Albany Symphony, under its adventurous conductor David Alan Miller, will perform on May 10. It presents New York premieres of eight works inspired by traditional spirituals, from composers including John Harbison, Donal Fox, Tania León and Daniel Bernard Roumain. The evening ends with Copland's "Appalachian Spring," inspired partly by a Shaker hymn that might be considered a different kind of American spiritual.

As the inclusion of "Appalachian Spring" indicates, repertory staples were not scorned by the festival directors as long as they were placed in artistically interesting contexts. Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, speaking of staples, turns up on the May 14 concert, "The Evolution of the Symphony," with Kent Nagano conducting the Montreal Symphony. Selections from Gabrieli's "Sacrae Symphoniae" will open the program, which includes Webern's Symphony, a spiky, vibrant 12-tone work, and Stravinsky's strangely haunting "Symphonies of Wind Instruments." Between the orchestral works the pianist Angela Hewitt will play Bach sinfonias (three-part inventions), all culminating in the Beethoven.

The Dallas Symphony, under its popular music director, Jaap van Zweden, is using its May 11 concert to present a single work by the American composer Steven Stucky that the orchestra commissioned and introduced in 2008 for the centennial of Lyndon B. Johnson's birth. Titled "August 4, 1964," it is an evening-length music drama for vocal soloists, chorus and orchestra with a text assembled from diaries and historical documents by Gene Scheer. The piece examines the intersection of the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War on a crucial day in 1964.

Mr. van Zweden and the Dallas Symphony might not have risked coming to New York to play just this substantial Stucky piece without the financial support and media attention the festival will provide. In a democratic touch each orchestra will share the box-office receipts

equally, and each receives an up-front payment of \$50,000, which takes the pressure off.

The conductor Carlos Kalmar and the Oregon Symphony open their May 12 program with Ives's "Unanswered Question," establishing a reflective, mystical mood. The program then offers works that ruminate directly or indirectly on the human consequences of war: John Adams's "Wound-Dresser" (with the baritone Sanford Sylvan as soloist), Britten's "Sinfonia da Requiem" and Vaughan Williams's Fourth Symphony.

From glancing at the May 13 program that the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra will present, it is hard to tell for sure what links its four works, other than that each draws in some way from folk music. Stravinsky's Concerto in D, Haydn's "London" Symphony and Bartok's Five Hungarian Folk Songs (arranged by Richard Tognetti), with the soprano Dawn Upshaw as soloist, will all be performed without a conductor. The composer Maria Schneider, who blurs genres of jazz, classical and folk music, will conduct the New York premiere of her "Carlos Drummond de Andrade Stories," again with Ms. Upshaw. Whatever the commonalities or contrasts, the program looks enticing.

Compare it with the standard fare that ensembles often present on visits to New York, like the Orchestre National de France's recent program at Avery Fisher Hall, which included Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto, Strauss's "Rosenkavalier" Suite and, in case you didn't get enough waltzes in the Strauss, the Ravel showpiece "La Valse." The presence of a fine pianist, Jean-Efflam Bavouzet as soloist in the Beethoven, was not enough to lure me to that concert.

I have long thought that in confronting the challenges of maintaining an orchestra and engaging new audiences, American ensembles should think a little less about how they play and a lot more about what they play and why they play it. This is not to suggest that the technical level of the playing does not matter. The general level of talent and technical skill in American orchestras is quite high over all, even in regional ensembles. But so much more is at stake.

Mr. Nagano's unusual program for this festival, tracing the evolution of the symphony, is fascinating on its own terms. The Montreal Symphony is excellent, and the Beethoven symphony performance that ends the program should be strong. But if it does not enter the annals of great Beethoven Fifths, that simply does not matter. This is something the people behind Spring for Music especially understand.

The Telegraph

Spring For Music festival, Carnegie Hall, New York

By James Allison

May 20, 2011

In the increasingly cautious and conservative world of orchestral music, true innovation is rare. Bad economic times have made things even more difficult for an art form that can do little about high fixed costs. So it takes idealists to come up with the sort of concept that was unveiled this month in New York, but the resulting Spring for Music festival makes so much practical good sense that the wider musical business should take note.

Hiring that high temple of American musical culture, Carnegie Hall, the organisers are making a powerful statement. Opening up a venue normally dedicated to selling stars and a shrinking repertoire, every year they will invite all North American orchestras to submit programmes based on adventurous repertoire and creative thinking. The slogan of “Uncommon concerts for \$25” also reflects the intention of making it affordable.

Many North American orchestras have previously only been able to dream of Carnegie Hall, and three of the seven selected to play this year were making their debuts. The Toledo Symphony, Albany Symphony and Oregon Symphony thus joined their better-known colleagues from Montreal, Dallas, St Paul and the New York-based Orpheus Chamber Orchestra for nine days of music that showed a desire to lead taste, rather than to follow it.

Revealingly, the biggest names remained aloof, afraid perhaps of being caught out with yet another season of dreary programming. But the days of orchestral ranking being determined by budget and fame are surely numbered; technical standards are high and uniform

almost everywhere, and one thing that Spring for Music showed is that the real scale on which orchestras should be judged is creativity.

Attending the final two concerts last weekend, I also caught the after-buzz of the Oregon Symphony's challenging programme, entitled "Music for a Time of War". The St Paul Chamber Orchestra's concert was the only one lacking an overt theme, though its works by Stravinsky, Maria Schneider, Bartók and Haydn all seemed to tap into folk music somewhere.

Preferring "artistic partners" to conductors, the St Paulers teamed up with the soprano Dawn Upshaw to give the New York premiere of Schneider's Carlos Drummond de Andrade Stories. Settings of the eponymous Brazilian poet, it evokes memories of Villa-Lobos and Samuel Barber but has a melancholy freshness all its own. Under Kent Nagano, the Montreal Symphony Orchestra presented "The Evolution of the Symphony". Their sequence of pieces proved to be less about musical history than a stimulating play on texture, moving seamlessly from extracts from Giovanni Gabrieli's Symphoniae Sacraeto Webern's Op 21 Symphony and Stravinsky's Symphonies of Wind Instruments, interspersed with Bach's keyboard Sinfonias (played prosaically by Angela Hewitt).

The concert's climax was a taut and exciting account of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony: thrown into fresh relief by everything else, even this iconic piece found its place in a festival of the uncommon.

The CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

Sounding together at the Spring for Music festival

By Elena Neo Antennae

May 23, 2011

Sure, I might not have wrinkles yet and my joints are still pretty flexible, but there are definitely disadvantages to being young in the 21st century. For one thing, I don't really know what it's like to not be able to Google something. Second, I can't ever say things like, "Those 80s were pretty crazy." But another reason why my youth is a drawback is a reason I can probably share with people who I don't share these other two reasons with. Though I can instantly access the newest modern pieces of music through a few clicks of the keyboard, I will probably never have the experience of wearing a ball gown, getting in a horse-drawn carriage, and riding to the premiere of the symphony of the latest, famous composer like they (most likely) would back in the 19th century. Symphonies, if one were to look back on a timeline of musical history, are benchmarks of aural progression through the times. Mozart's 40th, Beethoven's 5th, Dvorak's 9th, Shostakovich's 5th, Mahler's 2nd ... these are all protruding figures in the landscape behind us. However, despite the absence of petticoats in my closet, the premieres I will go to in my lifetime will probably have the same emotions that premieres of symphonies had in previous centuries – and it's not just because of the change in wardrobe and customs – but the change in the art of the symphony itself.

The now-annual Spring for Music festival was held last week, with concerts held almost every night from May 6th to May 14th. The festival is a place for orchestras to showcase their talent and inventiveness and was held at Carnegie Hall. The S4M's mission statement is: "Spring for Music provides an idealized laboratory, free of the normal marketing and financial constraints, for an orchestra to

be truly creative with programs that are interesting, provocative and stimulating, and that reflect its beliefs, its standards, and vision.” The orchestras that were featured in the 2011 festival were the Albany Symphony, the Dallas Symphony, the Orchestre Symphonique de Montreal, the Oregon Symphony, the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, and the Toledo Symphony. The performances ranged from Beethoven to Stucky, from Gabrieli to Vaughan Williams, and from Britten to Adams. While the programs were infested with modern music and inventive choices, almost all of the orchestras played a symphony. In fact, the Orchestre Symphonique de Montreal played seven symphonies during their program, the one that led the festival to an end.

