

## REVIEWS

### Review of Trio No. 4 premiere

Wealthy local conservative political activist Ralph Smeed recently financed and assisted in a retrospective exhibit of paintings by Norman Rockwell at a local charter school. The exhibit proved very popular so when the Trio commissioned their fourth string trio from local composer David Alan Earnest, it was suggested that he base the work on paintings by Rockwell. Earnest said in his pre-performance remarks that he had always admired Rockwell's work; his mother had had books of reproductions around the house when he was growing up. He looked at them again, searching for those particular works which suggested to him a specific musical impulse. The final selection of six paintings, all originally covers on the Saturday Evening Post magazine, were: No Swimming; Jester; The Horseshoe Forging contest; Breaking Home Ties; Two plumbers and a Dog; and, The Golden Rule. The paintings were reproduced in color on an insert in the program notes.

The first painting, No Swimming, shows undressed boys carrying their clothes fleeing from an unseen authority figure. Earnest said it reminded him of the trouble he and his brothers always used to get into--"stupid things"--and, after a brief introduction, the music suggested a comic bustling atmosphere. The second painting Jester shows a clown sadly contemplating a smiling mask of his own face and suggested the contrast between comedy and sadness. Mr. Earnest is particularly skilled at musically depicting contrasting emotions. The Horseshoe Forging Contest led to pulsing music steadily rising in tempo and energy, giving the trio a chance to show their skill and making three string instruments sound like hammers on anvils. It was all done with bows on strings, resisting the temptation to add any sound effects by striking the wood of the instruments. Breaking Home Ties shows a boy packed up to go off to school saying goodbye to his father and his dog. Earnest said it reminded him of the time his family saw him off with his guitar to play in a band in a distant city, the music a mixture of sadness and expectation. Two Plumbers and a Dog suggested Laurel and Hardy, leading to a depiction of slapstick antics ending with a broad musical joke that most of the audience appreciated with laughter. The final painting, The Golden Rule, depicts a group of people of all religions and ethnic backgrounds worshipping together. Earnest said he worked very hard to find a musical expression of this noble sentiment. "If some businessmen and politicians would observe the Golden Rule maybe we wouldn't be in the mess we're in," he said. This music was the most remarkable of the whole evening, expressing with rich musical textures a sense of searching and aspiration without at any time falling back of the trite formulas of hymn tunes or chorales.

There were many new faces at this concert and perhaps most of them, in view of the Norman Rockwell dedication, expecting an evening of hymns and patriotic tunes. Some regulars, perhaps fearing the same thing, stayed away. What Mr. Earnest produced was music of the highest and most original quality, demanding on the performers as well as on the listeners, returning rich rewards for careful, thoughtful attention. However I may speculate, as the piece progressed the audience became more restless and dissatisfied, coughing and hacking without restraint. At the end, in contrast to the lingering standing ovations previous premiers have occasioned, they applauded politely and briefly, and abruptly marched out. Mr. Earnest's suggesting that businessmen needed to be more ethical may have contributed to this evident hostility from

possibly pro business audience members. Whatever, those of us who admired the music remained to congratulate composer and performers. Mr. Smeed was as always graciousness personified, expressing appreciation, admiration and gratitude to everyone concerned, and presenting to the composer a large framed Rockwell print as a gift.

Paul Shoemaker

## **From a Review of Volante**

read the full review at:

[http://www.musicweb.uk.net/classrev/2009/Feb09/Langroise\\_Volante\\_5721.htm](http://www.musicweb.uk.net/classrev/2009/Feb09/Langroise_Volante_5721.htm)

Caldwell, Idaho, in 2008 may not be quite so exciting musically as Vienna in 1790 but the comparison is not so far fetched as you might imagine. Here we have two world class composers in David Alan Earnest and Jim Cockey regularly premiering stunning new works. The Langroise Trio and its world class virtuoso members are at the centre of this phenomenon performing these new works both as the Trio, as the Trio augmented with other soloists, sometimes accompanying Idaho Dance Theater performances, as section leaders in the Boise Philharmonic Orchestra, and individually as soloists in concertos. Recently we have had works for string trio from Earnest, three Symphonies from Cockey, Earnest's Cello Concerto with Sam Smith as soloist, and we look forward to soon hearing Cockey's Violin Concerto for Geoffrey Trabichoff. The interplay between composers and performers is electrifying and mutually reinforcing. On this disk we have recording premiers of two chamber works recently premiered in performance by the Trio.

