



Conductor
Marin Alsop

Taking exodus from the classical mainstream, the Cabrillo Music Festival continues to thrive after 40 years.

by Bruce Willey

Cabrillo Music Festival

Without music to decorate it, there is just a bunch of boring production deadlines or dates by which bills must be paid. —Frank Zappa

✓ **A**nniversaries come and go, but 40 is big. Biblical big. And for the intrepid musical adventure that is the Cabrillo Music Festival, beginning its two-week stint this Wednesday, it's pure musical manna and gravy.

It seems a little odd then to think Santa Cruz would get the distinction of being home to the longest-running continuous new music festival in the nation. After all, this isn't exactly a metropolitan area with a major opera house and a symphony hall, complete with acoustical wonders and elaborate staging. This is "surf city," a town in which a former basketball stadium (the Civic Auditorium) serves as a makeshift symphony hall for the Santa Cruz Symphony and the Cabrillo Music Festival. It's also a town where it's just as easy to hear a Celtic fiddler or African drummer on Pacific Garden Mall as it is to hear the blaring, true sounds of punk rock rippling

out onto the streets in front of The Catalyst.

Yet somehow, against all odds, and with enough creative energy to take on any production at the Lincoln Center in New York, or the Davies Hall in San Francisco, by storm, the private, nonprofit Cabrillo Music Festival is not only a viable entity known both nationally and internationally but is also an orchestral force to be reckoned with—all this in 40 years and running when most contemporary music festivals of its kind have gone either defunct or struggle precariously into the future.

However, it's obvious that putting on a festival of this size and scope is difficult to say the least. Above The Walnut Avenue Cafe, a popular downtown breakfast eatery, is the nerve center for the festival. It's a small, studio-sized office adorned with previous Cabrillo Music Festival posters hanging on every inch of the wall. It's also a veritable who's who of American composers—everyone from John Adams to local great, and founder of the festival, Lou Harrison, has signed their name on the posters. And there, the lissome Ellen Primack, the festival's executive director, sits at a glass table amongst the muddle of press releases and papers. With the festival

only two weeks away the phone rings constantly and the office hums in high gear.

"Our mission is to foster, nurture a modern symphonic heritage for our country," says Primack, adjusting her thick black mane of hair. "Large symphony orchestras across the country play contemporary works, but they typically do it sandwiched in between the classics, while trying to build audiences, but this might be a compromise of sorts. Whereas here, at the festival, we are absolutely dedicated to new music, and we have audiences that come with a sense of adventure and willingness and desire to be participates in the music-making. They're there for something that is living and developing."

This year the festival will feature seven living composers, some of whom will be in attendance. Primack says this changes the dynamic, offering audiences a unique view into the music-making process. Imagine being in Vienna when Beethoven or Mahler gave their respective premiers, and that stakes the festival on the avant garde cusp, something that makes for good conversation and bragging rights in that I-was-there sense.

Besides attending the actual concerts, patrons are

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encouraged to sit in on rehearsals and hear the pieces come together. However, it's not as if this will spoil the final concert, Primack says. "You get acclimated, you start to hear a vocabulary in the music, and then you're hearing it when everyone's juices, everyone's energy has gotten to that peak point. It's a nice place for people to explore. Marin (Alsop, the festival conductor and music director) really does everything to the highest level, she's just fantastic."

Marin Alsop has been the driving force behind the Cabrillo Music Festival for the last 10 years. As one of America's premier conductors, especially in a classical music world where women conductors are more a rarity than the norm, Alsop has not only championed modern music, but her career has been meteoric, securing enough awards to spill out of her Denver home where she is music director of the Colorado Symphony.

She comes from a musical family. Both her parents were classically trained and she says that she didn't have a choice when deciding upon a career after she witnessed the Leonard Bernstein conducting. "I was sold right away," she says from her Denver home. "I told my dad, 'Dad, that's what I'm going to be.'"

