Masquerade: A 90th Birthday Celebration for Composer-Teacher
Vincent Persichetti

In honor of Homecoming 2005, this evening's concert celebrates the unique relationship between teacher and student through the juxtaposition of works of Vincent Persichetti (1915-1987) and several of his students. While the concert is book-ended by works of Persichetti that are themselves theme(s)-and-variations, the *entire concert* actually is conceived as a hidden or disguised "theme-and-variations" (a masquerade, of sorts?): here the theme is Persichetti, the variations his students.

There have been few more universally admired twentieth-century American musicians than Vincent Persichetti. In addition to composing over a hundred and fifty works in numerous genres, during his forty-year tenure (1947-1987) at the Juilliard School of Music (where he chaired both the composition and Literature and Materials departments), Persichetti taught thousands of future musicians, including the other composers featured this evening (Charles Bestor, Richard Danielpour, Jacob Druckman, Einojuhani Rautavaara, and Steve Reich), as well as other prominent composers, such as Bruce Adolphe, Philip Glass, 2005 Grawemeyer Award winner George Tsontakis, 1983 Pulitzer Prize winner Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, and P.D.Q. Bach (Peter Schickele). To an adventurous generation of composers, Persichetti was a teacher *par excellence* and a highly lucid theorist. In both capacities—as composer and teacher—his great artistry was ever clear and impressive, providing an example of dynamic leadership for those who encountered his unique genius. In a recent interview with Andrew Cook, Steve Reich commented:

> [Vincent Persichetti] was a phenomenal teacher because he had enormous musicianship and he could be a complete chameleon. He could listen to you, look at your score, and he became you. He could improvise pieces in your style. He knew what information you needed at this point in your life today. And that's a great teacher. Because, he has more technique than you have and he can see where you're going, not as a reflection of himself, but as an amplification of yourself. There are precious few people like this and when you find teachers like this they become enormously helpful, because they solve specific problems that you have at a certain period of time.

In Andrea Olmstead's *Juilliard: A History,* Persichetti's L&M faculty colleague Michael White retells this anecdote about Persichetti's encyclopedic knowledge of the repertoire and virtuosic teaching:

> Fifteen years after her graduation, one former student remembered a class when Vincent was explaining the concept of *hemiola*. In the course of convincing student[s] to "use their ears," he kept running back and forth to the piano. (She emphasized the word "running" with the same look of amazement on her face that she must have worn in 1975.) "I wrote down all the works he played: a Brahms *Intermezzo*, a *Courante* of Bach, a movement from *La Mer*, a Scarlatti sonata, and another short work of Brahms. My god, he didn't just play a few bars here and there, he did a whole section—talking, singing, and bouncing over to the blackboard all the while!" She paused a moment, thinking back to that afternoon. "All the students in that class looked at their neighbors, mouths open, thinking, 'Does his guy know the entire repertoire by heart?'"
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> … Everything he spoke about or played had one purpose: to help the students make essential aural connections to what would otherwise be just intellectual concepts. Anybody could look up the definition of *hemiola* in the *Harvard Dictionary*—but, would they really understand? "You can look at music, talk about music, and read about music until the Second Coming," he'd say, "but if you don't have it in your ears, you'll never *get* it…." Vincent believed in the "time-bomb effect" when it comes to teaching and learning. He knew that if you piqued students' curiosities and senses of wonder (as opposed to filling their heads with facts), students would be encouraged to seek knowledge on their own. This would not happen immediately, the pressures of conservatory life being what they are, but he knew it would happen eventually. His humility would not allow him to recall praise received, but generations of teaching assistants could testify to the comments of former students, such as "Thank you, Mr. Persichetti, for helping me to understand," or "Thank you for teaching me how to listen," or, simply, "Thank you."

In fact, legend has it that Persichetti's reputation was so high, and the demand to enroll in his always-filled classes so great, that students wanting his section of L&M began a line for registration at 5:00 a.m. His advice to composition students was equally remarkable (if also demonstrating his sense of humor); once he admonished, "Never try to be a composer; if you really want to write music, that's different. Then it's worth the financial risk, it's worth starving. Early on I had a church job for 18 years. I got so I would improvise and play things like *Rite of Spring* as an anthem. I learned from playing the piano that I am a composer. I played

various famous themes and found relationships between them, pop music, Chopin. Then I realized I had a disease."

In addition to his activities as teacher and administrator, Persichetti still, despite believing that he was a "slow writer," was a prolific and prodigious composer. Persichetti's career flourished during a period when American composition was deeply divided among rival stylistic factions, each seeking to invalidate the work of its opponents. In the face of this partisan antagonism, Persichetti advocated the notion of a broad working vocabulary, or "common practice," based on a fluent assimilation of all the materials and techniques that had appeared during the twentieth century; he believed that "composers of [the twentieth century] have discovered, rediscovered, inherited, and accumulated a wealth of musical resources. These raw materials are only beginning to be used in an unself-conscious manner. Ours is a period of great diversification but, paradoxically, it points to a multi-common practice in which composers may create a solid literature—a literature speaking of now" (from *The Orchestral Composer's Point of View*). This interpretation of twentieth-century music (or more accurately, the music of the first 60 years of the twentieth century) also informed his theory/composition textbook, *Twentieth-Century Harmony: Creative Aspects and Practice* (1961), in which he accounts for specific harmonic materials commonly used by twentieth century composers; while serialism is hardly discussed, Persichectti does discuss other possibilities, such as: intervals; secundal, tertian, and quartal harmonies; polychords; and so on. As Persichetti asserts in the text's Foreward:

> Following a predetermined path of strict axioms is avoided, for harmonic creativity depends upon the relation of chord to chord in a particular context; any chord may progress to any other chord, and seemingly opposing techniques may be combined under certain formal and dramatic conditions. In theoretical deductions, the emphasis is placed upon creative ideas and composition stimulation…. Only when theory and technique are combined with imagination and talent do works of importance result.

