

## **PRESS in REVERSE CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER 6/7/07 to 12/17/02**

### **CONSCIOUS DREAMS 5/19/07**

7, June '07 **"Going Deep and Wide: Three classical vocal concerts addressed earth-bound struggles with celestial bliss.** Sometimes we stumble out into the night, unsuspecting of sudden emotional hits. But the truth is it takes no more than some Mahler songs, a singer, and a pianist to feel a profound connection to the universe, to humankind, and the depths of its tenderness, sorrow, poetry, love, and aloneness.

That's what I discovered when, in a single recent week, two local presenters – Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra and Jacaranda – each embarked on this special terrain... But then it became clear that Dawn Upshaw – yes, the indomitable soprano who famously just knocked down breast cancer and its chemotherapeutic side effects – could fill us with equal depths of feeling by finding Mahler's sort-of successors in Lukas Foss and Osvaldo Golijov.

The night before Upshaw's triumphant return Jacaranda brought back bass-baritone Dean Elzinga to its Santa Monica stage, along with the wonderful piano accompanist Mark Robson for songs from "Des Knaben Wunderhorn" ("Youth's Magic Horn") and "Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen" ("Songs of a Wayfarer"). The performance reminded me of the e.e. cummings line "no one, not even the rain, has such small hands." For these gently curving melodies that graze the heart and tap the tender innocence of childhood can cause a serious meltdown of your defenses.

— Donna Perlmutter, *Los Angeles CITY BEAT*

1-7, June '07 **"ELOQUENT ENDINGS...** There is this amazing music by Franz Schubert: *Song of the Spirits Over the Waters*. The words are by Goethe, a metaphor of souls intertwined with watery images. Schubert struggled four separate times with setting the words to music, and finally came up with a richly colored, dark and resonant piece for eight solo men's voices and five low strings – violas, cellos and a double bass – an impractical scoring seldom heard in concerts considering its extra-ordinary beauty. Trust the loving serendipity of the Jacaranda guys Patrick and Mark to bring the work forward, which they did to close the last of this season's concerts, Saturday night at Santa Monica's First Pres before another sold-out crowd.

It was another of their intricately planned, imaginative programs: all Viennese this time, starting with the Romantic landscape already under clouds (Alban Berg's *Piano Sonata*, handsomely dispatched by Mark Robson), stepping back into sporadic sun-shine for a Mahler group sung by the splendid bass-baritone Dean Elzinga. Beyond Mahler came a plunge into Schoenbergian non-tonality with the Opus 19 *Piano Pieces* played by Gloria Cheng and the wartime melodrama *Ode to Napoleon* again with Elzinga. Came then the Schubert: "Soul of Man, how like water you are..." a clearing of the air, a benediction.

Next season, announce the Jacaranda people, is the centennial of Olivier Messiaen, and this will initiate a two-year *hommage*: something of his on [half the programs], and much other music by composers reached by his music and/or his spirit. There will also be eight concerts, more than ever before. The growth of this superbly planned and managed series adds to the sense of strength and enterprise – and, therefore, of pride – in all of this region's musical life."

— Alan Rich, *LA Weekly*

**22, May, '07 "Jacaranda's Music Series finishes season with 'Conscious Dreams'**

Santa Monica's Jacaranda series chose, for its final concert of the season Saturday, works by composers whose careers were cultivated in Vienna in the last flowering of that city's great musical outpouring before two world wars left its fertile musical soil fallow for decades.

Titled *Conscious Dreams*, the program's lengthy introduction traced its conceptual origins to such disparate 19<sup>th</sup> century icons as Sigmund Freud, Charles Darwin and composer Richard Wagner. Revelations in life sciences and the psychology of human motivation stimulated composers, beginning with Wagner in the later half of the century, to develop new aesthetic techniques, chief among them an accelerated use of chromaticism. By the time the next generation of composers were active at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the sense of tonal center in musical composition had begun to disappear entirely.

Jacaranda's leaders, Mark Hilt and Patrick Scott, established the program's conceptual theme with an assemblage of six Gustav Mahler songs for voice and piano, most based on the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century collection of poems *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (*The Youth's Magic Horn*), which the composer later incorporated into his first four symphonies. Although the poems date from the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, they contain much of the imagery that was to occupy German and Austrian composers throughout it.

Performing the songs was bass-baritone Dean Elzinga. Possessing a dark and well-focused voice, his performance provided a generalized sense of their super-charged character, but left plenty of room for interpretive growth. His sensitive piano collaborator was Mark Robson, who had opened the program with a probing performance of Alban Berg's *Piano Sonata*, Op. 1, a work that both pushes the boundary of tonal harmony and presages its eventual breakdown.

Berg's teacher, Arnold Schoenberg, was represented in two works; his *Six Little Pieces for Piano*, Op. 19, opened the second half of the program. These pieces depart from tonality even further than the Berg, and reverse a 19<sup>th</sup> century trend toward rhetorical gigantism by emphasizing its polar opposite: concentrated miniaturization. Pianist Gloria Cheng captured their jewel-like precision in a splendid performance displaying taste and impeccable technique.

Culminating the evening were two works similar in form: Schoenberg's late *Ode to Napoleon Bonaparte*, to a poem by Lord Byron, and Franz Schubert's early and rarely performed *Gesang der Geister über den Wassern* (*Song of the Spirits Over the Water*), to a poem of Goethe. Both are secular cantatas of a sort - the one spoken, the other sung - and chamber string ensembles, in the Schoenberg also piano. The enlightened pairing provided an opportunity to compare how each composer - one at the beginning of the Romantic era, and the other well after its demise - handled similar challenges of pointillist tone-painting in treating evocative, episodic poems.

Schoenberg's 1942 setting of Lord Byron's *Ode to Napoleon Bonaparte* (actually an ironic indictment against tyranny) was prompted by Hitler's ever-expanding conquests in Europe. In it the composer employed virtuosic atonal and tonal devices that ennobled and brilliantly illustrate the poem's impassioned but somewhat rambling imagery. Its use of a reciter in lieu of a traditional singer recalls Schoenberg's similar treatment in his earlier *Pierrot lunaire*. When properly conveyed, hyperbolic phrases like "fountains of brass and clay", "the earthquake voice of Victory", and "from thy reluctant hand the thunderbolt is wrung" have

an impact in Schoenberg's ingenious score they might not otherwise have deserved in print. Elzinga did his best to capture the high-flown spirit of the work, but maintained too rigid a metrical rhythm in the recitation to rise to the melodramatic potential of Schoenberg's conception.

With the evening's musical fare having traveled well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was a canny curatorial move to return it at the close to the origins of the Romantic era in the music of Franz Schubert. Goethe's poem prompted several settings from Schubert; this one from 1820 was his most elaborate with low strings (no violins) and male chorus. Water as an image of mutability would occupy composers from Schubert to Wagner (think *Tristan*) and indeed until the end (and beyond) of the Romantic era in music. A good trend-setting example of chromatic wanderings to come from later composers, the Schubert cantata-choral song, in its role as the evening's coda, also provided a reassuring return to tonality. It ends, as it began, in the key of C major with a cyclic return of the opening sentiment: "The soul of mankind is like water, its fate like the wind."

An assembled men's chamber chorus handled Schubert's undulating vocal lines with aplomb. The Denali Quartet soared in its performance of both compositions, as a unit in the Schoenberg, and, in the Schubert, minus the violin but augmented with an additional viola, cello, and double bass. (Honorable mention must be given double bassist Nico Abondolo whose string runs on the large instrument - simulating the tumbling waters of the Goethe poem - kept right up with those of his nimble higher-stringed colleagues.) Gloria Cheng performed the piano part in the Schoenberg with idiomatic character and in full sympathy with the Denali.

Jacaranda has returned to its main venue at First Presbyterian Church after its remodeling earlier this year, and launches what promises to be another interesting season this fall. Pianists Robson and Cheng, the splendid Denali Quartet, as well as other artists, have been featured on many concerts of this young series, and have helped it achieve and maintain the highest of artistic standards. Jacaranda's willingness to build programs around ideas rather than as artist showcases makes it a most welcome addition to the music scene in Southern California."

— Rodney Punt, Arts and Music Critic online

## **AMAZING GRACE** 4/7/07

19, April '07 **"J is for Joie: Artistic thrills abound in a recent Joffrey visit and the new music series Jacaranda...** the extravagant [ballet] *Les Presages* by Leo-nid Massine, a vast panoramic thing with corps phalanxes in bold art-deco trappings set to Tchaikovsky's *Fifth Symphony*..."presaged" the destructive forces of World War II by way of the composer's big marches and orchestral heroics. It was grand.

Decidedly less grand but deeply deserving, Jacaranda returned to its home base at Santa Monica's First Presbyterian Church, now an invitingly clean-lined architectural space with fine acoustics. The new music series, headed by Patrick Scott (formerly a crack performance artist a.k.a. Patrick Marca Registrada) and the hard-working, multitalented Mark Alan Hilt, recently celebrated its homecoming in a program of American Masters – with irresistible *joie de vivre*. No matter that Steve Reich's *Eight Lines* took three tries to get going, or that some production hiccups intruded. Where else can you get Scott Joplin's melancholy rags chased by Rzewski's blues-y demonics of industrialization, from *North American Ballads*, played by the excellent pianist Scott Dunn?

But for all-out intrigue, there was Jacaranda's own Denali ensemble playing Ben Johnston's *Amazing Grace String Quartet*, a work that takes the everyman hymn down paths of grippingly subversive sorrow."

— Donna Perlmutter, *Los Angeles CITY BEAT*

12, April '07 "**No Place Like Home**...Jacaranda is home again. Renovations are done at Santa Monica's First Pres; the place looks good and sounds great. Last Saturday's homecoming concert drew as close to a sellout crowd as never mind. There's your success story.

The program was all-American and all-remarkable. Two really rough-cut works trod with emphatic step. One was Frederic Rzewski's piano setting of *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues* from his *North American Ballads*, played by Scott Dunn, piano music that leaps off the keyboard to create a rural and menacing setting. Ben Johnston's *Fourth Quartet* is also imbued with a rural atmosphere. Johnston, now 80, is the least-known of our individualists, off in the woods somewhere devising tuning systems, teaching now and then, poking around in old hymnals and in Arnold Schoenberg's twelve-tone theories.

