

KEEPING TEMPO Composer John Corigliano returns to the fest this year.

A Milestone for the Modern Symphony

Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music celebrates its 45th anniversary | by Amanda Martinez

Cabrillo Music Festival

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For so many of us, classical music exists only as the time-honored tradition of familiar melodies written by a handful of composers, who lived, wrote their masterpieces and died centuries ago.

But for two weeks every year, the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music (CFCM) sets out to remind us that classical music is very much a living art form. The soul of this festival is its living composers. They gather to hear their work brought to life, often for the first time, interpreted by a conductor, inhabited by musicians and experienced by listeners.

And as the audience, we are invited to take part in a musical conversation that speaks directly to our time, hearing music that is an immediate and vital reflection of our current events, cultural memes, crises, spirit, choices, triumphs, frustration and hope.

The CFCM has reached a milestone in this, its 45th year. In her 16th year at the helm of the festival, the incomparable Marin Alsop will lead the festival orchestra and 10 composers-in-residence in six West Coast premieres, five world premieres and one U.S. premiere.

Here is a look at three of the works to be premiered this year, the composers who conceived them and the commentary they provide us on present society.

Mr. Tambourine Man, Play a Song For Me

Faithful attendees of the CFCM will recognize the work of composer John Corigliano that has long been a highlight of previous festivals. One of the most highly-regarded contemporary American composers, Corigliano has been the recipient of society's most esteemed awards, including several Grammys, a Pulitzer Prize in 2001 for his "Symphony No. 2" and an Academy Award for his dramatic score for the 1997 film *The Red Violin*.

Corigliano returns to this year's CFCM as a composer-in-residence for the West Coast premiere of his piece "Mr Tambourine Man: Seven Poems of Bob Dylan."

Commissioned by Carnegie Hall to write a song cycle based on an American text, Corigliano initially found himself at a loss for inspiration. That is, until he picked up a collection of Bob Dylan lyrics. So

steeped had Corigliano been in the music of his genre when the iconic folk, singer-songwriter was popular, he had never heard Dylan's songs. Recognizing Dylan's lyrics to be (as he describes in his program notes), "every bit as beautiful and immediate as [he] had heard [they were] and surprisingly well suited to [his] own musical language," Corigliano decided to treat them as stand-alone poetry and, with Dylan's permission, composed his own piece around them.

The result is "Mr. Tambourine Man: Seven Poems of Bob Dylan," a 35-minute orchestral piece that, as Corigliano writes in his notes, "traces a journey of emotional and civic maturation."

In following a trajectory of Dylan's lyrical thoughts that begins with the social naiveté of "Clothes Line," explores the frustration, political indictment and ominous prophecy of "Blowin' in the Wind," "Masters of War" and "All Along the Watchtower" and leaves us with the hope of what Corigliano calls a "folk-song benediction" in his chosen epilogue, "Forever Young," Corigliano suggests the existence of an enduring hope, that society is capable of solving its greatest ills.

America, Young and Optimistic

The story of fiddler/composer Mark O'Connor's rise to prominence is one that the American audience loves to embrace. His biography makes no mention of a young artist's nascent talent shaped by the rigid tradition of a prestigious conservatory. Instead, O'Connor benefited from the motley dual mentorship of French jazz violinist Stéphane Grappelli and Texas fiddler Benny Thomasson.

From the basis of these two disparate genres, O'Connor explored and mastered a variety of musical styles, and has since developed his own unique form of classical music, distinctly American in its character, that embodies the ethos of 18th century America—grit, determination and optimism.