His own music exhibits a wide stylistic range, from extreme diatonic simplicity to complex, contrapuntal atonality; as Persichetti recognized (in a 1985 interview):

> My music varies, it goes from gracious to gritty very often. Someimes it has a lot of serial in it; other pieces have less of that and are more tonal. It's a mixture. I may have had something in 1942 that was more avant-garde, more advanced than something I did this year. It is not a change, but just that you happen to hear a piece that is more avant-garde than tonal. Right next to it might be a piece that is more relaxed; my music is always enigmatic. I have never joined a camp.

Perhaps more than any other composer before or since, Persichetti embraced the wind band as a vehicle for artistic expression; not only was his opus 1 written for a chamber ensemble comprised exclusively of winds, but he composed ten other works for band, including his Symphony No. 6, op. 69 (1956) and the monumental *Parable for Band*, op. 121 (1973). (In addition, Persichetti composed voluminously for solo wind instruments, creating numerous solo parables and serenades.) Speaking about the wind band, Persichetti once remarked,

> The concert band is a medium of expression distinct from, but not subordinate to, any other medium. More and more young American composers are turning to it now. You can get lots of things out of a band that you just can't get out of an orchestra.
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> I know that composers are often frightened away by the sound of the word "band," because of certain qualities long associated with this medium—rusty trumpets, consumptive flutes, wheezy oboes, disintegrated clarinets, fumbling yet amiable baton wavers, and gum-coated park benches! If you couple these conditions with transfigurations and disfigurations of works originally conceived for orchestra, you create a sound experience that's as nearly excruciating as a sick string quartet playing a dilettante's arrangement of a nineteenth-century piano sonata. However, when composers think of the band as a huge, supple ensemble of winds and percussion, the obnoxious fat will drain off, and creative ideas will flourish.

Persichetti was certainly not frightened by the "band;" in fact, his contributions are recognized as the corner-stone of the American wind band repertoire. (It is little coincidence that, two years after he wrote his *Divertimento*, with its transparent textures and demand for soloistic musicians, the Eastman Wind Ensemble was formed—Persichetti's music transcended and re-defined what the potential of the band medium was, pointing the medium in a new direction which has impacted the last 50 years of music-making.)

Vincent Persichetti: *Serenade No. 1*, op. 1 (1929)

Before Persichetti began his composition studies with Roy Harris and conducting studies with Fritz Reiner; before he earned his degrees from Combs College, the Philadelphia Conservatory, and the Curtis Institute; before he developed into the formidable musical genius who would dominate Juilliard during the last half of the twentieth century; before he became *Persichetti*, he was a precocious youngster living with his immigrant family in Philadelphia. (Persichetti would later joke that his parents, who actually were incredibly supportive of his musical pursuits, had hampered his development—that, though he wanted to study music at the age of two, they made him wait until he was three!) The greatest benefit of living in an Italian neighborhood was the community's attitude toward a young man pursuing music. Persichetti once remarked that "music in those days was as important as basketball," and that it was considered a social disgrace if a family's living room was not equipped with a player piano. Young Vincent would then get together with the other musically-inclined school boys (including the Angelucci brothers, all three of whom would go on to orchestral woodwind careers), playing whatever literature they could find; it did not matter what instruments were present—Persichetti would simply fill in the rest of the parts on the piano. In fact, the community support for music was overwhelmingly strong, as evidenced by this anecdote (from Donald and Janet Patterson's *Vincent Persichetti: A Bio-Bibliography*):

> One time when this odd little band gathered in one boy's home to play, more and more players came to join in until the room could not accommodate one more. In his enthusiasm for the boys' music, the "papa" of the house went to the cellar, got a sledgehammer, and knocked out part of the wall. When the dust settled there was room for all to join in the music making. Such was the encouragement given young boys pursuing music in the Italian neighborhoods of South Philadelphia during the first quarter of the twentieth century.

It was during this time that he began studying with Russell King Miller, organist, composer, and professor of composition at Combs; in later years. Persichetti would always speak fondly of Miller, who he regarded as his most influential teacher, characterizing their relationship as warm, harmonious, and productive. It was also during this period that he wrote his opus 1 and opus 2 compositions. (While these were certainly not his *first* compositions, they were the first, when viewed from a distance, to be deemed worthy of inclusion in his body of work.) The *Serenade No. 1*, op. 1 for Ten Wind Instruments, written in 1929 when Persichetti was 14 years old, is based on a chorale melody composed when he was nine. Persichetti's wife Dorothea offered this description of the premiere concert, performed for the alumni of Combs Conservatory, "The composer played seven of the ten parts on a tracker organ; the other three were played on a violin, oboe, and tuba. The composer's best memory of the concert is of fudge served afterward by the auxiliary committee, composed of sophomore girls." The official debut of the piece, then, in its intended (if still idiosyncratic) scoring would not take place for another twenty-three years. While *Serenade No. 1* betrays some of the not-yet-refined ideas of a teenager (for example, some of the orchestrational/tessitura choices seem a bit extreme given the musical ideas), the *Serenade* offers a provocative glimpse into the mind of this musical prodigy as a youth.

Steve Reich: *Music for Pieces of Wood* (1973)

> I am not interested in improvisation or in sounding exotic. One hardly needs to seek out personality as it can never be avoided. Obviously music should put all within listening range into a state of ecstasy. I am interested in music which works exclusively with gradual changes in time.
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> A performance for us is a situation where all the musicians, including myself, attempt to set aside our individual thoughts and feelings of the moment, and try to focus our minds and bodies clearly on the realization of one continuous musical process. This music is not the expression of the momentary state of mind of the performers while playing. Rather the momentary state of mind of the performers while playing is largely determined by the ongoing composed slowly changing music. By voluntarily giving up freedom to do whatever momentarily comes to mind, we are, as a result, free of all that momentarily comes to mind.
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> As a performer what I want is to be told exactly what to do within a musical ensemble, and to find that by doing it well I help make beautiful music. This is what I ask of my own compositions, and…this is what I looked for and found when I studied Balinese and African music. The pleasure I get from playing is not the pleasure of expressing myself, but of subjugating myself to the music and experiencing the ecstasy that comes from being a part of it.
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> Steve Reich, from "Music and Performance" (1969-1974; rev. 1993)

