

# How the Musical Mind “Sees”

## The Music of Jacob Druckman, Stephen Albert, and Ronald Perera

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**T**HE PRESENT NEW CLASSICAL music scene has a problem with the past. Pierre Boulez said that one was “irrelevant” after WWII if one did not write serial music. Although this approach has now been largely abandoned, it would still seem that those composers who wrote “in the tradition” have been forgotten, neglected, or just considered irrelevant. Most of the trendy music of today is post-minimalist, totalist, neo-folk/classical, or neo-pop/classical. It is attempting to find an audience among the general population who now have no knowledge of, and no interest in, the classical tradition. As a result, it is very much dumbed down providing now more an experience of entertainment rather than art. This music now borders on kitsch, a superficial and rather dumb experience, one that confirms a listener’s smug understanding of the world rather than one that seeks to elevate, inform, and even reveal a new understanding of the self and the universe. Even Susan Sontag, in her later years, rejected her youthful leveling of

all artistic creation and experience for a realization of the existence and beauty of high art and its lasting power.

It is in this context that I discuss the music of three composers: Jacob Druckman, Stephen Albert, and Ronald Perera. I do so to expose their depth of talent, and to demonstrate how musical ideas take shape and why they matter. Everything in the natural, literary, and man-made technological world is at their compositional disposal. The lives and examples of these artists represent an important reminder *not* to jettison innovative high art as a ruin or relic of an irrelevant era, but rather, to understand how such creativity sees everything in the world as the materials for an aesthetic engagement with life’s eclecticism predicated on the relevance of what we hear and how we can express it.

Jacob Druckman was born in 1928 and studied at Juilliard School with Bernard Wagenaar, Vincent Persichetti and Peter Mennin, and with Aaron Copland at Tanglewood. These composers are solidly in

the American classical tradition, and wrote a wide array of music, including chamber and symphonic. Druckman taught at the Juilliard School, Bard College, and Tanglewood; in addition he was director of the Electronic Music Studio and Professor of Composition at Brooklyn College. He was also associated with the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center in New York City. In so doing, Druckman experienced certain revelations provided by electro-acoustic music. It must be remembered that in those days all sound, whether electronic or concrete, was recorded on magnetic tape, and that the composition of a work involved the splicing together of small pieces of tape. It demanded that a composer understand and acknowledge the morphology of a sound in a detailed manner. Thus, composers worked with the notions of attack, development/transformation, decay, and release. These experiences transformed Druckman's compositional approach from that of his teachers to a music that was primarily about the dramatic gesture (like a dancer moving her arm through space), attention to color, and the dramatic and theatrical nature of music. In the spring of 1982, he was Resident-In-Music at the American Academy in Rome. In April of that year, he was appointed composer-in-residence with the New York Philharmonic, where he served two two-year terms and was Artistic Director of the HORIZONS music festival. In the last years of his life, Druckman was Professor of Composition at the School of Music at Yale University. He died in 1992 of lung cancer.

After his youthful neo-Classical period, Druckman wrote many early pieces for what was then called tape and instrument(s), as he explored the electro-acoustic realm. These pieces of the 1960s were brazenly dramatic and virtuosic, exploring the electro-acoustic medium

itself and the extended capability of each instrument for which he wrote. The *Animus* series included works for tape and solo trombone, clarinet, and soprano and two percussion. In these works, according to Mark Swed, "the drama becomes a visceral experience through the exploration of such elemental human concerns as madness, violence, and sexuality. In one extreme example, the highly virtuosic, ironically titled *Valentine* for solo contrabass, Druckman requires the soloist to assault his instrument with near sadistic ferocity." In his next phase, like his mentor Luciano Berio, Druckman explored music of the past through the musical quotation of long-dead composers. In *Delizie contente che l'alme beate* (1976), for wind quintet and tape, fragments of an aria from Cavalli's opera *Il Giasone* glide in the background; and in *Prism* (1980), for orchestra, the three movements are based on quotes from three *Medea* operas by Charpentier, Cavalli, and Cherubini. (Druckman at this time was exploring the possibility of an opera based on the *Medea* theme.)

