

Heaven Enough

Man, did opinions diverge concerning Johnny Reinhard's completion of Charles Ives's *Universe Symphony* at Alice Tully Hall June 6! Some aficionados found the work unworthy of Ives's oeuvre, others thought it a transcendent new masterpiece. I leaned toward the transcendent side. It's true that the first half-hour—drums, cymbals, and gongs marking off varying simultaneous tempos—was too uninflected to remind you of anything else in Ives's work, but that was the section that came most documentably straight from Ives's sketches. More conceptual than musical, it was a little tedious, but soon nine flutes ushered in a 45-minute crescendo of excitement.

There were no quotations, no hymn tunes, no rollicking folk songs nor marching bands out of sync. The remainder sounded like the least recognizable moments in Ives: the opening beats of "The Housatonic at Stockbridge," parts of the *Second Orchestral Set*, cloudier passages from "Emerson" in the *Concord Sonata*. The muddily orchestrated streams of meandering melodies, tonal within themselves but dissonant to the overall texture, sounded like a memory of Ives, and anything more tangible would have ill served the purported program: creation of heaven and earth. The final minutes lapsed into dazzling beauty: the horns suddenly burst forth in a single angular melody, the orchestra paused a few times to allow piano chords and gongs to die into

In the Lines of Fire

Fred Ho

Lotus Music and Dance
June 8

Dogs of Desire

The Kitchen
June 7

BY KYLE GANN

er had lunch with. What Ho's and Hartigan's music lacked, at times, was a sense of protest distilled to a higher level of universality.

Apparently this was by design. Ho's views on music are recorded in a fractiously rabble-rousing book of mu-

Big, beefy Fred Ho gets a big, beefy tone on his big, beefy baritone sax. If you turned down a dark alley and saw this fierce-looking Chinese American charging at you with his horn blowing, you'd skedaddle out of there. His music is angry, too. One piece he played at Lotus Music and Dance was called *The White Peril: Too Wrong for Too Long!*, with movements titled "Justice Denied Is Justice Died" and "No Crocodile Tears for Capitalism." But unlike so much music driven by political resentment, Ho's is not a pretext for raw emotion. Quite the contrary: *White Peril* burned with a seething inner flame, its passion so restrained and compressed that it shot out of his sax bell in pithy phrases of irresistibly cogent logic. The melody had the wild precision of Monk or Coltrane, but unlike conventional jazz, the form darted at surprising right angles. Rage eloquently channeled is always a thrill.

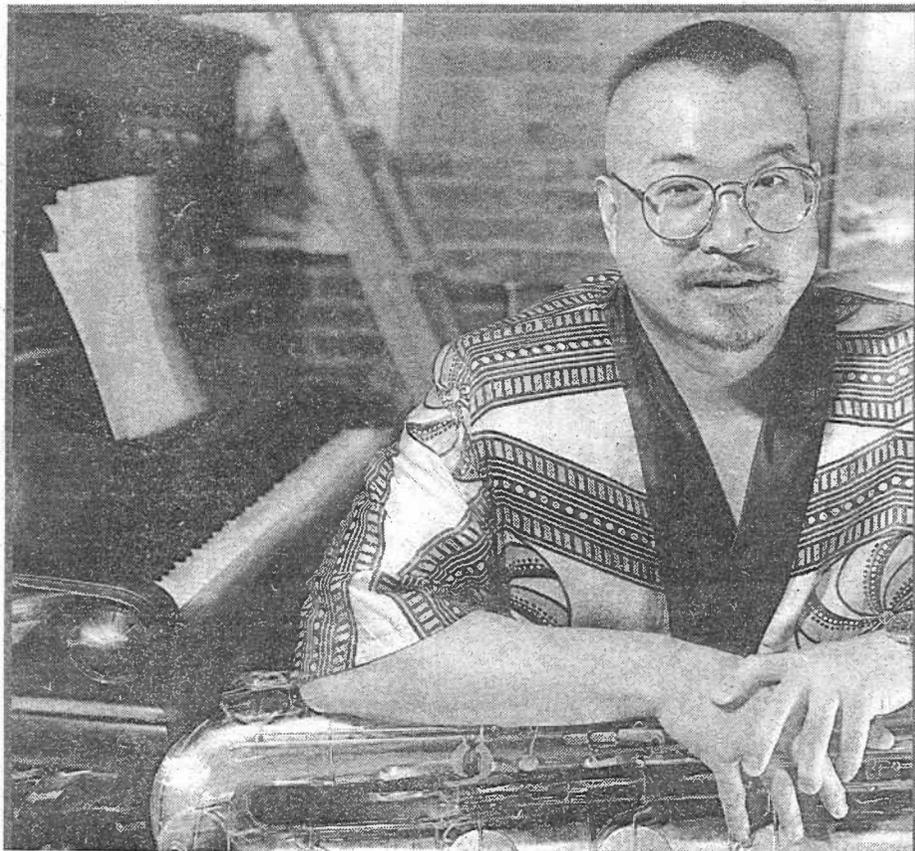
Ho's predilections were shared, more explicitly in one case, by the other members of his trio for the evening: percussionists Diana Herold and Royal Hartigan. Neither is as original a composer as Ho, but both play superbly. Hartigan, an Irish American with expertise in African drum styles, has a shimmering way of melding drums, cymbals, and gongs into a fluid continuum that makes you forget they're separate instruments. Herold I could hardly take my eyes off of. She played lightning-fast four-mallet chords more accurately than other marimbists can play with two mallets—for that matter, better than many di-