This *Fourth Quartet* is probably his masterpiece; fiendish to play for its rhythmic complexity and because it keeps running off into odd scale patterns, it is also built around the old-timey hymn 'Amazing Grace.' Jacaranda's Denali Quartet handled it fearlessly, and made most else on the program – even Steve Reich's *Eight Lines* for pianos, flutes, clarinets and larger string band, seem a piece of cake by comparison.

There was more and sweeter cake, too, a piece by Morty Feldman: who has even heard of his *Between Categories?* It's for violins, cellos, pianos, and *chimes*: two sets of each, answering each other, mostly pianissimo, across the front of the church: imagine! Only those Jacaranda guys, Patrick and Mark, could have dug up a piece like that,,,and made it work. (It did, like a distant cloud passing far overhead.)

Scott Dunn began the program with a handful of Scott Joplin Rags. Wonderful, rich, wistful pieces – *Solace* often has me in tears – these really constitute our American counterpart of Schubert or Chopin Waltzes, and ought to be given equal prominence on concert programs. First, they need to be given substance; Dunn, an excellent and imaginative musician, lessened their value by omitting every one of the repeats. Something like that last refrain of *Solace* (remember it from *The Sting?*) needs the time to break our hearts. Cutting it short like that broke mine."

— Alan Rich, *LA Weekly*

9, April '07 "**How Sweet the Sound in the Old Home Place: Jacaranda celebrates its return to its Santa Monica Performance space with a Spirited 'Amazing Grace.'** Jacaranda, the adventurous Santa Monica-based concert series founded in 2003 by partners Mark Alan Hilt and Patrick Scott, made a triumphant return to its refurbished First Presbyterian Church home Saturday. For nine months, if not exactly wandering in the wilderness, it had been playing in other venues. No wonder Hilt and Scott called the program 'Amazing Grace.'

Located about a block from the ocean, First Presbyterian now boasts an enclosed courtyard; new entry doors, pews, carpets and overhead lights; a small balcony; and a scrim that

serves as a backdrop for the musicians. The church is airy and comfortable and, according to series producer Scott, the acoustics are much improved.

The smell of paint was still faintly in the air for Saturday's ambitious program, which enlisted some 27 instrumentalists and the church's chancel choir, consisting of 16 singers. Cannily devised and fiendishly challenging, the program began with solo piano and shifted between a quartet and larger forces.

The theme of celebration included anniversary tributes to American composers Scott Joplin (1868-1917), Ben Johnston (born 1926), Morton Feldman (1926-88) and Steve Reich (born 1936). Works by Frederic Rzewski and Charles Ives completed the program.

Among the high points was Johnston's *String Quartet No. 4, 'Amazing Grace.'* Composed in 1974, this roughly 12-minute set of variations on the beloved hymn traces a structure familiar from the *Act I Prelude* of Wagner's *Lohengrin*. It begins in the radiant heights and descends to a lower level. But unlike Wagner, Johnston allows the theme to take on an anguished personal voice as it mixes with the muck of the human world, although it always retains its transcendent nature.

This knockout piece got a knock-your-socks-off performance by the Denali Quartet: violinists Sarah Thornblade and Alyssa Park (subbing for Joel Pargman), violist Alma Lisa Fernandez and cellist Timothy Loo. The Denali performs exclusively for the Jacaranda series.

Pianist Scott Dunn, associate conductor of the Pittsburgh Opera, was suave, master-ly, insouciant, nostalgic and exuberant in the opening set of four works by Joplin (*Solace, a Mexican Serenade, Paragon Rag, Bethena, a Concert Waltz* and *Maple Leaf Rag*). He was absolutely riveting, however, in meeting the infernal rhythmic and expressive demands of Rzewski's pro-labor *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues*.

David Washburn was the strong solo trumpeter in Ives' uncanny *The Unanswered Question*. Balance problems with the organ muted the choir in Ives' brief *Processional: Let There Be Light*. But Feldman's delicate *Between Categories*, for two small ensembles — each consisting of violin, cello, chimes and piano — was perfectly balanced.

The Jacaranda musicians had problems playing Reich's *Music for Mallet, Voices and Organ* at a concert in November, and another Reich score, *Eight Lines*, which closed the program Saturday, ran aground twice before taking off in an understandably cautious performance. Still, Jacaranda is home again, and that's plenty reason to cheer.

— Chris Pasles, *Los Angeles Times*

9, April '07 "**Amazing Grace in a Dazzling Space**...Like friends who can't wait to show you all the rooms of their newly remodeled house, Santa Monica's *Jacaranda* concert producers exploited every opportunity to showcase the refurbished sanctuary-cum-performance-venue at First Presbyterian Church last Saturday evening. After a nine-month hiatus with concerts in provisional venues, its Westside audience was ready to come home. Many had simply waited out the season rather than chase the moveable feast around Los Angeles during the remodel.

It was worth the wait. The sanctuary has been reinvented. Recessed lighting replaces the previous clutter of dated modern fixtures. A new mezzanine in the rear sits atop the foyer which now orients to the middle of the hall from the courtyard outside. Church kitsch is

blissfully absent; on the eve of Easter just one lily-strewn cross graced the voluminous white-as-snow interior. Padded pews properly face the stage area.

For its return program, ten American works were featured, with ne'er a patriotic cliché in sight. Appropriately titled *Amazing Grace*, the focus was on the fringes of our social or artistic heritage, particularly the Black American experience, which dominated the first half of the program. The second half continued along a formal scheme from folk narratives to increasingly abstract expressions. Musicians and vocalists, a generous 43 in number, were deployed in ever-changing combinations. In the unfolding mix, a blend of wistful spirituality and sensuous celebration was achieved.

Pianist Scott Dunn opened with four short pieces by Scott Joplin, alternating sentimental reflection in two character studies in just the right lilt to compliment the jaunty syncopations of the two other popular rags. He continued with Frederic Rzewski's *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues*, a mini-tone poem of African-American working class conditions during the Great Depression. Using of the entire span of the piano from growling lower registers to the upper reaches, the harsh monotony of the factory droned, in a manner reminiscent of Schubert's *Gretchen am Spinnrade*, punctuated later with heaving tone clusters delivered by the forearm, and poignant blues wailings of those resigned to a life of hard work and little hope.

The theme of Black America's oppression switched from victim to perpetrator in Ben Johnston's one-movement *String Quartet No. 4*, subtitled "Amazing Grace" which had lent its name to the overall program. It's a fiendishly difficult set of theme and variations in wrong-note romanticism, and was stunningly performed by *Jacaranda* regulars, the Denali Quartet. A vaguely surmised narrative suggests the repenting epiphany that moved former slave trader John Newton to write the words, 'I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind but now I see.'

To open the second half, *Jacaranda*'s producer-directors, Patrick Scott and Mark Alan Hilt, cranked up the wow factor in two works by Charles Ives. His luminescent *Processional: Let there be Light* and the haunting *The Unanswered Question* were both conducted by Hilt and employed woodwinds, strings, a strategic trumpet, and members of the church choir. Eyes chased sounds in the head-twisting choral song and a later trumpet (a solid David Washburn) from opposite sides of the rear mezzanine. Organ tones popped out of pipes hidden behind the front scrim. Eerie sounds depicting ancient Druids caused necks to whiplash again to witness the string ensemble 'off-stage' through the rear foyer's glass doors. Showcases of the hall's sonic capabilities, the two pieces were also an aspiring chiropractor's dream scenario for gaining clients.

A pleasant trifle by Morton Feldman, *Between Categories*, had two ensembles of strings, chimes and piano alternate lonely single tones in aural space. An occasional darting piano run of four or five notes was oddly reminiscent of those television dramas of the 1970's like *The Fugitive* when, in the dead of night, a cat-and-mouse chase is underway. From these eclectic but emotionally compatible works, the leap to Steve Reich's aggressive *Eight Lines* was a bit jarring - perhaps even for the musicians, as conductor Hilt had to begin it three times to establish the all-important pulse. The piece owes a debt to all of America's inherited musical influences, including African rhythms, Asian trances, and even the driving energy of America's Manifest Destiny. In keeping with a general hardening of the nation's soul from the era of collective spiritual crisis to that of coarsening self-absorption, Reich's hammering syncopations and patterned repetitions, brilliant as they are in other contexts, felt on this evening like cold rhythm with nary a scintilla of warm blues.

## Incidental observations:

1. Generous thanks are due to series patrons Abby Sher and Sue Bienkowski for supporting the unusually large component of performers in this gala return concert.
2. Acoustics in the sanctuary are even livelier than before, with bass and high tones breathing nicely. Strings excel under these conditions. The first set's Steinway piano with full lid extension, however, sounded too buzzy in dense sequences and might benefit from an underlying carpet to absorb excess overtones.
3. A daytime visit the church will reveal ribbons of pastel hues playing on the white walls of the sanctuary's interior. A luscious sight.
4. Memories of Joplin's music linger in Los Angeles. A short walk from First Presbyterian down to the Santa Monica Pier brings you to the Carousel where the movie *The Sting* was filmed. It's soundtrack of Scott Joplin's *The Entertainer* launched the American revival of ragtime music in the 1970's."

— Rodney Punt, *Martini Republic* blog, books & arts section: [martinirepublic.com](http://martinirepublic.com)

5, April '07 "**Punt's Picks: Return of the Jacarandas** ...Less than three weeks after the swallows miraculously returned to Mission San Juan Capistrano, *Jacaranda's* "music at the edge of Santa Monica" series returns Saturday evening to The First Presbyterian Church to resume their concert series there after a nine-month hiatus. The church, in the heart of the beach city's downtown business and entertainment district, has undergone extensive remodeling during the period.

Though dated in décor, First Presbyterian's sanctuary had always excelled in its acoustics. We are happy to report that an early preview allayed apprehensions that sound may have been sacrificed to sight. The facility's interior is vastly improved functionally (with an added mezzanine at the rear) and visually (with a minimalist white scheme complimenting abstract stain glass accents). But most important for music lovers, the acoustics are at the very least intact, and time will tell if they may actually have been improved.