But the work *Incenters*, from 1968, has no perceivable quotes. The title refers to the center of the incircle of a triangle or other figure, and is moderately enigmatic in relationship to music. In this case, it means that the three brass instruments—trumpet, French horn, and trombone—drive the activity of the others, which include winds, percussion and keyboards, and strings. This 13-minute work bustles with activity and drama. It is dense in texture, has an unprepared climax where you would expect it (about two-thirds of the way into the piece), is all about gesture, and not at all about harmony or melody, or even motive. It employs spatial notation, which means that space is equal to time (noteheads or beams can be extended to show longer or shorter duration, which means that the durations played are often approximate,

and that vertical sonorities that appear are also only approximate, thus, the de-emphasis of harmony. The materials are also non-tonal, which means in this case there is no focus on a particular pitch or hierarchy of pitches, but at the same time, he uses certain sets (small groups of pitches) that have a particular sound and color, just as a major or minor chord do. The pitches are very freely chosen (which is to say, this is not a serial work, where pitches are ordered in a very organized fashion), so as to fit the gesture desired.

There is little to no beat or meter as the music moves through time, more like a river of fluctuating tension than the accumulation of discrete and related pieces of a puzzle. The listener is drawn to the element of color, and this is one of the primary characteristics of the piece. At its beginning, the trumpet plays the open and consonant interval of a perfect fifth. As this sound fades, we hear a timbral change as the oboe takes over the pitch, which is held for a fairly long time while other burbles and gurgles enter. The piece is off, and it is a kaleidoscope of vivid and lively textures, colors, and sonorities. It moves moment by moment, with each successive moment seemingly following from the previous. Each action suggests the next reaction. It alternates bursts of energy and quiescence. There is little repetition, and few moments that are retained in the memory. The motion is like virtuosic moves in a modern dance, or assorted flickers in an abstract piece of visual art. Forget about large-scale structure. Just hang on and enjoy the ride of this youthful, exuberant work that features the colors of the EA studio and the freedom and sounds of jazz combined with a sense of classical direction—an extended mystery tour.

The success of *Incenters*, and its recording, part of the seminal series of American music recorded by Arthur Weisberg and his

intrepid band, The Contemporary Ensemble, on the Nonesuch label, resulted in Druckman going mainstream, much to his surprise, with a commission from the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. The work, *Windows* (1972), is not my favorite, but you might wish to judge for yourself. The conceit of the work is that every now and then a “window” opens to music that is redolent of the past, heard from afar. As a close friend remarked, it is often difficult to know when these windows open and close, and the music is not particularly distinctive. Also, the orchestration is often too dense with its overwrought textures. *Prism*, of 1980, is more successful. It combines Druckman’s own language with real quotes that provide more inherent drama in the unfolding of the musical line, and the textures are now lean and clear; in fact, they glisten. (This kind of musical quoting was in vogue from Berio’s *Sinfonia* of the late Sixties, through the Eighties, and originated in the electro-acoustic studio, where any source material was considered fair game. You can check out other examples of this practice in the works of George Rochberg (*Music for the Magic Theatre*), Karlheinz Stockhausen (*Hymnen*), and George Crumb (*Makrokosmos Book I*.)

Some critics and listeners think quoting is for the birds, or even unethical. Yet, throughout history composers frequently borrowed or stole from each other, or even themselves. Handel was a master at this. Brahms wrote music on a theme by Haydn. It can be seen as honoring the past. However, with Druckman I find it problematic. I agree with the British critic Andrew Porter, a long-time music writer for *The New Yorker*, who said that quoting seemed like painting graffiti upon a classical work or putting a mustache on a Mona Lisa. For Porter, music of the old masters wins out in the end.

It may be that Druckman thought the same, because his reliance on quoting

others' music almost stopped at some point. If he continued it at all, it became rather more like subtle references to one particular element from another work. In the work *Aureole*, for example, dedicated to Leonard Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic, who performed the work in New York and then on a tour of Japan, Druckman makes reference to the rhythm of the Kaddish prayer, which Bernstein also uses in his Kaddish Symphony, and which he borrowed from the Jewish prayer tradition.