intrinsically bound up with the oppression and struggle of our peoples. . . ."

And while, according to Ho, it is incumbent on the oppressed "to reject the stereotyping, distortions, and devaluing embodied" in the terminology invented by oppressors, Ho undifferentiatedly lumps whites together: The *White Peril*. One could argue that there are different ways a performer can separate himself from his audience. Artistic pretensions are one, presumptions of moral superiority another.

atrical spiel began: "I know you were looking forward to hearing this piece, but something terrible has just happened. While we were setting up, someone crept up silently behind you and dealt a quick blow to the side of your head." After that, the music simulated several dazed states of consciousness. While the piece caught my ear the first time I heard it, its joke doesn't survive repetition, and the textures are too thin and noncontrapuntal to retain musical interest. Daugherty's satire was the kind of ironic attack on mass culture that visual artists have been carrying out for years but musicians have no tradition for; here the little Barbie jokes were reiterated to the point of triviality, wasting the talents of two marvelous singers, Lisa Bielawa and Alex Sweeton. Despite a certain charm, Copeland's vignettes reminded one of naive classical jazz experiments from the 1920s.

This vernacular-oriented, audience-grabbing aesthetic is a great direction for orchestral music to take, and Miller's on the right track. The educated white boys he's working with, though, come from a tradition whose shallowness becomes painfully obvious the minute they strip down their style. For four decades, highly schooled composers have been taught to write dry, technical music with no passion or soul, hiding the shallowness under a distractingly complex surface. To write deeply affecting or emotive music in today's professional music world is considered naive, in poor taste, a breach of manners. And now that young composers are moving back



NDA HARRIS

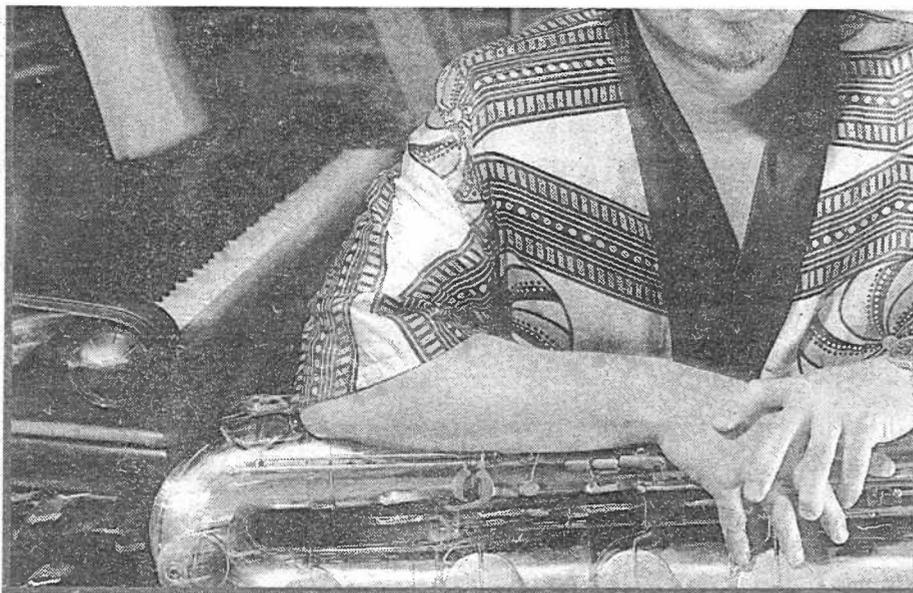
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It didn't detract that this was the most comically crisis-laden performance within memory. Reinhard, uncharacteristically tuxedoed and waving like a traffic cop, kept having to cancel out performers who threatened to enter too early, and you could track the drama unfolding onstage by the puzzled looks of the two assistant conductors, Charles Zachary Bornstein and Cory Crossman. Reinhard's American Festival of Microtonal Music Orchestra couldn't afford as many full rehearsals as a smooth performance would have required, yet the visual shenanigans never translated into sonic interruptions. And at the mystical end, an almost full Alice Tully Hall rose at once for a standing ovation: a fitting tribute, not necessarily for this performance, but for Reinhard's relentless sleuth work on Ives's sketches and his 14 years of dedication in providing New York's most finely tuned musical offerings. —K.G.