*Jacaranda's* music-making has been far from idle in the interim, and their enterprising producer-directors, **Patrick Scott** and **Mark Alan Hilt**, have been busy discovering interesting venues in greater Los Angeles while things were a-building at home. Beginning last November, the road show began at **Barnum Hall** at Santa Monica High, which hosted a marathon of Pan-American composers. Two venues in the San Fernando Valley earlier this year, **CSUN** and **Temple Adat Ari El**, present-ed, respectively, piano repertoire and a lovely all-Ravel program. A brief stopover at the *Sundays Live* broadcast in **LACMA's Bing Auditorium** last month prepared *Jacaranda* for its homecoming.

Appropriate to spring-time miracles, Saturday night's return concert will include an eclectic mix of American composers under the banner "Amazing Grace" in celebration of innovations in our native sounds. The oft-resident **Denali Quartet** returns with an ensemble of players including pianist **Scott Dunn**, in works by **Scott Joplin**, **Frederick Rzewski**, **Charles Ives**, **Morton Feldman**, **Steve Reich**, and **Ben Johnston**; the latter's String Quartet No. 4 (titled *Amazing Grace*) lends its name to the whole shebang.

If you've experienced *Jacaranda* in its natural setting before, you already know the kinds of treats in store. But we have even better news: those stiff church pews with the awkward sight-lines have been replaced with new padded versions that focus on a simplified and visually pleasing stage area. Who can argue with comfort AND sensual stimulation in one evening's music-making? Not me. See you there."

— Rodney Punt, *Martini Republic* blog, books & arts section: martinirepublic.com

## **NEW SEASON ANNOUNCEMENT 3/21/07**

26, March '07 "**What I Say: Calming the Traffic Beast...**I have previously written about the *Jacaranda* chamber music series, which has for several years presented top-caliber chamber music in Santa Monica at the First Presbyterian Church on Second Street. While the *Jacaranda* people seem more interested in the music than the urbanism issues, I have made the point that in an era when fewer Santa Monicans want to brave the crossing of the 405, *Jacaranda* at least has given local classical music fans an alternative.

In any case, it's a pleasure to report that after flitting about the region for this season while the congregation of First Pres. renovated their sanctuary and overhauled their pipe organ, *Jacaranda* will return to its home for what promises to be a fabulous concert April 7, at 8 p.m. The concert, named *Amazing Grace* for a string quartet by Ben Johnston that's on the program, the concert will be an all-American, all-20th century affair featuring music by, in addition to Johnston, Scott Joplin, Frederick Rzewski, Charles Ives, Morton Feldman, and Steve Reich.

No doubt *Amazing Grace* also refers to the delight *Jacaranda* feels moving to the renovated First Pres sanctuary. Last Wednesday at lunch the church and *Jacaranda* held a preview of the 'new' hall and the overhauled organ.

Patrick Scott, the series' producer, announced plans for the next two seasons, which will, for the centennial of his birth, feature the work of French composer Olivier Messiaen, as well as the work of composers who influenced him, and that of composers he influenced or taught.

Messiaen, according to Mr. Scott, was the greatest composer of organ music since Bach, and that bodes well for *Jacaranda* patrons, because listening to a pipe organ in an intimate space like the First Pres. sanctuary is an overwhelming experience. Wednesday, Mark Alan Hilt, the artistic director of *Jacaranda*, showed off the First Pres. organ by playing the *Toccata* from Bach's *Toccata and Fugue in D Minor*.

Wow. Let's just say Mr. Hilt pulled out all the stops.

— Frank Gruber, *The Lookout*, A Santa Monica news and urban issues blog. Go to: [www.surfsantamonica.com](http://www.surfsantamonica.com)

## **FIFTY FINGERS & EIGHTY-EIGHT KEYS 1/21//07**

26 January, 07 "**Tree on the Move...** The splendid *Jacaranda* Concerts still wait out the completion of remodeling at their Santa Monica venue: last Sunday's concert found activities transferred to the Cypress Recital Hall at Cal State Northridge. A big and loyal crowd had found its way. Five sets of fingers were involved in the kind of varied piano program that only a true music-loving connoisseur could concoct; that has been the peculiar

magic of these concerts from their beginning. The room at Northridge was pleasant enough... but Jacaranda's home base – Santa Monica's First Presbyterian, with its elegant small organ and its intimate layout – is a special place, and it will be good to get back, on April 7. "

— Alan Rich, *LA Weekly*

## **HEAT & LIGHT: A PAN-AMERICAN MARATHON 11/4/06**

10 November, '06 "**A Movable Feast...** Santa Monica's Jacaranda Concerts, displaced while their church is being remodeled, zoomed into life somewhere else last weekend, and how! The first notes of Aaron Copland's *Duo for Flute and Piano* sounded through the vastness of Santa Monica's Barnum Hall shortly after 4 p.m. last Saturday; the final fade-out of Terry Riley's *In C* drew the die hards' cheers just before midnight. The intervening eight hours had been filled with déjà vu mostly marvelous, a 'Pan-American Music Marathon' of some of the best music, in the best performances, that the founders of this treasurable series have brought forth – to an ever-growing, supportive audience – in their past four years.

Like the splendid catered dinner from the Border Grill, the program was a nice mix of flavors and aromas, best exemplified by the inclusion of one of Osvaldo Golijov's omnium-gatherum pieces to match his heritage. Eduardo Delgado hammered out a couple of Ginastera's piano sonatas; Gloria Cheng sailed by on the cloud known as John Adams' Phrygian Gates; there was lots of Steve Reich but no Phillip Glass – my choice too. Only one piece struck me as dull, the finale of Charles Ives' *Trio*, and that was preceded by the previous movement, an authentic hoot. After a year of innumerable mistreatments delivered upon Riley's pioneering masterpiece, it was encouraging to hear the work's freshness endure and glisten, lovingly delivered, lovingly received.

Best of all, please note, these performers – string quartet, percussion ensemble, soloists, a whole gatherum for the Riley – were all local people. They work in studios, in local orchestras; many are from USC or CalArts. It's when projects like Jacaranda succeed that they are encouraged to remain here rather than plunging into the New York maelstrom. Saturday's program was broken into segments; the audience could come and go. Around the midpoint, when some of the best past Jacaranda performances – Joel Pargman's of the Lou Harrison *Violin Concerto*, John Adams' *Shaker Loops* by seven strings – were being returned to life, you got the feeling of a lot of people, in a congenial room, sharing some happy memories."

— Alan Rich, *LA Weekly*

6 November, '06 "**Entering Valhalla, with an edgy beat...** *Under the eyes of Barnum Hall's swirling gods, Jacaranda opens its season by revisiting the past in a marathon Pan-American journey.*

In increasingly commercial Santa Monica, arts and artists are in danger of becoming a scenic coast's next endangered species. But cultural environmentalists are working to prevent that from happening. And one particularly successful tactic has been the planting and cultivation of Jacaranda.

Jacaranda is a chamber music series that focuses on the 20<sup>th</sup> century and has the motto 'music at the edge of Santa Monica.' To open its fourth season Saturday, it moved four

blocks east of its usual spot, First Presbyterian Church of Santa Monica, which is a block from the sea and now under renovation.

The event was an eight-hour marathon reprising highlights from the series' first three years. And the temporary site was the recently renovated Barnum Hall at Santa Monica High School. Barnum is a Westside treasure reborn but under-nourished. This 1,200-seat, 1938 Art Deco auditorium with excellent acoustics was recently restored [at the cost of \$7+ million], as was Stanton Macdonald-Wright's fabulous fire-curtain mural of the gods entering Valhalla.

The building now awaits a Santa Monican with vision and the powers of persuasion to get school and city bureaucrats to put it to regular use. As Jacaranda's marathon proved there is more to this town than surf, sand and mall. The marathon, as performed in front of Macdonald-Wright's swirling, graphic gods, was a swirling, graphic Pan-American pantheon. It began with Copland and Ives, dipped into Latin America, paid tribute to Steve Reich's birthday and landed in the California of Lou Harrison, John Cage, John Adams and Terry Riley.

A good part of Jacaranda's formula for success has been its fostering of excellent, neglected local talent. The three dozen musicians who took part were a mosaic of Southern California music-making, first-rate players who divide their lives between performing in regional orchestras, teaching and anonymous studio work.

One particularly noteworthy Jacaranda discovery is the lively rhapsodic, technically excellent Denali Quartet. It offered a riveting account of the great Mexican composer Silvestre Revueltas' ferocious *Fourth Quartet*. It added an exciting clarinetist, Donald Foster, for the searing 40-minute klezmer rhapsody "Dreams and Prayers of Isaac the Blind" by the Argentine American new music superstar Osvaldo Golijov. It brought in three more string players for the luminous septet version of Adams' early hit *Shaker loops*. And two Denali members broke off to give a fervent account of Ives' *Trio* with pianist Gloria Cheng.

Probably, though, the heart of the Pan-American musical experience in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was percussive. Cuban composer Amadeo Roldán's *Ritmica No. 5*, written in 1930, was the first all-percussion score, and 11 bangers and beaters swayed and shook in Barnum as if this were music written yesterday. Varèse's *Ionization* composed a year later can sound uptight next to the rocking Roldán, but it remains touching in its futuristic foresight and received an authoritative account here conducted by the still lively William Kraft, who at 83 is the dean of West Coast percussion.

Kraft also let Harrison's 1959 *Concerto for Violin and Percussion*, a work he made the first recording of in 1960. Saturday's performance, which rose from ferocity to lyricism, featured another important Jacaranda find, violinist Joel Pargman. But the most percussive music of all was probably Eduardo Delgado's high-style hammering of the keyboard in two sonatas by the Argentine modernist Alberto Ginastera.

Still it was Cheng's performance of Adams' 25-minute essay in high minimalism, *Phrygian Gates*, that proved the evening's greatest surprise. She has played it often, recorded it and is a reliable master of its repetitive style. But now, she's rethought it, giving it a freshly seductive, sensual, dramatic contour.

The low point was Reich's Bali-inspired *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices and Organ*. It fell apart. So, almost did Riley's *In C*, the marathon's final hour. A dominantly loud pulse

drowned quiet playing. But in moments when the ensemble of percussion, winds, cello, bass and harp came together, there was beauty.