Steve Reich (b. 1936) was recently called "…America's greatest living composer." (The Village Voice), "…the most original musical thinker of our time" (The New Yorker), and "…among the great composers of the century" (The New York Times). From his early taped speech pieces *It's Gonna Rain* (1965) and *Come Out* (1966) to his and video artist (and wife) Beryl Karot's digital video opera *Three Tales* (2002), Mr. Reich's path has embraced not only aspects of Western classical music, but the structures, harmonies, and rhythms of non-Western and American vernacular music, particularly jazz. "There's just a handful of living composers who can legitimately claim to have altered the direction of musical history and Steve Reich is one of them," states The Guardian (London). Paul Griffiths describes him as "One of the first masters of the repetitive music that emerged in New York in the mid-1960s and was soon branded 'minimalism', he has consistently broadened and developed his musical world without compromising the streamlined efficiency and precision of his technique. Repetitive, pulse-driven figures have remained a characteristic, but so have the slips and leaps of a lively mind."

Born in New York and raised there and in California, Mr. Reich graduated with honors in philosophy from Cornell University in 1957. For the next two years, he studied composition with Hall Overton [also a Persichetti protégé], and from 1958 to 1961 he studied at the Juilliard School of Music with William Bergsma and Vincent Persichetti. Mr. Reich received his M.A. in Music from Mills College in 1963, where he worked with Luciano Berio and Darius Milhaud. In a 1995 interview with Geoff Smith and Nicola Walker Smith, Reich admitted that, "I would say that my most interesting and beneficial teachers were Hall Overton and Vincent Persichetti." During the summer of 1970, with the help of a grant from the Institute for International Education, Mr. Reich studied drumming at the Institute for African Studies at the University of Ghana in Accra. In 1973 and 1974 he studied Balinese Gamelan Semar Pegulingan and Gamelan Gambang at the American Society for Eastern Arts in Seattle and Berkeley, California. From 1976 to 1977 he studied the traditional forms of cantillation (chanting) of the Hebrew scriptures in New York and Jerusalem.

Reich's earliest works, such as *Come Out* (1966) or *Piano Phase* (1967), reflected his interest in perceptible compositional processes that determined both the local and global parameters of a work (see excerpts from his essay "Music as a Gradual Process" below), as well as interests in African rhythms and jazz. After 1968, and as his works began to accommodate a greater element of personal choice and intuition (and hence greater coloristic, harmonic, and melodic variety), his formal structures also expanded in range and depth, all the while preserving the purity and integrity of an underlying process. As Geoff Smith writes, "It is this insistence on clarity and audibility of structure, combined with a radical simplification of musical means and an emotional directness, that characterize the music of Steve Reich." Although Reich consciously avoids use of the word, Reich's process pieces are recognized as monuments of early *minimalism*.

In 1966 Steve Reich founded his own ensemble of three musicians, which rapidly grew to 18 members or more. Since 1971, Steve Reich and Musicians have frequently toured the world, and have the distinction of performing to sold-out houses at venues as diverse as Carnegie Hall and the Bottom Line Cabaret. For the exigencies of touring, Reich created a piece that could be rehearsed in a hotel room and used sounds he was increasingly hearing: *Clapping Music* for two pairs of hands (1972). But his main swerve was, on the contrary, towards larger and richer ensembles, and to developing not so much the dynamism and attack of *Drumming* as its chiming sonorities: hence *Six Pianos* (later made a little more practicable, and gentler, as *Six Marimbas*), *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices and Organ*, and *Music for Pieces of Wood* (all from 1973). These works are based on a technique of repeating a figure and then building up a duplicate, beat by beat, out of phase through the repetitions. Reich has written the following regarding the piece performed this evening:

> *Music for Pieces of Wood* grows out of the same roots as *Clapping Music*: a desire to make music with the simplest possible instruments. The claves, or cylindrical pieces of wood, used here were selected for their particular pitches (A, B, C#, D#, and D# an octave above), and for their resonant timbre. This piece is one of the loudest I have ever composed, but uses no amplification whatsoever. The rhythmic structure is based entirely on the process of rhythmic "build-ups" or the substitution of beats for rests, and is in three sections of decreasing pattern length: 6/4, 4/4, 3/4.

In 1990, Mr. Reich received a Grammy Award for Best Contemporary Composition for *Different Trains* as recorded by the Kronos Quartet on the Nonesuch label. In 1994 Steve Reich was elected to the American

Academy of Arts and Letters, to the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts in 1995, and, in 1999, awarded Commandeur de l'ordre des Arts et Lettres. In 2000 he was awarded the Schuman Prize from Columbia University, the Montgomery Fellowship from Dartmouth College, the Regent's Lectureship at the University of California at Berkeley, an honorary doctorate from the California Institute of the Arts and was named Composer of the Year by Musical America magazine.

I do not mean the process of composition but rather pieces of music that are, literally, processes.

The distinctive thing about musical processes is that they determine all the note-to-note (sound-to-sound) details and the over all form simultaneously. (Think of a round or infinite canon.)

I am interested in perceptible processes. I want to be able to hear the process happening throughout the sounding music.

To facilitate closely detailed listening, a musical process should happen extremely gradually.

Performing and listening to a gradual musical process resembles:

pulling back a swing, releasing it, and observing it gradually come to rest;
turning over an hourglass and watching the sand slowly run through to the bottom;
placing your feet in the sand by the ocean's edge and
watching, feeling, and listening to the waves gradually bury them.

Although I may have the pleasure of discovering musical processes and composing the musical material to run through them, once the process is set up and loaded it runs by itself.

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Musical processes can give one a direct contact with the impersonal and also a kind of complete control, and one doesn't always think of the impersonal and complete control as going together. By "a kind" of complete control I mean that by running this material through this process I completely control all that results, but also that I accept all that results without changes.

…

What I'm interested in is a compositional process and a sounding music that are one and the same thing.

