

## With Bells On

**A**t the November 10 concert of the Downtown Ensemble at Greenwich House Music School, world premieres by Barbara Benary and Daniel Goode revealed a new wrinkle in postminimalism. Benary's *Tintinnalogia* applied traditional bell-ringing patterns to harmonies in a trio for violin (Benary), percussion (Christine Bard), and piano (Joseph Kubera). The second movement drove a dislocated boogie-woogie into the ground, but the outer movements were delicate, soulful, and delightfully peculiar. Goode's *Triocek* for violin, cello (Michael Finckel), and piano (Henry Shapiro) reiterated passionate motives whose energy gradually broadened out into poignant melody. Both left the strictness of minimalism behind and ventured into warmly emotional territory. The same was true of William Hellermann's *For Otto*, a 20-year-old waltz for his teacher Otto Luening, its simplicity ahead of its time. Noel Da Costa's jazzy but fragile *Mobiles obliques* and a recent, bitonally neoclassic *Divertimento* by the nonagenarian Luening also graced the program. —K.G.

# Duet for Soloist

David Hykes  
The Kitchen  
November 12

BY KYLE GANN

**T**he ancients and some moderns extol the power of consonance. In this century of dissonance's emancipation, we are reluctant to believe. Ecstasy reached via harmonic confluence seems a dream abandoned in disillusion, while discord—the noisy democracy of tones—represents hard-won freedoms. Why, then, was the Kitchen still overflowing for the fifth night of David Hykes's Harmonic Core and Choir, the groups' first New York appearance in eight years and the most consonant concert in recent memory? Why did Hykes's transparent music, chantlike and grounded in Eastern modes with simple drum patterns, so enchant a sophisticated Downtown crowd?

The "new" in Hykes's new music comes from one amazing vocal trick; the rest seems as ancient as a Byzantine fresco, but that trick is enough to freeze the audience. Trained in Tibetan overtone-singing, Hykes can produce one low note and bring out the overtones above it with tintinnabulary clarity. His control over the lower note, which sounds like

whistling, is so extraordinary that, all by himself, he can sing counterpoint in contrary motion. His actual voice might descend as the overtones rise,



Hykes: building buzz with consonance

the latter sometimes straying into foreign keys (since the overtones of the notes of a scale are not all within the scale) and even drawing elegant two-part cadences. I'm convinced the mesmerizing power of the effect is due not only to the astonishment caused by

watching him do it. It's because the pure intervals produced enchant the ear and disarm the mind.

Add other similarly trained singers—Timothy Hill, Marjorie Johnson, and Carter Burwell were in both the Core and the Choir—plus Burwell on accordion and Robert Mann and Eric Barret on frame drums, and the effect is pleasantly moving but hardly more impressive than Hykes's opening solo. Hykes's drummers are low-key, marking off lithe but regular patterns of four to seven beats, with no pyrotechnics nor complex Indian-style polyrhythms in the Glen Velez style. The only work that approached extroversion was *Special Times*, in which Hykes played, on a sampler keyboard, looped string pizzicati whose pulse-tempos duplicated the tuning ratios of the pitches the choir were singing—a nicely audible theoretical touch. The evening's entire second half, *Earth to the Unknown Power*, was a seven-section chorus for seven singers, its counterpoint fanning out and contracting again through exotic modes, with the

overtones making sporadic appearances and a drum only in the final *Alleluia*. We often say a vocal performance was perfectly in tune without implying the synergistic swelling of exactly in-phase frequencies the Harmonic Choir achieved.

The November 11 concerts had been piped into the 12th-century Le Thoronet Abbey in Southern France, and the resulting ambient reverb piped back again into the Kitchen. The night I attended, it was supposed to happen again, but the abbey turned out to be otherwise engaged (wedding? apparition of the Virgin? bingo night?). I had wanted to hear the result, especially with what I presume must have been a four-to-10-second delay with the signal coming back across the Atlantic. As compensation, the visuals by Hykes and Jeff Young—images from the abbey fading into each other with mandalike geometricity—set up their own beautifully natural processes, analogous to Hykes's tuning, that threatened to distract you from listening. No matter; Hykes's ancient counterpoint offered not so much the buzz of innovation as the precise persuasiveness of music made exactly right. ♦

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