The entire Spring for Music festival is something that hasn't been done before on the same scale. It inspired me and made me want to live in New York or have my own private jet really bad. But what really got me thinking was the program of the Montreal orchestra led by Kent Nagano. He themed it to describe the evolution of the symphony – in fact, the title of his program was “Evolution of the Symphony.” Weird. In his program were symphonies, some for orchestra and some for sections, by Gabrieli, Bach, Webern, Stravinsky, and Beethoven. But, contrary to what his title might suggest, he did not perform them in chronological order. Nagano chose to separate the large orchestral works with sinfonias by Bach played by Angela Hewitt on the piano. Gabrieli's piece was *Sacrae Symphoniae* for brass and demonstrates the beginnings of the form in the Renaissance. Webern's *Symphony, Op. 21*, the raw and almost conversational-between-notes piece, and Stravinsky's *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*, the triumphant yet slightly unsettling work, represented the early 20th century influences on the form while Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5*, one of the most iconic symphonies of all time, closed out the program. It was definitely risky, but it paid off. Tweets from the concert said things like “Fascinating programming tonight from the Montreal Symphony...” (Fred Child of APM Classical) and “the lack of lobby space turns into a seriously interesting health and safety issue when the place is as full as Carnegie is tonight” (kacareton). With this challenging and dense program, Nagano asked the questions (interviewed by WQXR),

“Why is a symphony relevant for today? Or is it relevant for today in the 21st century? What exactly would be the role of classical music in the future? Is it simply a group or genre of music only for an elite, selected, educated, sophisticated audience? Or is it something that’s much more meaningful to the general population?” In the same WQXR interview, Nagano said that he chose these specific works because they shy away from our stereotypical idea of a symphony. Though the first question I quoted was meant to inquire about the organization “symphony,” it made me think of why a piece symphony would be relevant today. As new CDs and albums are released, it seems as though intricacies of contemporary music are being focused on instead of the grandness of Romantic or early 20th century music. Instead of composers announcing the premiere of their newest symphony, it seems more common to hear about the release of chamber works, contemporary operas, or one movement orchestral tone poems. Is the art of the symphony as a work dying out? I rarely hear word of a modern symphony about to be premiered by a popular composer. The term is nowhere near dead, but, unlike the towering masterpieces that the members of the pantheon of symphonists composed, the walls of the intangible Modern Music Hall of Fame aren’t covered in symphonies. However, I say no—maybe we’ll just have to change the term.

A symphony is defined as an orchestral work most often written in the sonata principal. Because the word “symphony” (which comes from “syn,” together, and “phone,” sounding) is such a broad term, it was often used in the pre-Baroque ages as a label for many different types of musical composition. But that changed around the 18th century. While the symphony began as a three movement medium, Mozart and Haydn began to add a fourth movement in the middle which quickly became the norm. Beethoven made the symphony the grand mass that it is today, giving the world nine symphonies (he couldn’t beat Mozart by the around 40 point lead he had on Ludwig), and practically every single one is now a classic repertoire member. Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* was groundbreaking, as were Tchaikovsky's and Dvořák's. Gustav Mahler brought the art into the 20th century strongly, composing almost 10 symphonies (one even needs around 1000 performers). Stravinsky,

Shostakovich, Rachmaninoff, Sibelius, and Nielsen were brought into the mix soon after. The symphony isn't only a form though – it represents a great achievement in music; one expects to hear impressive and striking sounds when going to a performance of a symphony.

If these great, massive works that now bombard the programs of orchestras everywhere happened only a handful of decades ago, why are the releases that make up most of the hype in the classical world today (in America, at least) *not* symphonies? While there are most definitely modern symphonies that are *called* symphonies, such as ones by Christopher Rouse, John Corigliano, or Aaron Jay Kernis, we often don't hear of symphonic premieres that meet the statures of the ones decades ago. Perhaps this has to do with the downsizing of classical audiences anyway, but operatic premieres often are sold out and modern chamber music/solo piece premieres in big cities draw large crowds, especially premieres of well-known composers. But don't lose faith – we are nowhere near losing the art form that spawned from the symphony. That's just the whole point of it; the forms that are being practiced today are kin to the symphony, but can't be classified as such. Sure, some of it has to do with composer's brainchild has changed. Sometimes we are going to large scale symphony premieres, but we just don't know it.

Examples of these symphony-esque art forms are all around us. One of John (Coolidge) Adam's most famous works, *Harmonielehre*, is quite similar to a symphony. While it is not classified as one, the piece shares many similarities with the form we have come to know. It's divided into three movements (unnamed, "The Anfortas Wound," and "Meister Eckhardt and Quackie") that follow a similar mood progression that symphonies do. *Naïve and Sentimental Music* is Adam's real, official, categorized symphonic work (while the classification of *Harmonielehre* is a bit iffy). However, when I listen to N&S, I don't think "Oh, just off to listen to that Adam's symphony." When I'm listening to that piece, I'm listening to *Naïve and Sentimental Music* and nothing else. Another orchestral form that parallels symphonies is the tone poem. Famous tone poems from centuries past include Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*,

Liszt's (who created the term) *Totentanz*, and Schoenberg's *Pelleas und Melisande*. The tone poem is a wide concept – it's usually in one movement (sometimes close to or longer than symphonies themselves) and is inspired by another work of art or life. There are countless modern tone poems and similar art forms, such as Georg Friedrich Haas's *In Vain*, the 75 minute piece for 24 musicians that is chilling, watercolor infested, and hypnotizing (it's not exactly a tone poem, but it's pretty much the same thing). Other works of similar style include Milton Babbitt's *Relata I&2*, Iannis Xenakis's *Metastasis*, and John Luther Adam's *In the White Silence*.

Now, when I think about it, I listen to a lot more symphonies than I realize. No, maybe Haydn and Mozart wouldn't open up their silk-covered arms to the pieces that have spawned from their creations, but hopefully they would be able to see the timeline. Perhaps modern composers have strayed away from the traditional symphony form just to break away from the mold set in stone. Maybe composers feel bored by the limits of a four movement symphony and can feel freer inside a one movement landscape. But, looking back on Kent Nagano's questions he posed in the WQXR interview, perhaps composers today are just keeping things relevant. To an audience member not familiar with classical music, a one movement canvas is a lot more approachable than a daunting, Beethoven-esque symphony. Though they may be similar in length, tone poems are easier to become familiar with. Also, the beginnings of centuries are always transition periods, and we are definitely transitioning. To what, I don't know, but it's like gardening in one large bed versus four smaller ones – a composer has more space and chances to find where they are trying to go inside a musical form that isn't restricted by men who lived centuries ago. Tone poems and modified symphonic forms are more cultivating environments for musical modes and ideas still in the works. The composers today are taking care of the grandchildren that will grow up to change the world tomorrow. Should their daycare be the most nurturing place we can find?

I don't own ball gowns that women wore in the 19th century, and I probably never will own any (apart from the costume-end of my

closet). But I can still go to premieres, and they might be symphonic ones to. The program might not give that away, but I know that somewhere those other three movements are looking down, proud. Maybe.

THE NEW YORKER

Mix and Match. Spring For Music at Carnegie Hall

By Alex Ross

May 6, 2011

Spring for Music, a freewheeling new festival of North American orchestras, which unfolded in early May at Carnegie Hall, is premised on the idea that the programming of classical concerts isn't nearly as lively as it could be. Thomas Morris, who long ran the Cleveland Orchestra and now serves as the artistic director of Spring for Music, maintains a list of witless programs. The prize in his collection is a pairing of Gershwin's Concerto in F and Bruckner's Sixth Symphony – a blend of the fizzy and the sombre that makes about as much sense as a double bill of "His Girl Friday" and "The Seventh Seal." Great programs create a kind of invisible drama; they bring forth what E. T. A. Hoffmann, in his 1813 essay "Beethoven's Instrumental Music," calls "an unknown realm, a world quite separate from the outer sensual world." Such a realm seemed to materialize during a Spring for Music concert by the Oregon Symphony – the highlight of the festival and one of the most gripping events of the current season. Carlos Kalmar, a Uruguayan conductor of Austrian descent, who has been leading the Oregon since 2003, devised a program titled "Music for a Time of War." Not every ensemble capitalized on the occasion. The most contemporary-minded offering – the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra's program of six recently commissioned works inspired by Bach's Brandenburg Concertos – was also the most frustrating: it ran long and was interrupted by tedious rearrangements of the stage setup. The Dallas Symphony devoted its concert to a single work: Steven Stucky's "August 4, 1964," a seventy-minute-long oratorio written in ambivalent memory of Lyndon Baines Johnson. Jaap van Zweden, Dallas's gifted director, led with diagrammatic precision.