The garland for endurance goes to pianist Robert Thies and flutist Pamela Vliek, two more excellent young players. They began the day with Copland's *Flute Duo* (which I missed, lost in Samohi's parking maze) and were among those who brought beauty to *In C*. Jacaranda will remain on the move until it returns to First Presbyterian in April. But being on the edge is a much a point of view as a point in space. "

— Mark Swed, *Los Angeles Times*

1 November '06 "**GO! HEAT AND LIGHT: A PAN-AMERICAN MUSIC MARATHON** Trust Jacaranda, that intrepid group of world-class visionaries, to present a truly exciting eight-plus hours of music. Divided into three concerts, the blowout pays homage to our greatest contemporary composers. Program 1 features works by Copland, Ives, Ginastera, Varese, Golijov and Roldan. Pause for a dinner break hosted by Border Grill and Ciudad, and then dive into Program 2, which includes works by Revueltas, Varese, Ginastera and Harrison, along with two John Adams favorites: *Shaker Loops* and that death-defying solo piano feat *Phrygian Gates*, performed by – who else? – Gloria Cheng. Take a dessert and coffee 'breather' and settle in for the finale, a retrospective of new-music classics that includes Steve Reich's *Clapping music*, John Cage's *Wonderful Widow of 18 Springs* and Terry Riley's *In C*."

— Mary Beth Crain, *LA Weekly*

## **PROFILE OF A JACARANDA EXCLUSIVE, THE DENALI QUARTET**

November '06 "**LA Story...** *Los Angeles may not be renowned for its chamber music, but two up-and-coming quartets are changing the musical landscape...* (excerpted)

For musicians, Los Angeles has long been a Mecca among American cities, but its role in the culture has differed from such East Coast bastions as New York, Boston and Philadelphia. In chamber music – and especially string quartet playing – Los Angeles has not enjoyed a reputation as a national center... Classically trained players flock here for work as studio musicians, earning the bulk of their living with entertainment behemoths likes Disney, Universal, Sony and Warner Bros; but they spend much of the rest of their time performing the same pieces as their East Coast brethren, including the chamber repertory.

Nevertheless, quartet players have had a rather difficult time of it... Yet things may be changing in Southern California. Two groups, the Calder Quartet and the Denali Quartet, have been attracting attention lately, from audiences, critics and the press. Besides being technically adept and musically sensitive, both are made up of young, photogenic players possessing keen stage presence, the majority of who were at least partly educated in Los Angeles. The groups have unconventional names in common.

Cellist Timothy Loo called the ensemble he founded Denali [in 2000] after the Inuit term for Alaska's Mount McKinley. The name is also an oblique homage to the Alaskan Fairbanks Summer Arts Festival, where the quartet in its original form studied for two summers under Peter Marsh, former first violinist of the Lenox Quartet. The current roster – cellist Timothy Loo plus Sarah Thornblade and Joel Pargman, violins, and Alma Fernandez, viola – emerged only in 2003. Indeed, the Denali achieved its present form following much *Sturm und*

*Drang*. A love affair between two members of the quartet was the catalyst for the troubles, and a result of their subsequent departure was the cancellation of study with the Takács Quartet in Boulder, Colorado.

Most players would have quit the quartet business at this point, but not Loo, who didn't even tell one of the presenters that the Denali was now, technically, a duo. In October 2002 the group was to perform all of the Mexican composer Silvestre Revueltas' quartet at a festival at the University of California, Riverside, devised by musicologist Byron Adams. 'The daughter of Revueltas was coming,' recalls Loo. 'So I didn't tell Byron about the quartet's situation.'

Instead he contacted Thornblade, an old friend who was then and still is assistant principal second violin with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra. 'I asked her to join' says Loo, 'and to my surprise, she accepted.' That left the quartet without a second violinist, but Fernando Vela, then the Denali's violist, recommended Pargman, whom he knew from USC. There was little time to determine if the new formation would work. 'We just had to leave it to the universe,' says Loo. 'But I figured it would be a perfect match.'

In their present incarnations, both quartets claim strong institutional affiliations... The Denali's loyalty is to a concert series, the relatively new but highly praised Jacaranda, named after a purple-blossomed tree common to Southern California.

The Denali...in just three years has tackled repertory that other quartets might not get to even after a decade of music making. Indeed, it was the players' performance of Britten's *Third Quartet* at a memorial for Philip Brett, [Britten scholar, choral conductor and] a pioneer in the field of gay and lesbian musicology, that ensured the Denali's future. For in the audience were Mark Hilt and Patrick Scott, the moving force behind Jacaranda. As their venturesome series of informal concerts have rightly become a critical darling, so has the Denali.

'Mark and Patrick heard us and told Tim they were interested in having us play in their new series,' says Thornblade. 'They gave Denali a home, and that's why Denali exists. We're the in-house quartet. Jacaranda makes it possible for us to keep playing.' Relief from the sorts of cares confronting most quartets – programming issues, marketing schemes and travel plans – mean that the Denali can concentrate on practicing and performing. As for income, it derives primarily from other sources, mostly studio playing and touring with non-classical musicians – lucrative endeavors compared with earning a living as a chamber musician.

True, the Denali, which has a looser sound than the Calder Quartet – one that favors greater individual expression – cannot claim the creative freedom that the Calder enjoys. But Jacaranda's programs take the players' concerns into account, and Hilt and Scott have earned their confidence. The series has given them something they wouldn't get in a more traditional situation: they regularly partner with other musicians in the series. Last season, for instance, the group played only one quartet, Shostakovich's *Third*, but various members joined with other artists for Adams's *Shaker loops*, scenes from Glass's *Einstein on the Beach*, Golijov's *The Dreams and Prayers of Isaac the Blind*, Schnittke's *Prelude in Memoriam Dmitri Shostakovitch* and Enesco's *Octet*.

Keeping a quartet viable is never an easy task, and it may be harder in LA than elsewhere. But the Calder and the Denali are off to a promising start. If they have a secret, it may simply be that they make no secret of calling Los Angeles home. 'Other groups just pass

through,' says Thornblade, 'but both the Denali and the Calder have a home here. We're part of the structure of the city, and that makes a difference.'

— David Mermelstein, *The Strad*      Read the whole article at [www.thestrad.com](http://www.thestrad.com)

## SEASON ANNOUNCEMENTS

9, October '07 "**What I Say: And Livable is?...** I have previously written about "grocery store urbanism," but having lots of choice in the purchase of anchovies is not the only advantage of living in a city. One element that cities have that makes them livable is music. The variety and quality of live music available is directly proportional to the population of any given place.

I still listen to cheesy oldies on the radio, but as I age, I have become addicted to listening to serious music, whether "classical" or jazz, performed live. Fortunately, Santa Monica is becoming a much more convenient place than it was to hear concerts. It's not that I know much about music. I don't. In fact, one result of having a child in his sixth year of studying music in the Santa Monica public schools is that I've learned just how much I don't know about music.

But knowledge isn't everything. Visceral, gut-wrenching emotional responses count, too, and watching human beings collaborate to perform at high levels of artistry is a thrill. You realize how pale an imitation a recording is when you focus every sense on the soloist playing the slightest pianissimo, as if you're watching a humming bird and trying not to scare it away, and then you let the fortissimo roll over you like a wave that spits you up on the sand, exhausted.

Serious music is a city thing. It takes a large pool of people -- musicians, audience, even philanthropists -- to make it happen. I go to the opera and the L.A. Phil at the Music Center and the Disney Hall as much as possible, but let's face it -- traffic is a bear. One can easily spend as much time driving to downtown L.A. and back as one spends in the concert hall.

The reason I'm going on about music is that I want to plug a concert series that is about to begin its fourth annual season in Santa Monica. The series is called Jacaranda: Music on the Edge of Santa Monica, and for three years it has presented chamber music of the highest level at the First Presbyterian Church, on Second Street between Wilshire and Arizona. There is no way in a few words that I can summarize Jacaranda's programming; go to their website to get the whole story.

This year because of renovations in process at First Pres., Jacaranda will be moving around. Their first concert -- actually, a marathon of three -- will be presented at Barnum Hall at Santa Monica High School on Nov. 4. Tickets for each concert are a reasonable \$25 (\$10 for students). Then Jacaranda will present concerts in the Valley and at LACMA, before returning to First Pres. and Santa Monica in the spring.

The disadvantage of dense urban living is congestion; the advantage is convenience. Jacaranda is making great music more convenient in Santa Monica. Check it out. Live a little.

— Frank Gruber, *The Lookout*, A Santa Monica news and urban issues blog.

29 September '06 **"CHAMBER MUSIC Intimate Settings around Los Angeles: Jacaranda...**As this adventurous chamber music series enters its fourth season, the organization finds itself virtually homeless. Formerly, the series was in residence at the First Presbyterian Church in Santa Monica. But the church is undergoing significant reconstruction and is not expected to be available to Jacaranda again until April. Therefore, the company has transformed its offerings into a moveable feast.

In an attempt to maintain its Santa Monica roots, Jacaranda (under the direction of Patrick Scott and Mark Alan Hilt) will open its 2006-2007 season Nov. 4 with "Heat & Light: A Pan-American Music Marathon." This three-part concert will take place at Barnum Auditorium, a recently restored 1938 art deco hall on the campus of Santa Monica High School, 601 Pico Blvd.

Part 1 of the marathon, from 4 to 6 p.m., will feature music by Copland, Ives, Varèse, Golijov and Roldán. Part 2, from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m., will include music by Varèse, Revueltas, Ginastera, Adams and Harrison. And Part 3, from 10 p.m. to midnight, will focus on music by Reich, Cage and Riley. Participating musicians will include the Denali String Quartet."

— Jim Farber, *Daily Breeze*

### **EXULTANT JUBILATION – ALL MOZART 5/13/06**

17 May, '06

**"Spinal Column: All in a Night's Work...** Life in 2006 is a big, gleaming round of one all-Mozart celebration after the other — as, for example, the one that ended the Jacaranda concert season last weekend. Some of it traced familiar ground: *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*, the "Exsultate" motet, the *Flute and Harp Concerto*. You might have dismissed the concerto from your anticipation: No. 299 in the Köchel Catalog, out of 626, means it's an early work, immature, maybe not worth serious listening. The first movement, up-and-down, tonic-dominant, fits these expectations, except that the Jacaranda people devised a cute cadenza, with quotes from Mozart's other "flute" work, the "magic" one.

But then came the slow movement, with its soft, tentative first phrases and then, out of nowhere, an episode that soars toward sublimity, a conversation of deep import, compounded of sequences of the most heartbreaking harmonies. Suddenly there is the very young Mozart, baring his own inmost thoughts and engaging ours in the process. Mozart does that to people.