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And at times, disagreeing didn't seem an option. In Hartigan's *Adzohu*, Ho yelled "How dare you" as incipit to each new item in an interminable list of crimes: burning the homes of those of a different race, buying and selling human beings, land theft, lynching, genocide. YOU, YOU, YOU, roared the accusing litany until I finally decided some of the people in the audience must have perpetrated such atrocities, and I had wandered into unsavory company. Admittedly, the message came across more effectively than that of your average avant-gardist, because the performers were so identified with the segment of society their music spoke for; by contrast, political composers like Frederic Rzewski, Christian Wolff, and Cornelius Cardew can come off as gentlemen of leisure protesting on behalf of working stiffs they've nev-



LINDA HARRIS

Don't call Fred Ho a "jazz" musician.

sico-political essays he edited with Ron Sakolsky entitled *Sounding Off! Music as Subversion/Resistance/Revolution*. In his own essay, "Jazz, Kreolization and Revolutionary Music for the 21st Century," Ho makes the intriguing point, given his own well-planned compositions, that "jazz" (a term he rejects as inherently derogatory) is not enslaved by notation, but by being institutionalized, by being treated as a thing-in-itself used to separate artist from amateur, instead of to carry a message to the people listening. He divides the world into two types of people, oppressors and oppressed, with very different rights in terms of musical exploration. While Asian Americans may push jazz forward, whites cannot:

"So-called 'whites' can embrace and identify with African American culture, but as long as the system of white supremacy exists they will always be 'whites' whether or not they consciously desire to be so. Though well intentioned or skillful 'whites' might make interesting music within the idiom, they can never be innovators or cultural/artistic leaders in relation to the cultural forms of oppressed nationalities because those forms are inevitably and

From its name, you'd expect that the orchestra called Dogs of Desire aimed at the kind of ferocity Ho's trio expressed, but its performance the preceding evening at the Kitchen provided an almost exactly opposite experience. David Alan Miller led his 16-piece ensemble from Albany in a program of composers who've achieved a hip reputation on the orchestral circuit lately. David Lang's *Are You Experienced* featured the composer reading a stream-of-consciousness text over an amplified tuba played with Hendrix-style feedback. Michael Daugherty's *What's That Spell?* was a satire about Barbie, the doll, with a text consisting of little more than the titles of its movements: "What's That Spell?" "Ballerina," "Drum Majorette," "Oh Ken," and "Give Me a 'B.'" Kamran Ince's *Evil Eye Deflector* strung noisy images together, beginning with a repeating violin shriek underlaid with a rock beat. And there were three short pieces by the Police's Stewart Copeland based on catchy ostinatos. All the pieces were more or less rock-oriented, highly rhythmic, and entertaining.

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cover-up of serialist tricks and obfuscations. Every piece here kept up a titillating, cop-show-paced succession of clever effects, but not one made you need or want to hear it again. And when Dogs of Desire encoored (at little prodding) with arrangements of two pop tunes, "Born To Be Wild" and "That's the Way I Like It," the thin line distinguishing this hip, Downtownish ensemble from the Boston Pops grew dim.

And so these are the musics of the culture wars: on one side a complacent, white, male establishment whose music is wanly ironic, calculated, professional, and just as devoid of feeling now that it's got a rock beat as it was when it was incomprehensibly serialist; on the other, a passionate, deeply felt, but divisive music with no aspirations to universality, for whom the distinction between, say, Abbie Hoffman and George Bush is too subtle to bother with. Which concert should I have enjoyed more? The forgettable one that didn't offend me but had nothing to offer me? Or the beautiful one propelled by an anger it didn't invite me to share? ❖