Finally, *Summer Lighting* is a late work from 1990. In its 8-minute duration, it summarizes all of the composer's strengths. It has color galore, marvelous climaxes, and fast music that truly bobs and weaves. It has a beautiful melody and moments of sensuous languor, leopard-like. Its pacing and structure are sure, and it has a wide emotional range from the mystical to the low-down. Maybe, just maybe, it is Druckman's finest little gem.

**S**tephen Albert was born in New York City in 1941, thirteen years after Druckman. His early musical endeavors involved playing both the piano, and the brass instruments, French horn and trumpet. He began compositional studies with Elie Siegmeister (a composer with a decidedly American vocabulary, who incorporated popular musical languages in his operas, symphonies, and his many choral, chamber, and solo works), and then continued a few years later at the Eastman School of Music, where he studied with Bernard Rogers, a composer of opera and symphonies solidly in the American-neo-classical tradition. Albert then concluded his studies with Joseph Castaldo at the Philadelphia Musical Academy, where he received his B.M. in 1962.

The following year, Albert worked with George Rochberg at the University of Pennsylvania. At this time, Rochberg was writing serial music of a lyrical nature, a language he was to abandon a year later, however, soon after the death of his son following a long illness. I suspect that Albert was very much influenced by the lyrical side of all these composers, and perhaps a seed of Rochberg's soon-to-come apostasy from serialism as well. For throughout his career, Albert railed against serialism—the totalitarianism of the European avant-garde—and, like Rochberg, called for a reconciliation with the past and its musical traditions. Indeed, Albert's musical language is rich and deep with associations to the tonal music tradition.

By the early Seventies, in *Cathedral Music*, Albert was already writing music that partakes of a romantic sensitivity, with engaging harmonies that are often quasi-tonal, and melodies with tonal implications. His slow music (Movement IV) creates mysterious, foggy, and allusive textures, with slow-moving and memorable melodies. The clearly etched fast music of Movement V, in contrast, can also be boisterous. Already in this work, he is not afraid of directness and simplicity. He presents clear motivic ideas, sometimes used with Varesian repetition, featuring brass. (Remember he was a brass player!) Sometimes his tonal fragments are overlapped to create sonorities of greater dissonance and complexity. He sometimes clears these complex decks with moments of tonal simplicity. The faster music is particularly good, with strong forward direction expressed in a clear structure; and it is intensely dramatic, with its quick changes of texture and dissonance and consonant levels. Like the man, it is strongly argued and always intensely passionate.

*To Wake the Dead* begins Albert's delight in, perhaps even infatuation with, the writings of James Joyce, with the texts of this work coming from that modernist author's novel *Finnegan's Wake*. The work is scored for the same ensemble as Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*: soprano, flute, clarinet, piano, violin, cello, with the addition of a harmonium and a percussionist who plays on the strings of the piano (this last item I think is a quasi-borrowing of the inside-of-the-piano music found in George Crumb's *Makrokosmos Book I*). The work is in seven movements, six of which are songs and one just for instruments. Joyce held an interest for many composers during the middle to late 20th century, due to his frequent use of words for their musical or sonic nature, rather than for their meaning (e.g. Berio, Takemitsu, Cage, Barber, Del Tredici, Gideon, and Martino, among others). And as Albert says in his program note, it also "is informed by rich imagery, a mysterious atmosphere and an almost hypnotic rhythm. As the language of the novel is akin to the language of dreams, it seemed an intriguing prospect to translate this dream-state into something more palpable, less surreal." In the guise of making this language "more palpable, less surreal," the music is even more tonal than Albert's previous work. Tonal themes are lodged in larger non-tonal textures; good ol' dance music is to be heard; and Albert

**We perceive in these three composers' work the important relationship between language and expression, both literary and musical.**

even quotes one of Joyce's own tunes, a little folk ditty that, not surprisingly, goes awry. The singer, who in *Pierrot Lunaire* is actually a chanteuse, is here both a classical singer and one who must lift her heels—and voice— as if in a bar where Irish jigs are played and danced. The musical language used is wide, moving effortlessly from non-tonal to tonal realms, classical to old-time popular song, with and without interpenetration of these styles. It is a fine display of Albert's increasing compositional dexterity.