James Tenney said in conversation, "then the composer isn't privy to anything". I don't know any secrets of structure that you can't hear. We all listen to the process together since it's quite audible, and one of the reasons it's quite audible is, because it's happening extremely gradually.

The use of hidden structural devices in music never appealed to me. Even when all the cards are on the table and everyone hears what is gradually happening in a musical process, there are still enough mysteries to satisfy all. These mysteries are the impersonal, unintended, psychoacoustic by-products of the intended process. These might include submelodies heard within repeated melodic patterns, stereophonic effects due to listener location, slight irregularities in performance, harmonies, difference in tones, etc.

Listening to an extremely gradual musical process opens my ears to it. But it always extends farther than I can hear, and that makes it interesting to listen to that musical process again. That area of every gradual (completely controlled) musical process, where one hears the details of the sound moving out away from Intentions, occurring for their own acoustic reasons, is it.

I begin to perceive these minute details when I can sustain close attention and a gradual process invites my sustained attention. By "gradual" I mean extremely gradual; a process happening so slowly and gradually that listening to it resembles watching a minute hand on a watch – you can perceive it moving after you stay with it a little while.

…

The distinctive thing about musical processes is that they determine all the note-to-note details and the overall form simultaneously. One can't improvise in a musical process – the concepts are mutually exclusive.

While performing and listening to gradual musical processes one can participate in a particular liberating and impersonal kind of ritual. Focusing in on the musical process makes possible that shift of attention away from he and she and you and me outwards towards it.

Steve Reich, from "Music as a Gradual Process" (1968)

Charles L. Bestor: *Three Portraits* (1984)

Charles Bestor (b. 1924), a native of New York City, received his musical training under Paul Hindemith at Yale University, Vincent Persichetti and Peter Mennin at the Juilliard School of Music and independently under the electronic music composer Vladimir Ussachevsky. He also holds degrees from Swarthmore College (Phi Beta Kappa) and the Universities of Illinois and Colorado. Dr. Bestor is a Fellow of the MacDowell Colony, Yaddo, the Ragdale Foundation, the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, and the Tyrone Guthrie Centre, Ireland.

Dr. Bestor's early works were largely dodecophonic, with a strong grounding in Hindemithian counterpoint. The New York Times described his early Piano Sonata as "a dissonant, tightly organized working out of clear and dramatic motives; explosive and vigorous declamations with sweep and power." In his more recent music, much of it in the electronic medium, Dr. Bestor has increasingly explored the integration of jazz-derived, tonally-based harmonic, melodic and rhythmic elements into the formal structures of conventional concert music. The Boston Globe spoke of his *In Memoriam Bill Evans* as "lush, urbane, shrewdly paced, neatly transferring some quality modern-jazz orchestration to a related and congenial symphonic territory," and the Salt Lake Tribune, writing of his earlier jazz-based orchestral work *Until a Time*, referred to its "searching treatment of melodic and percussive ideas; a witty piece, interspersed with bits of Stravinsky and Poulenc, but highly original in sound."

Dr. Bestor has been awarded a National Endowment for the Arts Composer's Fellowship and was a winner in the 1999 Bourges (France) International Electro-Acoustic Music Competition. He was also the winner of the Main Prize in the 1996 Musica Nova International Competition of the Czech Republic and first prize in the Omaha Symphony's 1994 International Orchestral Competition. He has also received awards in the New England Philharmonic and Quinto Maganini Orchestra Competitions, New England Composers' Orchestra Competition, LGBA National Wind Competition, the David Lipscomb Prize and the Delius Prize for Instrumental Chamber Music, among others. His works have been commissioned by the Composers String Quartet, the Utah Symphony, the Salem Symphony and the Five-College Symphony Orchestras, the Utah Bicentennial Commission, the Peter Britt Festival, Phi Beta National Professional Fraternity and a number of individual performers.

Dr. Bestor has collaborated, as a composer, with the sculptor Sherry Healy on the installation "Pathways from the Dream Spell Series" which was exhibited at the Chicago International Art Exposition at Navy Pier, the Illinois State Museum, the Michigan Art Park and the Chicago ARC Gallery. He also collaborated with the visual artist Barbara Cornett and the lighting designer John Wade on the installation "Cycles," which was commissioned by the Maier Museum of American Art and has since toured extensively throughout the mid-Atlantic states. He has subsequently collaborated with Ms. Cornett and Mr. Wade on the installation "Into the Labyrinth," commissioned by the Fine Arts Center of the Virginia Museum in Lynchburg and "The Unfound Door", commissioned by the College Music Society, which has been widely seen and heard in its video and tape versions.

For many years Dr. Bestor has pursued a parallel career as a teacher and administrator. He was for a decade on the faculty and administration of the Juilliard School of Music and subsequently served as Dean of the College of Music of Willamette University and as Head of the Music Departments of the Universities of Massachusetts, Utah and Alabama. He has also taught on the faculty of the University of Colorado and is presently Professor of Composition and Director of the Electronic and Computer Music Studios of the University of Massachusetts.

About his *Three Portraits*, Bestor writes:

> The score for *Three Portraits for Wind Octet* bears the following note: "Dedicated to those pictured within and to the MacDowell Colony, where we all met and where this work was largely written." The piece was composed during the winter of 1984. Its three movements are musical portraits, after the manner of Elgar's *Enigma Variations*, of three artists—two musicians and a painter—who were colleagues and friends, and there are a number of musical references, some of them obvious and some carefully hidden, to their association with the composer and to their work together. *Three Portraits* was premiered at the Wellesley Composer Conference in 1984 with Efrain Guigui conducting.

The eight members of Symphonic Winds who are presenting *Three Portraits* would like to thank Dr. Bestor for his gracious assistance in the preparation of this evening's performance.