2012 Spring For Music

Orchestras:

Houston Symphony

Edmonton Symphony

New Jersey Symphony Orchestra

Alabama Symphony Orchestra

Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra

Nashville Symphony Orchestra

Press Quotes:

“It had its first outing in 2011, its second in 2012. Both added welcome color and quirkiness to the New York season and drew attention to ensembles in some cases little known nationally, and both were warmly greeted by critics.” -*The New York Times*

“Adventure is king in Spring for Music, which chooses North American orchestras chiefly on the basis of the coherence, inventiveness and panache of the programs they submit. But the prices and atmosphere are democratic. All seats for each concert cost \$25. And the large contingents of flag-waving supporters most of the orchestras bring from home make for a clash of staid formality and rah-rah boosterism unlike any other.”

--*The New York Times*

The New York Times

A Good Line On the Résumé For an Orchestra

By James Oestreich

May 4, 2012

If anyone can tell the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra or the Alabama Symphony Orchestra what blessings may flow from a Carnegie Hall debut, it is the Nashville Symphony. Having rented the hall on its own initiative and paid its own freight, Nashville made its Carnegie debut in 2000, conducted by the music director who had elevated its stature, Kenneth Schermerhorn, five years before his death.

At that time, said Alan Valentine, the orchestra's president and chief executive, a badly needed new concert hall was a pipe dream. But thanks in large part to the name the ensemble made for itself at Carnegie and the acclaim it took back to Nashville (and thanks to the efforts of Mr. Valentine and others) it was able to raise funds for what eventually turned out to be the resplendent Schermerhorn Symphony Center, which opened in 2006.

Now, after continued growth in its new home, the Nashville Symphony returns to Carnegie by invitation of the annual festival Spring for Music, which pays for the hall rental (though not the freight). It joins the newcomers from Edmonton, Alberta, and Birmingham, Ala., as well as three orchestras more familiar with the hall in the festival's second season, beginning Monday.

Not every orchestra can expect a new concert hall to result; most don't need one. But last year's participants — most notably the Oregon Symphony, which garnered tremendous acclaim with its war-theme program and went on to record it — can attest to the boost in morale at home and prestige in the larger world that can come of a Carnegie appearance.

Adventure is king in Spring for Music, which chooses North American orchestras chiefly on the basis of the coherence,

inventiveness and panache of the programs they submit. But the prices and atmosphere are democratic. All seats for each concert cost \$25. And the large contingents of flag-waving supporters most of the orchestras bring from home make for a clash of staid formality and rah-rah boosterism unlike any other.

The New York Times

Some Orchestras With Imagination

By James Oestreich

February 24, 2012

American symphony orchestras are living in interesting times, in both the positive and the negative sense of the old Chinese blessing. (Or is it curse?) At a time when money is tight and would-be listeners are often lost to other activities, the dangers are painfully obvious and, in some cases, already playing themselves out. But it is also a time of opportunity in a shifting orchestral landscape, as exemplified by the second Spring for Music Festival at Carnegie Hall from May 7 through 12. Suddenly you don't hear much about the Big Five, a term that had long outlived its usefulness in any case. The Philadelphia Orchestra's filing for bankruptcy probably put the last nail in that coffin. But the New York Philharmonic, living on its reputation, and the Cleveland Orchestra, banking on residencies outside Cleveland, are both following courses fraught with peril. For various reasons, the Boston Symphony and the Chicago Symphony remain on surer footing, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the San Francisco Symphony are making substantial claims to be considered in the same breath.

Probably none of the Spring for Music participants this year — the symphony orchestras of Alabama, Houston, Milwaukee, Nashville, New Jersey and Edmonton, Alberta — can hope to make an immediate leap into that exalted company. But all are worthy of wider recognition, and the Spring for Music format, with participants chosen for the imagination and meaningfulness of the programs submitted, is designed to present each in the best possible light.

Last year's consensus winner, if there can be said to have been one, was the Oregon Symphony, which presented a war-theme program and performed it brilliantly, by all accounts. (I could not be there.) But more important was the overall impression of inventiveness and excellence. At a time of struggle for the classical music business this

year's festival, like last year's, promises nothing but exhilaration.
And at \$25 a head, the price is right.

Forbes

2012 'Spring For Music' Festival Kicks Off Online And At Carnegie Hall

By Jane Levere

May 7, 2012

The 2012 "Spring for Music" classical music festival kicks off tonight, both live at Carnegie Hall and online.

Now in its second season, the festival provides a laboratory for North American orchestras to develop provocative and stimulating programs – free of typical marketing and financial constraints–that reflect their beliefs, standards and vision, said Mary Lou Falcone, a public relations consultant and festival organizer. Festival concerts also are the Carnegie Hall debut of some orchestras.

Orchestras participating in the festival this year include:

*Houston Symphony, which will perform Shostakovich's Anti-Formalist Rayok and Symphony No. 11 on May 7

*Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, which will make its Carnegie Hall debut and perform the U.S. premiere of works by Robert Rival, John Estacio and Allan Gilliland, as well as Martinu's Symphony No. 1 on May 8

*New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, which will perform Varese's Nocturnal, Weill's Symphony No. 1 and Busoni's Piano Concerto on May 9

*Alabama Symphony Orchestra, which will make its Carnegie Hall debut and perform the New York premiere of works by Avner Dorman and Paul Lansky, as well as Beethoven's Symphony No. 7 on

May 10

*Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, which will perform Messaien's *Les offrandes oubliées*, Debussy's *La mer*, and Qigang Chen's *Iris dévoilée* on May 11

*Nashville Symphony, which will perform the New York premiere of Ives' *Universe Symphony*, as realized and completed by Larry Austin, and of Terry Riley's *The Palmian Chord Ryddle for Electric Violin and Orchestra*, as well as Grainger's *The Warriors* on May 12

Tickets for all concerts are \$25; in addition, concertgoers can buy tickets to four concerts for the price of three, or six concerts for the price of four.

WQXR.org, the Web site of WQXR, New York City's only all-classical music station, will broadcast all six concerts live, with intermission features and interviews; it will also archive the performances.

TRAVEL+ LEISURE

Q + A: Spring for Music with Conductor Jacques Lacombe

By Mario R. Mercado

May 9, 2012

This week and through May 12, six North American orchestras arrive in New York to participate in Spring for Music at Carnegie Hall, a festival that celebrates the individuality of musical enterprise, from Alabama to Edmonton, Houston to Milwaukee, and inventiveness and adventurousness in programming. Audiences get the chance to hear these orchestras, some in Carnegie debuts, at which new music or music, familiar or rare, in new contexts is key. And the price of these musical adventures: \$25 for all seats, regardless of the location in the hall – front row to top balcony. Carnegie’s celebrated acoustics ensure every ensemble will be heard at its best.

I spoke with Jacques Lacombe, music director of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra (NJSO), one of the participants who is traveling the least but which brings one of the widest-ranging programs.

Q: Tell us about your program.

A: I have spent quite a bit of time in Berlin, have long been interested in that city’s remarkable musical life in the early 20th century and, particularly, in the role of Ferruccio Busoni, an Italian cosmopolite, who in addition to being a great pianist and composer, was also an influential teacher. And his students were as distinctive as his own music is original. We are presenting one of Busoni’s masterpieces, the concerto for piano and orchestra, one of the most difficult in the repertoire. The pianist Marc-André Hamelin plays it with such ease that audiences can’t help be swept up by its quality and emotional depth. And in the fifth and last movement, a chorus of male voices is added to the mix that brings the whole thing to another level, away

from virtuosity to a sort of meditation.

Q: And the other works?

A: We are presenting Kurt Weill's Symphony No. 1, known as the Berliner, written by the composer when he was 21 and studying with Busoni. Its composition was about seven years before his smash hit The Threepenny Opera, which premiered in Berlin. Although it shows the influence of Busoni, Weill's original voice comes through, both in moments of dark intensity and in lyrical spots that hint at his later work as a Broadway composer. Also on the program is Nocturnal, by Edgar Varèse, who also studied with Busoni.

However, Nocturnal is one of Varèse's last works, written in the early 1960's. Like the Busoni concerto, it calls for men's chorus as well as soprano to deliver a text of words and phrases drawn from House of Incest by Anaïs Nin, set by Varèse in his wholly original sound world and uninhibited fashion. I think it is both an alluring program and offers a very interesting voyage.

