

UPCOMING CONFERENCES

2006 National Conference
San Antonio, TX
September 13-17, 2006
Co-located Conference with the
College Music Society

2006 National Student Conference
Arizona State University
October 2006 (Dates TBA)
Submission Deadline: TBA
Host: Glenn Hackbarth
E-mail: hackbarth@asu.edu

2006 Region IV Conference
Middle Tennessee State University
October 26-28, 2006
Submission Deadline: 6/30/06 (receipt)
Host: Paul D. Osterfield
E-mail: osterfie@mtsu.edu

2006 Region II Conference
Hamilton College, Clinton, NY
November 10-11, 2006
Submission Deadline: TBA
Host: Sam Pellman
E-mail: spellman@hamilton.edu

2007 Region V Conference
Clarke College, Dubuque, IA
February 22-24, 2007
Submission Deadline: TBA
Host: Amy Dunker
E-mail: amy.dunker@clarke.edu

2007 Region VI Conference
Central Missouri State University
Spring, 2007
Submission Deadline: TBA
Host: Eric Honour
E-mail: eric@erichonour.com

Darkling: a 21st century opera

Stefan Weisman

The opera-theater piece *Darkling* is an exploration of a fractured twentieth century that deals with oppositional forces on several levels.

The multimedia work incorporates not only operatic singers and a string quartet, but also poetry spoken over music, dance, video, text projections, staged dramatic performances, and an extensive sound design with prerecorded electronic sounds and effects.



Darkling's text is based on a book-length poem of the same name by the award-winning author Anna Rabinowitz. Her poem is an acrostic—a form in which the first letter of each line spells out another text. In this case, Thomas Hardy's poem "The Darkling Thrush" is threaded throughout Rabinowitz's work. Hardy's poem written on New Year's Eve in 1900, looks back at the nineteenth century as a corpse. Only a disheveled old thrush, which appears suddenly in a gloomy woods singing an ecstatic song, gives the poem a sense of hope for the future. This is ironic since Rabinowitz's book, completed on New Year's Eve in 2000, is a rumination on family lost during the Holocaust, one of the many horrors of that century.

Rabinowitz and Hardy, two poets new and old, appear side-by-side in the book *Darkling*. The opera mirrors this acrostic

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SCI Region VI 2006 Conference

John C. Ross

February 9-12, 2006
The Shepard School of Music, Rice University, Houston, Texas
Art Gottschalk, conference host

Whether you work at a small college or a large university, undertaking an SCI conference is no small feat. There are many choices to be made regarding the number of pieces and the variety of instrumentation. In the handful of SCI conferences that I have helped to organize, the performers were instrumental in making most of the decisions about which pieces got performed, and I've always thought that was a practical and a considerate way to go about the selection process. What better way to whittle down the often-enormous number of submissions—of one's colleagues—to a manageable seven-to-ten concerts in two, or two-and-a-half days. Furthermore, the available performers also determine the variety of instrumentation.



Michael Horvit and Art Gottschalk

Given the resources of a school such as Rice, this process was enabled by extremely capable performers, and by the contribution of guest artists and visiting ensembles. To my ear, the performances were all uniformly excellent, and it is hard to imagine any composer who would have been displeased by the performance of his or her work. The conference was as much a showcase for the Shepard School of

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The Society of Composers, Inc.

The Society of Composers, Inc. is a professional society dedicated to the promotion of composition, performance, understanding and dissemination of new and contemporary music. Members include composers and performers both in and outside of academia interested in addressing concerns for national and regional support of compositional activities. The organizational body of the Society is comprised of a National Council, co-chairs who represent regional activities, and the Executive Committee.

