

Monteverdiana

Composer Mary Jane Leach has found her métier in choral music. While her instrumental pieces can be rather dryly minimalist, the human voice lends her processes a fluidity that makes for sparkling acoustic illusions. At Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church September 29, Virginia Davidson led the New York Treble Singers in six of her works, four of them based on music by the Baroque master Claudio Monteverdi. In *Green Mountain Madrigal*, the voices grew to resemble the ring of crystal glasses rubbed by wetted fingers. *Ariel's Song* bounced four-note patterns around a large circle with lively effect, and *Ariadne's Lament* strikingly sustained tone-clusters in a tonal context. For the final *Song of Sorrows*, a local premiere, the chorus was ably joined by Bucknell University's Rooke Chapel Choir, directed by William Payn. The most harmonically conventional work by far, it underscored how easily Leach's music could enter and enliven a choral repertoire starved for good contemporary work.

—K.G.

Tones of Atonement

Jerome Kitzke's *The Paha Sapa Give-Back*

BY KYLE GANN

that were stolen for gold and uranium.

Something of a loner and an anomaly in the Downtown scene, Kitzke started out as a Milwaukee rocker, then studied with an underrated Midwestern atonalist, John Downey. Though he moved here in 1984, it's



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only in the last several years that he's emerged, with his group Mad Coyote, as both a freely whimsical improviser and a hard-edged composer of music that is atonal yet jaunty, vernacular yet odd-textured and meticulous. With his lanky figure, braided ponytail, and earthy evocations of Native American spirits, he seems out of place east of the Rockies. His odd approach to the piano, he explains, started in the '70s, as an attempt to energize the dance classes he was accompanying: "We sigh, we

groan, we shout for joy, we cry. Those are musical sounds as valid as a drum or flute."

On an earlier project about Wounded Knee, Kitzke spent three months working with the Native American community in Milwaukee. "I had meetings that were really intense. They asked me, 'Who are you? How much money are you making off this? Why do you want to make money off our tragedy?' But they wanted to make sure my heart is good. And I've

been fine." Though Kitzke's gone into debt producing his projects, he's pledged all royalties from *Give-Back's* performance and potential recording to the Black Hills Steering Committee, the South Dakota group in charge of getting tribal lands back from the government. He's particularly honored that Charlotte Black Elk, great-granddaughter of Sioux chief Black Elk and a member of the committee, will speak at the performance to give the Lakota viewpoint.

The score to *The Paha Sapa Give-Back* is exquisitely hand drawn, with elaborate circles and spirals to denote where the ensemble (two actor-singers and 17 musicians) breaks into groups that relocate to different parts of the space. For Kitzke, the movements outward and back have symbolic value. "The piece is a protest against that impulse in humans to take without thinking of the consequences, because you feel you're superior. These are issues we have to deal with before we can become a great country. Things are not disconnected. There's a connection between the way we live on this land and the way we came to live on this land." In Kitzke's vibrant music theater, the connections are hard to miss. ❖

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