Vincent Persichetti: "Evening Hymn," No. 7 from *Hymns and Responses*, op. 68 (1956)
Vincent Perischetti: *Chorale Prelude: So Pure the Star*, op. 91 (1963)

Although the Symphonic Winds is a wind, brass, and percussion ensemble, and thus this evening's concert is focusing on that domain of Persichetti's compositional output, Persichetti's choral music played such an important role in his ouevre that it seemed to beg for inclusion in this evening's concert. *The Hymns and Responses for the Church Year*, op. 68, provide thematic source material on which Persichetti drew for many subsequent works; "Evening Hymn," for example, provided the inspiration and basis for his wind band work of seven years later, *Chorale Prelude: So Pure the Star*. As Persichetti biographer Walter Simmons observes, "The use of self-quotation—musical inventories, cross-references, and indexes—as a compositional device suggests an archival, intellectual bent consistent with the eclecticism so deeply rooted in [Persichetti's] nature." This same eclectic attitude is reflected in the selection of texts for the *Hymns and Responses*, ranging from the Bible through Shakespeare and Milton to Louis Untermeyer and Conrad Aiken. The text for "Evening Hymn," written by an anonymous 20th century poet, is set by Persichetti in a harmonic language which combines parallel triads with occasional "added note" and quartal harmonies.

In *So Pure the Star*, Persichetti delves deeper into this material. While the opening presentation maintains a strong sense of fidelity to the original, as the piece proceeds in a fantasy-like fashion, Persichetti's harmonic imagination is afforded greater and greater license until, at the climax, this chorale prelude erupts in an authentic polytonal progression, before receding into a "calm tranquility."

The Symphonic Winds would like to thank the vocalists, all members of the Williams College Concert Choir and/or the Elizabethans, for offering their musical talents to this evening's concert.

Jacob Druckman: *In memoriam Vincent Persichetti* (1987)

After his teacher Persichetti, Jacob Druckman (June 26, 1928–May 24, 1996) was unquestionably one of the most influential American composer-teachers of the second half of the twentieth century. Druckman not only won numerous awards, such as two Guggenheim Fellowships (1957, 1968) and the Pulitzer Prize (1972), but he also taught many of today's leading composers, including Michael Daugherty, David Lang (Artistic Director of *Bang on a Can*), Augusta Read Thomas, Michael Torke, and 1998 Pulitzer Prize winner Aaron Jay Kernis. However, Druckman was prepared to abandon music at the age of 21, concerned that he had yet to make an "impact" on the classical music scene. Fortunately, Aaron Copland recognized his talent and invited him to join his composition class at Tanglewood during the summer of 1949; that fall, Druckman then began studies at the Juilliard School of Music with Persichetti and Peter Mennin. After completing his Master's degree (1956) he returned to teach at Juilliard and remained there until 1972; ironically, he was a member of the Literature and Materials faculty, and never of the composition faculty. The year he won the Pulitzer Prize, Druckman left Juilliard, accepting the position of associate professor of composition at Brooklyn College, CUNY; four years later in 1976, Druckman was appointed chair of the composition department and director of the electronic music studio at Yale.

It was perhaps during his tenure as composer-in-residence with the New York Philharmonic (1982-1986) that Druckman made his most significant contributions to the greater musical world. As Paul Horsley, music critic for *The Kansas City Star*, wrote:

> Few composers embodied the crisis of accessibility in music during the second half of the twentieth century as emphatically as Jacob Druckman…. For not only did his own musical output mirror the shift in American music from esoteric complexity to approachability, but his activities in the 1980s as organizer of the New York Philharmonic's Horizons series made a powerful and public case for the "new tonality" that was already being embraced by the public—if not immediately by critics or academics. Yet even as he helped pave the way for this sea change in American concert music, in his own music Druckman remained a composer of complexity, even as he strove to weave points of contact into his music. If music at the beginning of the twenty-first century is more coherent, not to mention more "romantic," than it was in 1950, it is partly because of Druckman's ultimately

> influential belief that, in his words, "it was possible to use materials that refer to earlier music and yet to use them in a way that is fresh, a way that everybody can understand."

Druckman's earliest published works, such as Divertimento (1950), tend towards neo-classicism; with the *Animus* series for musicians and tape (1966–1977), however, he moved briefly towards an abstract expressionist aesthetic, initially adapting serial techniques to expressive ends. In electronic music he discovered a theatre of imagery in which to compose vivid, even ritualistic character studies of musical and psychological complexity. By 1972, when Druckman wrote *Windows* (his first piece for large orchestra, and the piece for which he won the Pulitzer Prize), his interest in serial techniques had been entirely abandoned, in favor of what James Wierzbicki (music editor of the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*) calls "a new aesthetic that had as its basic ingredients dramatic gesture, an orchestral palette reminiscent of that of the turn-of-the-century colorists, and paraphrase—sometimes obvious, sometimes subtle—of older music." Druckman's (and composer George Rochberg's) contention that this music evidenced a new aesthetic style—"New Romanticism"—marked a polemical stance against abstractionism and indicated a renewal of the kinetic power of the musical image from synaesthetic correspondences among sound, speech, gesture, color and character. Describing Druckman's music as "brilliantly paced sequences of strongly colored images that have an earthy physicality and dramatic impact," Austin Clarkson (a Yale colleague of Druckman's) believes that:

> [Druckman's] music has always been based in a somatic imagery that invests music with an immediate physicality. If a term is sought to contrast music of this nature to the "cognitivism" that leaves music disembodied in ratiocinative structures, then what about "kineticism" or "somaticism"? Anything but the overused and rather vacuous "romanticism."

While the New York Times, upon Druckman's death in 1996, could justifiably write, "The exploration of timbres and instrumental style remained the hallmark of [Druckman's] style," Druckman was less concerned with technique, no matter how refined or sophisticated his was, than with his belief that, ultimately, music is an expressive art. Druckman's overt juxtaposition of tonal and atonal elements and his incorporation of quotations is not merely another example of post-modern pastiche; instead, Harold Meltzer contends that, like his teacher Persichetti before him, Druckman "sought to refract the panoply of music history through the present, not to return to the past."