In Albert's relatively small output—he died tragically in an auto accident at age 52—there are numerous works for voice, often on Joycean texts. These include *Distant Hills*, *Treestone*, and vocal works employing other texts. Albert did not compose quickly or easily, but I suspect that texts helped him in the creation of musical material, in the genesis of musical ideas.

Having said this, one of his best works is his *RiverRun* symphony of 1983. And while there are no words in this composition, its title comes from Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. The piece is in four movements: "Rain Music," "Leafy Speafing," "Beside the Rivering Waters," and "River's End." All are waters in movement.

The entire work might be thought of as a mash-up between Stravinsky of the Russian period with some delightful minimalist elements, but these are only basic references. Albert combines the non-tonal (while never serial) with the tonal, as Stravinsky does in *The Rite of Spring*, along with Stravinskian ostinati and walking bass figures. Albert's orchestration partakes of the glistening quality of some of John Adams's early scores, with twinkling flutes and piccolos combined with the pitched percussion of vibraphones, glockenspiel, and piano. Albert employs both recognizable and memorable tonal melodies, as well as impertinent, and

registrally wide-ranging, quasi-improvisational flights of pure fancy. In so doing, Albert blends qualities of the past and the present.

The First movement, “Rain Music,” begins in the minor key, and is portentous and mysterious, heavy, and deep in register. This introduction precedes light and delicate music in the highest register, of woodwinds flickering, like nervous rain and mildly static. These two states are presented then in alternation. A third section of ostinatos in strings, much more lively and motoric, also presents melodic materials thrown back and forth between woodwinds and strings. The orchestration is finally detailed. Brass come to the fore to provide a climax before the music returns to its lighter rain theme. Albert mixes reiterations of low, covered brass and piano, with more portentous music in low brass. The music builds tension, and then waits and hovers before moving to another climax in the brass with piercing flutes up high. The music builds until the end with a massive crescendo.

“Leafy Speafing” is slow and mysterious, beginning with an improvisatory melody in the clarinet, taken up by the violin and then the flute. It moves slowly and episodically, with these three soloists playing either unaccompanied or over a bed of slow-moving mid-range strings. This opening gives way to a churning music that is turbulent and rather quick-paced. Its layering in the orchestration is lush and fantastical, with excited strings. This gives way to another section of two flutes delicately pairing with music from the improvisatory opening. The violin enters into the conversation. This is, again, ruminatory music, with splashes of color provided by the piano and vibraphone. The turbulent music interrupts, now with layers of ostinati that are right out of *The Rite of Spring*. But Albert’s melodies, *molto romantico*, are all his own;

they are big and bold, and mostly diatonic. The orchestral piano is prominent towards the conclusion, which heads towards a massive climax, but then peters out. It provides a nice corollary to the first, in that it suggests it will end in a similar fashion, and then surprises by not doing so.

“Beside the Rivering Waters” is kaleidoscopic and a bit of a pastiche. Albert quotes his own *To Wake the Dead*, the same Joycean tune, and alludes to a bit of Crumb’s aforementioned *Makrokosmos*. Different musics are quickly abutted against each other or layered on top of each other. Yet every motivic strand has a clear and strong profile. The thick textures are never opaque. Occasionally the presence of low reiterated pulses produce a Russian allusion, perhaps Mussorgsky or Shostakovich. Like the latter’s music, it is quite comical in a dark way. It too just stops, as if in mid- course, cut off.