Most of us think of "bathos" as meaning something absurd or vulgar. Specifically, the Webster dictionary says "a ludicrous descent from the lofty ... to the commonplace ..." But in titling his piece *Isle of Bathos* David Alan Earnest is playing a game with us, using bathos more in its original sense where it merely meant descent from complex to simple or an abrupt emergence of simplicity out of complexity. Admittedly to those who don't have the opportunity of hearing the composer explain or read the program notes, the joke must remain a private one, and Mr. Earnest is apparently satisfied with that, letting most people think he is simply making light of himself and his music. He explains that while composing the work he was bombarded by too many ideas and only by taking himself very lightly, humorously, could he resolve them into a coherent structure. A further hint at what this music is about are early titles for the work: *El Extranio Espanol*, or *The Eccentric*. But in the end, music is music, and we expect too much if we demand an explanation from the composer in non-musical terms because, as Mendelssohn said, "...music is too explicit for words" and a title is after all just something to put on the cover of a score. And, however much the preceding may have assisted the composer in overcoming obstacles, the result is a relatively straightforward sonata movement based on rhythmic as well as melodic motifs. In this as in the next work you will at times find it impossible to believe you are only hearing three instruments; this music has the sonic depth and textural complexity you associate with string quartets or larger ensembles. The Langroise Trio have an amazing ability to produce a tremendously powerful sound without in the least sacrificing beauty of tone.

Earnest was born in rural Canyon County, Idaho, and obtained a Bachelor of Music Composition degree from Wheaton College. He writes music for a living in an amazing variety of forms, including commercials, film and television scores, and a very successful New Age electronic album, "Visit the Blue Planet." To listen to excerpts or for information on purchase of his recordings, go to his website. Paul Shoemaker

## **Review of Langroise Trio Concert**

for complete review, go here:

<http://www.musicweb-international.com/sandh/2007/Jan-Jun07/langroise1003.htm>

excerpt:

We then returned to the present for the high point of the evening, the world premiere of "Isle of Bathos" by David Alan Earnest (b. 1960). He began the composition in 2004 with the title of El Extrano Español intended to be an homage to Pablo Picasso. Then images of islands, both in the Caribbean and Aegean Seas intruded, and the word bathos, here meaning "an abrupt change from the lofty to the ordinary" suggested itself - hence the title applied when the work was completed on December 28, 2006. The music is comparable with late Shostakovich only in its richness and density and the excellence of its fitting to the qualities of the instruments, but is much more positive in mood and in its greater range of its drama. My observation is that this is the least derivative work Mr. Earnest has yet produced and likely shows the beginnings of his mature style which will inform the music to come. The audience appreciated what they received with vigorous applause which Mr. Earnest acknowledged shyly and modestly.

Mr. Earnest ([www.davidalaneearnest.com](http://www.davidalaneearnest.com)) is unusual in that he makes his living composing every kind of music from TV commercials and film soundtracks through New Age woo-woo electronics to symphonic and choral oratorio, as well as chamber music. For eight years, he and the Langroise Trio have enjoyed a brilliantly productive association - of world class artists with a world class composer - that has enriched the string trio repertoire with many excellent compositions. I feel deeply privileged to be present when something so wonderful is happening here in Idaho; if you live within a day's drive of Boise, it is well worth your effort to attend these concerts. If you are flying to Boise on business from Paris, Sydney, or Moscow, arrange your flight to take in the next concert on 21 September 2007. After that you may come just for the music.

