

Sound Bytes of Truth

New Music on the Web

BY KYLE GANN

Jeffrey Harrington's *Acid Bach* plinks its way through microtonal melodies like banjo music somehow smeared by a wet hand. The way those melodies fit together is determined by computer, for Harrington has programmed his software to work out the contrapuntal problems itself. He's a rare find; from his beginnings in Mississippi he's lived in a number of musical worlds, and at 17 wrote a serial piece based on the bass line from a Billy Cobham song. In the '80s he forged a style by combining an 18th-century harmonic vocabulary with jazz rhythms, while working as a galley hand in the offshore oil fields of Louisiana, as clerk in the world's oldest record store (Liberty Music on Madison Avenue), and writing Java games for Children's Television Workshop.

By a slim margin, Harrington is the most intriguing new figure I've discovered (so far) on the Web page that every new-music Web search ultimately brings me to: Kalvos & Damian's New Music Bazaar (www.goddard.edu/wgdr/kalvos). Kalvos and Damian are the noms de Web of Dennis Báthory-Kitsz and David Gunn, two Vermont composers who not only maintain this massive Web site of more than 3000 pages, but run an eponymous radio show in tandem with it that airs Saturday afternoons at 2:30 on WGDR, 91.1 FM in Vermont. The site includes pages with audio files, interview excerpts, and bio and Web page information for more than 120 composers, some well-known in new-music circles, but most strikingly unfamiliar.

They also offer an overwhelming slew of links to sites of recording labels, theory papers, composer support organizations, composer fan clubs, and so on. Those interested in tuning will be directed to the Just Intonation Network (www.dnai.com/~jinetwk/), others to an essay on 21st-century acoustic instruments by Patrick Ozzard-Low or an iconoclastic essay on the absurdity of intellectual copyright by Dr. Godfried-Willem Raes of Belgium ("An idea is not a product"). On the tinnitus page I learned that ringing in the ears (from which every musician I know suffers from time to time) can be brought on by red wine, chocolate, and especially aspartame, all of which I consume in quantity.

Helpful as such tidbits are, though, the best part is the guest composer index, whose component pages weave together interview quotes (as audio files) and musical examples in such a way as to shed light on each other. We learn about New England jazz pianist and composer Canary Burton, who was surprised to have her music described as minimalist: "It seems full of notes to me," she says. No bio is provided yet for Ann Southam, but her *Re-Tuning* is attractive, seething with rapid fiddling over changing drones. I got to hear *Magus*, by a former classmate I haven't seen in 18 years, Craig Bove: a rippling essay in leaping computerized lines of sputtering timbre.

Appropriately, the webmasters give emphasis to local Vermont composers, including some far removed from new-music sophistication. We hear, for example, the jaunty ragtime of Bea Phillips, who started in the Depression writing down "songs of praise and gratitude that erupt in my consciousness." But we also

find some younger Europeans I hadn't heard of, like Calliope Tsoupaki of Greece and the Estonian Canadian Elma Miller, whose *udok asemets*, offered as a Real Audio file, makes a wild vocal-ensemble composition out of the letters in the name of her fellow Estonian-born composer Udo Kasemets.

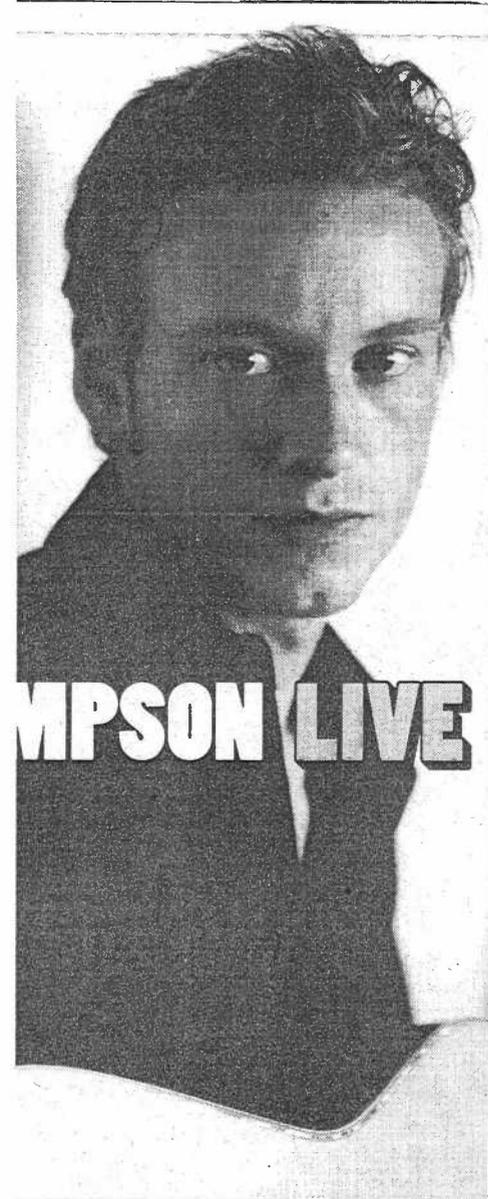
Most refreshing, Báthory-Kitsz and Gunn have filled out a multidimensional musical world utterly free from the taint of academism. So many of these unknown names show you how pervasive the postminimal aesthetic has become, and those who don't usually exhibit a delight in providing ironic contexts for weird noises: like Mary Oliver, whose *Erts* for

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voice and instruments drips crazy glissandos throughout a conventionally tonal texture. The variety is dazzling, though you inevitably become a little wary of the inevitable Net-inspired practice of judging all music according to two-to seven-minute sound bytes, often devoid of context or compositional specifics. Nevertheless, the French drone-composer Eliane Radigue is here, one of the composers most dependent on long-term listening. A three-minute excerpt from her *Kyema* gives little idea of her slowly evolving drones, but it will vibrate your monitor near what you fear is its exploding point.

Kalvos & Damian is far and away the Web's best new-music resource, giving you a richly textured world of unknown new music, but there are other sites comparable in terms of links and information resources. The Electronic Music Foundation (www.emf.org) provides a worldwide calendar of new-music events, plus info on software, conferences, and such. The online New Music Calendar (www.soundart.org) has a good list of composer and organizational Web pages, and an even better one is at Pauline Oliveros's Deep Listening page (www.deeplisting.org).

Despite the current irritations of Net congestion and download waits, all of these sites together evince a healthier new-music world than you'll find in the concert halls and college music departments, bubbling up through the Internet. The freedom we have to put on the Net the truths that are squelched in our official musical discourse is going to lay the foundation for a livelier, more inclusive 21st-century music. **V**



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