Druckman composed *In memoriam Vincent Persichetti* for orchestral winds, brass, piano, and percussion within days of learning that Persichetti had passed away; the piece was premiered shortly thereafter by the American Composers Orchestra, conducted by Dennis Russell Davies, another of Persichetti's former students. In homage to his mentor and friend, Druckman treated the opening viola soli from Persichetti's *Symphony for Strings*, op. 61 (1955) as a cantus firmus upon which *In memoriam* is based. While Druckman maintains the pitch and rhythmic profile of this melody, he presents it twice in highly fragmented orchestration and with poignantly complex embellishment and elaboration; during the reprise, the cantus firmus is not completely stated, instead dissolving into a trumpet solo playing fragments of "Taps." *In memoriam* seems to perfectly embody Wierzbikci's comment that "Druckman's music strikes the ear as organic, not architectural, in design; no matter how striking the rich sonic images, they seem embryonic and fleeting, mere passing fancies in a stream-of-consciousness progression of ideas that flow from start to finish unimpeded by literal repetition of obvious development of thematic materials." And while Druckman wrote few words about this powerful miniature (besides saying that the use of a string piece as the basis for a wind ensemble work seemed natural to him given Persichetti's penchant for re-crafting existent music and his love for the wind band), his comments about *Windows* seem entirely relevant in this context:

> [The musical quotations] are points of light which appear as the thick orchestral textures part, allowing us to hear, fleetingly, moments out of time—memories, not of any music that ever existed before, but memories of memories, shadows of ghosts. The imagery is as though, having looked at an unpeopled wall of windows, one looks away and senses the afterimage of a face.

Vincent Persichetti: "Soliloquy" from *Divertimento for Band*, op. 42 (1950)

The *Divertimento for Band*, op. 42 was Persichetti's first work for full band. Persichetti commented on the work's origin, remembering, "I'd been composing in a log cabin schoolhouse in El Dorado, Kansas during the summer of 1949, working with some lovely woodwind figures, accentuated by choirs of aggressive brasses and percussion

beating. I soon realized the strings weren't going to enter, and my *Divertimento* began to take shape." The complete work, a staple in the high school and university band repertoire, is comprised of six movements, of which the nostalgic "Soliloquy" for solo trumpet with a thinned-out, transparent accompaniment is the fifth. (The other movements, each a miniature in its own right, include a Prologue, Song, Dance, Burlesque, and March.) This evening's performance features Benjamin Wood '08 as the trumpet soloist, with Jeffrey Wessler '07 providing the obbligato flute counterpoint.

Einojuhani Rautavaara: "At death's door/In hora mortis" from *A Soldier's Mass*, op. 40 (1968)

> There is a message in a good music work always, yet you cannot express in words and concepts what that message is. It can be very, very distinct, very clear, almost like information to you. A scientist wrote once "the existence of music is a continuous intellectual scandal." With that he meant that he understands that there is a message in music, and there are no words for that message. It's from another world. For a scientist that is a scandal, of course. For me, it's a wonderful thing.
>
> Einojuhani Rautavaara (in a 1999 interview on Minnesota Public Radio)

Einojuhani Rautavaara (born October 9, 1928) is one of the most well-known and most frequently performed Finnish composers. He is by nature a romantic, even a mystic, as is often apparent from the titles of his works: for example *Angels and Visitations* for orchestra or his double-bass concerto *Angel of Dusk*. Despite Rautavaara's label of "mysticism." he is a complex and contradictory figure whose works defy categorization in stylistic terms. As Kimmo Korhonen explains in his essay "Inventing Finnish Music":

> The output of Einojuhani Rautavaara as a whole is almost a textbook case of post-modernism. He has gone through several stylistic periods in his career: neo-classicism, dodecaphony up to and including serialist experiments, neo-romanticism and a synthesis period bringing together the various facets of his output. What is more important from the post-modernist point of view, however, is that consecutive works in his output may differ violently from one another and that many of his works combine a variety of different elements. The extremes of Rautavaara's profile as a composer are marked by modernism and romanticism, or by constructivism and mysticism. He himself likes to emphasize the Romantic and mystical side of his profile; instead of alluding to the unconscious workings of the creative process, he quotes Thomas Mann in describing compositions as "having a sort of metaphysical mind of their own." He sees himself as a mediator in the creative process, a midwife rather than someone giving birth. Alluding to his fundamental Romantic nature—and acknowledging a post-modernist absence of history—he has said: "A Romantic has no coordinates. In time, he is yesterday or tomorrow, never today. In space, he is over there or over yonder, never here."

At the age of seventeen Rautavaara began studying the piano and later went on to study musicology at Helsinki University and composition at the Sibelius Academy. In 1955 the Koussevitzky Foundation awarded Jean Sibelius a scholarship in honor of his 90th birthday to enable a young Finnish composer of his choice to study in the United States; Sibelius selected Rautavaara, who then spent two years studying with Vincent Persichetti at Juilliard and also took part in the summer courses at Tanglewood given by Roger Sessions and Aaron Copland. In 1957 Rautavaara continued his studies with Vladimir Vogel in Ascona, Switzerland and a year later with Rudolf Petzold in Cologne. He was appointed successively lecturer (1966–76), artist professor (1971–6) and professor of composition (1976–91) at the Sibelius Academy.

Rautavaara is a prolific composer who has experimented with a wide variety of genres and approaches. He has written a comic opera bordering on a musical, *Apollo contra Marsyas* (1970) and numerous choral and vocal works, including the *Vigilia* (All-Night Vigil, 1972), a profound exploration of Orthodox mysticism. He has further written a considerable body of chamber and orchestral music, including eight symphonies, the most frequently performed of them being the seventh, *Angel of Light*; Symphony No. 8 *"The Journey"* was premiered in April 2000 by the Philadelphia Orchestra under Wolfgang Sawallisch. Other important groups of works include concertos for different solo instruments, among them the three piano concertos, the popular Violin Concerto (1977), the Harp Concerto (2000) and the Clarinet Concerto (2001-02). One of Rautavaara's most popular works is *Cantus arcticus*, a concerto for birds and orchestra, in which the straightforward orchestral part is juxtaposed with the sounds of birds recorded by the composer himself.