The performers — soprano Maria Lazarova, flutist Pamela Vliek, harpist Maria Casale and the Denali Quartet — represented Jacaranda in full blossom. Like the Monday Evening Concerts of comparable value, the series has been rendered temporarily homeless — not this time out of managerial chicanery, but for repairs to Santa Monica's First Presbyterian that will take about a year. Next concert: a "Pan-American Marathon" in a Deco setting, November 4 in Barnum Hall at Santa Monica High.

— Alan Rich, *LA Weekly*

### **PAMPAS TANGOS DREAMS & PRAYERS 2/18/06**

22 February, 06

**“Onward. Go Golijov...**Over last weekend, as Lincoln Center’s Osvaldo Golijov festival ended with the glorious cacophony of his *La Pasión Según San Marcos*, Santa Monica’s Jacaranda didn’t do so badly, either. *The Dreams and Prayers of Isaac the Blind*, with which the Kronos Quartet (plus airborne clarinetist David Krakauer) first brought Golijov to our delighted attention in 1994, was the centerpiece of an altogether splendid evening of “Pampas, Tangos, Dreams & Prayers” that filled Santa Monica’s First Presbyterian Church to near capacity. Works by Ginastera and Piazzolla rounded out the program with, of course, a decidedly Argentine accent; the clash between these and the whole panorama of backgrounds and derivations within the one 30-minute Golijov work was one of the concert’s many rewards.

This matter of nationality and accent in music is not easily dealt with, and Golijov, with his mingled background of Jewish, Russian, Latino and, currently, Bostonian, has always been uncommonly successful at drawing upon this and making it work in his music. *Isaac the Blind* deals primarily, of course, with Yiddish ancient history; the clarinets of several sizes stand in for the *geschrei* of the traditional klezmer band — and, possibly, of the abandoned Jewish mother. Yet it is more than that; already, in 1993, Golijov had mastered the many strands in his own heritage. Surrounded on the Jacaranda program by the intense Hispanic identity of Alberto Ginastera’s music — a couple of songs and the short, powerful *Piano Sonata*, which more people should play — it became by far the evening’s richest music. Its multinational spirit was handsomely caught by Jacaranda’s resident Denali Quartet — its own membership of mixed heritage including Jewish, Hispanic and Chinese — plus clarinetist Donald Foster.

Resplendent in shirt of flaming crimson, veteran Argentina-born pianist Eduardo Delgado — currently on faculty at Cal State Fullerton — performed the Ginastera *Sonata* [No.1] and several short works; sweet-voiced soprano Maria Lazarova sang a couple of songs; John Walz performed a short work for cello: a long, varied and rewarding program. From Jacaranda’s enlightened planners, we have come to expect no less.”

— Alan Rich. *LA Weekly*

## **FOREST MURMURS – ALL SCHUBERT 11/12/05**

18 November, '05

**“Truth, Beauty, Fantasy...**I don’t mean to sound obsessed with the Santa Monica concert series known as Jacaranda... It’s just that its concerts have generally been so fine, its programs so adventuresome, the audience growth — in the handsome, small and comfortable First Presbyterian Church — has been so encouraging, and I wonder why in three years the *L.A. Times* has chosen to review only two of its programs.

Saturday’s program was all Schubert, including two works from his last year — the *Trio* in E flat and the F-minor *Fantasy* for piano duet — whose magnificence everybody takes on faith but that rarely turn up in live performance. Most gorgeously accoutered of all music’s elephants, the *Trio* crashes headlong through outer space, fearlessly chasing its own tail, endlessly and arrogantly reiterating its blustering key changes, which under some star-borne momentum actually seem to intensify in momentum and ecstasy.

Jacaranda’s resident players — violinist Sarah Thornblade, cellist Tim Loo and, need one add, pianist Gloria Cheng — played as if delighted to imbibe the music’s dangerous brew. By mid-finale, by the forty-leventh mad Schubertian hurtle from E flat to C flat, it seemed as if

all willing souls in that enchanted space "at the edge of Santa Monica" were sharing the same spell, and happy to be there.

The *Fantasy*, that troubled outcry that intrepid pianists (including myself in braver times) attempt at home but rarely get to hear alive in concert, stands up to the *Trio* as an exact opposite: terse and stern, melting only in the magical moment when the melancholy F-minor theme dissolves into a momentary wisp of F major. It was that work of Schubert, above all others, that first made me aware — as a Berkeley grad student shopping for a thesis topic — of his scope and depth. As Gloria Cheng and Steven Vanhauwaert performed it last Saturday, my own 60 years with Schubert passed by most agreeably...

More Schubert ended the program, with utter delight: four of his choral pieces, quite nicely sung by 32 members of the Cal State Fullerton Men's Chorus. Two of them were short and familiar, but two were special. One was *Nachthelle*, an ecstatic nocturne for high tenor (Shawn Thuris) and voices; the other, *Nachtgesang im Walde*, perched on a Wagnerian threshold, set a long, woodsy text for voices and, up in the organ loft, a quartet of French horns. Talk about your magic!?

— Alan Rich. *LA Weekly*

## **A PERFECT EQUATION** 10/22/05

25 October, '05 "**Season opener of Jacaranda music series offers minimalism to the max...**Talk about your movers and shakers. An ensemble made up of members of the Denali and Eclipse String quartets was immersed in a dynamically charged performance of John Adams' *Shaker Loops* Saturday night at the First Presbyterian Church in Santa Monica, when a 3.0 earthquake shook the house.

It hit at a moment when the music was pulsating at such a furious tempo it may have caused Mother Nature to react in kind. Did people jump up and bolt for the exit? No.

Did a single musician miss so much as a semiquaver? No.

We real Californians don't let a little thing like an earthquake get in the way of our music. The concert, opening the third season of Santa Monica's cutting-edge music series "Jacaranda," may have been devoted to the composers who pioneered the minimalist revolution in classical music — Philip Glass, Steve Reich and Adams — but there was nothing minimal about the intensity of these performances, or the ability of this music to retain its contemporary edge.

Three decades may have passed since most of these compositions were first performed, but *Shaker Loops*, Reich's *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices & Organ*, and Glass' *Mad Rush* for solo organ and his *Knee Plays* from the opera *Einstein on the Beach*, remain fresh, stimulating and provocative.

In his introduction, Jacaranda producer Patrick Scott commented that though minimalism is often derided, every seat for this all-minimalist program was filled. It was a sign of how strong the attraction to this music really is, as well as a validation of Jacaranda as the best new music series Los Angeles has to offer. It is a series that thrives on adventurous programming drawn from the entire spectrum of classical music, performed by top-flight musicians and vocal soloists. But the minimalists have been a staple of the series since it began.

Minimalism exploded in the 1970s, and its impact was like a shot across the bow of academically approved classical music. Instead of looking to Europe for inspiration, its founders sought inspiration in the intricacy of African drumming, the tintinnabulation of the Javanese gamelan, and the spiritual ragas of India.

Repeated and subtly varying patterns replaced the idea of theme, variation, recapitulation, development and resolution. Time in minimalist music is more spatial than linear. The earliest piece on the program, and the one that best captured this sense of time suspension, was Reich's *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices & Organ* from 1974. It was superbly performed and greatly enhanced by the hall's acoustics. The crystal-bright tones from the multiple marimbas and xylophone, accented by the nonverbal pulses from the three vocalists and the low ground notes from the organ, were mesmerizing.

Of all the composers who donned the minimalist mantel, none has developed as far as Adams, something that was exemplified this month with the premiere of his new opera, *Doctor Atomic*. Even in 1978, when Adams composed *Shaker Loops*, it was clear that his musical vocabulary would use minimalism as a jumping-off point. Structurally, it may be cut from minimalist cloth, but its rainbow sense of color and spirited emotional evocations are anything but minimal. Saturday's performance expanded the instrumentation to include an added viola part, which provided an even richer sonority.

Including the *Knee Plays* was a nice idea, since the work was so important when it was premiered in 1976. But the truth is, these five transitional sections, with their abstract spoken narration, vocal chorus and violin obbligato accompaniment, cannot capture the scope of Glass' *Einstein on the Beach* opera. It was a little like trying to grasp the shape of a leopard by looking at its spots. It was, however, excellently performed by narrators Gail Eichenthal, Toni Guinyard and Ken Page, the Chancel Choir and violinists Joel Pargman, Sara Parkins and Sarah Thornblade."

— Jim Farber, *Daily Breeze*

25 October, '05 **"A perfect equation...**Word has hit the street. The Jacaranda music series, no longer a fledgling on the opening night of its third season, has found its audience. A near capacity crowd, sitting straight in their church pews at Santa Monica's First Presbyterian Church, paid rapt attention to an evening of Minimalist works, vintage 1974 to 1978. Composed by then upstarts, now icons, John Adams, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass, the works surveyed the expressive devices of the movement's early peak period. And if they don't shock us now, these compositions yet remain fresh as if newly minted.

Jacaranda is the brain child of two musical entrepreneurs, Patrick Scott, whose lucid introductions this evening set an elevated but informal tone, and Mark Hilt, the church's music director and organist, who led the musical forces with insight and kinetic energy.

The sonic banquet found a happy home in the resonant acoustic of this church just two blocks from the cliffs of Santa Monica overlooking the Pacific Ocean, next stop Asia. And this survey of Minimalism's expressive dimensions circa thirty years ago reminds how much the movement owes to the sounds and philosophy of the East. Born out of rejection of the severe avant-garde music of Europe, and tired of the Americana traditions of Copland, et al, Minimalism in the 1960's took much of its creative juice from Buddhist philosophy and the emotionally calm but shimmering textures of Eastern musical traditions.

That debt to the East was on its finest display in Steve Reich's *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices & Organ* (1974), with its marimbas, glockenspiels, metal-lophone, and church organ. Under the collective name of the Jacaranda Percussion Pack, the ensemble offered the best approximation of Balinese gamelans Western musicians are likely to muster. Reich is Minimalism's purest exemplar, and the tintinnabulation of this music's repetitions allowed the ear to wander from pattern to pattern on a magic carpet of soundscapes.