“River’s End” begins with a lovely walking paced solo in the horn. The strings take over in a rich texture. A new section of stasis is followed again by the horn playing its fine melody, supported with a background of long-held notes in the strings. Ruminations in the brass lead to the contrabassoon, then to a flute partnering with violins. The overall texture is thick and in the lowest register. Does the river widen and deepen as it seeks its release? This longest movement, at ten minutes, is the most variegated in texture, with the presence of many solos, as in the first movement. The piano plays solo with music almost like a music box, followed by wandering string solos. It is often a bit murky, maybe obscured, and of mixed emotion. A huge climax, the biggest, occurs at the golden mean point, only to be stopped abruptly and overtaken by woodwind solos over strings. A churning, and brass interjections, turn into a massive build towards...a cutoff, with a return to

quiet woodwind solos punctuated by piano and glockenspiel strikes. Shimmering strings are held with quiet tinkles in the piano and glockenspiel as the music quietly fades out. Perhaps that river is blending gently into the waters of the ocean.

The entire work is over one-half hour in duration, but it passes quickly and effortlessly. Albert is a master of drama and pacing, and his materials are finely etched and memorable. If occasionally derivative of others, or even himself, this is a fine piece of music.

**R**onald Perera was born in Boston in 1941. He studied composition with Leon Kirchner during his time at Harvard, which might account for the rigor and clear structure in his music. He also studied electronic music with Gottfried Michael Koenig at the University of Utrecht and with Mario Davidovsky (of the highly influential *Synchronism* series consisting of works for solo instruments and electronic sounds), and this had a strong influence on his music of the Seventies. He also worked independently with Randall Thompson in choral music. The approaches of these teachers represent wide aesthetic interests and different understandings of what music is, can, or should be. Kirchner, who studied with Arnold Schoenberg, was a strident atonalist, an expressionist at heart. His music is tough, wildly emotional, hard-edged, and always clearly structured. It is intellectual and rigorous, always purposeful, perhaps even confrontational. Davidovsky's music is always clean, sharp-edged, and glassy in its brilliant timbres. It verges on the antiseptic. Thompson is the author of approachable works for amateur and professional choruses. It is always approachable on first hearing, and it is tonal

in the old-fashioned sense of that word.

All these influences show up in Perera's individual voice. While eschewing Kirchner's hardness and confrontational stance, Perera's music is clear and clean in structure and purpose. His electronic works demonstrate Davidovsky's attention to detailed timbre and the unfolding of electronic sounds. The development of his language seems always to have been based on the movement of harmonies, predicated by a refusal to abandon a tonal orientation, even if the earlier music is not explicitly tonal. Also, Perera has a knack for coming up with beautiful melodic materials. Schuller, in revising his excitement and participation in the avant-garde of the 1950s and 1960s, decried the giving up of melody, and even suggested that many of the most famous avant-garde composers probably just couldn't write a good one. The result was, as Rochberg noted, the creation of much music that had no place in the memory, ultimately without individual profile, bland, and anodyne. This is *not* the case with Perera's music, which is assured, lyrical, approachable, and inventive.

One of Perera's early works of the Seventies is *Three Poems of Günter Grass*. The work, commissioned by the Goethe Institute of Boston for the new music ensemble Musica Viva, is scored for a chamber ensemble, including mezzo-soprano and flute (doubling piccolo, alto flute), clarinet (doubling bass clarinet, alto sax), violin, viola, cello, piano, and tape. This is an expanded ensemble of Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* forces, similar to that of Albert's *To Wake the Dead*. The additions are the inclusion of a solo part for viola, rather than the doubling that Schoenberg used in his work, and the crucial addition of an electro-acoustic element. It should be noted that this was a time when many composers, as we have seen with Druckman, and of course

Davidovsky, were writing for live instruments and tape, the conjunction of which created a critical issue. Because the sounds on tape are immovable, the musicians and conductor must follow the tape; however, this rigidity presented a problem, as most music does not just need—but demands—flexibility. This was also the time that minimalism and multi-tracking had swung into high gear, so that playing to a click-track or in the groove became, without any rubato then, more acceptable and widespread. However, this was not the norm in most classical music. Perera gets through this problem by having various tape parts starting and stopping at various points in the piece, thus involving a tape performer. The tape part is mostly *musique concrète*, the sounds being manipulated and altered recordings of real sounds of a “railroad train, a fragment of a Hitler rally, and so on,” as well as synthesized sounds.