Rautavaara made his breakthrough with the neo-classical *A Requiem in Our Time* (1953), which won first prize in the Thor Johnson composition competition in the Cincinnati in 1954. Rautavaara views his *A Soldier's Mass*,

commissioned to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Finnish armed forces, as a companion piece, in terms of color, structure, and tone, to his youthful *Requiem*. As Rautavaara writes about his *A Soldier's Mass*:

> Because I had experience of the army both in war (as a very young civilian) and in peace (as a reserve officer), I furnished the traditional four movement titles (Kyrie, Miserere, Gloria, In hora mortis) with sub-titles appropriate to the soldier: "The Lord of Battles," "Have Mercy on Us," "On the Fields of Glory," and "At Death's Door." The symphony orchestra wind section is augmented with a saxophone group whose duty it is to inject human grief into the slow movements and the metallic relentlessness of battle into the fast movements.

Rautavaara's adoption of a "new romantic" (perhaps better termed "stylistically pluralistic") aesthetic in the late 1960s was manifested most clearly in a preference for tonality and a striving to combine modern with traditional techniques. While the works of this period, including *A Soldier's Mass* (1968) continue to exhibit Rautavaara's meticulous craftsmanship and extensive imagination, the use of triads, freely combined and often superimposed, became far more prevalent, as did the use of the octatonic scale (a symmetrical scale of alternating whole tones and semitones). "At Death's Door," the final movement of *A Soldier's Mass*, is an emotionally-charged ritual which, through the utilization of a bare economy of octatonic materials, attempts to express the moment of death. Over a low woodwind and low brass motive constructed from parallel diminished seventh chords (itself a subset of the octatonic scale), the upper woodwinds, each playing an independent octatonic scale figure and beginning with two clarinets, continue to join the heavenly procession, the harmonic intervals becoming ever more complex; while the first two lines begin with parallel thirds, each subsequent voice adds an additional layer of triadic density: the addition of the third voice results in oscillating major and minor triads, the fourth voice creates shifting minor seventh chords and Bartok triads, and so on until there are six voices moving in poly-triadic, quasi-parallel motion. After three statements (two soft, one loud) of the work's primary melody (presented in quartal harmonies), an ethereal, other-worldly, off-stage trumpet solo (the unnamed, unknown soldier of the work's title—performed this evening by Karl Schultz) enters over harsh (but still parallel-octatonic), sinuous woodwind lines. The movement closes with the trumpet finding final release after a soaring melodic ascent, while the remainder of the ensemble seems, instead of finding a harmonic resolution or closure, to simply break-off, ending the work in doubt, in silence.

Richard Danielpour: *Vox Populi* (1998)

Commissioned to write a piece for the inauguration of the newly restored Vandeveer-Victory Theatre in Evansville, Indiana, Richard Danielpour (b. 1956) began work during the summer of 1998 while in Tuscany; the resulting orchestral work, *Vox Populi*, was premiered later that year in the Victory Theatre by the Evansville Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Alfred Savia. Besides being a mere reflection of Danielpour's time in Italy, the Latin title also depicts the community effort, the "voice of the people" of Evansville, to save their dilapidated theatre. As Thomas Stone writes:

> The music is laced with tinges of jazz and other Americanisms that remember the "voices" of America. Specific brass gestures are intended to recall the jazz era that witnessed the original opening of the Victory Theatre in 1919. These nostalgias are integrated into the futuristic Danielpour idiom, anticipating the many wonderful years to come in the life of the refurbished theatre. The music features rhythmic disorientation, minimalist elements, spatial effects, and primitivistic dance gestures that punctuate the texture throughout. Jack Stamp's transcription for symphonic band is convincing and forceful, leaving no doubt that Danielpour's music speaks here in genuine tones.

That Danielpour would be asked to write a piece for such a public, celebratory occasion should come as no surprise. As music critic (and Danielpour champion) Richard Rodda has written:

> Danielpour's music is among the most distinctive and uplifting of our time—music solidly rooted in the soil of tradition, yet singing with an optimistic voice for today…. The compositions of Richard Danielpour grow from his conviction that music is able to communicate his deeply held beliefs in the value and sanctity of life, to renew the essential joy of what the late Joseph Campbell called "the rapture of being alive." …Only in turn-of-the-millennium America could Richard Danielpour's compositional techniques and sensibilities have been formed. Yet his works are rooted in the time-honored belief that music is a transcendental, life-enhancing force, one that can nourish our humanity and reveal truths about our world and ourselves—one that can sing the unspeakable.

In fact, many of Danielpour's pieces describe emotional journeys by means of the juxtaposition of contrasting types of music, which Danielpour intends to evoke the "public" and "private" aspects of modern life. The "public" music is most often dance-like and strongly rhythmic, brazen in its harmony (though always built around a stabilizing tonal center), and flamboyant in expression—an aggression that Danielpour associates with the frustration and edginess of modern city life; in contrast, the "private" music is usually richly lyrical, caressing in the warmth of its harmony, movingly beautiful. Danielpour's works, though, do not as much seek to find a reconciliation between these opposing forces, but rather an understanding and acceptance of the ways in which they enrich each other—how darkness makes light seem all the more brilliant, or how the realization of death sweetens the act of living—as the means of embracing, "surrendering to" in the composer's words, the fullness of life. *Vox Populi*, then, is primarily a public exultation; although there are a precious few moments of repose, as well occasional solo outbursts, *Vox Populi* is a communal, primal, energetic celebration of life.