Adam's *Shaker Loops* (1978) launched the program with perhaps its weightiest piece, not in gravity, but gravitas, its sound tapestry enriched by a varied formal structure and harmony. An early hit by the youngest of Minimalism's four great masters — only Terry Riley not represented this evening — the work has undergone a number of transformations. Set first as a string septet, it was later orchestrated, then revised in its original setting, and for this evening altered further with a doubled viola part to emphasize inner voicing. It was performed here to rhythmic snap by a merger for the occasion of the fine Denali and Eclipse string quartets, with an added string bass.

*Shaker Loops* recalls the — not surprisingly — now extinct sect of New England Christians who practiced chastity but got their kicks in various states of shaking, trembling, hymning, looping and versing. It was a perfect subject for the hypnotic, repetitive, and ecstatic phrases of Minimalism's trademark sound. Midway through the piece, an aftershock from an earthquake earlier in the day added an eerie authenticity, and, according to some in attendance, a reminder from, you know, up there.

Two pieces by Philip Glass concluded the program. Mark Hilt performed a favorite, 1978's *Mad Rush* on the church's fine pipe organ, with especially resonant pedal notes, both heard AND felt. Hilt then conducted choral forces, narrators Gail Eichenenthal, Toni Guinyard, and Ken Page, string soloists and organ in a suite concocted by Jacaranda from Glass' opera *Einstein on the Beach* (1976). Seldom performed due to costs, the opera contains excerptable bits, here combined under the title *Knee Plays*. It turned out to be the evening's most conceptual piece, and its most difficult to appreciate on a purely musical basis. As a vocal exercise, however, fine speaking turns were offered in the cool-mood expressions ("These are the days my friends...") of Eichenenthal, and the warm effusions ("Two lovers sat on a bench holding hands in the moonlight...") of Page.

Fascinating as a series of samplers, the five parts of the suite - prelude, three interludes and postlude - span the opera with literary references more fully developed elsewhere. The staccato vocal music offered the evening's least interesting musical lines, though well-executed by the church's Chancel Choir. Glints of the larger score's beauties were heard in violin obbligati, particularly noteworthy being a virtuoso turn by Sara Parkins and a lyrical idyll from Joel Pargman. As a resurrected torso from one of Minimalism's high water marks, *Knee Plays* was a welcome conclusion to an evening amazingly varied for its brevity.

Jacaranda's eclectic fare continues this November 12 with an evening of some of Franz Schubert's most beloved pieces, and a few that rarely gain performance, all worth your drive west. Don't miss it."

— Rodney Punt, *Martini Republic*

4 November, '05 "**Minimal**...On the Saturday (10/22), at Santa Monica's First Presbyterian Church, the treasurable series known as Jacaranda began its third season with a whiz-bang program of American minimalism: John Adams' *Shaker Loops* in the original version for eight players in a daredevil performance without the usual safety net of a conductor; Steve

Reich's *Music for Mallet Instruments*; a small and, perhaps, expendable Philip Glass organ solo; and — wonder of wonders — a suite concocted out of the *Knee Plays* from the Glass–Robert Wilson *Einstein on the Beach*, the most extensive hearing of anything from that legendary, elusive bedrock masterwork to make it to these shores ever.

Imagine! *Einstein on the Beach*, finally here! We were doled out only 40 minutes out of 300, to be sure, and without the spaceship, the locomotive, the crazed dancers acting out the numerals, the recitation — 39 times repeated — about bathing caps and the Beach. Yet the sense of the work was somehow there, with Gail Eichenenthal and Ken Page among the narrators to deliver the frenzied verbiage and with Jacaranda's string players — Sara Parkins, Joel Pargman and Sarah Thornblade — to stand in for Dr. Einstein's fiddling. Jacaranda's heroic founders, master mover Patrick Scott and conductor-organist Mark Hilt had had to move mountains to pry some of the work's tattered manuscripts out of the publisher's vaults. To their greater glory, this third season — seven imaginatively planned small-ensemble programs, each a connoisseur's wet dream — began, as it deserved, with a capacity crowd. All-Schubert comes next, November 12: concert planning to die for."

— Alan Rich, *LA Weekly*

## **SEASON OVERVIEW with PROFILES of Patrick Scott & Mark Alan Hilt**

October '05 "**Music at the Edge...** *Jacaranda, Santa Monica's blossoming chamber music series, offers yet another enticing season.*

Patrick Scott remembers the time, not many years ago when a small pocket notebook was the companion of his dreams. 'I carried it always,' he remembers, 'to dream myself into the role of a super impresario. I'd dream up concert programs, favorite pieces of music, ideal combinations. If I could own all the music in the world, and all the players, these would be the programs I would want to produce.'

Patrick has been luckier than most dreamers; Jacaranda has been the fulfillment of his dreams — some of them anyway. Patrick supplies the program ideas out of his 'voracious appetite for music'; musician Mark Alan Hilt is the practical partner who actually makes things happen. Mark is organist and choirmaster at Santa Monica's handsome, welcoming First Presbyterian Church on Second Street, a block from the shore where these dreams come true.

And what concerts! In just two years, Jacaranda's audiences, a continuously growing contingent, have sampled a lavish serendipity: astonishing, wrenching Americana, including percussion works by Lou Harrison and all four of Silvestre Revueltas' string quartets; wind serenades by Mozart and Dvorak, racketing gloriously in the churchly acoustics; side-by-side journeys into madness, Peter Maxwell Davies' *Eight Songs for a Mad King* and H.K. Gruber's *Frankenstein!* on a single program, delivered in blood curdling splendor; and sublime Schubert nights, including one coming up next month.

The seeds of Jacaranda were sown during the 2000 Bach Anniversary Year. 'It is traditional in Presbyterian churches to maintain some kind of *Friends of Music* program,' says Mark Hilt, 'and so, of course we did our bit for Bach. Then it seemed right to move on to celebrate a Messiaen anniversary in 2002. That brought a lot of people, and that made us think we could go on and do whatever we want, which is what we have done. Our boldest decision was to move our concerts from nice, safe Sunday afternoons to a really

competitive, prime-time Saturday night. Why *Jacaranda*? Oh we just liked the name: all the same vowels, all the letters above the line; a Gertrude Stein kind of choice.'

Peopling a chamber-music enterprise, given the wealth of freelance talent in the Los Angeles area, is less a problem than in other communities, and *Jacaranda*'s list of stalwarts from the beginning teems with familiar talent: pianists Gloria Cheng, Mark Robson, Vicki Kirsch, and the ubiquitous EAR Unit. Among the newcomers, one significant bulwark has been the Denali Quartet, four recent USC graduates (sic) who had just begun to make it on their own had taken their name from Alaska's highest mountain peak, which they had glimpsed during a festival performance up there. 'I heard the Denalis in 2003, in their *Revueltas* program in Riverside (sic),' Patrick remembers, 'and immediately booked them – not only one concert, but as a group we could work with over time and develop a repertory.' In the upcoming seven-program season, Denali Quartet members, singly or on all fours, participate in all but one program.

Take a look at their upcoming third season if you want to see programmatic dreaming at its most imaginative. In February, Argentine pianist Eduardo Delgado appears on a program devoted to his countrymen, 'Pampas Tango Dreams & Prayers,' featuring music by Astor Piazzolla, Osvaldo Golijov and Alberto Ginastera. The opening program (October 22) fulfills a *Jacaranda* 'tradition' of starting off American: a Minimalist bash of monumental signature works by John Adams and Steve Reich, culminating in something many of us had given up hope of ever hearing in Los Angeles: music from Philip Glass' *Einstein on the Beach*. No, it won't be the whole five-hour Glass/Robert Wilson stage fantasy but a 40-minute suite of its excerpts known as *Knee Plays*, with instruments and the marvelous Dadaistic word-play that can mean any and everything you want it to. Among the speakers: Classical KUSC's own Gail Eichenthal. How's *that* for programming beyond your fondest dreams?"

— Alan Rich, *Classical KUSC Members' Newsletter*

## **ALLELUIAS, ODES & ENIGMAS 5/21/05**

26 May, '05 "**A Happier Ending...** Splendidly planned and produced, the *Jacaranda* concerts at Santa Monica's First Presbyterian Church give me the impression of a series of aristocratic musical evenings fashioned by exceptionally intelligent people for their own pleasure first of all, and for anyone of like mind who happens by. The exceptionally intelligent people are the partners Patrick Scott and Mark Hilt, and the second year of *Jacaranda*, which concluded last weekend with a Benjamin Britten program, has been a glowing tribute to the high inventive level that these concerts have attained from the start. The like-minded, furthermore, have been happening by in droves. The church itself is handsome, small and comfortable; its new concert going friends pray that the current round of repairs and additions will keep it so. Patrick does the welcoming, and writes the uncommonly informative program notes. Mark is the organist and choir director, and the one small drawback at this Britten evening was that the Chancel Choir, numbering 14, is not quite ready for prime time.

Everything else was. The Denali Quartet, which has been *Jacaranda*'s resident string group from the start and grows in strength and expressive depth, mastered the Britten *Third Quartet*, a work of remarkable richness and subtlety of tone, centered on a slow movement that is a long, haunting violin solo with other instruments massed as a soft shimmer underneath. Oboist Keve Wilson and violist Alma Lisa Fernandez unearthed Britten solo works seldom heard, and the chorus did muster a fair degree of strength at the end to deal with the mix of the childlike and the visionary in the remarkable cantata *Rejoice in the*

*Lamb.*

Jacaranda's third season begins in October with an American program. The whole season isn't quite set, but what's been confirmed includes a lot of my favorite music and, perhaps, yours as well.

— Alan Rich, *LA Weekly*

## **HOLY, MONSTROUS, MAD** 3/19/05

25 March, '05 "**MAX to the MAX: Wholly Monstrous and Mad**...Sir Peter Maxwell Davies (known to his friends as Max) live on, at least in this country, but barely. His symphonies, massive works that once enjoyed the attention of Simon Rattle, seem to have disappeared from the landscape. Some of his interesting dramatic works for mixed ensembles – e.g. *Resurrection*, for singers, orchestra, Salvation Army Band and rock group – have apparently come and gone. The Fires of London, the extraordinary performance ensemble that toured and recorded his music in thrilling, close-to-the-bone performances, no longer exists.

Two works remain popular in the U.S.: his film score to Ken Russell's *The Devil's*, so far available only on VHS, and his solo theatre piece *Eight Songs for a Mad King*, which was brought forth last week's Jacaranda Concert at Santa Monica's First Presbyterian Church in a performance that might modestly be described as stupendous.

