

GANN'S CONSUMER GUIDE

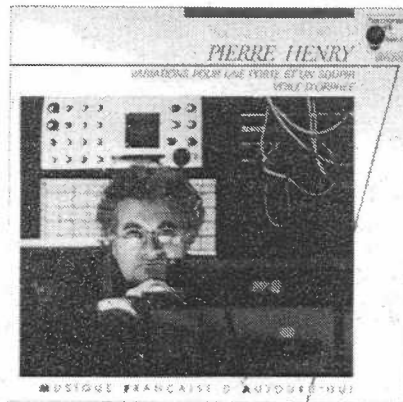
BY KYLE GANN

Contrary to all my predictions, the compact disc has been a tremendous boon for new music; obscure repertoire that would never have seen vinyl five years ago made it to CD this year. Everything here is on CD except the Rouse, Schanzer, Klucsevsek, and Previte.

Jean Barraque: *Concerto and Le Temps restitue* (French Harmonia Mundi) Barraque was Boulez's friend and rival in Messiaen's Conservatoire class, but never became as famous, partially because he died untimely in 1973. His reputation as the Romanticist among the serialists is based only on the size and extravagance of his gestures, because no one wrote thornier, more difficult music. This concerto, ostensibly for clarinet, begins with an explosive violin cadenza and pits harp, guitar, harpsichord, winds, and strings in fiery competition. *Le Temps restitue* is a violent choral setting from Hermann Broch's important stream-of-consciousness novel *The Death of Virgil*. It's arid stuff, not for timid listeners, but Barraque had a colorful imagination, and his frenetic intensity strikes a personal note in the serialist movement. **A MINUS**

CDCM Computer Music Series Vol. 1 (Centaur) Keep your eye out for this series, which intends to highlight mid-career, school-affiliated but nonacademic composers. Larry Austin's *Mozartean Episode*, a computerized reading of Mozart's letters, demands excessive listener indulgence, but the other four works are charming, accessible, and almost-tonal. In Austin's *Sonata Concertante* the computer comments sardonically on Adam Wodnicki's serene piano line; Thomas Clark's *Peninsula* is similar, but more richly textured and meditatively mellow. Phil Winsor's voluptuous, computer-written Chopin takeoff, *Dulcimer Dream*, fetishizes late Romantic chord resolutions, tragically atmospheric and sorta funny.

spunky West Coast label has provided America's greatest joiner of East and West musical traditions with his first CD homage. Harrison's 1972 setting of the Buddhist Heart Sutra—translated into Esperanto, his chosen language for many works—combines the sensuous energy of justly tuned gamelan with choruses of Carl Orff-like urgency. The melodies are simple, modal, and often in unison, the great bells made from oxygen tanks sometimes only clank out tonic and dominant. But from the opening *om* to the closing mantra, this is ecstatic, voluptuously rhythmic music, performed with silken grace by the U. of California at Berkeley Chorus. Harrison's a stylistic virtuoso, and the same disc's *Varied Trio* dances around several medieval forms; the Suite for Violin and American Gamelan weaves raga-ish melodies in exotic fusion. Play this at sunrise to transport yourself to a Himalayan peak. **A PLUS**

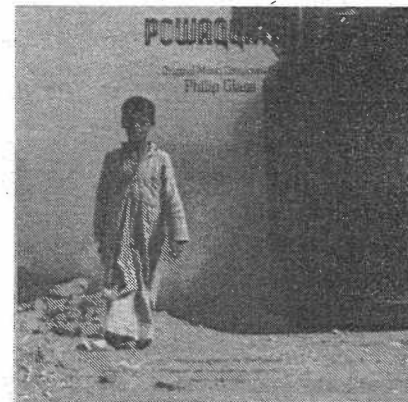


PICK HIT: Pierre Henry

Pierre Henry: *Variations pour une porte et un soupir and Voile d'Orphée* (French Harmonia Mundi) This 1963 classic by the master of musique concrète uses only three sound sources: a sigh, a saw, and a squeaky attic door. In an exquisitely grating 48-minute tone poem divided into 25 movements, Henry makes

a grab for a larger audience, and this disc's pretty timbres and smooth modality are at least pleasant, occasionally more than that. **B**

Roscoe Mitchell: *Four Compositions (Lovely Music)* Any resemblance between these pointillistic chamber compositions and Schoenberg is purely coincidental. Delicate as to texture, curiously dispassionate as to mood, these mostly notated woodwind, string, and piano chamber works are motivically atonal, but tend to collapse into tonal cadences just to show you they know where they are. Like Ornette Coleman, Mitchell's playing with the tension between center and periphery, but in a milder, more abstract idiom and from the other direction; Coleman still had the center as a given, Mitchell's trying to reconstitute it. His most enticing non-Art Ensemble release, this demands and repays careful listening. **A**