Years later she would get a chance to learn from the maestro himself when she became a student of his in 1988 at Tanglewood.

Alsop enthusiastically runs down the upcoming line-up of composers and performers, unable to single out one highlight. From Christopher Rouse, a composer she is incredibly fond of, to her friend Evelyn Glennie, a world-famous Scottish percussionist, to Mark Adamo's critically acclaimed opera "Little Women," Alsop says the festival is an oasis of creativity from the rest of the world.

"The essence of Cabrillo (Music Festival) has remained the same, probably for all the 40 years," she says. "The spirit of it is almost child-like curiosity and excitement."

As for those that might be intimidated by contemporary music, what with its sometime dissonant sounds and peculiar rhythms, Alsop believes it's gotten a bad rap. "People aren't in touch with what real contemporary music is these days," she says. "It's music that is vital and reflects the society we live in. A lot of it is influenced by music of our day, by rock, by jazz. People think they won't be able to access it, but not only can they access the music, but the way we present it, by speaking about the

pieces and having the composers there. If you wanted to educate yourself about music this is the perfect festival to go to. Everything you always wanted to know about contemporary music but were afraid to ask."

Often enough though, Alsop, in pre and post concert talks, interprets the pieces in plain English which not only illuminates the score in a more understandable light, but strikes down the notion that these pieces are too hard to understand for those raised on a meat and potato diet of Bach and Beethoven. "This is the place where contemporary music becomes accessible," she adds. "It's part of the tradition at the Cabrillo Music Festival."

What's in a Name?

The festival gets its name from its early affiliations with Cabrillo College. Marion Taylor, who has worked for the festival for 30 years and is a life member on the board, cites two important factors that put the festival in motion. First, there was the construction of the community college theater where performances could be put on, and there was, of course, the composer emeritus and Aptos resident Lou Harrison, who is considered the founding father of the festival.

Taylor gives her quick historical summation of the Cabrillo Music Festival starting with the first music director Gerhard Samuel, conductor of the Oakland Symphony.

"He did a mixture of new music and music from the past," Taylor says, beginning her Cabrillo Music Festival history lesson, "especially unfamiliar music. And one opera every year."

"After six years the budget was just getting out of hand," she continues. "So they had a year of transition and hired Carlos Chávez, a Mexican conductor/composer who put on a more symphonic festival."

Following additional budget snafus, the festival board members decided to hire a conductor who could lead a smaller chamber orchestra. That conductor would turn out to be the infamous motorcycling maverick and conductor Dennis Russell Davies, who would go on to lead the Cabrillo Music Festival for the next 17 years. Davies juxtaposed living composers with more classical works such as Schubert and Beethoven, and also moved the festival venues to churches around the county, a tent on the UC Santa Cruz campus, and, of course, the ever-popular concerts held at

Cabrillo Music Festival at a Glance

► In the Works 31 Wednesday

Civic Auditorium

5:30-6:30 p.m.

A chance to see and hear three composing and seven conducting stars of tomorrow.

► Little Women 2-4 Friday-Sunday

Civic Auditorium

Friday 6:30 p.m.

Pre-concert dinner *Al Fresco* (\$20).

7 p.m. Pre-concert talk with Marin Alsop.

7:30 p.m. *Fanfares of Brass*.

8 p.m.

Opening performance "Little Women."

Saturday 8 p.m.

Sunday 2 p.m. Matinee performance.

Mark Adamo's opera based on the classic novel by Louisa May Alcott "Little Women." Marin Alsop conducts the Cabrillo Festival Orchestra.

► Music, Art and Wine Festival Free Family Concert 3-4 Saturday-Sunday

Civic Auditorium

11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Free family concert at 2 p.m.

Besides the music, art and wine, this truly is a festival for all ages including a "Creativity Tent for the Kids," ethnic music and dance and a host of other activities. (See page 21.)