Q: What does the appearance in Spring for Music represent for NJSO?

A: A lot. The orchestra hasn't played there for quite some time. It is a big deal and it is my debut in the hall with the orchestra. It is also confirmation of what we are trying to accomplish in New Jersey. It is an adventurous program, but it is something we do in our programming, alongside traditional repertoire. It is part of my mission as music director to present new music and also music that has been neglected.

Q: What is particular about the NJSO and this concert?

A: We are the rare example of a state orchestra that tours every week and this leads to performing in a completely different acoustic on a nightly basis. This is standard procedure for the orchestras. Also, the chorus for the program features from the men of the Westminster Symphonic Choir. It is one of the best choruses in the entire country and they are based in Princeton. This Spring for Music concert is an opportunity to promote and collaborate another New Jersey organization. It has special meaning for me to be at Carnegie Hall with this special group of singers as well as the orchestra.



Nashville Symphony Goes Electric, Electric

By Anastasia Tsioulcas

May 12, 2012

In the past decade or so, the Nashville Symphony's international profile has zoomed upwards, first with the late conductor Kenneth Schermerhorn, then with Leonard Slatkin and, since 2008, music director Giancarlo Guerrero. During this period, they've won seven Grammy Awards for a series of albums featuring exciting new repertoire, including Joan Tower's *Made in America*, Joseph Schwantner's Concerto for Percussion and Michael Daugherty's *Metropolis Symphony*.

That sense of adventure was rewarded with an invitation to the Spring for Music festival at Carnegie Hall, where the Nashville players will present the New York premiere of [Terry Riley's](#) *The Palmian Chord Ryddle*, a concerto for electric violin and orchestra commissioned by the Nashville Symphony. The soloist is Nashville resident and former Turtle Island String Quartet member Tracy Silverman, for whom Riley wrote this work.

The program also includes the New York premiere of [Charles Ives'](#) super-ambitious and unfinished *Universe Symphony*, for which the composer left only sketches; this version was realized by composer Larry Austin and features no fewer than 20 percussionists. The program is rounded out with Percy Grainger's fantastical and engagingly strange "imaginary ballet" *The Warriors*, which he began writing in 1913. It's a fitting complement to both the Ives and the Riley. Grainger anticipates Ives by demanding three conductors (here, Kelly Corcoran and Christopher Norton to assist Guerrero) as well as an onstage battery of "tuneful percussion," an offstage brass sextet and at least three pianos.

THE NEW YORKER

Star Quality

By Alex Ross

May 14, 2012

Of all the otherworldly sounds that composers invented in the twentieth century, nothing quite matches the cosmic shudder of the opening of Charles Ives's unfinished "Universe Symphony," in which nineteen percussionists and a piccolist, each playing in a different meter and at a different tempo, generate a swirling nebula of rhythm. In a realization of the work prepared by the composer Larry Austin, the pulses converge every eight seconds, the synchronicity marked by a tolling bell. The Nashville Symphony will bring this tremendous conception to Carnegie Hall on May 12th, as part of the second edition of the Spring for Music Festival, which values passion and vision over pedigree and celebrity. Also on offer are Busoni's heaven-storming Piano Concerto, by way of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, and a clutch of new scores, courtesy of the Edmonton and Alabama symphonies. But the "Universe" may reverberate the longest: a few minutes in, you are ready to believe that Ives's bell has been sounding for billions of years.

WALL STREET JOURNAL

An Iconclast and His Students

By Stuart Isacoff

May 15, 2012

Orchestras are the luxury liners of the classical-music world — beautiful, huge and often unwieldy — and many are finding it increasingly difficult to stay afloat. So last year, three music industry veterans — publicist Mary Lou Falcone, Opus 3 Artists president David Foster and festival director Tom Morris — launched a program to help turn things around. The "Spring for Music" festival at Carnegie Hall comprises six orchestras from around the country, selected for proposing especially creative programs, and offers audiences seats for just \$25.

"I believe programming is an art, not a formula," Mr. Morris says. "This is a challenge to orchestras to demonstrate thoughtfulness and a sense of adventure. Some construct their programs around a theme, others build an evening so that each work illuminates the others."

One particularly interesting concert this time around will take place on Wednesday, when the New Jersey Symphony, under the direction of Jacques Lacombe, presents the little-heard Piano Concerto by iconoclastic 20th-century composer Ferruccio Busoni, along with works by two of his equally individualistic students, Kurt Weill and Edgard Varèse. On the surface, the three could not be less alike. Weill is perhaps best known for his "Threepenny Opera" and its signature pop hit, "Mack the Knife," but his early First Symphony is in a starker, more dissonant mode. Varèse's advanced modernist music, which relies on unusual, percussive timbres, is represented by his final work, "Nocturnal," complete by his student, Chou Wen-chung.

Busoni's 1904 Piano Concerto score is sprawling and lush. "The contrast is important," Mr. Morris explains. "The Busoni is such a huge Romantic potboiler, you want to go the other way in the first half with a completely different sound world."

Busoni is a fascinating figure, more often talked about than heard. "We know him mostly by his Bach arrangements or his late works," says pianist Marc-André Hamelin, who will be soloist in the concerto. Those piano arrangements add dynamic intensity and drama to Bach's solo writing; Busoni became so associated with them that several anecdotes depict people accidentally addressing his wife, Gerda, as "Mrs. Bach-Busoni." But his essays and books peer into a future in which the 12-note scale is divided into even smaller slices, and music takes on an aesthetic of "oneness" – rising beyond mere sensuousness and subjectivity.

"Somehow I was under the mistaken assumption that Busoni's piano concerto was one of his late works and would be dark and mystical," Mr. Hamelin reports. "But it turned out to be this gloriously rich and serene work, and I knew it had to be played. Then, I worked to get it under my fingers and realized it is a bear." That's quite an admission from a brilliant pianist who seems capable of playing anything, from the standard repertoire to the most finger-breaking rarities, with seeming ease. Nevertheless, he says, there is nothing flashy about Busoni's solo writing here. "The work is a sort of symphony with piano. If you expect the traditional concerto, you are going to be disoriented. All the movements are very long – the slow movement alone is over 20 minutes. So you must be prepared to experience the kind of narrative more commonly associated with the symphonic utterance. The difficulties for the pianist are of an internal kind – getting the grasp of the harmonic and architectural world of the piece, and coordinating the minute changes of tempo and shifting balances with the orchestra."

The concerto, which the composer saw as the culmination of his early manhood, is in five movements, including a lively Tarantella and a finale with male chorus. The text comes from a never-completed setting of "Aladdin," based on a tale from the "1001 Nights." It's a

poem of praise to Allah – "Lift up your hearts to the Power Eternal" – envisioned as a melody that "blossoms and ascends without end."

"The links between these featured composers are not so obvious," Mr. Lacombe explains. "But they all knew each other and worked together in Berlin in the early part of the 20th century. And there are some wonderful programmatic connections. The Busoni concerto and Varèse's 'Nocturnal' – a work based on Anaïs Nin's 'House of Incest' – both call for male chorus, for example. In the case of Weill, you see the attempt of a young composer to try out a lot of things, and you can sense the influence of Busoni at times – in his fugal writing, for instance – while there are also moments that sound almost like Broadway. It's all there, and very touching.

"I'm proud of the New Jersey Symphony's ability to pull it all off," he continues. "We have all the qualities necessary: the strings are gorgeous in the Busoni, and the orchestra does a fantastic job with Varèse's varying timbres. 'Spring for Music' makes it possible for us to present the program without having to worry about the business and marketing details. For us, it's a very exciting moment."

