

## CONSUMER GUIDE Kyle Gann

**Bernard, my kid**, saw the *Voice* ad for the Forever Bad Blues Band, featuring La Monte Young's face with only sunglasses, bandanna, grin, and fuzzy beard visible. "I know who that is!" he yelled. "Who?" I coaxed, proud that my eight-year-old recognizes major musical figures. "That's the guy who bombed the World Trade Center!" Oh well, if Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman is rocking Alice Tully Hall, the good news is that there are twice as many CDs as I've ever had to select from before. Hard times have taught artists to put cash into discs rather than gigs, and granters (Mary Flagler Cary, the Copland Fund) are reinforcing that trend. Lay low and survive is the point, and if concerts die in a flash, CDs are (allegedly) forever. Ironically, while discs boom, women composers have vanished.

**American Works for Balinese Gamelan Orchestra (New World)** Downtowners like Barbara Benary and Phil Corner have done gamelan pieces for decades, and it's too bad the earlier generation is ignored here. But this disc is impressive for the sophistication of its American/Balinese cultural fusion. Evan Ziporyn's *Aneh Tapi Nyata* (Strange but True), the "most American" piece, vibrates with an amazing hybrid momentum, like Reich's *Different Trains* with percussion and Asian flute. Ziporyn collaborated on *Kekembangan* with Nyoman Windha, substituting saxophone quartet for voices in a complexly tempo-shifting Balinese style. The other pieces stick close to tradition, and though Michael Tenzer allegedly departs from gamelan norms, I can't hear the difference. **B PLUS**

**Nic Collins: It Was a Dark and Stormy Night (Trace Ele-**



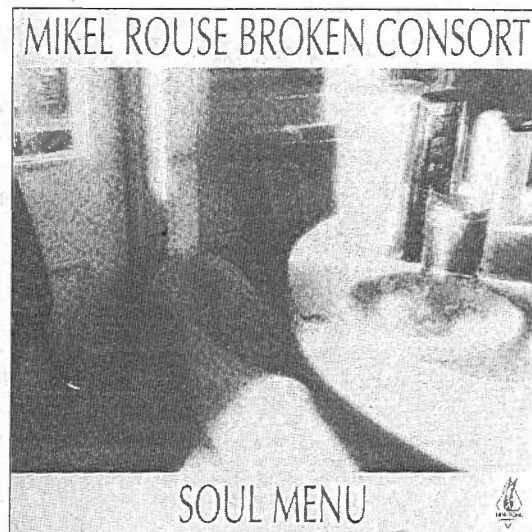
**PICK HIT:** Jerry Hunt

**(New Albion)** Garland may be the only heir to the rolling, mild-mannered, diatonic tradition of Lou Harrison and late-period Henry Cowell. Hardly minimalist, the music doesn't repeat so much as melodicize a small repertoire of diatonic sonorities, with a circumscribed intensity akin to Central American folk music. *Jornada del Muerto* suggests what Gregorian chant might have sounded like if Saint Gregory's monks had been piano-playing cowboys. Its tough, wide-West chords, lovingly traced by Aki Takahashi, are only sporadically present in the more delicate, cluster-filled *Walk in Beauty*, which she also plays. The charm of Garland's trio *Sones de Flor* is due to his Mexican travels, which left him with a poignant touch for the violin. His other new disc, *Nana + Victorio* (Avan), is more austere; this will have wider appeal. **A**

**Philip Glass: Low Symphony (Point)** I've been defending this disc to my new-musicky friends, whose art is so infused with self-

while Hunt rattles jingle bells and scrapes a hardware store of doo-hickeys. *Lattice (stream): ordinal* is a Nancarrowian barrage of nervous piano clusters that sometimes astonishes you with its prettiness. Elsewhere, Hunt surrounds his whistling, cow-horn blowing, and stuttering conversation with metallic bumps and electric shimmerings. His purism is Cagean, but the frenetic gesture-language he's evolved is a purposeful, undecipherable tone-magic. **A PLUS**

**Otto Ketting (Donemus)** Unlike their troglodytic French and German colleagues, the Dutch jumped the 12-tone ship in droves 20 years ago to pioneer their savage brand of postminimalism before American minimalism even lost steam. Andriessen (whose *De Tijd* is out on Nonesuch) is a Bang on a Can hero, but my favorite Netherlander has long been the less minimalist Ketting. His *Symphony for Saxophones and Orchestra*, rereleased here, melts from jackhammer virtuosity into ecstatic calm, combining the bite of good Boulez with



**PICK HIT:** Mikel Rouse

ity and *Hope Chest's* permutational mallet melodies, and to glide with the smooth asymmetry of *Leading the Machine's* seven-beat phrases and four-against-three melody-to-drumbeat ratio. Frequent melodic inspirations cut through the arithmetic. Some of my rocker friends object to the rock clichés (like the title cut's opening), but Rouse deconstructs them, pulling each theme inside out and neatly folding it again. **A**