Saturday 2 p.m. Composer and festival favorite Greg Smith returns with "A Major minor Mystery" for the Free Family Concert with Marin Alsop and the Cabrillo Festival Orchestra.

► All About Rouse 4 Sunday

Civic Auditorium

8 p.m.

Four works by Pulitzer Prize and Grammy Award-winning composer Christopher Rouse will be featured with Marin Alsop conducting the Cabrillo Festival Orchestra. "Phantasmata," Envoi (West Coast premiere), "Phaethon" and Kabir Padavali (West Coast premiere). A post-concert TalkBack Session will follow.

► Kronos Quartet 7 Wednesday

Civic Auditorium

8 p.m.

World-renowned string quartet returns to the festival in this gala benefit concert. Featuring works from their latest CD *Nuevo*, Kronos plays a literal menagerie of works ranging from Hendrix to Handel.

► Music at the Millpond 9 Friday

The Millpond

6 p.m.

Music, fine wine and food set amongst the redwoods, oaks and sycamore trees, the Music at the Millpond brings all the senses together into one glorious evening. Led by concertmaster Yumi Hwang-Williams, the festival orchestra will play selections from Beethoven and Mozart. Besides music chefs from Pearl Alley Bistro, Clouds, Oswalds, Ristorante Avanti and more others will roll out their creations as will local wineries such as Salamandre Wine Cellars, Bonny Doon Vineyard, David Bruce and Storrs. Attendance is limited to 125 people.

Evelyn Glennie at the Civic

► 10 Saturday

Civic Auditorium

6:30 p.m. Pre-concert dinner *al fresco* and music

8 p.m. Evelyn Glennie

Grammy Award-winning percussionist and Scotswoman Evelyn Glennie and Marin Alsop with the Cabrillo Festival Orchestra. Featuring Michael Daugherty's "Route 66," "UFO" (West Coast premiere) and Steve Reich's "The Four Sections."

► Music at the Mission 11 Sunday

Mission San Juan Batista

Three works, three West Coast premiers set in the historic Mission San Juan Bautista. Michael Daugherty's "Bells for Stokowski," Thea Musgrave's "Journey Through a Japanese Landscape" (with Evelyn Glennie) and John Corigliano's Symphony No. 2."

Info: 420-5260 or www.cabrilloomusic.org

Mission San Juan Bautista.

Numerous financial crises later the Festival was still in the red. To make matters worse, Prop. 13 and the 1989 earthquake made it impossible to keep their administrative offices at Cabrillo College. Now, Taylor says, the festival is completely out of debt and in good solid condition. Each year the audiences grow, flocking from all over the Bay Area. "It's really unusual that an audience will support this much new symphonic music," she says. "People have confidence that when they come to the festival it's going to be enjoyable. They trust the programming and they're willing to take a risk. Santa Cruz is a kind of place where people are willing to explore the new, the unknown. Even if they don't know what it's going to be they think it might be worthwhile and they find out it is."