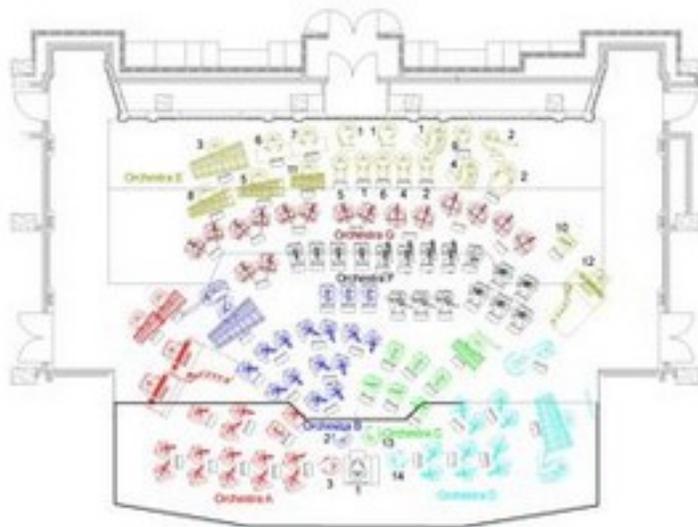
Alex Ross: The Rest Is Noise

The *Universe* comes together

By Alex Ross

May 11, 2012

The 2012 edition of Spring for Music is drawing to a close, with two performances remaining: the Milwaukee Symphony tonight, the Nashville Symphony tomorrow. I've been to three of four concerts so far: Edmonton, New Jersey, Alabama. Marc-André Hamelin's rendition of the Busoni Piano Concerto was, as expected, a sensation. And, having heard the Alabama perform the Eroica in 2007, I was not surprised by the quality of their Beethoven Seventh, although perhaps others were. This was Justin Brown's Carnegie Hall debut, and it was long overdue. WQXR is again broadcasting and archiving the performances. Michael Huebner, of the Birmingham News, has covered all of the events so far, including, of course, the Alabama concert. Elizabeth Withey has the Edmonton perspective.



Above is the seating chart for the Nashville's rendition of the Ives Universe Symphony, as realized by Larry Austin. The orchestra has been offering extensive coverage of its preparations on its Road to Carnegie website, not to mention Twitter and other media. Whoever has been running this online operation deserves a raise — it's an

informative delight. One tweet shows the great three-hundred-pound bell that will sound every eight seconds during the wondrous opening section of the Universe, when twenty rhythmic layers accumulate, the bar variously divided into 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 19, 22, 23, 29, and 31 pulses. Back in 1996 I covered the premiere of the Johnny Reinhard version of the Universe; that occasion also brought forth a remarkable piece by Richard Taruskin.

2013 Spring For Music

Orchestras:

Albany Symphony

Baltimore Symphony

Buffalo Philharmonic

Detroit Symphony Orchestra

National Symphony Orchestra

Press Quotes:

“In its third year, Spring For Music has drawn praise for putting adventurous programming ahead of warhorses and starry soloists and for keeping all tickets at an affordable \$25. The festival...also plays up civic pride by passing out flags for audiences to wave, each orchestra getting its own colors.” *-Detroit Free Press*

“The performance was dazzling, though, as with most Spring for Music programs, the music was the star.” *-The New York Times*

The New York Times

ArtsBeat

The Culture at Large



Detroit Symphony Riding to the Rescue at Carnegie Hall Spring Festival

By Daniel J. Wakin

October 25, 2012

It's another Detroit bailout, very loosely speaking, with Detroit doing the bailing out this time. The Detroit Symphony Orchestra has agreed to step in for the Oregon Symphony, which had to drop out of an orchestra festival next spring at Carnegie Hall because of financial problems. The weeklong festival, Spring for Music, showcases six orchestras that bring offbeat and interesting programs.

The Detroit Symphony was already scheduled to play Ives's symphonies No. 1 through 4 on May 10. Now it will also take the place of Oregon the evening before, even adopting part of its program – the one-act opera “Seven Deadly Sins” by Kurt Weill, starring the performer Storm Large, and Ravel's “Valse.” The Detroiters, led by their music director, Leonard Slatkin, will add Rachmaninoff's “Caprice bohémien” and “Isle of the Dead.”

The New York Times

Success, Interrupted: Spring for Music Festival at Carnegie Hall

By James R. Oestreich

February 22, 2013

In only its third season Spring for Music has already reached its autumn.

The festival was founded in 2008 by three idealistic veterans of the music business — David V. Foster, the president of the management firm Opus 3 Artists; Thomas W. Morris, a consultant and the artistic director of the Ojai Festival in California; and Mary Lou Falcone, a public-relations consultant — to encourage and present adventurous programming by North American orchestras of various shapes and sizes. It had its first outing in 2011, its second in 2012. Both added welcome color and quirkiness to the New York season and drew attention to ensembles in some cases little known nationally, and both were warmly greeted by critics.

But in September the festival announced that the 2014 event, already programmed, would be the last. The organizers said they could not raise the money for another season or find another presenter to see to the festival's survival.

This was sad news indeed, but two seasons of celebration still lie ahead. From May 6 to 11 orchestras from five cities will take over Carnegie Hall, accompanied by many of their hometown followers brandishing color-coded handkerchiefs in a refreshing display of unabashed boosterism and sheer enthusiasm.

This festival was to have featured the return of the ensemble that scored the biggest hit in 2011, the Oregon Symphony, with its program "Music for a Time of War." But that ensemble had to withdraw for lack of funds. (The festival pays a fee to each orchestra and covers the hall rental, promotion and ticket sales, but orchestras must see to their own travel and lodging.)

The Oregon concert will be replaced by a second one from the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, which had gained entry with an ambitious program of Ives's four symphonies (not counting the unfinished "Universe," performed at Spring for Music 2012 by the Nashville Symphony). Leonard Slatkin, Detroit's music director, will conduct both programs, the second offering works of Rachmaninoff, Weill and Ravel.

Another of the 2011 orchestras, the Albany Symphony, returns with a program of Gershwin, Morton Gould and John Harbison, led by David Alan Miller. In addition Marin Alsop conducts the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra; JoAnn Falletta, the Buffalo Philharmonic; and Christoph Eschenbach, the National Symphony Orchestra.

Next year the festival's swan song will be sung by the New York Philharmonic and the leading orchestras of Cincinnati; Pittsburgh; Seattle; Rochester; and Winnipeg, Manitoba.

THE NEW YORKER

Spring Kings

By Alex Ross

May 6, 2013

For the past three seasons, Spring for Music, a Maytime tournament of North American orchestras at Carnegie Hall, has been celebrating the art of programming: in place of the usual shuffle of celebrity soloists and warhorses, audiences have been treated to an unpredictable cavalcade of novelties and curiosities. Despite the fact that the most expensive tickets cost twenty-five dollars, the series has been underattended at times, and, short on funds, it will not continue past next year. Still, it will leave a bright legacy. This year's edition (May 6-11) brings to town the Baltimore Symphony, the Albany Symphony, the Buffalo Philharmonic, the National Symphony, of Washington, D.C., and, for two nights, the Detroit Symphony, which, on May 10, offers the boldest spring venture to date – the four numbered symphonies of the outsider master Charles Ives. Under the conductor Leonard Slatkin, Detroit has come roaring back from a near-death experience during a strike two years ago; there, spring is ongoing.



There's Something About Charlie

By Leonard Slatkin

May 8, 2013

Let me say this right off the bat: I hated Charles Ives.

In 1965, I attended the world premiere of his Fourth Symphony. It was a star-studded audience that heard Leopold Stokowski lead the American Symphony Orchestra. My roommate played viola in the orchestra and said that this was an important event and that I had to go. At this point in my young life I really did not know much about Ives and had only heard *The Unanswered Question*. There I sat in Carnegie Hall, totally confused by what was transpiring – three conductors, three pianos, a huge percussion section, and all manner of cacophony. If it had been longer than 35 minutes I am not sure that I would have stayed. It all seemed to be disorganized rioting. Even the relatively conventional third movement seemed out of place.

I left the hall angry. What was the big deal? How tacky were all those quotes? Did the orchestra actually play what was written or were they just faking it?

Over the years I have had similar early reactions to music by Mahler, Foss, and Berio, to name a few. And in each case I have been so upset that I needed to look at the scores to see what had gotten me so riled up. After closer examination, I found that it was precisely those elements of style and chaos that made the works interesting, and, ultimately, I embraced those composers and their music.

In presenting the four numbered symphonies by Ives during the course of one concert, the Detroit Symphony is taking listeners on a journey unlike any other in music. I can think of no composer who literally changes before our very ears in this way. Whether

Beethoven, Brahms, Schumann, Bruckner, or Mahler, the path from the first symphony to the last always leaves breadcrumbs along the way. But from his first to his fourth, Ives completely veers off that path and along the way creates a wholly new way of compositional thinking.

This presentation is not a stunt, something that may strike some as a circus-like event. It is a serious examination of how American music evolved and how one composer brought that about.