**Stuart Saunders Smith: Crux (O.O.)** A fertile and persuasive music philosopher tucked away in Baltimore, Smith calls himself a jazzier though his music's texture is serialist, and in the Midwestern milieu he came from, that was no contradiction. Like Hunt, he brings a '70s soundworld to idiosyncratic fruition, though these works aren't recent enough to give a timely picture. Good luck recognizing the melodies (modified from a jazz fakebook) in *Notebook's* mobile form for quartet. *Tunnels* is a seven-minute concrete poetry opera, energetically

melody, and justly tuned, it's his first work to venture up to the 31st harmonic. Meaning the finale's returns to C major ascend from B through B 1/4 sharp to C, and when a harmony like that cadences, it stays cadenced. With a charming second-movement allegro in 7/8, the piece demonstrates Johnston's mastery and just intonation's power in a conventional genre. **B**

**Wes York (New World)** York's made his rep analyzing Feldman and Glass, which takes chutzpah in academe. You can hear Feldman's timbral iconoclasm in his chirpy postminimal chamber pieces, but not Feldman's chromatically ambiguous harmonies. York's idiom is pretty, constant, diatonic, and nonrepetitive, spelling out lively rhythmic systems in slowly changing tonalities, like the music of Paul Epstein. Four of the six works are vocal, with mildly dramatic songlines over accompaniments that fall like raindrops. Three Native Songs on Teton Sioux poems pit piano against vibraphone to pungent effect, and *Reminiscence 2*, the more extended instrumental essay, hops from key to key with a sprightly motivic logic. **B**

**La Monte Young and the Forever Bad Blues Band: Just Stompin' (Gramavision)** The ultimate new-music party disc is here. With this on the stereo, you can corner that blond over the hors d'oeuvres and suavely mention that Young's blues scale contains septimal intervals over the tonic chord (7/6 and 7/4), but five-based intervals on the subdominant. Meanwhile, the Catler brothers' guitars bump and grind in sonic orgasms half an hour long, not-too-subliminally getting across the point you're really try-

Ziporyn collaborated on *Kekembangan* with Nyoman Windha, substituting saxophone quartet for voices in a complexly tempo-shifting Balinese style. The other pieces stick close to tradition, and though Michael Tenzer allegedly departs from gamelan norms, I can't hear the difference. **B PLUS**

**Nic Collins: *It Was a Dark and Stormy Night (Trace Elements)*** I assumed the highlight would be the title cut, which blew me away at the Kitchen. But just as good, *Broken Light*—for string quartet and hot-wired CD player—screws with CDs to loop and distort unfortunate fragments from Baroque concerti (the movements are titled “Corelli,” “Locatelli,” and “Torelli”). The Solder String Quartet fiddles along valiantly in a kind of neo-Baroque, Stockhausenish minimalism. *Dark and Stormy* is a logical tour de force in which nested, self-referential narratives about forgery and appropriation are mirrored by the gradual emergence of the Peruvian tune from which the ensemble's notes had come all along. Great live, the process fogs up in this recorded version. **B PLUS**

**David Dunn: *Angels and Insects (Nonsequitur)*** Dunn is a philosophic conceptualist, and the significance of his noisily meditative disc may be more mystical than musical. *Tabula Angelorum Bonorum 49* computer-samples the names of the angels recorded in the conversations of 16th-century magus John Dee, and slows them into rough, evolving, deep bass drones. Equally electronic-sounding, *Chaos and the Emergent Mind of the Pond* is a compilation of unretouched underwater insect recordings from North America and Africa. Listening is pleasant, if uninvolved, and I love the ideas. **B**

**Peter Garland: *Walk in Beauty***

Chant of Garland's *Two Songs as Flor* is due to his Mexican travels, which left him with a poignant touch for the violin. His other new disc, *Nana + Victorio (Avan)*, is more austere; this will have wider appeal. **A**

**Philip Glass: *Low Symphony (Point)*** I've been defending this disc to my new-musicky friends, whose art is so infused with self-protective ambiguity that Glass's clarity seems a breach of professional manners. It's an admittedly redundant work, with textures no newer than Debussy's *Images*, and syntax on the level of Tchaikovsky. BUT—the music evolves more than it repeats, its logic is leagues above Tchaikovsky's gaffes, and it isn't Glass's fault that well-orchestrated music still sounds like an orchestra. Glass gives David Bowie's themes some twists Bowie didn't think of, and if his ostinatos remind you of old music *now*, you can't take away his originality: he built this style from the three-note scale up. The symphony won't intimidate you the way the totalists do, but it sticks in the mind, and I bet it sounds more solid 15 years hence than Górecki's sentimental fluff. **A MINUS**

**Jerry Hunt: *Ground: Five Mechanic Convention Streams (O.O.)*** Didn't expect this Texas wild man's manic genius to survive on disc, but actually, minus the distraction of his deadpan antics, his sonic originality blares louder. His noises result from electronic skrying with John Dee's angelic tables (see Dunn above); as Hunt puts it, “congruent layers of associations of infection calls evoke, through a directed scanning skrying action, point-specific, melody-action strings embedded in a reference context of conventions of performance.” Whazzit mean? In *Chimanzzi (Olun)*: core, Jane Henry plays stream-of-consciousness violin