The Road to Rouse

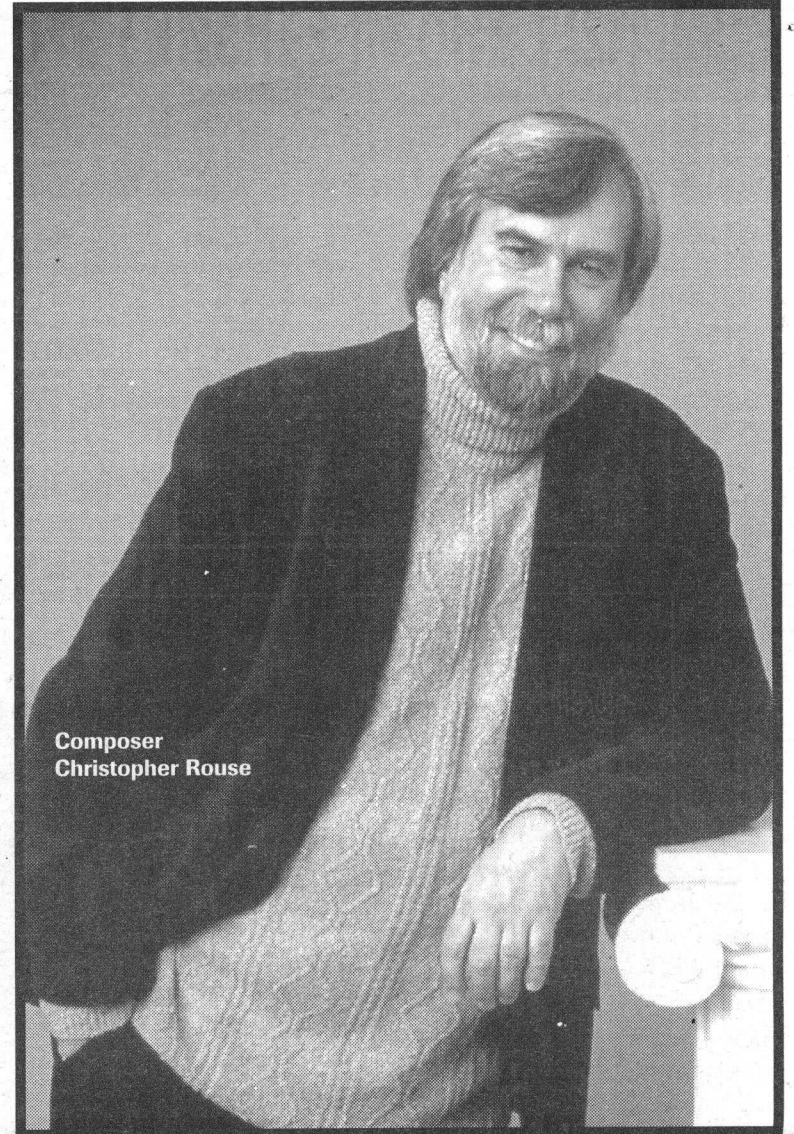
Christopher Rouse, a Pulitzer Prize and Grammy Award-winning composer has been coming to the festival almost every year since Alsop took over conducting duties. Four of his pieces will be performed at the festival including "Phantasmata," "Envoi," "Phaethon" and "Kabir Padavali." Over the phone he explains the background behind each of the four pieces—beginning with "Phaethon," which he dedicated to the memory of the astronauts on the 1986 Challenger tragedy.

In Greek mythology, Phaethon steers his chariot through the skies. Unable to control the horses, Zeus is forced to knock him out of the sky to his death. While composing the extremely fast and virtuosic mini concerto, Rouse, in a spooky coincidence, finished up the measure where the thunderbolt knocks Phaethon out of the chariot and he took a break. "For some reason I was compelled to turn on the television and the Challenger had just exploded five minutes earlier just as I was scoring that passage."

Even over the phone it's obvious that Rouse's mind covers an uncontainable wide spectrum of ideas, ideas that he somehow translates into his music. He also seems to have a precocious, child-like intensity where rapid-fire thoughts tend to bounce to and fro, making it difficult to keep up with him.

Rouse is well known for writing loud music that can make speed metal sound downright lethargic. "Without being glib, I like to keep the audience awake," he says, "particularly in this day and age because the noise level in our daily lives, and certainly in pop culture, has been getting louder and louder. And I grew up with rock 'n' roll so certainly that has something to do with it; the only way to really get someone's attention is to either whisper at barely an audible level so they tune into you or you scream. So I do tend to whisper and scream a lot."

He's come up with a term for vapid music that is mostly in between loud and soft.



Composer
Christopher Rouse



**Percussionist
Evelyn Glennie**

"Moderato mezzo forte. Nothing too fast, nothing too loud, nothing too slow," he says. "It doesn't interest me to hear music like that and I don't think it interests most other people. We need to have music that grips us right from the start."