The three poems that Perera set include *Gleisdreieck*, *Klappstühle*, and *Schlaflos*, written by Günter Grass, who is most famous for his book *The Tin Drum*, a magical realist novel about World War II and a young boy who refuses to grow. Grass was a novelist, poet, illustrator, sculptor, and won the Nobel Prize in 1999. Only in 2006 did he reveal that he had been drafted into the Waffen-SS in 1944 and served with them until his capture in April 1945. The three poems were written during the postwar years, when Germany was divided into East and West.

*Gleisdreieck* is inspired by the eponymous U-Bahn elevated train station in Berlin’s Kreuzberg neighborhood. It was the scene of a horrific accident in 1908, when two trains crashed causing multiple fatalities. Before the building of the Berlin Wall, the station was at the juncture of East and West. The poem alludes to washerwomen who pass back and forth between the

sectors to do their work. There is a spider who, from his glands, spins tracks. The mood is surreal and macabre, and questions the division of East and West.

The work begins with the sound of a train and people exiting. Perera then freely enters the text in the middle, spoken. Its numerous repetitions recall *She was a visitor* by Robert Ashley, as it is mesmerizing, and suggests a time that stands still— a hazy reflection of a past period. A drone and repeated motives with echo add to this sensation. The entrance of instruments with these same qualities continues this musical atmosphere. The motives suggest a train whistle and then transform into purely musical gestures, short and abrupt, but also with some sustain that suggests the echo of the train gestures. The vocalist now starts the poem from its beginning still in spoken tones, and then moves freely into singing. The piano then plays music with a jazz ostinato. And in fact, the music is ‘popular,’ what one might have heard in a Berlin cabaret. The music hovers in a middle ground as it again transforms back into a shady new music world of instrumental repetitions of descending short figures, alternating with lyrical vocal writing. The instruments provide a delicate accompaniment for the voice, which leads all of the action. The tape part then enters with a reappearance of the ostinato, which is joined by the piano in unison and the jazz music.

The music has a continuous sense of movement and has sections of transpositions. It fades on the repetition of the word *gleisdreieck*, and a repeated motive of the descent and then rise of a minor third back to the note of origination. The music is mostly tonal, jazzy, with moments or short sections of atonality, the latter providing sensations of dislocation. (By the way, this minor third figure is similar to that found in Albert’s *To Wake the Dead*,



wherein he repeats the same figure for the name ‘Timothy’, another word of three syllables.) Perhaps more importantly, both Perera and Albert were involved in the recovery of tonality. The movement fades out as it began, with an inchoate music in the instruments, a repeated phrase in the tape part—now male—and a final fading out of the ostinato in the piano. Perera repeats and subtly alters his materials in a way that is quirky and formally clear. At the beginning and end, there is a sound like that between stations on an old radio, an electro-acoustic noise with some dirt in it. The eerie quality of this sound takes us in and out of that earlier time.

*Klappstuhle*, or folding chairs, is about German emigration following the war. It suggests that whether one stays in, or leaves, Germany, one cannot escape the utter shame of the German people. It begins with many bell sounds, perhaps of doors opening and closing, church bells, subtly altered to sound a little out of kilter, and music, or snippets, of a distorted waltz: Johann Strauss’s *Künstlerleben* (“Artist’s Life”), which is heard on a distorted music box. It is rather gentle and serene, like looking at dancers at a ball through slightly drunken eyes. The instruments enter playing real waltz music, or again, brief snippets, that are interrupted or overlaid with other less tonal materials, as well as scalar, diatonic and chromatic fragments. The voice enters with instrumental accompaniment that is reminiscent—or has a whiff—of the second Viennese school, atonal Schoenberg, or Berg. The vocal material is tonal and lyrical, even playful in its evocation of high society life. As with del Tredici’s *Final Alice*, repetition of a phrase is used to suggest things gone askew. Thirds, particularly of the minor sort, pervade. The voice is allowed a completely triadic arpeggio pushing from low to the

highest range, as if quoting a song of the Romantic period. As in the first movement, the music fades, to be concluded by a single low piano note. The general tone is one of nostalgic melancholia.

