



Crossings

November 18, 2011



About the Works

Junk Shot (2011) *first Boston performance*

John Elmquist

In *'Orizon* (the title being a little nod to BP's British CEO Tony Hayward), what I am going for is churning machinery in the bass clarinet/cello/piano-left-hand undergirding alarms in the piccolo/piano-right-hand, and the movement is spent observing the machinery fail gradually. High piano chords signify things going underwater in *Decessional*. This short movement is in two layers – floating A/E-flat chords accompanied by small, unconnected gestures – and is the source of the title *Junk Shot* which was the name given to a process of (futilely) attempting to stop the gusher by ramming a bunch of random junk down the pipe against the flow of the oil. The middle movement, *On My Shoe* is a little funky do, a gob of goo stuck to the national shoe. There was a lot of discussion about whether or not what was extruding from the bottom of the sea could technically be called a "plume". Apparently this meant something when it came to calculating liability. And when I would look at it on television, it appeared as a giant ugly flower, so *Fleur de Plume* is a sonar ping revealing a bloom of a plume on the bed of the sea. This leads uninterrupted to the final large movement. It seemed that by the time the fall of 2010 rolled around, the media were basically saying, "Oil spill? What oil spill?" and I decided that the oil must have all been gobbled up by magic secret oil-eating clams. So in this movement we have a giant bed of clams stretching as far as the eye can see, each jumping up in turn to grab a glob – at first to shades of *Where Have All the Flowers Gone?* and finally in a jubilant chorus of their own that suddenly recedes.

Concerto di Camera II (2011) *world premiere*

Bernard Hoffer

Concerto di Camera was written in 2011 for the Boston Musica Viva, featuring their spectacular cellist Jan Muller-Szeraws. In essence it is a three movement cello concerto in the classic/romantic tradition. The third movement is actually two movements combined using the same materials. The opening is a melodic duet for the cello with the percussion providing coloristic backgrounds. The main body of the movement consists of two alternating, fast moving sections, one in sixteenth note patterns and one in triplet patterns. The ending is a return to cello and percussion duet. The middle movement is a classical type scherzo with a definite three feeling, although it is written in 6/8 and 9/8. It is mostly a pizzicato movement with the piano being muted so as to create an additional pizzicato type effect. The finale is a set of Variations in which the cellist plays duets with each of the other players. The thematic material of these duets is based on the circle of fifths. Each Variation is separated by a chordal fanfare of sorts using the circle of fifths also. The variations are all in a miniature AABA structure. After an cadenza-like introduction the cello plays the thematic material which

becomes the basis of the variations. After all the duets have been played, the circle of fifths is then used as a basis of a passacaglia, introduced by the piano, which builds to a big ending.

B.A.B.B.IT.T (a musical birthday card) (1966)

Donald Martino

B.A.B.B.IT.T (a musical birthday card), honoring the 50th birthday (May 10, 1966) of my teacher, Milton Babbitt, was composed on my birthday (May 16, 1966). For obvious astrological reasons, the card had to be delivered late. It was delivered and performed by me on May 21 at a special concert in Mr. Babbitt's honor sponsored by ISCM (International Society for Contemporary Music), New Haven. The piece is written for Bb clarinet with special extensions, of my invention, which expand the instrument's range to five octaves; its musical materials derive from the letters of Mr. Babbitt's name: B = B flat, a = A natural, ti = B natural, t = B natural. When I performed the piece for Babbitt, his completely unrehearsed response—a perfect example of Babbittry—went something like this: “Don, dear boy, of course, and quite naturally I'm thrilled (and I mean to suggest not less than each and every implication of those most superabundant words) to be able to extend to you my thanks for having so extended yourself and your instrument for me.” The technical operations by which the piece unfolds are extensions of principles of which Mr. Babbitt is the founder; the musical sentiment I extend to him is, I hope, uniquely my own.

Special thanks to Lora Martino for sharing Donald Martino's notes on B.A.B.B.IT.T.