The First Symphony is a naïve exercise, a work from Ives's student days under Horatio Parker. The music is mostly derivative, sounding sometimes like Dvořák, Tchaikovsky, and Brahms, with a bit of Wagner thrown in for good measure. There is little to identify that we would call "Ivesian." The opening of the slow movement, with a plaintive English horn solo over the strings, is clearly a crib of the "New World" Symphony. In addition, the orchestration is often clumsy, and to that end, I have tried to help out a bit. Since Ives did not revisit this score, it seems more than appropriate to alter some of the phrasings and articulations. The piece emerges as that of a talented fledgling who has not yet found his voice. With the Second Symphony we move toward a true American symphonic language. I use the word language in the same way that, say, Mozart, Schubert, or Mahler would. There are elements of borrowing, some of the vernacular and some of the music of its time. The appearance of "Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean," as well as other patriotic tunes seems wholly American and, when combined with hymns and popular ditties, makes this piece the first truly native symphony from the new world. Hard to believe it waited 50 years for its first performance. That premiere is well documented and the performance by Leonard Bernstein was a hallmark at the time. The fact that he also chose to include it in his Young People's Concerts showed that this was a work to be proud of. Of the famous "raspberry" at the end, Bernstein extended the length of the chord, and it had an instant effect on the audience. With the passage of the years, it is now more shocking to hear it the way Ives originally put it on the page.

By comparison, the Third Symphony had a somewhat easier birth: it

was recognized with a Pulitzer Prize following its premiere thirty years after Ives wrote it. The harmonic language is more complex than in the previous symphonies, especially in the last movement. The shadow lines, those single instrument passages where wrong notes are evident, are more pronounced now. The shortest of the symphonies showed Ives's ability to compress his thoughts into a more concise form. The work is also for the smallest forces of the four, and is best heard with reduced string section.

And then we come to the last symphony. What did not make any sense to me almost 50 years ago now seems perfectly constructed. The introductory first movement sets up the rest of the piece. We get the kernel motive in the piano and low strings at the outset. The idea of the distant ensemble of violins and harp is presented. The choir intones, "Watchman, tell us of the night," preparing us for what is to come at the end of the work.

And that riot of sound and texture that is the "Comedy"? Quarter-tone piano and strings, six trumpets, eleven percussionists, and, of course, the two or three conductors. *The Rite of Spring* was only three years old when Ives wrote this movement. What was going through his mind and how did he find a way to notate all this? More importantly, what is the listener supposed to hear?

Perhaps it is this last question that perplexed me the most back in '65. Today, at least when I conduct the piece, I am overwhelmed with the vision and almost disregard for Ives's contemporaries. His world was without parallel. When we come to the final "collapse," it is as if the composer has said that he is out of ideas. But that is hardly the case.

In a brilliant stroke, he brings us to his earlier style of writing—simple, pretty much straightforward, and pretending to be a fugue. What better way to set up the most moving of all Ives? The finale, with its questions of "why" and "what," are the perfect summation for the symphony. All the elements of the first three movements are here, plus the off-stage funereal percussion. As the music moves to a solemn D major and the chorus and orchestra fade away, we can only be left in wonderment at the achievement. I guess I have come a long

way, from utter disdain to reverence. Sometimes we decide that a journey is not worth taking, but once in a while we go against our initial response and find that the road has many sights and sounds. Perhaps some of you will take this trip with us.

2014 Spring For Music

Orchestras:

New York Philharmonic
Seattle Symphony
Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra
Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra
Cincinnati Symphony
Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra

Press Quotes:

“The empowering idea that orchestras, big and small, should take chances and even dream in their programming.”

-The New York Times

“This excellent program has allowed orchestras from all over North America to come to Carnegie’s stage and show us just how much we’ve been missing.”

-New York Classical Review

“ [In its]..final year, [Spring For Music]is a joyous celebration of orchestral excellence and adventurous programming”

-The New York Times

“[Spring For Music] has engaged orchestras based on the conceptual creativity of their programming” *-The Pittsburgh Tribune*

The New York Times

Big Dreams, Then Rude Awakening: 'Spring for Music' Plans One Last Lineup

By Anthony Tommasini

February 20, 2014

It is with gratitude and sadness that I am looking forward to the fourth annual Spring for Music festival. Gratitude because each year this weeklong series of orchestra concerts at Carnegie Hall has been so exciting. Sadness because this spring's festival (running from May 5 to 10) will be its last.

Spring for Music has been driven by the empowering idea that orchestras, big and small, should take chances and even dream in their programming. Ensembles are chosen to take part not for their institutional clout but for the artistic creativity of their proposed programs. It has been especially gratifying to see enterprising regional ensembles, like the Alabama Symphony Orchestra and the Toledo Symphony, making long-awaited Carnegie Hall debuts through this event. Audiences have savored these adventurous programs, for which tickets cost just \$25. But organizers have found it difficult to secure continuing foundation and corporate support.

This final festival begins with an orchestra hardly lacking for exposure: the New York Philharmonic. The music director Alan Gilbert will conduct a full-evening work: the Requiem by Christopher Rouse, the Philharmonic's current composer in residence, joined by the Westminster Symphonic Choir, the Brooklyn Youth Chorus and the baritone Jacques Imbrailo.

On subsequent nights, the Seattle Symphony, which has been thriving under its youthful new music director, Ludovic Morlot, plays works inspired by water, or the lack thereof, by John Luther Adams, Varèse and Debussy. The Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra and Eastman-Rochester Chorus, under the conductor Michael Christie, offers a rarity: a concert performance of "Merry Mount," an

opera by the American composer Howard Hanson, who was a towering figure in Rochester. The Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra plays works by three Canadians: R. Murray Schafer, Derek Charke and Vincent Ho. Go Canada!

The Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and the May Festival Chorus, conducted by James Conlon, will perform John Adams's "Harmonium" along with "The Ordering of Moses," an oratorio by the neglected African-American composer Robert Nathaniel Dett (1882-1943), first performed to acclaim by this orchestra in 1937.

To conclude, Manfred Honeck conducts the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, with chorus and vocal soloists, in works that have funereal themes, including the final scene from Poulenc's "Dialogues of the Carmelites," James MacMillan's "Woman of the Apocalypse" as well as "Requiem and Death in Words and Music," selections from Mozart's Requiem interspersed with readings. So this estimable festival will close with a touch of gallows humor.

The New York Times

Tested Out Upstate: Classical's Future

Orchestras in Albany, Rochester and Buffalo Sray Nimble

By Zachary Woolfe

April 30, 2014

Two hours into the drive from Buffalo to Albany on the New York State Thruway, you pass Syracuse, a city with dark associations for classical music lovers.

Founded in 1961 and inflated by foundation grants and some flush years, the Syracuse Symphony Orchestra filed for bankruptcy before the end of its 2010-11 season. "The S.S.O. is unable to issue refunds for any tickets because we have run out of money," its website said at the time.

"You can say a city the size of Syracuse should be able to support a \$6.5 million orchestra," David Alan Miller, the music director of the Albany Symphony Orchestra since 1992, said over omelets at an Albany diner recently. "But if it can't, it won't."

Even after that minor-key finale, upstate New York remains a part of the world unusually rich in orchestras. Buffalo, Rochester and Albany all have impressive ensembles. It is no surprise that each has appeared at the Spring for Music festival at Carnegie Hall, which features North American orchestras that have been chosen for their programming creativity. (This year's festival starts on Monday; article, Page 17.)

But it will also be no surprise to those following the American arts landscape that all three groups face a simple yet daunting challenge: summoning the revenues, in ticket sales and donations, to meet their expenses. Syracuse succumbed to this math, and the region is still a test case of both the perils and possibilities facing this country's orchestras.

In 2012, amid persistent deficits, the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, which appears at Spring for Music on Wednesday, fired its music director in the middle of his contract, and has not yet hired a new one. The Albany Symphony has spent the past two years without an executive director. The Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra fills fewer than 60 percent of Kleinhans Music Hall's 2,800 seats for an average "Classics" series concert. (Even Spring for Music, conceived as a four-season experiment, ends this year, lacking a viable financial path forward.)

But in visits to these three cities and their orchestras in April, brighter skies were visible, too. Though still suffering reduced donations from once-mighty local corporations like Kodak and Xerox, Rochester's ensemble benefits from a close association with the Eastman School of Music. The Buffalo Philharmonic has a beefy sound, a popular music director in JoAnn Falletta and a relationship with the record label Naxos that has encouraged the orchestra to explore Romantic and post-Romantic rarities. Remarkably, 1,500 Buffalo fans traveled to Carnegie for its Spring for Music concert last year.