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Please email [current](mailto:current@societyofcomposers.org) information on your activities to:

SCI Newsletter
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Daniel Adams

Two recent concerti by Daniel Adams were premiered at the University of South Florida (USF) Center for Visual and Performing Arts in Tampa. *Concerto for Marimba and Percussion Ensemble* was premiered by the USF Percussion Ensemble, conducted by Robert McCormick, on March 6. The solo marimba part was performed by University of South Florida student percussionist Beran Harp. On March 7, Robert McCormick performed the solo timpani part for *Concerto for Timpani, Percussion, and Winds*, premiered by the USF Wind Ensemble under the direction of William Wiedrich.

On March 10, Adams received the premiere performance of *Ambivalence Recalled* for flute solo on a concert presented at the joint conference of the South Central Chapter of the College Music Society (CMS) and the Texas Chapter of the National Association of Composers, USA (NACUSA), held at Texas State University, San Marcos. The solo was performed by guest artist Danilo Mezzadri. Also performed at the CMS/NACUSA conference was Adams's *Embracing Personal History* for violin solo on March 9. The solo violinist was Texas State University Faculty Artist Paula Bird.

On March 4 Adams's *Shadow on Mist* for flute and percussion ensemble was broadcast on The Power of Percussion as part of the "Works for Me" series on Radio Hong Kong hosted by Christopher Coleman. *Shadow on Mist* is recorded on the Capstone Records and is performed by Kim McCormick, flute and the McCormick

Percussion Ensemble, conducted by Robert McCormick.

Timothy J. Brown

Songs of Light, Songs of Shadows, music by Dr. Timothy J. Brown has recently been released by Capstone Records. The first song cycle uses texts by Mark Doty, and is performed by Justin Ryan, baritone; Mary Jo Peña, piano; Michi Wiancko, violin; and Javier Diaz, percussion. The second cycle is scored for baritone and piano only, and uses poems by Pablo Neruda which make reference to light or darkness. The Neruda pieces are set in Spanish. The CD was recorded at The Looking Glass Studios in New York City, and is available at www.capstonerecords.org.

Ken Davies



Ken Davies' newest woodwind work, *Dark River* for Solo English Horn and Digital Media received its excellent premier performance by Dr. Kelly Vaneman at the Southeastern Composers' Conference held at Converse College in Spartanburg, SC on March 17, 2006. *Dark River* presents a distinct variant from the traditional "pastoral" works so often attributed to the English Horn, instead featuring pitched and unpitched content supporting his vision of a "dark river

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The SCI Newsletter

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SCION

John Bilotta, *Editor*

SCION, SCI's on-line electronic news, provides information on opportunities for composers. News items, announcements, comments, and other material for publication may be sent via e-mail to:

SCION@societyofcomposers.org

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murky, mysterious, melancholic mist suspended over the surface like ancient spirits." A mini-grant from the Mississippi Arts Commission has allowed Ken to obtain professional recordings of both *Dark River* (Jim Rice) and his recently finished *Soufriere* for Solo Flute and Digital Media (Hannah Albers).

Ken's *Quietudes* for organ continues to gather accolades as it is performed in various recital and church settings across the country. A recent addition to the recital repertoire of West Coast composer-organist Christopher Wicks, the four-part work was performed by Christopher this March in Silverton, OR and also recently reviewed in the February 2006 issue of *American Organist* magazine.

A request from Washington composer Lothar Kreck has led to *K'Danza* for piano. The flamboyant cadenza-like work is intended to be included as a part of Lothar's own *Piano Concerto*, but is also available as a stand-alone piece for concertizing pianists.

Dorothy Hindman



Dr. Dorothy Hindman, Assistant Professor of Music at Birmingham-Southern College, has received a number of important performances of her music this spring, including a performance of her work *Drift* by the IALSAX saxophone quartet at the Conservatorio di Santa Cecilia in Rome,

Italy, the premiere of her work *centro* by Karen Bentley Pollick, violin and Ivan Sokolov, piano in Seattle, Washington, the premiere of her work *Monumenti* by Karen Bentley Pollick and Craig Hultgren, cello, and a performance of her work *Ticking* by the Freon Ensemble in Rome, Italy. Her work *Seconds* for soundfile, realized this past June at the Visby International Centre for Composers in Sweden, has toured the US as part of the 60x60 Midwest Minutes project, and was featured in the VOICES ON THE EDGE: International Women's Electroacoustic Listening Room Project at Cal State Fullerton in March.