Like many American composers of his generation, Danielpour has largely divorced himself from serial techniques, which were important to early works, such as his String Quartet No. 1 (1983); as Jeremy Eichler of *New Republic* has observed, "Richard Danielpour came on the scene after the serialist cartel had been broken, and his music is indebted not to the Second Viennese School and its American disciples, but to an alternate strain of twentieth-century composers who suddenly became central once the serialists stopped writing the history: Stravinsky, Copland, Barber, Britten, and Bernstein." Danielpour began his studies at Oberlin College and the New England Conservatory, where his teachers included John Heiss (composition) and Benjamin Zander (conducting). Both of Danielpour's advanced degrees in composition (M.M 1982, D.M.A. 1986) are from the Juilliard School of Music, where he studied with Persichetti and Mennin. He is best known for his orchestral and chamber music, including vocal works in both genres. In May 2005, his first opera *Song of Exile* (a setting of Toni Morrison's dramatic text) premiered in Michigan, with subsequent stagings in Cincinnati (July 2005) and Philadelphia (February 2006). Although he is often described as a neo-romantic, his musical language is broadly based and widely varied, drawing freely from pop, rock and jazz idioms, as well as more "classical" traditions. Embracing his eclecticism (and admitting to the influence of pop/rock musicians such as the Beatles), Danielpour has commented:

> When I was an adolescent, I listened to an enormous amount of black popular music—Arethra Franklin, James Brown—and white artists who were imitating black artists, such as the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and Eric Clapton. I think that what makes my music American-sounding is its rhythmic sensibility and eclecticism. To be an American composer is to be by definition an eclectic, borrowing from many different areas. In New York, we're living in the middle of the entire world with Pakistani cab drivers and grocers from Korea. I would definitely consider myself an urban rather than rural composer. And in my case, a composer is really an alchemist—a witch—continually combining new potions to yield something that's never quite tasted the same way before.

He has received numerous awards and honors, including the Columbia University Bearn's Prize (1982), the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters' Charles Ives Fellowship (1983), a Jerome Foundation Award (1987), a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship (1989), and two Barlow Foundation grants (1989, 1991); in addition he has enjoyed five residencies at the MacDowell Colony and six at Yaddo. His teaching appointments include positions at the Manhattan School of Music (from 1993) and the Curtis Institute of Music (from 1997).

Like most "accessible" composers, Danielpour has received, along with public acclaim, episodes of critical scorn. Eichler, for example, has written, "Taken together, Danielpour's compositions reflect the great post-everything compendium that rules today, which seems to have eclipsed many composers' drive to say anything particularly original. In Danielpour's world, there are no strict rules that dictate the structure or form of a composition; there is just a questing Romantic spirit, communicating with the deities of music's past and hoping to provide his listeners with what Americans like to call a 'peak experience.'" Danielpour, however, would agree; he is out-spoken in asserting that "originality" and "innovation" are antithetical to his creative process:

> I see myself as an assimilator. The late Stephen Albert (composer of the symphony *RiverRun*) was similar in this way. He called himself a collector of music, rather than an inventor of music. I will take an idea that may resemble

> another composer's or be the equivalent of a found object to a visual artist, and I'll kvetch and mull and agonize over it until it no longer resembles the object I have found. Hopefully, it becomes something else.

Danielpour's friend and fellow composer Ned Rorem confirms this assessment, "To call Richard an innovator would be a joke. What he does is to take what's around. Then he is embarrassed by the fact that he's stealing, and he tries to cover his tracks. For a good composer, the act of creation is the act of covering one's tracks, and now I'm speaking as much for myself as for him." While he may not consider himself "original," Danielpour does possess articulate, philosophically-grounded opinions on the nature of music, teaching, and composition, some of which can be found in Ann McCutchan's *The Muse That Sings: Composers Speak about the Creative Process:*

> I've always felt that music has to have an immediate visceral impact and elicit a visceral response. If that happens, I feel quite successful. I think that Stravinsky once said, when asked to give a detailed account of a particular work of his, "All I can tell you, gentlemen, is that music must sing and dance." I feel very much in keeping with that statement, that my music relies on those basic elements of singing and dancing. I don't like to think of myself as a composer of "modern music" or a "contemporary composer," but simply someone who writes music…. Bernstein once told me that in the end, what a composer really does is share love. I've heard the same thing said in different ways, by people who are courageous enough to say it. By making music, a composer is sharing something ineffable—it's a natural process of putting it out and having it come back. I don't write music because I want to express myself. That is something that happens in spite of me. For me, more and more, writing is about listening and waiting. It's about receiving rather than willing something into being. The moment I feel like I'm willing a piece, trying to carve it out in some grim and painful way, I stop, because it doesn't feel right to me…. I say to my students all the time, "You're taking yourself way too seriously. You're thinking only about beautifully sculpted, perfect ideas. Why not look at the dorkiness inside, see the clumsiness, and realize that that may be where your real genius lies?" In awkwardness you can find tremendous grace. Just futzing around, sort of piddling with ideas—I mean, composers are in a constant state of improvisation, right? The lightening bolt everyone talks about is the result of incessant work, which should hopefully be informed by a sense of play. Every now and then you hear professional baseball players still talking about having fun. The fact is, for them baseball's a business, but it's good they can remember it's also a game. It's better to approach composing with "Let's see what happens if…." rather than "I've *got* to do this." Perfect things usually happen because we get out of the way, not because we make them so.

Vincent Persichetti: *Masquerade for Band*, op. 102 (1966)

Masquerade, a theme and set of ten variations, is a realization of examples and exercises that can be found in Persichetti's book *Twentieth Century Harmony*. Reflecting his ever-present sense of humor, Persichetti did not reveal the relationship between the book and the composition until long after its publication, later referring to the piece as "a masquerade of the harmony book." It was written for and premiered by the Baldwin Wallace Conservatory (Berea, OH) Symphonic Band in 1966. The formal structure of *Masquerade* is that of a theme-and-variations, but not in the traditional sense; while Persichetti does extract a theme (more of a brief motto) from his book, most of the variations can be traced, not back to this theme, but instead directly to materials from the text. Persichetti culls material from almost every chapter; individual variations embody such various harmonic principles as: octatonicism, pentatonicism, polytonality, modality, parallelism, whole-tone harmonies, quartal harmony, pedal-points, and ending with 12-tone aggregates. While *Masquerade* could have been a dry litany of 20th-century compositional techniques, the music instead moves between the composer's polar stylistic descriptions of "gracious" and "gritty," all the while sparkling with Persichetti's wit, enthusiasm and musical creativity—a fitting end to a concert that is a tribute not only to the American composer-teacher Vincent Persichetti, but also to the myriad musical relationships between mentor and protégé, teacher and student.