

The melody of Daniel Goode's *Tunnel-Funnel* has rung in my mind for weeks. It's one of those tunes that program annotators might call "ineffably sad." I thought I had it down, but when Goode loaned me the score I saw that it wasn't what I had remembered. The tune's a simple whole-step waving motive descending through minor triads and resurfacing, but Goode adds eighth-notes so that the triads never appear where you're sure they're going to. First you think, well, maybe it's in 9/8, then you get insecure and decide you've had the accent pattern wrong for the last three measures, then you move the metric pattern around, trying in vain to settle in. That melody's as soothing as a lullaby, but it won't conform to your memory of it.

But unpredictability is one of its lesser virtues. It *generates* the piece, the way Beethoven's best motives generated his. In fact, it does something many romantic melodies do, but hardly any minimalist ones: it modulates, shifting downward a whole-step at a time. The movement toward the *flat* side of the harmonic spectrum creates a feeling of continual relaxation, and the flutes, inconspicuously jumping octaves, draw an illusion of eternal descent. The modulations forestall the "going-nowhereness" that so many new tonal works fall into, but the process's unidirectionality denies dialectical expectations. As a result, *Tunnel-Funnel* is more flexible, freer to pause and turn, than the recent pieces by Reich or Glass that seemed hemmed in by the inertia of their repetitions.

The amazing thing is how many roles that tune satisfies: it *functions* as a classical theme, it *sounds* minimalist, it *sequences* like a Baroque adagio, it *weaves* gamelan procedures into a Western form, yet it *defines* the piece so sharply that genre associations are afterthoughts. When a theme like that, which no composer receives oft in a lifetime, appears it is the critic's privilege to lead fellow lis-

Daniel Goode

Tune of the Decade

BY KYLE GANN

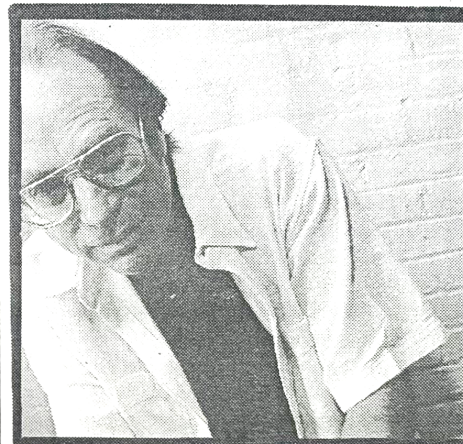
teners in a doffing of the hat to one of the few gifts we moderns still receive from the gods, a spark of genius. Let no one scoff at Ralph Shapey's declaration: Great art is a miracle.

Maybe it's *too* good a theme, because it overshadows what happens to it. Strings

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and brass pick out notes and hold on, blurring it into delicious dissonances. A chorus of trombones picks it into motives, then a chorus of flutes (shades of Mahler's *Sixth!*) slows it into half-note chords. Goode's guiding metaphor is the tunnel (how New York), a reduction of energy and focus followed by an expansion, and his piece's immobile mid-section enacts upon minimalism the same psychological reversal that Brahms imposed on sonata-form, the upside-down climax.

A more American model that comes to mind is the typical Roy Harris symphony movement, an aimless chorale articulated by flashes of color, just as Goode, gamelan-like—marks the passage of time with vibraphone and piano accents. The second half of *Tunnel-Funnel* (a long piece, almost 40 minutes) exhibits a kind of courage found in both Brahms and Harris: the courage to spend the time required, to explore the idea and let the audience wait. If it works (*I* was never bored), it's because the theme stays close to the surface, because its gravitational pull gives Goode's imagination a wide orbit. One measure of *Tunnel-Funnel's* self-



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Goode: He won't conform to memory.

assurance is that it ends with an ellipsis, not an exclamation mark.

Another sad thing about *Tunnel-Funnel* was the performance: not its quality, but its conditions. Conductor David Gilbert and his ad hoc orchestra (organized by the Downtown Ensemble), who premiered the work at Washington Square Church June 4, gave Goode nine hours of rehearsal (exorbitant by professional standards), and did the piece proud. The Philharmonic would have rehearsed less and played worse. But the ensemble inevitably sounded ad hoc, and the act of faith in *Tunnel-Funnel's* ending begged for a group used to looking at each other.

What it shouted was that downtown is still a ghetto, a place where the country's best composers, even at Goode's age (52), still hustle their own music. It pointed to downtown's desperate need for a counterpart to Speculum Musicae, an ensemble

capable of commissioning and playing works by Cage-influenced composers. (Goode blames Reich and Glass, who inspired everyone to start ensembles playing only their own music.) Philadelphia has such a group: Relache. But even an ensemble isn't enough. We need a downtown *conductor*, someone with orchestral resources who believes in the *principle* of downtown music, someone willing to listen beyond the trendy Glasses and Andersons and Zorns on the surface.

Leonard Slatkin, America's most honorable conductor even though his taste in music is less expert than my cat's, tours with and records god-awful works by America's least deserving composers. Imagine a Slatkin with intelligence, someone aware of the music the establishment keeps hidden: the Goodes, the Kotiks, the Carman Moores, the Julius Eastmans, the Charlie Morrows, the hard-core downtowners whose integrity keeps them out of career-advancement games. Goode began *Tunnel-Funnel* in 1972, and has spent years building the apparatus necessary to realize it. A conductor in touch with music below 57th Street could have shortened that process by 10 years. That makes me mad.

What it takes, of course, is a composing conductor. Conductors' vanity notwithstanding, only composers can consistently separate good work from bad, and it is only through composer/conductors that good new music gets a wide hearing. Europe has Sinopoli, Gielen, Boulez, but America had only Bernstein, who's bur-nishing his Beethoven rep. Until someone does come along, America's official routes for the "career composer" are paved for morons and pretentious jerks, and incredible works like *Tunnel-Funnel* are played 10 years too late. Like Ives, Partch, Oliveros, Cage, Ashley, and Feldman, Goode embodies his own aspect of the tragedy of American art music. My first impulse after hearing *Tunnel-Funnel* was to cheer. My second was to weep. ■