Her *Psalm 121* was featured by the Birmingham-Southern College Concert Choir as part of their Spring Tour 2006. In April 2006, her work *Needlepoint* was performed by guitarist Paul Bowman at the American Academy in Rome (AAR), and at the end of May, four of her works will be performed at the AAR in a Salone concert. She recently collaborated with photographer/video artist Carrie Mae Weems, providing the music for the video *Italian Dreams* which will premiere at the end of May, also at the AAR.

This past academic year, while on leave of absence from Birmingham-Southern College, she completed commissioned works for saxophone and piano for Carey Valente (*Lost in Translation*), violin and cello (*Monumenti*), violin and piano (*centro*), and orchestra, and is currently completing a commission for baritone and piano for Daniel Seigel, and *Tapping the Furnace* for percussion solo for international artist Evelyn Glennie, in consortium with Scott Deal (Fairbanks, Alaska) and Stuart Gerber (Atlanta). Remaining to fill are commissions from Duo 46 and the Corona Guitar Quartet with orchestra. Hindman will return to the Birmingham-Southern College Faculty this fall, after spending the year in Rome, Italy at the AAR.

Neara Russell

Seventeen-year-old Wisconsin composer Neara Russell recently appeared on "From

the Top," a popular National Public Radio show featuring young classical performers and composers. Russell's art song "*Lemonade Pie*" from her latest song cycle "*Food for the Gods... and me*" was performed on the show by a young Boston soprano, with Russell on piano.



As a part of the show, Russell was interviewed by host Christopher O'Riley and sang a self-penned country song depicting the story of her birth (she was born in a pickup truck, which made for a humorous tale.)

The program featuring Russell was taped in Boston before a live audience in New England Conservatory's Jordan Hall. Show #132 aired on 250 stations nationwide the week of March 13, and is archived on From the Top's website for online listening at: www.fromthetop.org.

Russell was also selected as an honoree of From the Top's Young Composer Project, which pairs an outstanding composer from the show with a professional composer for a one-on-one mentoring session. For her mentor, Russell was paired with John Corigliano and had a March meeting with him in New York City.

While in New York, Russell worked with a fifth grade composition class in Queens as part of From the Top's Cultural Leadership program.

For more information or to contact Russell, please visit her website at www.neararussell.com.

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Music (and its visiting ensembles, the Attacca Percussion Group, SYZYGY, Aura, and the Enso String Quartet) as it was for the composers whose works were performed.



Attacca Percussion Group

Not only are these conferences a chore to put together—although some might say it is a labor of love—they are also a chore to attend, by which I mean that attending to ten concerts of 87 pieces in two-and-a-half days is flat out fatiguing, if not impossible. It is perhaps understood that all the composers in attendance will pick and chose which concerts to attend and which to skip, and that no one would expect any one to attend them all. And yet, I have been to regional conferences where I easily attended all the concerts. So why did I find the Rice conference particularly difficult?



Brian Connelley

No doubt, any host wants to accomplish several things when planning a Regional or National conference: to create a platform for showing off the strengths of the host school, the pleasure of hearing

the music of colleagues, and giving student and faculty performers a chance to play new music for a diverse, if eccentric audience of composers. All of us composers enjoy having our pieces selected and performed; and the host no doubt feels an obligation, where possible, to be as inclusive as possible when it comes to representing the membership of SCI. And to his credit, Art Gottschalk certainly did that. To perform the music of 81 composers is as generous as any regional conference I have ever attended—indeed, this conference had the scope and diversity of most nationals.