20 years ago to protect their savage brand of postminimalism before American minimalism even lost steam. Andriessen (whose *De Tijd* is out on Nonesuch) is a Bang on a Can hero, but my favorite Netherlander has long been the less minimalist Ketting. His *Symphony for Saxophones and Orchestra*, rereleased here, melts from jackhammer virtuosity into ecstatic calm, combining the bite of good Boulez with the rhythmic urgency of early Glass. More recent, *Monumentum* floats diatonic melodies from piano to orchestra. Amazingly, most of the works date from the '70s, but to us late-noticing Yankees, they sound state-of-the-art. **A**

**John Oswald: *Discosphere (Cuneiform)*** The samplemaster's latest is less funny, more acoustically exploratory, than his infamous Plunderphonics disc (destroyed by the Canadian Recording Industry Association). These sampling vignettes, dating from 1983 to 1991, feature inventive transformations of tiny bells, music-box melodies, crackling fires, dance records, carnal language, and children playing. Most were made for choreography, and in the sparser ones the visuals are missed. *Field*, though, a four-minute collage of *Appalachian Spring*, *American in Paris*, *West Side Story*, the Marlboro cigarette commercial, the theme from *How the West Was Won*, and many other tunes, is the most hilarious soundbite on disc today, worth the price by itself. **B**

**Mikel Rouse Broken Consort: *Soul Menu (New Tone)*** Rouse's elegant neogeo patterns for rock quartet represent totalism's pop edge, and ought to have crossover appeal. It's unimportant to know who Schillinger was, or that Rouse evolved his polymetrics from a rigorous reading of Schillinger theory. The point is to fake out your ears with *Copperhead's* metric ambiguo-

is schism, and in the new-american milieu he came from, that was no contradiction. Like Hunt, he brings a '70s soundworld to idiosyncratic fruition, though these works aren't recent enough to give a timely picture. Good luck recognizing the melodies (modified from a jazz fakebook) in *Notebook's* mobile form for quartet. *Tunnels* is a seven-minute concrete poetry opera, energetically spoken by Thomas Goldstein with self-interruptions by drums, ratchets, electric drill. *Here and There* is chaotically gentle, a Stockhausenish instruction score for flute, piano interior, and shortwave radio; imagine Thoreau fluting at Walden. **B PLUS**

**Dave Soldier: *The Apotheosis of John Brown (Newport Classic)*** Like Spike Lee's *X*, Soldier's cantata restrains its creator's wide-ranging style to maximize its grand statement. And like *X*, it succeeds, if on a much smaller scale. Soldier's libretto, from Frederick Douglass's autobiography, portrays the raid on Harper's Ferry with strings, harpsichord, percussion, and a fine chorus of speaking and singing soloists. The conservative, lightly jazzed music ranges from Vivaldi to folk Americana, letting loose only in Laura Seaton's uninhibited fiddling, but it scrupulously complements the antislavery text with a variety of vocal effects. Given the story's wide appeal and the music's accessibility, it's a shame Newport Classic didn't provide a decently informative booklet. **B**

**Stanford String Quartet Plays *William Bolcom, Ben Johnston, Marc Neikrug (Laurel)*** If you're into Bolcom's academic romanticism and Neikrug's expressionist clichés, good for you. But you have to hear the latest quartet, No. 9, by the current string quartet master, Ben Johnston. Classical in form, infectious in

content, and on the stereo, you can corner that blond over the hors d'oeuvres and suavely mention that Young's blues scale contains septimal intervals over the tonic chord (7/6 and 7/4), but five-based intervals on the subdominant. Meanwhile, the Catler brothers' guitars bump and grind in sonic orgasms half an hour long, not-too-subliminally getting across the point you're really trying to make. But know your crowd. This *Well-Tuned Piano* with a 12/8 beat is a litmus test: the Kitchen went wild, Lincoln Center turned cold; new music fans rave, blues aficionados find it too clean, safe. **A MINUS**

**Evan Ziporyn: *Animal Act (CRI)*** Ziporyn is a jazz clarinetist who used to run a Balinese gamelan, which tells you a lot. He shows his elegant virtuosity solo in *Waiting by the Phone* by delineating several lines at once, like the Bach cello suites. *Tree Frog* (with ensemble) and *Walk the Dog* (with electronics) are virtual bass clarinet concerti, whose forms twist and turn to keep you thinking. In them you can hear totalism's clear pitch images and competing metric frameworks: Bali is the dry beat clicking three against four, jazz is the sensuous reed solos squirming against it, and each piece is a contest between them; suspenseful to the last note. Totalism isn't a free-wheeling eclecticism (the '80s gave us that), but a tight fusion of elements never brought together before. **A MINUS**

**ADDITIONAL CONSUMER NEWS:** Addresses: Trace Elements, 172 East 4th Street, Suite 11D, NYC 10009; Classic Masters, 41 Fourth Place, Brooklyn NY 11231; O.O. Discs, 502 Anton Street, Bridgeport CT 06606; Nonsequitur, Box 2638, Santa Fe NM 87504; Cuneiform, Box 6517, Wheaton MD 20906. ■