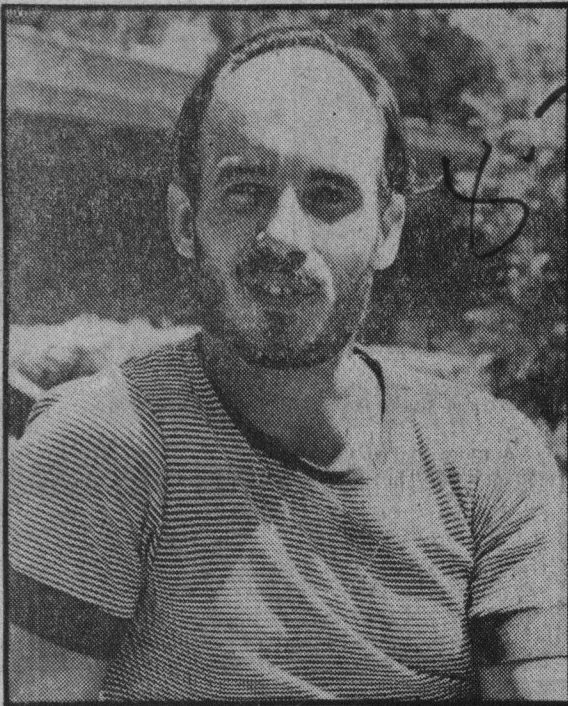


Music's Creative Process



Jana Marcus/Photo

Dennis Russell Davies

AT THE Cabrillo Music Festival, said its director Dennis Russell Davies earlier this week, "the audience is used to listening to all kinds of things. It really loosens you up." Davies demonstrated his point Thursday, opening the Festival's 19th season at Resurrection Church in Aptos with a program stretching from Stephen Foster's "Jeanie With The Light Brown Hair" to the world premiere of Alan Hovhaness' Symphony No. 43, Op. 334.

The distinguished Hovhaness was on hand to conduct his richly melodic work, as was the Festival's other composer in residence Pauline Oliveros. She concluded the program with two works — "Variations For Sextet" and "Sonic Meditation," which had the audience making the music, humming its way into a harmonious pitch to end the concert on a properly blissful note.

There were also works by Maurice Ravel, Benjamin Britten and Percy Grainger to remind the listeners at this Prelude Concert that the Festival's reputation for presenting new music is balanced by a firm foundation in the classics. The diverse program offered an opportunity to preview the talents of several of this year's soloists — bass Thomas Paul, oboist Philip West and mezzo-soprano Jan DeGaetani — in its spirited "sampler" of things to come from the 12-concert series which continues this weekend and next at various locations.

(For those who can't attend in person, the Festival will be broadcast live on radio station KUSP, 88.9 FM.)

Music Review

Davies, returning after directing last year's Festival from abroad, brought his characteristically casual but dynamic and prodigious musical gifts to the opening program. He began the concert with a piano solo on Percy Grainger's "Molly On The Shore," and returned as accompanist for both West and DeGaetani.

"Music has to be thought of as a living creative process," he had told reporters earlier in the week, and his playing makes the same point, moving within the time and melody prescribed by the composition to allow vitality and a sense of surprise to emerge.

"Molly On The Shore," he said, was included in answer to questions about the whereabouts of his wife Molly, a contributor to previous Festivals who is currently making a film in Italy.

The English country reel feel of the Grainger piece was followed by Ravel's "Don Quichotte A Dulcinee," three songs of widely different mood illustrating facets of Quixote's temperament in three different Spanish and Basque dance rhythms of the times.

Thomas Paul richly portrayed these moods — from plaintive and tender to

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boistrous and blustery — with sensitive accompaniment from pianist Emily Wong. The operatic nature of the 1934 compositions — the last that Ravel wrote before his death — belied the fact that they were in fact written for a film.

Benjamin Britten's 1936 work "Temporal Variations" was lost and then found in a trunkful of music that the composer had left with friends, said soloist Philip West. Although it was almost 40 years old, the haunting composition had only been re-discovered in the late-'70s, and oboist West ventured a guess that his was probably "the first California performance" of the exploratory composition.

With jazzy hints sneaking in, West and Davies on piano carried on a musical dialogue, complementing one another as they moved ahead, seemingly into the unknown, with bravado. The piece was one in which one instrument would seem to suggest themes to the other, and the effect was one of powerful fragments of emotion being woven into a more subtle, delicate and sometimes playful texture.

Soprano DeGaetani — who also happens to be West's wife — then took her husband's place next to Davies' piano, presenting a light-hearted Stephen Foster Song Cycle. Adding "Hard Times Come Again No More" to the other selections which ranged from "Jeanie With The Light Brown Hair" to "If You've Only Got A Moustache," her powerful voice added a classical dimension to these mementoes of our own mid-19th Century folk culture.

The new Hovhaness Symphony was the high point of the concert, revealing that some contemporary composers are still deeply concerned with the prospect of making melody at the same time it was raising its "voice" in a moving statement of the Hovhaness' wonderfully gentle spiritual awareness.

Hovhaness warned his listeners not to be afraid of the work — "it's short," he explained — before leading the small instrumental ensemble through its six movements. ("There are six movements — but they're all short," he good-naturedly added.)

Sandwiching its "Christmas Vision" — which the composer equated with "a vision of infinite compassion" — into its other movements the Symphony allowed solo work from oboe, tympani and trumpet against a lush background provided by the strings. With hints of folk dance motifs revealing the

composer's Armenian heritage, the piece was quite lovely throughout. Visual, dramatic and somehow sweetly innocent, the Symphony climaxed with Hovhaness, arms raised, leading the players into a sharing of his own joyous exaltation.

Oliveros' major contribution to the program was the 1960 "Variations For Sextet," which the composer described as being "21 years old — old enough to vote." The piece was very much a collection of musical fragments in space and time, each like a sentence building to a mark of punctuation before the next began.

The effect was one of a lot of musical space, being filled with little bursts of brash color — and an occasional comic sound effect — almost like fireworks. The piece hovered between creating tension and turning listless, and at times the sounds of things dropping in the audience or listeners shifting in their seats seemed to be natural parts of the score.