Ariella Perlman, Lillian Copeland, Craig Hauschildt, and David West

Yet, perhaps that generosity is eclipsed, somewhat, when a number of concerts are over two hours in length. (Concert 8, I believe, holds the record: it was 2 hours and 45 minutes!) It seemed that there was no attempt to determine the length of each concert. So, when a concert ran long, which is to say, when it allowed less than 20 minutes between it and the next concert, the next concert was delayed a bit. This in turn, crowded the afternoon and evening schedule, curtailing meals and most importantly, down time.

Lest I seem to be whining about not getting my afternoon nap, let me state that I wish simply to raise the point about where the emphasis of a conference should be placed. Although my bias is toward conferences with shorter concerts and more down time—in order to talk more leisurely with other composers—I recog-

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Position Announcement: SCI Newsletter Assistant Editor

The Society of Composers, Inc. (SCI) is pleased to announce the new position of Assistant Editor for the SCI Newsletter. With the growth of our organization, the amount of information about member activities has grown significantly as well. This has contributed to an increase in projects and opportunities of particular interest to our membership. The Assistant Editor will support the Editor by gathering and editing member news, and by pursuing other possible articles of interest (such as interviews, concert reviews, performer profiles, and other projects of interest to the SCI membership).

If you have superb writing, copy editing, and proofreading skills, please consider applying for this position. It is a great way to get to know the community of composers that constitutes our membership, as well as provide a great service to that community. It is an opportunity to explore the many and varied trends of contemporary composition, both in theory and practice.

To apply for this position, contact Bruce Bennett, the editor of the newsletter, by email at:

newsletter@societyofcomposers.org

This is a volunteer position. You should have ready access to email, and word-processing, layout, and photo-editing software.

Visit our Web page

Dr. Mike McFerron, assistant professor at the Lewis University, is our webmaster.

The URL is:

<http://www.societyofcomposers.org>

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form: the esteemed composer Lee Hoiby was commissioned to create a song based on Hardy's text, and I used elements from Hoiby's song to build the entirety of the overall piece. I split the song into measures, and mapped these onto scenes in the libretto. As I began to set music for a specific scene, I would look at the relevant measures and use some elements from them—harmony, accompanimental figuration, or melodic fragments—to compose the music for that section. In the final scene of the opera, Hoiby's song emerges in its original form as a coda to the piece, in the same way that Hardy's poem appears as an epilogue in Rabinowitz's book.

Darkling went through several workshops and trials before its premiere. Songs and scenes were performed at Princeton University in March 2005, and at an American Opera Projects' "First Chance" Concert in April 2005. (AOP's "First Chance" series allows composers to hear their work before an audience, and then invites the audience members to provide written feedback. This is akin to the way that Hollywood movies are pre-screened for audiences who provide critiques, and it was a very valuable experience.)

In November 2005 *Darkling* was presented at the Guggenheim Museum's "Works & Process" series during which sections of the piece were presented along with commentary by the various creators, followed by a question and answer session with the audience.



Finally, the piece was premiered at the Classic Stage Company Theater in New York City, running from February 26 to March 18, 2006. Music direction was by J. David Jackson, with instrumental accompaniment by members of the FLUX Quartet with Brian DeMaris, conductor. The production also included five exceptional singers: Jody Sheinbaum, soprano; Hai-Ting Chinn, mezzo-soprano; Jon Garrison, tenor; Mark Uhlemann, bass-baritone; and Marcus DeLoach, baritone.

Darkling will next be included in the Friends of Freie Universität Berlin's Jewish Documentary Film, Theater, and Speaker Series held in the German Consulate on June 5 and 6, 2006. There are plans to stage the piece in Berlin in early 2007.

Darkling was commissioned and developed by American Opera Projects, Inc. with generous support from the Peter Jay Sharp Foundation, the American Music Center, private foundations and individual donors.

For more information please see:
www.stefanweisman.com
www.operaprojects.org/darkling.htm

Staging *Darkling*

Michael Comlish, Adaptor and Director

Transforming *Darkling* to the stage seemed possible when I first opened the book, as I saw potential in dramatizing the mind's skittering inability to piece together fragments of memory and loss. I was also fascinated by *Darkling*'s use of the Thomas Hardy poem, "The Darkling Thrush," because I had read several of his novels, and I had been haunted by his themes of marital discord.