*Schlaflos*, or Sleepless, is nightmarish poetry, with surreal scenes of desperation, remnants of war, as in “The bed leaves for a journey,” and the central point, “And everywhere/The Customs interpose: What’s in your baggage?” The baggage of the War and Holocaust loom large, but as images that cannot be revealed, acknowledged, or confronted. The music begins with a scrape inside the piano, the whispering of numbers by the ensemble members, then a desperate and vacant duet with piccolo and bass clarinet. The voice enters with a line almost sultry, and strings play *col legno battuto* (striking the strings with the wooden part of the bow), then pizzicato, then high harmonics. All is desiccated, fleshless. The music is episodic, proceeding fitfully. The voice then presents in *Sprechstimme* before a recorded voice appears with isolated words, almost in a stutter, and a recorded voice speaks accompanied by long-held uncomfortably grainy electronic tones. Then the live vocalist declaims texts in spoken voice accompanied by semi-tonal wanderings/glissandi in the strings, and then accompanied by a recorded man’s voice, presumably Hitler’s. Ever quickening, non-coordinated string glissandi lead to a stochastic climax; this is a musical collage of disparate materials. The climax fades with sputterings in the strings and a reminiscence of the minor third motive of the opening song. It is an unhappy and unresolved conclusion, appropriate for topics that allow no closure. Finally, the work altogether provides a melding of live and recorded music, musical languages, vocal techniques, and lyrical and memorable melodies that are perfectly

## The eclecticism evidenced in these works speaks to the ability of the human mind to discern its place in society and the natural world.

suiting to the texts. In its truthfulness to those words, this work is one of depth and transcendent meaning.

Like Druckman, Perera dropped out of the realm of electro-acoustic music later in his career; Druckman to write many works for orchestra, and Perera, to write more for voice, or voice and instruments. The former's gift is for color, which can be exploited with orchestral forces, and the latter's gift is for writing beautiful melodies for single voices or voices en masse.

*Visions*, written almost twenty years after *Three Poems of Gunter Grass* in 1992, for two sopranos and chamber ensemble, is in three movements looking at three different artistic visions: the painter, writer, and sculptor, and is based on the poetry of three different poets. The musical language used in each movement is chosen to reflect the individual character of each of the texts. The first movement, "Sky Above Clouds" (for Georgia O'Keefe), contains continuous eighth notes in the instrumental accompaniment that suggest a continuity of the ever-same yet changing sky. Sections of chordal material are rich in color. The two sopranos sing lines that are both declamatory and lyrical. They are, not surprisingly, like the clouds, often in the stratospheric part of their range. Their relationship is almost like clouds that blend as they pass each other, briefly merge, and then go their own ways. The music easily floats along with moments of punctuation, which builds to a climax at the end on the text "toward the vision/there is nowhere to go beyond."

The second movement, "The Writer," features sections of quick repeated sixteenth notes, suggesting the clicking and

clacking of typewriter keys. The alternating sections of internal introspection feature one voice in lyrical writing, with similar accompaniment by the instruments. The second voice finally enters. The voices represent the young writer and daughter of the poet. The daughter is working. A starling was stuck in the very same room as the one the writer is in now. After a long and bloody time, it finally finds its way out. The bird's fight for survival, for life or death, is just like the creative process in which the writer is now engaged. This internal, creative battle is represented in the friction between its tonal and serial materials, a jarring combination of perspectives. However, even at its most complex, the music is never harsh or fearsome, but rather always expressive.

The third and final movement, "After Brancusi," is solidly planted, with a reiterated bass note, in B flat major, and the presence of tonal harmonies. The two voices sing in tandem, mostly note for note, while the accompaniment is luxuriant. The surfaces, like Brancusi's bronze sculptures, are shining. The melodic lines traverse a widely expressive space. They return to a middle range at the conclusion, which the instruments then finalize with a classical iteration of three repeated B flat major chords, as if to state that the wholeness of the sculpture has affirmed the wholeness of the world.