The 'mad king' is of course, our old friend George III, with Randolph Stow's text a series of crazed monologues, partially based on remembered words from the dotty monarch himself. Onto these manic recitations Davies affixed music of comparable vehemence, imposing on an interpreter a vast array of vocal demands – including a span of four-plus octaves – while allowing considerable theatrical freedom in the way those demands might be met. For last week's performance at Jacaranda, an extra-ordinarily gifted singer/actor/acrobat/tragedian/clown named Dean Elzinga, pre-viously unknown to me, met these demands with the force of Lord Nelson's massed cannons, and delivered one of the most memorable solo turns of my recent memory.

Arriving on stage in high hysteria, barely covered in a tattered hospital gown, then departing in silent tragedy half an hour later to a solemn drumbeat and a held low F on the cello, Elzinga shaped an astonishing gamut: searing, shocking and remarkable too, in the absolute clarity of his diction even at the most piercing falsetto. Earlier in the evening he had forged another level of pleasure, in the wacko charm of HK Gruber's "pandemonium" *Frankenstein !!* – music that, despite its composer's best intentions, has worked its way out of the prescribed cabaret milieu and onto the con-cert stage. As cabaret, the nose thumbing is murderous and hilarious: Batman and Robin in bed together, Goldfinger vs. "Jimmy Bond," Superman with his pants down.

As a stage piece of innocent merriment, everybody loved the 'Robinson Crusoe song,' which drew an encore. Participating in all this was the excellent young ensemble that has formed around these Jacaranda events, including the Denali Quartet, whose praises I have previously sung, and Mark Alan Hilt, the musical director who, with Patrick Scott, has dreamed up this whole series of resourceful, imaginative programs in this exceptionally pleasant Santa Monica venue.

I'm sorry if I sound like a Jacaranda pitchman, which I'm not, but the impulse behind this series – and its fruition – is a pretty good case study in the way a musical community can be served, from within, by its members. The crowd last week was gratifyingly large and continues to grow, as it should."

— Alan Rich, *LA Weekly*

## **EQUATORIAL FRICTION 1/15/05**

3 February '05 "**Smaller Pleasures...** Earlier in the month, Santa Monica's Jacaranda concerts came up with yet another of their exceptionally rewarding, brainy events, a Latino affair culminating in all four of the string quartets by the troubled and still grossly undervalued Silvestre Revueltas: 45 minutes of music composed in a grand whoosh (around 1930-31) and probably demanding to be performed that way. There are sags; the throb of a life colored by alcohol and political conscience pulls the music this way and that. The final music, full of fiesta sounds and yet tragic, is thrilling.

The splendid young Denali Quartet, who have had to reconstruct, even re-imagine, the music from incomplete published sources, made it their own at the end of a knockout program that also included a percussion segment, with Varèse's *Ionisation* gloriously blasting against the walls of Santa Monica's First Presbyterian."

— Alan Rich, *LA Weekly*

## **PIECE ABOUT THE CONCERT SERIES SCENE WITH SIDEBAR PROFILES**

2 December '04 "**Up Close and Classical: Generous to the ears, easy on the wallet...** *Great classical music also thrives beyond the curved walls of Walt Disney Concert Hall.*

[T]he Los Angeles region offers a host of...opportunities to hear classical music. Indeed, there is a long tradition here of gathering excellent musicians who make big money playing in Hollywood recording studios...attracted to the exposure they get playing chamber music, which is where you'll find composers' best and most concentrated writing.

That spirit is...what inspired the Santa Monica-based Jacaranda series, founded only last year by Mark Hilt and Patrick Scott. Times music critic Mark Swed called a recent Jacaranda concert 'a terrific program celebrating the West Coast spirit and American spunk.'

The newest kid on the classical block, the Jacaranda concert series is the brainchild of artistic director Mark Alan Hilt and series producer Patrick Scott. It grew out of an earlier series called *Friends of Music* at First Presbyterian Church of Santa Monica where Hilt is director of music. That series lacked a distinctive profile, Hilt says, which the new version is designed to overcome by filling gaps in programming while also providing a venue for high-quality chamber music on the Westside."

—Chris Pasles, *Los Angeles Times WEEKEND cover story*

## **GOTTLIEB THEOPHILOS AMADEUS – ALL MOZART 11/20/04**

17 December, '04 "**Four Play...** A couple of Saturdays ago there was Mozart in Santa Monica, four young string players astonished at the harmonic suspensions of the start of the

[*Dissonance*] *Quartet*....and eager to share their discoveries with a pleased audience. This came midway in one of the Jacaranda Music programs...all Mozart and velvet, but this performance – by the young quartet that calls itself Denali (after the native name for Alaska's mountain otherwise known as McKinley) – was a special delight.

The next afternoon there was another Mozart quartet, in Pasadena this time, when the venerable and much-honored Guarneri played the B-flat (K. 589) at Caltech's Beckman Auditorium – not this time, I'm sorry to say, with communicable astonishment, but merely as the first number on the latest concert of their latest tour. The Jacaranda concert, in the second year of this new series, which is quickly building a happy audience of mixed young and old, drew half a house; the Coleman Concerts at Beckman, which play to a large codger contingent, had people begging tickets at the door.

I found the Guarneri concert depressing on the whole, even the concluding Ravel *Quartet*, which is so full of wonderful sounds that it usually helps even tired musicians score points. The Guarneri's publicity is full of wonderment of their having played together for the last 40-or-whatever years, but that was what was wrong with their performances that day.

I prefer the Denali's way of playing, edgy and full of shared surprise, and that of another excellent upcoming new local quartet, the Calder – with the advantage of both group's young approach to music that was born young. The Denali returns to the Jacaranda Series on January 15, and its music will be the four string quartets by Silvestre Revueltas: edgy, disorienting music by an ecstatic inexplicable genius.

—Alan Rich, *LA Weekly*

## **LIVING ROOM MUSIC** 10/23/04

25 October, '04 "**Jacaranda series in a bracing Golden State of Mind**... A year ago, a jacaranda was planted near the ocean...it has bloomed and Santa Monica is a better place. Not a tree, it is actually Jacaranda, a concert series at First Presbyterian Church, which began its second season Saturday night with a terrific program celebrating the West Coast spirit and American spunk.

The series features bright young talent alongside some of the better established local performers and seems to take its inspiration from the original Evenings on the Roof in Silver Lake in the 1940s. Like that pioneering series, which evolved into the new-music-exclusive Monday Evening Concerts, Jacaranda celebrates the new but also looks back. Mozart, Dvorák and Debussy are due later in the season.

The starting point for Saturday's program was John Cage, whose first public performance was at the Santa Monica Women's Club in 1932. The program opened with his *Living Room Music*, written for one of the early Evenings on the Roof programs, percussion music meant to be played on the furniture of the Silver lake bungalow where the concerts were held. Other Californians were also represented Saturday: Lou Harrison, with his *Concerto for Violin and Percussion Orchestra*, and Terry Riley with *Cantos Desiertos* for violin and guitar. Charles Ives, who was a large influence on Harrison and often played in Silver Lake, was the other main composer.

The performances were, for the most, joyful – a lackadaisical and jokey version of Living Room Music given by the Jacaranda Percussion Pack, being the only letdown. Most important, there were young string players to discover.

Sarah Thornblade, a member of the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, took a rapturously winning approach to Riley's exquisite tunes (Miroslav Tadic was the understated, eloquent guitarist). Joined by a commanding young cellist, Timothy Loo, and a strong pianist, Scott Dunn, she also contributed to a fervent performance of Ives *Trio*. The other violinist to remember, Joel Pargman, a student at USC, played Harrison's concerto with a firm authority perfectly suited to music that comes and goes from Asian destinations. Here the Jacaranda percussionists were exhilarating when conducted by Donald Crockett.

Elsewhere, Dunn turned to Cage's silent piece *4'33*, focusing listeners on distant street sounds, and he contributed a luminous reading of the *Alcotts* movement from Ives' *Concord Sonata*. Tapping on the piano percussively Mark Hilt accompanied mezzo-soprano Christina Sjöblom as she intoned a James Joyce text in Cage's *The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs*.

There wasn't much need in this packed concert for an outsider: Chris de Blasio's saccharine *God is our Righteousness* for guitar (Tadic) and organ (Hilt). But Californians are friendly and open, and the music proved pretty and inoffensive. When a concert is this inspiring, why not bring out the welcome mat?"

—Mark Swed, *Los Angeles Times*

29 October, '04 "**Cage, Ives, Harrison, Riley** . . . somebody in heaven must have had a hand in concocting Jacaranda's first program of the season (and the second one, too, all-Mozart on November 20, with the 13-Wind *Serenade*, the *Piano-Wind Quintet* and the *Dissonance Quartet*). Surely you know this concert series by now: chamber music lovingly planned, handsomely set in Santa Monica's First Presbyterian (where even the organ is the proper size). This first concert, a rewarding variorum of masterwork and not-quite, drew well; word is around.

Matters began with the endearing trivialities of Cage's *Living Room Music*, congenial strokings of household furniture brought onstage for the occasion, some to Gertrude Stein poetry, some not. Later there was Cage's famous silent piece *4'33*" performed by pianist Scott Dunn with majestic solemnity; Dunn also participated — fingers and all this time, and with violinist Sarah Thornblade and cellist Timothy Loo — in Charles Ives' *Trio*, with its hilarious jumble of quotations one minute and its apparent inability to get to any kind of point the next.

Guitarist Miroslav Tadic and violinist Thornblade collaborated in a set of garrulous Terry Riley pieces whose inability to get to a point was part of their charm. Best of all was Lou Harrison's hugely insistent, dramatic *Concerto for Violin and Percussion Orchestra*, its killer solos dispatched by a phenomenal 22-year-old (sic) violinist named Joel Pargman — remember that name — with a mostly student ensemble led by Donald Crockett.

There are times when you're listening to a piece, and you squirm in your seat and can't wait for it to end. There are times when you sit transfixed and pray that it never ends. On successive nights last week — the [LA Opera's production of] *Carmen* and Lou Harrison's *Concerto* — I was able to touch both extremes."