The simplicity of most opera plots, though thought of as ridiculous, allow us to savor the extreme emotional states of life, and somehow extend them. *Darkling* does tell a tale of a hasty marriage in Poland on the eve of Hitler's invasion, but we don't need to follow this as a narrative, memory cannot assemble it. The bride leaves for America, temporarily abandoning her new husband. The father of the bride is angered at his daughter's sudden departure, and sings of hope that at least his son-in-law will say goodbye before he leaves for another world. But the son-in-law has already fled—just in time, joining his bride in a life of drudgery and marital incompatibility. Ultimately the couple is permanently separated from their extended families,



who are presumably wiped out by the Holocaust.

But the bride and groom's separation and reuniting really serve a ritualistic purpose, as the two elements of the Conjunction or "Chemical Wedding." The mind, certainly in its dream state and often in its wakened chatter, projects its images and juxtaposes memories in ways that are scrambled and fleeting. Yet there is a universal process of psychological alchemy that refines our lives over time, and the process can involve years of intense pain and loss.



In the current world of electronic sound, when live music is employed, an attempt is often made to level a uniform listening environment by amplifying live musicians and singers. In order to portray a dreamlike weaving in and out of chaos and confusion, we chose to embrace both integration as well as a texture of clashes between live and recorded sounds. Voices in the mind are sometimes difficult to grasp, somewhere locked in the closet of the subconscious, or appear just on the tip of the tongue.

The original poem by Anna Rabinowitz often plays with the inability to express the horrors of the 20th century. Thus, references to speaking or writing describe the indescribable: "congealed vowels," "consonants of Unreachable destinies," "scenarios sentenced to decomposed alphabets," "redactors of the latest version of How To: How to be TRAPPED, How to be UNDERLINED FOR EXTERMINATION. Video projections allow words, shapes, and film fragments to appear and disappear as ghost images on all four surfaces of a black scrim barrier. Our "subtitles" for

the sung section are there to follow as in a standard opera, but sometimes appear randomly, as they flash through the mind, half grasped.

In a three-sided theater the audience sits in their own corner of the mind, receiving a slightly different visual and aural experience. *Darkling* can be seen and heard as an operatic fantasia on themes of emotional fragmentation, as we glance back from our troubled new century to the cataclysm of the last.

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nize that I am merely stating one way in which a conference could be put together. Art had a different emphasis. In my ideal conference, fewer composers would be represented, but perhaps, more composers would attend each concert. The experience would be more social. But in the conference that Art created, a very high number of composers were represented; yet social occasions often were created at the expense of attending a concert. (Although, it must be said that the Friday night banquet was a real pleasure and a great way to end the day.) Each conference host will have to think about this balance as he or she plans the next conference.



Esther Lamnek



Mei-Fang Lin, Paul Kwo, and Ken Ueno

In writing about this conference, it was decided not to report on each piece; there were far too many; but rather comment on the conference as a whole, and address any standout pieces and/or performances. For my part, I wish to mention saxophonist Scott Plugge, who graciously found time in his busy schedule to perform three works on Concert 8. Although the least attended of the concerts I went to, he played splendidly—and would again that evening with the Dallas Symphony! Also, saxophonist Valerie Vidal gave what I found to be a stunning performance along with pianist Timothy Hester on Rob Smith's *Juggernaut*. Finally, I can think of no better close to the conference than hearing the Enso string quartet. The delicacy, the verve, and the sense of ensemble with which they played—they sounded ready to make a recording of that concert! I hope the composers felt as grateful to the quartet for performing their music as I did simply for hearing them play.

Alert!

If you teach in a department or school of music, please ensure that concert programs presented by your university are being collected and sent to both ASCAP and BMI on a regular basis. Each agency, which relies on these programs, extracts performance information and determines the amount of royalty credited to each composer based on a sample rate.

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