Paul Shoemaker

## **Review of Visit the Blue Planet**

[http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2007/Apr07/Earnest\\_planet\\_511601.htm](http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2007/Apr07/Earnest_planet_511601.htm)

There are quite a number of New Age music recordings available, probably thousands. Of these, there are a few great classics worthy of the attention of critical listeners: Laughton's Harps of the Ancient Temples, one of the very first (1958); Ray Lynch's Deep Breakfast (1966); Paul Horn's Inside the Great Pyramid (1977); the Gordon brothers Garden of Serenity series (1992 et. seq.);

Kitaro's Tunhuang (1983). This disk deserves comparison with these; track 9 from this disk is now my favorite meditation music. It is my loss that I only became aware of it 11 years after it appeared. This disk can be included here only because it was many years after the release of it that Mr. Earnest became well known locally as a serious classical composer. I suspect in the ensuing years when he becomes better known around the world, this disk will also become better known and more generally available.

As to the sound of the music, it is difficult to describe apart from its genre and the titles of the tracks. This disk uses mostly electronic sounds, but some acoustic instruments are heard, perhaps synthesized, perhaps recorded live and processed. "Celebration," for instance, contains an episode reminiscent of walking by near a group of African musicians out on the plain, as well as wind sounds and the ubiquitous distant chorus sounds. The point is how well does this composer create his mood by balancing the dramatic sound-picture, now moving it forward, now letting it glow. Mr. Earnest in his single entry into the genre does this with supreme skill.

It is to my great gain that I, by coincidence, happen to live near the composer, in fact only four miles from the Idaho farm he grew up on. While I would like to say we are friends, the relationship is hardly an equal one; I am more a groupie, at least at this point as I eagerly become acquainted with his oeuvre while attending his premiers several times a year. I would suggest you remember his name, for you will some day find it unavoidably thrust upon you if you continue to explore modern classical music and search out the very best.

Paul Shoemaker

\*from this genre I exclude electronic pieces by established composers (e.g. Philip Glass), electronic arrangements of symphonic repertoire works (e.g. Tomita), symphonic works where there are electronic sounds added into the orchestra (e.g. Edgard Varèse, Alan Hovhaness, Einojuhani Rautavaara), electronic compositions of symphonic length, structure, and intent (e.g. W. Carlos, Pierre Henry). I also exclude works by established rock and pop musicians (e.g. David Bowie, Jefferson Airplane/Starship) but I have included recordings consisting mostly or entirely of acoustic instrument sounds.

### **From a Review of Romancero**

[http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2006/Feb06/Taneyev\\_6035536502.htm](http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2006/Feb06/Taneyev_6035536502.htm)  
(Recording by The Langroise Trio)

"The most remarkable work on this disk is the Earnest Trio (Trio No. 2), in particular the first movement. Like most great composers, Earnest freely borrows phrases and moods from other composers, fully assimilating these influences into his own art. The first moments of this work might be said to depict Philip Glass meeting Cesar Franck, but the impression is only momentary as the music sweeps onward with its own authentic and vitally compelling logic. As we explore this rich tonal landscape, there are moments of aggressive dissonance, not unlike middle period Bartok, but the overall shape of the music is solidly neo-Romantic. With each hearing, this work further ingratiates itself and I will be surprised if Earnest is not soon universally recognized as one of the major musical personalities of the early twenty-first century. Fortunately his works are frequently performed by the Langroise Trio, among others." Paul Shoemaker

## **Broadjam Reviews** (peer review website)

"what can I say--astonishing work!! Exquisite strings and superb orchestration bring to life an excellent composition. I'm running out of superlatives here! Bravo!" (Cello Concerto - I)

"very enjoyable. nice stereo separation makes it even larger than life. this composer is putting enormous effort toward the humbling task of discovering and developing their own personal style, and that is honorable. Good luck with this and future efforts." (String Trio No. 2 - I)

"Very beautifully put-together piece." (String Trio No. 2 - I)

"Incredibly orchestrated! Beautiful Voice! I typically don't listen to Opera however this has won me over. Nice work." (7. The Future - Immence Ranges of High Mountains)