Of the three groups, Albany's has most successfully distinguished itself from the tired old American orchestra. The ensemble's economic model will not be to all tastes, even as that model looms in the future as rule rather than exception: The musicians are paid for each concert, rehearsal and other "service."

While this keeps costs relatively low — the orchestra's budget is \$2.2 million — and allows flexibility in season planning, it significantly doesn't include full-time work or more than minimal benefits. But artistically the ensemble is flourishing, with music by living composers on every program and an annual season-ending American Music Festival.

"It's the only way it can be done, I think," Mr. Miller said of his focus on new music, the morning after a warmly received concert that featured Chen Yi's "Caramoor's Summer" (2003). "It should be part of your diet."

Breakfast with Mr. Miller came on the final day of a long weekend of travel through upstate New York, attending concerts and talking with conductors, administrators and donors about what their orchestras might be like in the long, long term, as ticket sales and donations remain challenging, subscriptions continue to decline and ensembles are forced to experiment with new configurations, programming styles and performing spaces.

Are these changes negative? The Spring for Music festival is a discouraging example. How has such a force for good – bringing excellent if less internationally prominent orchestras to Carnegie Hall and fostering new repertory ideas while inspiring local communities – not found permanent grounding in New York? It seems yet another toll of the old classical-is-dead bell.

Why does that bell keep tolling? The 16-month Minnesota Orchestra lockout, recently resolved; the decimation of public-school music education programs; and the declines in the recording and radio industries and subscription rolls, to name just a few, have collectively incited endless talk of the “death” of classical music. But it is worth remembering that classical music has been said to be dying roughly since it began. Over the centuries it has reportedly fallen prey to new technologies (the grand piano, the compact disc, the Internet); to changes in audience habits; to – again and again – financial shortfalls.

Then what is the period everyone recalls so fondly, the era that makes the present seem so fragile by comparison? Surely there was a time of true peace and prosperity – perhaps during the salad days of the currently reigning generation of 50- and 60-something administrators and commentators?

“I think there were, like, six years in the 1980s,” Mr. Miller said, half joking. Yet even those six years seem questionable: they apparently didn’t include 1987, when, in the Jan. 19 edition of *The New York Times*, John Rockwell wrote: “More of America’s symphony orchestras are in trouble than at any time since the Depression – afflicted with strikes and lockouts, struggling to raise money and in

some cases canceling seasons and even declaring bankruptcy.”

The golden age, if indeed it existed, must have been fleeting and local, making it more sensible to think about the future than dwell on divergence from a misremembered past. What will the American orchestra be like in 2050?

Once people got over their surprise at being asked that question — orchestras are generally focused on meeting next week’s marketing targets, not on speculation about 35 years hence — they spoke in remarkably consistent terms. Words like multidimensional, varied, flexible and collaboration kept coming up in interviews. The orchestra of the future will likely be smaller and play less. Subscriptions, while not disappearing entirely, will increasingly become a thing of the past.

“The concert hall with the two-and-a-half-hour concert is not what’s going to appeal 10 years from now, 15 years from now,” said Dawn Lipson, the chairwoman of the Rochester Philharmonic’s board, at a preconcert donors’ reception. Her orchestra, along with others small and large across the country, is experimenting with new special events, like next season’s “Video Games Live,” with arrangements of music from “Final Fantasy,” “Halo” and others. These programs are intended to appeal to new audiences, even though such programs pose a marketing challenge, lacking the buffer of guaranteed ticket sales provided by even a declining subscribership.

Ms. Lipson said she advocates reducing the main-stage season to less than half its current size. “The rest should be concerts that deal with our community and what our community needs,” she said, like lunchtime appearances at local company headquarters by chamber ensembles made up of orchestra members.

But the Buffalo Philharmonic will be adding a week to its 2015-16 season, and it has been varying the offerings at its New Deal-era hall with concerts that feature pop performers like Natalie Merchant. Ms. Falletta’s own tastes are wide-ranging, and her audience seems to trust her. “I can program things, like an all-Ives program, and not

worry about people not coming,” she said over lunch after a Friday matinee concert prefaced by a recent, swiftly beloved innovation: a free doughnuts-and-coffee reception.

The orchestra’s executive director, Daniel Hart, agreed that repertory choices will open up as the standards begin to lose their dominance: “We’ve had some recent experiences with Vivaldi’s ‘Four Seasons’ and Beethoven Five really not doing the numbers we thought that they would.”

It will be a silver lining to the decline of music education if taste now forms from audiences’ curiosity rather than by learning in school that Beethoven is good.

This widening of the repertory will be helped along by the fact that, by 2050, there will be few, if any, soloists who are audience draws on the level of Joshua Bell or Yo-Yo Ma today. The star system, endemic to high culture in America for a century, is fading. Intriguing programming and the excitement of an orchestra’s music-making will have to carry the day, putting more emphasis on intriguing one-off events and themed festival-style series. Seeking to connect with a large local Polish community, for example, Buffalo has programmed celebrations of composers from Chopin to Lutoslawski.

Musician contracts will grow more flexible to allow ensembles to shift in size from week to week and as they travel to different venues in their communities. Players in 2050, particularly those outside major urban centers, may well find that a more substantial part of their job involves being sent to schools to provide music education. These will be expansions of existing programs in many places, like the Albany Symphony’s effort to foster musical literacy through songwriting, partnering with young composers like Ted Hearne.

Deborah Borda, the executive director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, has long insisted that orchestras of the future will need to more closely align their artistic activities with a social mission. Her ensemble’s mission fairly landed in its lap, provided by the association between its music director, Gustavo Dudamel, and the

international music-education program El Sistema, but every community has needs that its orchestra can help address.

Matthew VanBesien, the executive director of the New York Philharmonic, which plays at Carnegie on Monday as part of Spring for Music, spoke to this point in an interview in his office at Avery Fisher Hall, invoking another breed of nonprofit organization. "Look at the zoo community," he said. "It used to be just animals in cages and now they're much more about conservation and the environment. They become this larger resource."

The question underlying these expansions of focus is whether they will be accepted by orchestra members who will have to agree to revised contracts granting more flexibility as they also cut costs. Will Albany's per-service framework, or something like it, become the norm?

"It's a model that full-time musicians in orchestras would naturally fight against as hard as possible," Mr. Miller said. "But it's exactly what happens in industry."

Jesse Rosen, the president of the League of American Orchestras, was more skeptical in a telephone interview.

"We will be moving to orchestras that deploy their musicians in many different ways," he said. "I would hope that the ability of orchestra administrators to provide substantial employment would be something we would see. One of the challenges of an Albany is musicians have to piece it together. They also play in western Massachusetts, or Schenectady, or somewhere. From the standpoint of stable employment, they're not ideal."

But young musicians entering the field may be more open (by temperament, necessity or both) to such instability. Administrators said that it was these players who were by far the most flexible in conceiving adaptations of the standard orchestral model; several cited Claire Chase, the flutist who founded the International Contemporary Ensemble, as a prototype for the agile, entrepreneurial

player of the future.

It can be hard to accept changes that will involve the losses of jobs and security. But there is something strangely comforting in the fact that classical music has seemingly always been on the verge of collapse, yet here it remains.

“When I moved here from Los Angeles, I was very sad in the fall,” Mr. Miller said of Albany. “All the leaves died and fell off the trees, and I associated fall with death. And then finally my wife had to explain to me that it’s not about death. People love fall because it’s the first step to rebirth.”

THE NEW YORKER

Climate Change: The Final Edition of Spring for Music at Carnegie Hall

By Alex Ross
May 26, 2014

MUSICAL EVENTS

CLIMATE CHANGE

The final edition of Spring for Music, at Carnegie Hall.

BY ALEX ROSS



Spring for Music, the annual orchestra festival that began running at Carnegie Hall in 2011, was one of the best ideas to hit the New York music world in a decade or more. Here was a series dedicated not to the empty-headed pursuit of technical excellence but to the exploration of ideas. Orchestras were invited on the basis of the freshness of their repertory and the inventiveness of their programming. Twenty-three North American ensembles performed music by sixty-six different composers, half of them still living. The overplayed warhorse was Charles Ives, five of whose symphonies were heard. Mozart and Beethoven received only token representation; Brahms, Tchai-

kovsky, and Mahler appeared not at all. Some concerts were riveting, others rambling; none were pointless. In a better world, the festival would have run forever, but Spring for Music failed to secure funding for further seasons, and this year's edition, which unfolded over a week in early May, is the last.