His works have been performed by virtually every major symphony in the United States and the world is taking notice, making Rouse one of the most sought after composers of his generation. It's music that prompted the *The New York Times* to call it "some of the most anguished, most memorable music around." However, Rouse is surprisingly modest about his large body of work, saying that most times he is all too aware of the warts in his music. The exception is "Kabir Padavali,"

which will be played at the festival featuring world-class soprano Valdine Anderson. "I think it's one of my best pieces. I suppose we're not supposed to say things like this. It may not have some of the personal connotations that one of the death pieces might for example, but I think it came out pretty well. How vain, geez."

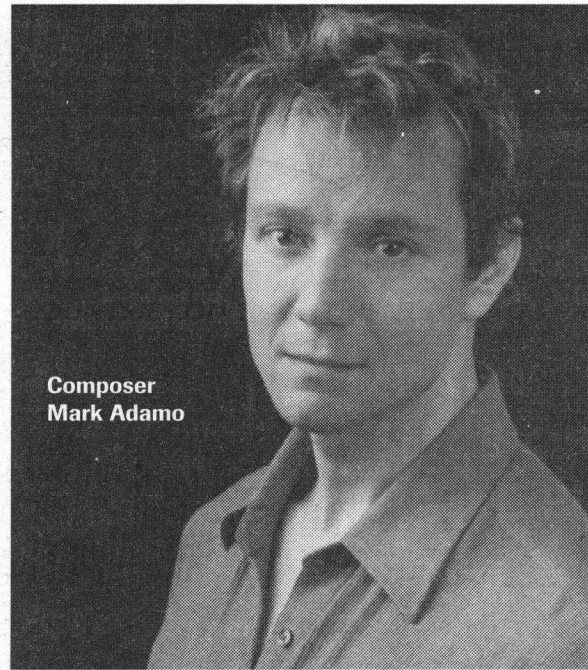
Rouse says he begins the pieces by mentally sketching them in his head. He most always takes a walk after dinner pondering the work. By the time he actually sits down to write the score in longhand it has been simmering in his brain for quite some time.

Does this mean that if you ran into Rouse walking down the sidewalk with his after-dinner cigar in his hand that he would be humming his work out loud? "Rarely, once in a while," he says, laughing. "I try to keep it in my head. I don't want to seem too much the eccentric."

Bowed Over

For members of the Cabrillo Festival orchestra scattered throughout the United States and Canada, it's a huge task to tackle all this music, most of which is unfamiliar and exceedingly hard to play—especially the Rouse works. None of the musicians get paid and yet they return year after year to play in the festival. Most pay their own transportation costs and stay in local host homes. And these are all accomplished musicians in their own right, many with careers in major symphonies. With the two-week commitment comes never-ending practice before they arrive and six-hour long rehearsals once they're here. Not much in the way of a vacation.

But one of the musicians, fortunate enough to live close by, is Santa Cruz resident and cellist Roger Emanuels.



**Composer
Mark Adamo**

Emanuels has been playing the festival for years and also announces each concert on KUSP. In his Westside home he sits down in his living room, his prized early 18th century Italian cello resting on the couch. He's just received all of the scores, which make a stack an inch and a half high. These are scores that Emanuels has just a few weeks to learn before the first rehearsals with conductor Alsop and the Cabrillo Festival Orchestra.

"I recognize an old emotion," Emanuels says. "I receive this huge packet of music. I open it, excited that there's all this new stuff to learn, and I start leafing through it, and I start getting depressed. I go down and down and I say, 'How am I ever going to learn all this stuff? This is impossi-

Kronos Quartet



ble, what did I get myself into? I should just be sitting in the audience listening to this. It reminds me of the time when I was student learning how to play this instrument."

Each orchestra member sees only their part, making it akin to trying to put together a jigsaw puzzle with one piece. But by the time Emanuels gets to rehearsals he says he starts to see how everything works out and it makes more sense.