"This was an incredible adventure in diissonance and wonderful authentic orchestration. Bravo to you and to the fine musicians that carved this piece to blissful perfection. My ear-training was most challenged! Absolutely riviting and beautifully orchestrated!!" (Cello Concerto - III)

"Rousing Intro sequence made me sit up and take notice! Writing for full orchestra with the support of a full orchestra...Wow. Not only Wow, but in addition you have singlehandedly changed my 10 year rant about the substandard quality of the mp3 format. Tremendous work, highest quality sound and compositional skill level I've ever heard on broadjam. You made my pupils dilate. You made me drool. Your cello ripped my heart out. I bumped my head on the lamp above my head when I jumped up to applaud at the rousing ending! No cons at all. If there was a rating of 6 I'd put you at 6+. Bravisssimmoooo!" (Cello Concerto- III)

"Fantastic - great intro (main theme) Stravinsky eat you heart out! Great recording too. Beautiful structural development and the atmosphere you create is immaculate. The diverse rhythm is great - love it. I can almost see the images you are capturing. Performance is great as well. This is an exceptional piece of music, probably the best i have reviewed on thiis website so far. (Cello Concerto III)

"REALLY ENJOYED THIS COMPOSITION. TOOK ME ON AN ADVENTURE WITH GREAT INSTRUMENTATION. LIKE FINE WINE WITH HINTS OF COPLAND". (Cello Concerto III)

Excellent orchestration. Excellent piece. Flawless. (Cello Concerto III)

"Excellent! Fine sounding! Keeps interest throughout." (Cello Concerto III)

"Heart rendering intro with solo cello/viola, staccato strings enter as perfect accompaniment to buld suspense. Enjoyable arrangement, Suspenseful. Pizzacato section provides a wonderful intro to the pull and tug between the violin parts. Build up of intensity and key change at 6:00 move the piece forward with visual strength. In fact, the entire piece could be a fantastic underscore for a drama. Was pleased and surprised to hear this was a live performance for your string ensemble. Bravo, excellent recording quality. Had no idea it was live until I heard the

round of applause. I hope you're into film scoring because your work certainly stands ready to enhance the silver screen. You had me from the get-go with the lilting cello intro....like a deer in the headlights! No criticisms at all in this work. It's a 5+/5. (String Trio No.1 - III)

"Haunting melodies. Great playing. Excellent use of dynamics. Constant development throughout the composition. Dramatic" (String Trio No.1 - III)

"This piece is wonderfully eerie. Great voicings for illustrating darkness. It is so refreshing to hear true instrumentation played so well. This could certainly be placed in the appropriate scene in a horror film. Great composition and an equally great arrangement. BRAVISSIMO!!" (String Trio No. 1 - III)

"The melody is haunting yet moving, and the overall agitated mood can fit many scenarios. I think this is a beautifully performed and recorded piece of music." (String Trio No. 1 - III)

"GREAT JOB!!!! Great writing!" (String Trio No. 1 - III)

"Great composition. Reminds me of the Bartok String Quartets." (String Trio No. 1 - III)

"Absolutely superb! Tremendous musical performances and storytelling, with instruments alone, filled with nuance, expression and emotion. And for eight straight minutes in front of a deathly silent audience, totally hooked upon your every note. Didn't even know they were there until the end, unusual for me! Great live recording with outstanding dynamic contrast and musical intonation. Not to put a damper on the accolades, but if you had inserted this potential soundtrack into the shower scene in Hitchcock's "Psycho", I think it might have worked. Great job and best of luck." (String Trio No. 1 - III)

"Nice job! Well written, recorded and played. I'm a brass player so I'm guessing it's a string trio - violin, viola and cello. Wow a live performance so no editing going here! Lots of contrasts in all areas to keep listeners interested." (String Trio No. 1 - III)

"Listening to this work is like reading a good book in that I looked forward to the turning of each new page. Nicely done. Fresh, unique, but not so over the top where it could be hard to relate. Needless to say, it really does lend itself to film, though it stands well on it's own." (Three Dances - Dance No. 2)