One stumbling block for Spring for Music was the very mystique of the place where it unfolded. In the popular imagination, Carnegie is the Everest of the musical world, the ultimate goal that every artist must reach. When orchestras from cities like Toledo, Ohio, or Portland, Oregon, made their debuts in the hall, home-town newspapers hyped the

occasion, and hundreds of locals, sometimes more than a thousand, travelled to New York to celebrate. These displays of civic pride, complete with the waving of color-coded handkerchiefs, were fun to witness, yet the journey-to-Carnegie narrative tended to valorize just the sort of temple-of-masterpieces mentality that Spring for Music hoped to avoid. At its best, the festival did more than demonstrate that a particular group had made it to the big time; it showed that the big time no longer exists. Greatness can flare up anywhere.

Until this year, my most memorable Spring for Music outing was a concert by the Oregon Symphony, in 2011. Carlos Kalmar, the orchestra's music director, took the theme of "Music for a Time of War," presenting works of Ives, John Adams, Britten, and Vaughan Williams. The musicians played ferociously well, and the program wove an affecting tale of humanity attempting to survive its own urge toward self-destruction. What it didn't do was to look toward the future; the mood was one of lamentation and remembrance. Enter the Seattle Symphony, which, on May 6th, played John Luther Adams's "Become Ocean," Edgard Varèse's "Déserts," and Debussy's "La Mer." A meditation on climatic extremes, prompting thoughts of one coast drenched in floods and the other parched by drought, the program was that rarest of classical happenings: an intellectual event. Just as significant was the twentieth and twenty-first-century chamber concert that the orchestra had mounted the previous night, at (Le) Poisson Rouge. This was representative of an auxiliary Seattle Symphony series called "[untitled]," and it suggested a new, more flexible kind of ensemble.

I wrote about "Become Ocean" last July, on the occasion of its premiere, in Seattle. It has since won a Pulitzer Prize. On second hearing—or fiftieth, if you count the times I've listened to an unofficial recording—it remains a transfixing phenomenon. It offers a seductive surface, its expanded tonal harmonies evoking Wagner, Debussy, and Sibelius. At the same time, it is a cold, relentless machine, as distinct groups of instruments rotate through recurring musical palindromes, the sub-orchestras coinciding in three tsunami-like swells. The fearsome beauty of the sea finds a near-per-

R. Nathaniel Dett's Biblical oratorio "The Ordering of Moses" was a festival highlight.

fect musical analogue. Much of the score's glittering detail—notably the piano part, which consists of 17,640 notes in a continuous stream—was lost in Carnegie's mellow acoustics. As a result, the piece felt more static than it had in Benaroya Hall, the Seattle Symphony's home. It engulfed the senses all the same. Ludovic Morlot, who has been the Seattle's director since 2011, followed "Become Ocean" with clean, purposeful accounts of the Varèse and the Debussy. The orchestra needs more plushness in the strings, but it is a far more responsive organism than it was under Gerard Schwarz, its preceding music director.

Morlot introduced the Poisson Rouge event and then ceded the spotlight to the players. Kimberly Russ, the orchestra's indefatigable pianist, gave a luminous rendition of Debussy's "Pagodes"; Zartouhi Dombourian-Eby crystallized Varèse's "Density 21.5," for solo flute; the percussionist Michael Werner led John Cage's "Imaginary Landscape No. 1," which requires variable-speed turntables; the violinist Mikhail Shmidt supplied background for Vladimir Nikolaev's antic quintet "vnik-ton experience," which, in a nod to Seattle culture, had lashing lines reminiscent of Jimi Hendrix. Angélique Potéat's "Much Difference" and John Luther Adams's "The Light Within" completed the program. Orchestral musicians have been known to roll their eyes at outré fare, but here they were fully engaged: Shmidt had a look of delightfully solemn concentration as he operated a turntable in the Cage. When conductor, players, and administrators are of one mind, an orchestra can become a singularly vital beast.

The other major discovery of Spring for Music this year was R. Nathaniel Dett's Biblical oratorio "The Ordering of Moses," which arrived courtesy of the Cincinnati Symphony and the Cincinnati May Festival Chorus. This neglected landmark of African-American composition had its world premiere at the May Festival in 1937; NBC radio carried a broadcast, but cut it off about ten minutes before the end, alluding to "previous commitments." At Carnegie, the conductor James Conlon suggested, in remarks from the stage, that NBC had received complaints from racist listeners. While that speculation is unconfirmed—African-

American composers were not unknown on radio at the time, and NBC had featured Florence Price's First Symphony four years earlier—Dett has certainly been the victim of an injustice. His oratorio, a setting of texts from Exodus with spirituals interwoven, is a startling, potent piece, and the skilled amateur singers of the May Festival Chorus, which has been in existence since 1873, made sure that it shook the rafters.

Dett was born in 1882, in Niagara Falls, Ontario, and grew up on the New York side of the falls. After attending Oberlin, he served for two decades as the choir director at the Hampton Institute, the venerable black college in Virginia. Though he cherished African-American heritage, he resisted stereotypes of black music as an atavistic, shake-your-body affair: his singers didn't clap their hands or sway about, and his programs intermingled spirituals with Renaissance polyphony, Bach chorales, Russian liturgical anthems, and his own a-cappella pieces, which fuse folk and classical strains. (The Nathaniel Dett Chorale, in Toronto, has a fine CD of them.) His works on black themes were criticized for being too refined; on hearing "The Ordering of Moses," Olin Downes, of the *Times*, wrote that Dett had "not gone nearly far enough in striking the racial note." As Lawrence Schenbeck observes, in his 2012 book "Racial Uplift and American Music," Dett once turned down an invitation from the Library of Congress for a piece involving barjo and saxophone, detecting condescension in the request.

"The Ordering of Moses" was Dett's master's thesis at the Eastman School of Music, which he attended in the early nineteen-thirties, decades after his initial schooling. He studied there under Howard Hanson, the school's longtime director; in a curious coincidence, this year's Spring for Music also presented the Rochester Philharmonic in a concert performance of Hanson's only opera, "Merry Mount"—an entertainingly schlocky piece about Pilgrims doing unsuccessful battle with the temptations of the flesh. Dett's score is not as polished as his teacher's, but it is a more original and substantial creation. The great spiritual "Go Down, Moses" and related motifs are cycled through stark choral declamations, an extended fugue, Wagnerian half-diminished sevenths, a brush or two with

atonality, an exotic march sequence over a "Bolero"-like snare-drum pattern. Throughout, there are novel combinations of timbres: a Berliozian passage pairing horns and harp, for example. The interpolation of hard-edged wind lines into vocal textures recalls Janáček, another late bloomer with a love of folk heritage, although Dett probably did not know Janáček's music. At times, the choral writing has a chattering minimalist surface, anticipating John Adams's 1981 tour-de-force "Harmonium," which opened the Cincinnati program.

The closing section of the oratorio, "Sing Ye to Jehovah," takes a turn toward the visionary: the soloists portraying Moses and Miriam chant in free rhythm while the chorus sustains enriched F-major triads and the strings shimmer ecstatically. Conlon and his Cincinnati forces, augmented by the tenor Rodrick Dixon and the soprano Latonia Moore, conveyed the moment with precision and fervor. The uncanny radiance of this music is tied to a fundamental ambiguity: does the Exodus story serve as a metaphor for the black experience, or does that experience serve to amplify the religious text? When we hear the rattling of chains in the percussion, whose enslavement is being invoked? The doubleness of the work is evidence of a large, cosmopolitan spirit. The sadness of Dett's career is that he began composing in earnest so late; he died, at the age of sixty, just six years after the premiere of "The Ordering of Moses."

There were other riches in this final Spring for Music: the New York Philharmonic's traversal of Christopher Rouse's turbulent Requiem, whose best passages were the intimate ones; the Winnipeg Symphony's exacting account of R. Murray Schafer's moody, surreal Symphony No. 1; the Pittsburgh Symphony's driving rendition of the "Dies Irae" of the Mozart Requiem. But the most winning moment came in the wake of "The Ordering of Moses," when, for an encore, the Cincinnati singers and players dared to offer something supremely familiar: the "Hallelujah Chorus," which ends the May Festival each spring. Hundreds of visitors from Cincinnati joined in, voicing well-tuned four-part harmony. The border between performers and audience fell away; Carnegie has seldom felt so alive. ♦