MUST TO AVOID: Philip Glass

Robert Previte: *Dull Bang, Gushing Sound, Human Shriek* (Dossier) In a completely different vein than his jazzy *Pushing the Envelope* album, Bobby Previte—oops, the cover here says Robert—paints an ominous urban atmosphere like that of Zorn's *Spillane*, but minus the pretensions. You feel like you're being

Like much African-influenced, ostinato-based improv, some of its formulas are a little too safe, its linear developments too predictable. But the title cut, an improvised lullaby with bells, has an unusual, calm texture of echoing motives, and there's a nice edge to even the most Zen-like material. **B**

Ralph Shapey: *Kroslich Sonata and Concertante No. 1* (New World) It's high time for a thorough overhaul of Ralph Shapey's reputation—he's no academic, but rather, like Feldman, an abstract expressionist with a superb ear. The Kroslich Sonata, for cellist Joel Krosnick and pianist Gilbert Kalish, is in his most granitic vein, sturdy and relentless, with a marvelously fragile middle movement, like an ice crystal between two boulders. The *Concertante* for trumpet and ensemble etches a hard solo line over a rocky landscape, and takes its leave in a poignant trumpet-and-chime duet. Shapey's rhythmic-motive repetition, allegedly passé 20 years ago, seems prescient today, especially in light of recent European music. Docked a notch for Faye-Ellen Silverman's lyrical, but less distinctive chamber works on the flip side. **A**

Giuseppe Sinopoli: *Lou Salome—Suites Nos. 1 & 2* (Deutsche Grammophon) The only woman Friedrich Nietzsche ever loved should make a great opera subject, but these suites sound as though they depict *Lulu's* corpse. From the opening notes, Sinopoli looks back nostalgically to 1930s Vienna, as though this all were an adagio epilogue to the Berg Violin Concerto. It's well-crafted, and the harpsichord helps. But here's your standard macabre waltz parody, your obligatory *morendo* triplet flute chords, your impassioned soprano melismas, your reluctant endings that don't really end. Whether the opera's libretto justifies such parasitic references, the cataleptic duet between Lucia Popp and Jose Carreras doesn't quite indicate. I'll

zart's letters, demands excessive listener indulgence, but the other four works are charming, accessible, and almost-tonal. In Austin's *Sonata Concertante* the computer comments sardonically on Adam Wodnicki's serene piano line; Thomas Clark's *Peninsula* is similar, but more richly textured and meditatively mellow. Phil Winsor's voluptuous, computer-written Chopin takeoff, *Dulcimer Dream*, fetishizes late Romantic chord resolutions, tragically atmospheric and sorta funny. The CD also includes Jerry Hunt's quirkily vibrating *Fludd*, which may not be as effective if you haven't heard the piece live. **A MINUS**

John Chowning: Phoné; Turenas; Stria; Sabelithe (Wergo) 1988 is the year of the computer-music CD boom. The world owes John Chowning enough for the invention of FM synthesis (as in DX7, remember?) to at least listen to his first commercial recording. Like the liner notes, the music is a little academic; its melodies are vague, its development slow and almost entirely invested in the aspect of timbre. As you wait for things to happen, though, imaginary instruments transform themselves: for example, a drum metamorphoses into a trumpet in *Sabelithe* (1966), and *Turenas'* modulating bells are deliciously tactile. Not exciting listening, but to be fair, some of these pieces were the first to flex the power of frequency modulation. Also on Wergo, new computer discs by Barry Truax and Jean-Claude Risset are worth checking out. **B MINUS**

Philip Glass: Powasqqatsi (Nonesuch) Remember the Steven Wright joke in which, when he woke up, everything in his apartment had been stolen and replaced with an exact replica? That's what's happened in Glass's new soundtrack, only instead of the replicas being exact, they're caricatures. The melodies (Glass's first in years) are *symbols* of melodies, the ubiquitous little syncopations are *signs* of the (ungratified) desire for rhythmic interest, the African instruments are generic *references* to cultures other than that of the listener. Nothing is the real thing. Welcome to postmodernism. **D**

Lou Harrison: La Koro-Sutro (New Albion) With characteristic integrity, this



PICK HIT: Pierre Henry

Pierre Henry: Variations pour une porte et un soupir and Voile d'Orphée (French Harmonia Mundi) This 1963 classic by the master of musique concrète uses only three sound sources: a sigh, a saw, and a squeaky attic door. In an exquisitely grating 48-minute tone poem divided into 25 movements, Henry makes that hinge creak and groan in every configuration imaginable, with some relief provided by breathing and the pings of the struck saw. Rubbery noises are captured with hair-raising realism. The extent of his sonic invention takes one's breath away. *Voile d'Orphée's* 1953 collage of percussion, voice, and electronics is of primarily historical interest, but *Variations for a Door and a Sigh* is guaranteed to drive your downstairs neighbor to distraction. **A PLUS**