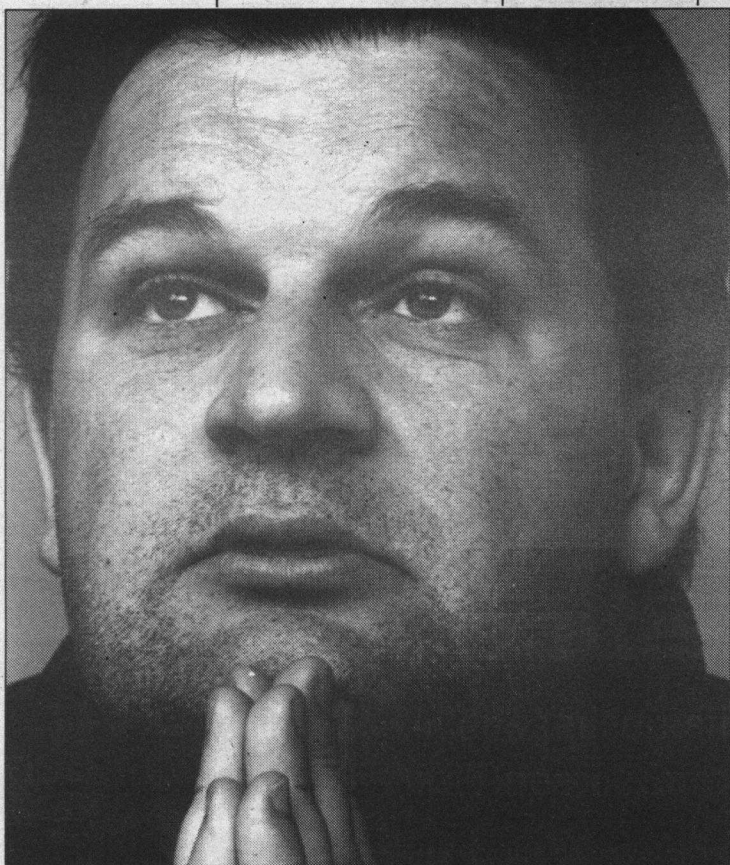
Celebrated as a consummate crossover artist, O'Connor, a two-time Grammy winner, has performed with James Taylor, Béla Fleck, Wynton Marsalis and Yo-Yo Ma. Critics laud the musician for his ability to combine the rigor and rules of the highly structured classical idiom with the organic, grassroots approach of American folk music. His compositions acknowledge convention, yet are deeply personal. Their sound is refined, yet harbors that rugged nostalgia of early America.

On Aug. 3, the CFCM offers the world premiere of O'Connor's "Symphony No. 1, Variations on Appalachia Waltz." The symphony is derived from O'Connor's 1992 composition "Appalachia Waltz" that was originally recorded in 1996 as a trio piece featuring O'Connor on violin, Yo-Yo Ma on cello and Edgar Meyer on double bass.

In an essay recounting his inspirations for the piece, O'Connor describes a moment of epiphany in which "a window opened to the American optimism that I tend to look for, a melody appeared seemingly out of thin air." Twenty minutes later, O'Connor had written the main music for the piece.

The symphony that O'Connor has fashioned around "Appalachia Waltz" will contain five movements: a brass fanfare, a jig, a fugue, a hoedown and the final movement which will serve as a recapitulation of the theme in full.

O'Connor's compositions, in their championing of a pure American spirit, unfettered by modern



DAVE'S DEBUT Composer David Heath's "Colourful World" has its world premiere at this year's festival.

perversions and corruptions, attempt to restore a little virtue to our motivations, our pursuit of happiness and therein, our national pride.

An Outsider's Approval

A British composer who has written numerous concertos and other orchestral pieces, Dave Heath initially studied jazz. His first compositions, "Out of the Cool" (1978), "Rumania" (1979) and "Coltrane" (1981), integrated traditional jazz chords and rhythms into a classical structure.

Early in his career, Heath developed a taste for the avant-garde, and began to incorporate a broader range of techniques into his compositional style, experimenting with funk and rock rhythms, assertive and extreme harmonies, and minimalist methods.

Heath's unique composition style has garnered both praise and resentment from his audience. His 1993 violin concerto "Alone at the Frontier," which featured a beatbox choral ensemble and a graffiti-laden backdrop, received a standing ovation at its American premiere in Minneapolis, but was considered highly controversial by the American musical establishment.

Heath is also a professional flutist, focusing primarily on the modern genre. If you remember the flute solo on Sting's 1991 single "Mad About You"—that was Heath.

This year's CFCM will feature the world premiere of Heath's "Colourful World," a work inspired by an oil painting done by Heath's 6-year-old son. The painting, a rendering of Earth as it appears from space, ignited in Heath's imagination the story of a space traveler who discovers the planet, explores it, meets, falls in love with and is inspired by its people and then leaves it forever changed. As a series in six parts, "Vision of Perfection," "Teeming with Life," "Earth Rhythms," "Romance," "African Crossing" and "Prayer," the composition is driven by a solo trumpet. In reflecting the beauty of Earth in the eyes of a true outsider, Heath hopes to remind us, his audience, of our motivations for ensuring its survival.

In his first appearance at the CFCM, Heath has dedicated "Colourful World" to Alsop and the festival.

For more information about the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music, visit cabrillomusic.org, or call 426-6966.