"We've got to make this work," he says. "We bring all our training, our background and experience and that's the fun challenge. It's very stimulating."

Emanuel demonstrates some Rouse bars on the cello. He's practicing the difficult piece at half the speed, a piece that has presto (fast) written all over it. His bow becomes a blur and the deep rich timbre of the cello sounds agitated and synergistic. "What is this guy (Rouse) trying to do to us?" Emanuel says, flipping through the score. "He has everything, the whole gamut of musical expression. He can make some crazy, wild statements in music. He's working out some problems he had years ago and now we have to help him do that."

Lee Duckles, another cellist, travels all the way from his home in Vancouver, British Columbia to be at the festival. Like Emanuel, he is furiously practicing his parts and preparing for his role as principal cellist in the festival orchestra.

Duckles began his association with the festival in 1978, back in the Davies days of churches and tents. Now, with Alsop's all-American contemporary repertoire, Duckles finds immense satisfaction in playing the festival every year.

"It's refreshing because it makes you see that orchestras are not museums, they're not the dinosaurs that some critics claim," he says from his home in Canada. "At the Cabrillo Festival you see this stuff that is just fresh and alive."



Sambada

Cabrillo Music Art and Wine Street Festival

The Cabrillo Music Festival may be known for its cutting edge music programming and adventurous symphonic fare but the festival is also home to the ever-popular weekend-long art and wine festival.

Billed as a "festival within the festival," this event is a cross between a fair and a carnival—it plays all day Saturday and Sunday, Aug. 3 and 4. More than 70 food, wine and art booths will line Church St. in front of the Civic Auditorium.

Besides fine libations offered by local vintners alongside savory food from around the world prepared by area chefs, the festival plays host to music and dance groups from around the county on the Church Street stage. Groups like samba experts Sambada, Irish jigs by California Celt, Jewish Gypsy music by Esther's Klezmer Band to name a few. The dancing is first-rate as well. The Santa Cruz Ballet Theatre will showcase some of their finest young talent, the Motion Pacific Dancers will enthrall with out-of-this-world hip hop moves and La Canela will perform traditional Flamenco dance with guitarist and cante singer Quijote. It's a full spread of musical and visual feasting, and this is but a small sampling of local talent.

Beside the sights and sounds there is the activity tent to inspire the next generation of artists and musicians. On Saturday the tent will be devoted to music workshops with a veritable host of instruments for the kids to try. On Sunday the tent goes visual with clay, paint and various other art making mediums to incite the creative urge. Local artists and teachers will be on hand both days to invigorate and coach the artistic process.

Inside the Civic on Saturday is the free family

concert featuring Disney composer Gregory Smith's delightful "A Major minor Mystery." Musical sleuths Marin Alsop and the Cabrillo Festival Orchestra take on the beguiling piece that is sure to wildly entertain.

And finally, if you have an old workable instrument lying about the attic or garage bring it to the Instruments for Kids Donation Program that will help the Santa Cruz City District music programs. Below is a complete (at press time) list of events and times.

3 Saturday

- 11 a.m. TBA
- Noon: **Zambra**
- 1 p.m. **Santa Cruz Ballet Theatre**
- 2 p.m. **Free Family Concert** "A Major minor Mystery"
- 3:15 p.m. **Motion Pacific Dancers**
- 4 p.m. **Flamenco** with La Canela, Quijote and Friends
- 5:15 p.m. **Orient'al** with Heavy Hips Tribal Belly Dance and Sahar
- 6:30 p.m. **Kuzanga**
- 6:30 p.m. Flamenco guitarist **Adam Markowitz** in the auditorium

4 Sunday

- 11 a.m. TBA
- 1 p.m. **Esther's Klezmer Band**
- 2 p.m. **California Celt**
- 4 p.m. **Watsonville Taiko**
- 5:15 p.m. **Modern Gypsies**
- 6:30 p.m. **Sambada**