Guy Klucevsek: Scenes From a Mirage (Review) To quote the composer, the title cut, a set of moody variations on a hauntingly simple theme, is "the greatest piece ever written." Even when paying tribute to the accordion's rural/Slavic heritage, Klucevsek knows just when to bend the rhythm a bit and veer away from the expected. *The Flying Pipe Organ*, a breathing, churning continuum, is the only piece here with artsy pretensions; the rest have plenty of ooms, even if the paws don't always fall where they should. "And Then There Were None" may be the only polka for people with one leg shorter than the other. **A**

Elodie Lauten: Blue Rhythms (Cat Collectors) Like many intelligent composers, Lauten is a savvy marketer, and this slick CD debut seems calculated to penetrate the pop market. Like the rock Terry Riley made with John Cale at a similar stage in his career, this is hard-edged minimalism with a stiff beat, overdubbing bluntly miked piano with various electric keyboards to the point of Lauten's usual thick, melodic profusion. Some of the cuts are too repetitious to intrigue the sophisticated ear, and true fans of her work will prefer the mystical ambience of her three earlier albums. But all minimalists have, at some point, made



MUST TO AVOID: Philip Glass

Robert Preverte: Dull Bang, Gushing Sound, Human Shriek (Dossier) In a completely different vein than his jazzy *Pushing the Envelope* album, Bobby Preverte—oops, the cover here says Robert—paints an ominous urban atmosphere like that of Zorn's *Spillane*, but minus the pretensions. You feel like you're being beckoned into a Thai brothel, not hit on the head with someone's theory of modern culture. Preverte's smoky bass pours some Xenakis-like concrete textures into the heady despair of Eno/Fripp's *An Index of Metals*; but it is a soundtrack (for Michael P. DiPaolo's *Bought and Sold*), and the gritty timbres aren't varied enough for *too*-close listening. The cover says Preverte plays every instrument here, but it doesn't mention whether he overdubbed. I can see him playing them all at once. **A MINUS**

Mikel Rouse Broken Consort: A Lincoln Portrait (Cuneiform) This may be the minimalist version of the Berg Three Pieces for Orchestra. Like Rhys Chatham, Mikel Rouse straddles minimalism and rock, and can get passionate about polyrhythms like five against four. *Lincoln Portrait* shows a promising advance over Rouse's previous *A Walk in the Woods*; the melodic patterns are less process-oriented, less obvious, and the rock beat is well integrated. I'd give a penny for Rouse's thoughts about what this has to do with Lincoln, but the dedication to the late Morton Feldman says something about the clean textures and careful melodies. I want to hear Rouse live up to those beguiling sax lines and develop these into longer works. As Robert Ashley says, anything under five minutes is still rock. **A MINUS**

Jeffrey Schanzer Ensemble: Vistas (MusicVistas) It's to Schanzer's credit that the music isn't overwhelmed by his stellar performers: Leroy Jenkins on violin, Ned Rothenberg on reeds, Preverte on sticks. Preverte's exotic percussion creates a space in which a polyphony of solos can wax mellow and hot by turns, though the energy stays within a controlled level.

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Stockhausen: Tierkreis and Oberlippentanz (Acanta) Remarkably similar to the Mitchell album above, Stockhausen's *Tierkreis*, "a cycle of musical formulae" representing the signs of the zodiac by motives rather than moods, is a highly listenable work in the mystical/contrapuntal vein of his *Sirius* and *Mantra*. Its mercurial polyphony is almost Hindemithian, but more fluid and spontaneous. Star buffs will find the Cancer movement fairly immobile, Leo's open fifths sufficiently leonine, and Sagittarius's flute laughs unmistakable. Even if you think that's all bull hockey, this level of contrapuntal inspiration makes a convincing argument that Stockhausen has tapped into some supranormal level of consciousness, far more effectively than the metaphysical pretensions of his *Aus den sieben Tagen* and *Donnerstag aus Licht*. The filler, *Oberlippentanz*, is an enigmatic trumpet virtuoso piece whipped off by the composer's son Marcus. **A**

Jukka Tiensuu: The Fantastic Harpsichord (Finlandia) Tiensuu, who judging from this release is the world's most athletic harpsichordist, had the brilliant inspiration of putting an amazingly lively 1976 piece by Iannis Xenakis, *Khoai*, next to a programmatic *Combat Naval* by 18th century composer Michel Corrette that requires the use of the forearm on the keyboard to simulate cannon blasts. Next Tiensuu throws in a hilariously repetitive fandango by Haydn's Spanish contemporary Antonio Soler, and a "Fantango" of his own that slithers its way through a quarter-tone dance. Somehow, it all fits together perfectly and makes you think the 18th century was ahead of its time. **A PLUS**