—Alan Rich, *LA Weekly*

## **INNOVATIONS/EVOCATIONS/IMPRESSIONS** 5/8/04

20, May '04 "**The Real Thing...** The imaginative Jacaranda series filled Santa Monica's First Presbyterian Church with a nice pairing of early Ravel and Stravinsky, music wound around with tendrils of Art Nouveau. From both composers there were fragrant, willowy song cycles: Ravel's to poems of Mallarmé, Stravinsky's to bits of Japonaiserie composed later in the year of *Rite of Spring*. Both called for ensembles of winds and strings, and so to start things off there could be Ravel's *Introduction and Allegro* for harp and those instruments. Susan Kane was the singer, Maria Casale the harpist; the young, splendid ensemble included the Denali Quartet. Blessings on them all, and on the planners of this exceptionally tasteful, worthwhile series."

—Alan Rich, *LA Weekly*

## **MEMORIES/MODES/METAPHORS** 3/20/04

1 April, '04 "**Two events on last week's** crowded calendar, with music created eons apart, came agreeably close to whatever it is that people can define as "perfection." One was Gloria Cheng's piano concert in Santa Monica on Saturday, especially in extended works by Olivier Messiaen and John Adams... Cheng's concert was part of the new and charmingly chosen Jacaranda series at Santa Monica's First Presbyterian, with benches that make you sit upright and music that makes it worth the effort. Messiaen's *Eight Preludes*, from 1929, shows us a young and ardent composer under Debussy's spell and trying out the extreme ends of his palette, with enchanting sounds that would stay with him in later, surer works but with an earnestness that already bears his own signature. Cheng has performed and recorded a lot of Messiaen; she wears his colors well.

Her command of color also ennobles her concept of Adams' *Phrygian Gates*, which becomes, with her, a marvelous ebb-and-flow that transcends the "pure" minimalist patterning and assumes its important position as the ancestor of much of Adams' later mastery. The plan of the work, the interplay of modalities and modulations as set forth in Adams' intricate program notes, is important in itself; in every succeeding performance from Cheng – I have heard several, plus her two recordings – I become more aware of the dramatic instincts that motivate the piece and make its final moments both devastating and thrilling."

—Alan Rich, *LA Weekly*

## **PULSES/PATTERNS/PHASES** 10/4/03

6 October, '03 – DEBUT CONCERT "**Here, Less was truly more...** Minimalism, though relatively free of any particular spiritual creed, can sound right at home in church. At least that seemed a valid notion Saturday in Santa Monica's First Presbyterian Church. The new chamber music concert series known as Jacaranda, music at the edge of Santa Monica opened with the rippling, rhythmically charged music of Minimalist pillars Terry Riley, Steve Reich and Philip Glass, whose rolling, hypnotic structures demand a meditative spirit to be properly appreciated.

While no neat primer in what makes Minimalism tick, the program offered some important touchstones of the genre, from Riley's proto-minimalist 1964 concept piece, *In C*, to Reich's *Clapping Music* and a rarity by Glass, the movement's best seller. Reference points seem urban and spiritual in Glass' too rarely heard 1981 piece *Mad Rush*, originally written for a

visit by the Dalai Lama and premiered in St. John's Chapel. In the Santa Monica space it sounded gripping and vibrant given the spatial splendor of the in-house pipe organ, played with illuminating care by organist Mark Hilt.

The room filled with shimmering timbres and a lovely maze of Glass-ian musical traffic. Written during a rich seminal period for the composer, around the time of the definitive *Glassworks*, the work benefits from his refined musical vocabulary, which he hasn't strayed much from or improved upon since.

Opening the concert with Reich's *Clapping Music*, fastidious clappers Fred Strickler and Linda Sohl Donnell were rightly credited in the program with 'body music'. This 1972 piece is a primitive 'hands-on' work, its rhythms shifting in focus and synchron-ization, its result clearly blending the mesmeric and the rational.

Nine musicians gathered for *In C*, with unusual colors here including electric bass (Arthur Jarvinen), bassoon (Sara Schoenbeck) and the resident organist (Hilt). They joined a party of loosely choreographed short fragments – built around the anchor of xylophonist Robert Fernandez's insistent 'pulse' of eighth notes – for 45 minutes as tonality gradually slipped 'out of C' as part of the desired time-space warp effect. *In C* remains a fascinating historical artifact; quirky, cool and essential to music's evolution."

— Joseph Woodward, *Los Angeles Times*

24 October, '03 – DEBUT CONCERT "**Earth, Sky and Regions in Between...** In Santa Monica there was *In C*, Terry Riley's first great work, now approaching 40. In Costa Mesa there was *Sun Rings*, Riley's latest great work, in its first local hearing. The music of the years between these two strange and wondrous masterpieces forms a body of creativity like nothing else on earth: irritating at times and self-indulgent beyond redemption but often lit with a visionary's authentic ecstasy. Were our pathways not illuminated by the presence of this smiling, soft-spoken, supernally wise gnome, he would be impossible to invent.

*In C* has always been a piece apart, an ingenious trick to test a hearer's perception, a whimsical spinning of substance out of nothingness. That's all very well, but the performance at Santa Monica's First Presbyterian Church – the first event in a nicely concocted new chamber-music series called Jacaranda – struck me as being about more than tricks. It seemed to me as if the work has now settled into the repertory as a milestone in the onrush of music over the past several decades. The 45-minute performance in Santa Monica – nine players, led by Mark Hilt on the church's excellent small organ – was spirited and forward moving...the right music in the right place at the right time."

—Alan Rich, *LA Weekly*

## **FESTIVAL PRELUDE TO THE FOUNDING OF JACARANDA**

17, December '02 "**CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK: Messiaen's mystical, complex music is reverberating again...**When Olivier Messiaen died in 1992 at age 83, there was no doubt that he was a major figure of 20<sup>th</sup>centurt music, a great French composer and an important link between Ravel and Pierre Boulez. But great and important are one thing, popular is another.

Ten years ago, Messiaen had only one work that could be said to have entered even the fringe standard repertory – *Quartet for the End of Time*, which he had written in a Nazi

prisoner-of-war camp in 1941. A couple of other pieces – the *Turangalîla Symphony* and the piano cycle *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant Jésus* (Twenty Gazes Upon the Infant Jesus) – were on the fringe of the fringe, accessible and impressive, though too massive and demanding to ever be anything but special-occasion works.

For all the fanaticism Messiaen inspired in his devotees, for all the stellar performers who care deeply for his music, he had such a perplexing collection of unfashionable proclivities that he seemed, at the time of his death, ever destined to be a glorious outsider. Messiaen's is a music absorbed in mystical Catholicism and invaded by incessant birdsong, doused in garish instrumental colors, sweetened with sometimes lurid harmonies, all of it tangled up in obscure, complex Indian rhythmic. Listening to the reed warbler carry on for half an hour in one of the 13 parts of the piano cycle, *Catalog of the Birds* is enough to drive some audiences – and pianists – to distraction.

And yet on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Messiaen's death, he really has arrived. The San Francisco Opera's gripping American premiere of the composer's only opera, *Saint François d'Assise* – generally dismissed at its 1983 premiere in Paris as a meditative, un-operatic five-hour self-indulgence – proved the American operatic event of the year. The San Francisco company also organized a Bay Area-wide Messiaen festival that proved so successful it turned away audiences for a concert at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and filled a large hall for a Messiaen symposium at UC Berkeley.

Despite a climate of severe cutbacks at the major record labels, Deutsche Grammophon refuses to kick its Messiaen habit. It has just released a six-CD set of the composer's complete organ music in very fine performances by Olivier Latry, stunningly recorded at Notre Dame. And this comes on the heels of Myung-Whun Chung's spectacular account on two CDs of *The Transfiguration of Our Lord Jesus Christ* with the Orchestra and Chorus of Radio France. Next month DG will release yet another Chung-led two-CD set from Radio France, this time of *From the Canyons to the Stars*, the result of the composer's spiritually intense, bird-happy visit to Bryce Canyon in Utah.

For Messiaen, music was a grand event intended to express his Faith (something he always capitalized) and his reverence for Nature (also capped). And part of the attraction to this work is its sheer scale – sonic and temporal. But under even the best of circumstances these big pieces are too labor intensive and expensive to be played or recorded very often.

If Messiaen's music is to fully enter the mainstream, it needs musical advocates at the grass-roots level. And that has begun to happen. In Los Angeles alone last week there happened to be two performances of *Quartet for the End of Time*, one by New York New Music, an ensemble that played in the Monday Evening Concerts series at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The other was by local musicians, as part of a modest weekend Messiaen festival at First Presbyterian Church of Santa Monica.

That festival could be viewed as a microcosm of how and why Messiaen has taken hold. It was organized not by a music professional but by an enthusiast, Patrick Scott, an administrator with LA's BEST After School Enrichment Program. The small church is highly resonant, which was great for the massed sonorities in an early organ piece strongly played by Mark Hilt, the festival's music director and the church's organist.

In the *Quartet for the End of Time* – with violinist Robin Lorentz, clarinetist Marty Walker, cellist Roger Lebow and Pianist Vicki Ray – there was a lot of lingering echo yet these players, members of the California EAR Unit and Xtet, are specialists in new music. And they

brought an intriguing West Coast sensibility to Messiaen's hallucinatory apocalyptic visions. The third movement, 'Abyss of the Birds' is a plangent clarinet solo, and Walker used the church's reverberations to make his tone sound disembodied, timeless.

Then for two hours on Sunday afternoon, Mark Robson played the *Vingt Regards*. It was an exceptional, world-class performance, deeply committed and massively virtuosic. This work, written in 1944, shortly after Messiaen was released from the Nazi prison camp, is on one level the ultimate Christmas piece, an adoring vision of the infant Jesus. But as in all of Messiaen, it is full of other, often contradictory things. It has huge philosophical concerns, Hindu rhythms, Greek modes and meters, and some of the most voluptuous, downright erotic sonorities in all of piano literature.

Before the performance Scott told the audience that he hoped some day to see Messiaen elevated beyond being merely a musician. 'In an attempt to find a way to reveal theological concepts through sound,' Scott said, Messiaen 'transcends religious denomination and touches on a universal sense of spirituality.'

This is a particularly good time of year for Messiaen's music and his message – no one loved Christmas more than he. And by the way, if you want an indication of just how wide-spread Messiaen interest has become, one of the benefactors of the festival was Matt Groening, creator of *The Simpsons*.

– Mark Swed, *Los Angeles Times*