



New York audience of nonmusicians who follow his every move. He's gotten some international attention (of which more below), but most of his energy is spent in direct connection with the community he works in, with the churches and performance centers he lives among. He's got hundreds of fans who, otherwise, don't follow contemporary music at all. His music's appeal is not an abstraction he reads about in the paper—he can feel it from the people who come back to hear him year after year. His career path looks more like that of a popular minister than an art celebrity.

It could have been otherwise. Recently turned 70, Moore was once a Pierre Boulez protégé, and the Maitre even commissioned an orchestra piece from him: *Wildfires and Field Songs* of 1975, for the New York Philharmonic. (Though the style was basically serialist, Moore slipped some blues into the second movement.) "Trained to the teeth," as he puts it, at Juilliard with Persichetti and Berio, Moore groomed for

Carman

by Kyle Gann

I've long thought of Carman Moore's career as a sustainable paradigm for the composer of the future. Few, I think, would call him famous, yet he is manifestly successful. In a profession in which fame and success are pretty much considered synonymous, this is a curious idea. Moore doesn't have any operas commissioned by the Met, and he isn't flitting among big-five orchestras fulfilling commissions. He has something better: a local

the classical path. (The apartment he moved to across the street from Juilliard is one he's now inhabited for some 43 years.) But in the '60s he got involved with the happenings at the Judson Church crowd, banging bottles and blowing whistles with Terry Riley and artists Claes Oldenburg and Jim Dine. For a while he also wrote music criticism for the *Village Voice*. As an African American musician he had already kept one foot in jazz, and the happening scene made him comfortable with other types of improvisation as well. There was no way an artist of such disparate energies

and interests was going to hew to the straight and narrow.

And so what could have become a Juilliard-trained serialist detoured instead to become the director of the little-known but much loved Skymusic ensemble, and for many years composer-in-residence of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. Skymusic is made up of musicians from diverse backgrounds, for whose particular talents Moore composes with Ellington-like specificity: pianist Marianna Rosett, keyboardists Kenneth Bichel and Eric Johnson, percussionist Gordon Gottlieb, violinist Leroy Jenkins, flutist Katherine Hay, and others. Imagine a music exactly poised between classical and jazz, but conditioned by a strong dose of Taoist thought: that's Skymusic. The music they play has nothing to do with jazz forms or soloistic energy, but it is couched in jazz harmonies, and there is room for improvisation. The solos, though, are so smoothly fused with the written passages that you can't tell where the notation ends and the extem-

rainbow of other groups, and involved gospel, rap, electronic sampling, and jazz as well as classical idioms. Ten thousand listeners heard the piece outdoors at Lincoln Center, and in December of 1999 the work was reprised at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Cape Town, South Africa. Moore has also made CDs of meditations in praise of God, Allah, Vishnu, the Torah, and Shintoism. As with his musical tastes, he seems to have never met a religion he didn't like,

But back to Taoism. Despite the planet's worth of influences he brings together, Moore has at the core of most of his music a still center—in fact, one could say it's that still center that makes the kaleidoscopic variety possible. Frequently there's a mid-register drone that runs through a piece, or simply a sound that never leaves. *Mystery of Tao*, one of his signature works from 2001, is for string trio and keyboard sampler; the keyboardist plays a pulse on a high, gonglike tone around which all the gentle string melodies revolve. *Variations on a West*

language. The forces of political correctness (a term invented by liberals to satirize the more dogmatic and humorless among them) have cast aspersions on those who "appropriate" the musics of other cultures. But music, with its limited ability to state facts about the world, never fit into the ideology of identity politics anyway, and needs to be rescued from it. Like Henry Cowell before him, Moore sees the entire planet's music as his to draw from, and he picks his performers to ensure authenticity. Moore has written a concerto for Chinese *pipa*, a concerto for blues piano for Jay McShann, and a piece for gospel singers and orchestra for Cissy Houston (a close friend and the mother of Whitney Houston). He was delighted when, in 1993, Tibetan flutist Nawang Khechog insisted in sitting in on a performance of his *Righteous Heroes: Sacred Spaces*, another gorgeous work that ties its clouds of dissonance together with a rhythmic drone on C.

Making a music both spiritual and intellectually challenging, while bringing in a classical sense of structure, jazz freedom, and most world musics? It's a big project, and Moore accomplishes it not by borrowing from existing styles (though he's done that too in *Mass for the 21st Century*), but by creating his own calm, centered idiom into which other influences can float without tipping the boat. It is a measure of Moore's success, of his universality, even, that he doesn't fit in the tuxedoed world of the big orchestra circuits, nor in the scruffy world of the avant-garde. Where he fits is among his fans, who come from all walks of life, and who respond to his music because it speaks in all languages—and has something comforting to say in every one.

Composer Kyle Gann is a professor at Bard College. His most recent book is Music Downtown: Writings from the Village Voice (University of California Press). His music is recorded on the New World, Cold Blue, and Lovely Music labels.

Moore

porizing begins, and Moore's proud of that ambiguity.

Then there's that Taoist influence. More than almost any composer I can think of from an avant-garde background, Moore is associated with spirituality, and comfortable with it. His magnum opus to date is his two-hour *Mass for the 21st Century*. Written as a call for sanity during the first Iraq war, it was originally written for the New York Muslim Youth Choir, the Chinese-American Children's Choir of Northern New Jersey, the Hare Krishna Choir from Long Island, and an ecumenical

African Lament (1987) spins off of a rhythmic ostinato that migrates among different percussion instruments, drops out occasionally, but keeps reappearing. It's comforting music, and one could accuse its atmospheric panspirituality of New-Agey propensities. However, Moore's range is breathtaking, and the constancy of the drones or ostinatos seduces one from noticing at times how far out the music gets in dissonance and complexity.

Moore's omnivorousness harks back to a conception, that's been in danger of being discredited, of music as a universal