Finally, *The Saints* was written in 1990 with the subtitle "Three Pieces for Orchestra with Audience Participation." This is because it was commissioned by the New York Chamber Symphony of the 92nd Street Y in New York for its Sidney A. Wolff

School Music Series, a series involving children's participation. The entire work is decidedly tonal and welcoming. It could almost be a pops piece, which I do not mean in any demeaning way.

The first movement is wonderfully clear in structure and timbre, often featuring the sections of the orchestra playing by themselves. The opening features upward rising scales in the strings, with fanfare-like materials in the brass and timpani. The gestures and sound are quite Baroque. This is followed by chirping winds in a decidedly minimalist figure. Brass instruments interrupt these sounds with their own similar but different music, with clear phrase structure—the music breathes in clear parcels—ending with a chord borrowed from the lexicon of one of Stravinsky's Neo-classic works (it is a gorgeous chord very much worth stealing, and just right in this situation). At this point in the journey, it is finally the strings' turn to lead, and they take this music in a somewhat more Coplandesque direction of, say, *Appalachian Spring* or *Rodeo*. But the mood darkens with the entrance of the timpani, and a French horn that plays a lovely solo based on the peppy and rhythmic wind figure, soon to be partnered by a few of those winds. But it is now expressed with pathos. The strings finally enter as well, expressing a prairie moroseness; the brass intone some of their opening music, but now gentle and serene, and the movement just drifts away. The movement has clear shape and form, phrasing, and distinctions of timbre and register that make it easily glide through its 3 1/2-minute duration.

In the middle movement, the sounds of the orchestral instruments are expanded by some pre-recorded electronic sounds, and others made by the musicians in the orchestra, thus bringing Perera full circle, back to his music of the late Sixties and

Seventies. The work begins with glissandi in the timpani and strings, followed by finger snaps and vocalization by the orchestral members. A fugue starts and quickly goes awry. Then there is music almost of a hoedown quality. There are trumpet, then flute solos. The music is perky and alive. It starts and stops, moving quickly from one musical idea to another. The middle section is highly gestural, with the addition of vocal utterances, finger snaps, and finally the addition of electronic sounds. Unlike in the *Three Poems of Günter Grass*, this is light and frothy, but with a witty sense of humor (imagine, contemporary music with mirth!) This builds to a wicked climax with instrumental trills, leaving the electronics and strings alone, followed by piano, and then with a single stroke, the timpani softly finishes this music.

The last movement features the tuba at the start, and riffs from *When the Saints Go Marching In*, but all just a bit hidden. The brass and clarinet finally play a full version of the tune, then the strings come in doing the same. It plays with the conventions of how it might have been heard in the Twenties or Thirties. The entire orchestra then joins in, and the conclusion is now forte with the timpani providing a conclusive strike as well. This is a rousing finish to the entire three-movement work, which, if a little bit tongue-in-cheek (or very much tongue-in-cheek), is just the right length for this delightfully simple—but not simple-minded—joyful orchestral composition.

**W**e perceive in these three composers' work the important relationship between language and expression, both literary and musical. Whether through the quoting of other compositions or the inspiration derived from one of music's sister arts, these

composers translate the world aesthetically through the language of music, filtered and molded by the creative act. The examples of Druckman, Albert, and Perera show just what a musical mind “sees” in making works of such quality.

What is at stake here? In some sense, everything. The eclecticism evidenced in these works speaks to the ability of the human mind to discern its place in society and the natural world. Every musical composition guides the listener’s soul, like a boat that carries one across the water, through the undulating waves of temporal experience. The composer is the captain of this ship for the duration of the artistic voyage, the musicians the crew, and the instruments the hull and frame.

The metaphor is apt, since the musical crossing is one that traverses time and space itself, which are mediums within which our souls are suspended, and onto which our consciousness grasps as we navigate the experience of life.

The language of the arts, as we have seen, is the best vehicle to advocate for such knowledge of the world. Its poesis is most poignant in the musical arts, which at its root places the human heart, mind, and voice in accord with the infinity of moments that constitute reality. The lives and music of Druckman, Albert, and Perera embody the important lesson that innovative high art should *not* be neglected, is not irrelevant, and should not be forgotten.  ♫