Crossing the Meridian (1982)

Ronald Perera

Celestial navigators check their longitude by timing the exact moment the sun crosses their local meridian. At this transit the sun seems to hang for a moment at its zenith, neither rising nor descending. So, also, can our lives seem to hang still in a moment of passage. *Crossing the Meridian* is about those moments when time can seem almost frozen to us, about those eternal-seeming moments when we perceive ourselves in the middle of experience: in “July 18, 1846, Crossing the Great Divide,” a pioneer woman at the symbolic midpoint of her journey westward; in “That ‘Sensual Phosphorescence’” the persistence of desire; in “Meticulous, Past Midnight” a premonition of lovers parting; in “Danse Russe” a moment of reflection before a mirror; in “Math” the ecstasy of the moment of breakthrough in a creative act. In this work I have explored the use of very small note collections, especially in the first and last songs. The first song is a continuous variation on the pitch succession *c, g, b-flat, f, e*. The last song uses only the pitches generated by the overtone series of C up to the twelfth harmonic—*c, g, b-flat, d, e, f-sharp*—only two notes different from the note collection in the “theme” of the first song. The music works itself out in quite opposite ways in these two songs, however, the first being tentative and searching in character, the last continuous and ecstatic. The central song, which sets an especially intense poem by Hart Crane, is the most chromatic of the group. A viola solo sets in motion a series of commentaries by the tenor and piano quartet which rise to a passionate outcry and then die away. Flanking this central song are two short songs featuring unusual instrumental duos which have the character of scherzos. *Crossing the Meridian* was composed in 1982 for Boston Musica Viva and premiered by the ensemble with Frank Hoffmeister, tenor, in December of that year. It was subsequently recorded by BMV with John Aler, tenor, on a CRI compact disc (No. 798).

About the Composers



John Elmquist received his DMA in composition from the University of Memphis where he studied with Don Freund, and his MM in piano performance from Virginia Commonwealth University where he studied with Landon Bilyeu. He serves on the faculties the Chicago High School of the Arts, the Merit School of Music and the People's Music School. Elmquist is also the Music Director at Ebenezer Lutheran Church in Chicago and works in and around Chicago as a bass player. In 1999 he formed HardArt group as a vehicle for performing his music; this ad hoc ensemble, ranging in size from 3-20 players, has produced 14 recordings and currently performs 2-3 times per year at various venues in Chicago. Performance venues have included the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Pritzker Pavilion in Millennium Park, the Green Mill and Northeastern Illinois University. Much of the music of the group can be heard at hardartgroup.com. Elmquist has received an Individual Artist Grant from the Illinois Arts Council and his recent work "Hairless Cat Sonata" (saxophone and piano) is currently being performed by saxophonists Jeremy Koch and Susan Cook.



Bernard Hoffer was born October 14, 1934 in Zurich, Switzerland. He received early musical training at the Dalcroze School in New York and attended the Eastman School of Music, where he received a B.M. and an M.M and studied composition with Bernard Rogers and Wayne Barlow and conducting with Paul White and Herman Genhart. After serving as arranger for the U.S. Army Field Band of Washington, D.C., he came to New York as a freelance musician, composer, conductor, and arranger. Hoffer is known not only for his chamber and orchestral music but also for works written for films, television, and commercials. He scored the hit children's cartoon series *Thundercats*, the theme for the *PBS News Hour*, and orchestrated the Emmy Award-winning theme to PBS's *The American Experience*. Hoffer has received grants from Meet the Composer and the Margaret Fairbank Jory Copying Assistance Program and prizes from New Music Delaware, among many others. His concert works have been performed by the New York Philharmonic, the Spokane Symphony, the Greenwich (CT) Symphony Orchestra, the Concord Orchestra, the Amherst Saxophone Quartet, the Boston Musica Viva, and the Composers String Quartet. Recent works include *Concerto di Camera* (2006) for bassoon, horn, cello, and piano; *Saint Lucia Morning* (2006); *Symphony: Pousette-Dart* (2008); *Six, by George* (2008), a tribute to George Gershwin; *Sadako* (2009), a ballet for Japanese instruments and strings; and *Elegy* (2009) for violin and string orchestra. Hoffer has written three ballets for young audiences, *Ma Goose*, *A Boston Cinderella*, and *The Three Little Pigs*, all commissioned by BMV for its Annual Family Concerts.

Donald Martino (1931 - 2005) was born in Plainfield, New Jersey. He began music lessons at age 9 – learning to play the clarinet, saxophone, and oboe – and started composing at 15. He held degrees from Syracuse and Princeton Universities. A member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, his many awards



include two Fulbright scholarships; three Guggenheim awards; grants from the Massachusetts Arts Council, the National Institute of Arts and Letters, and the National Endowment for the Arts; the Brandeis Creative Arts Citation in Music; the 1974 Pulitzer Prize in music for his chamber work *Notturmo*, First Prize in the 1985 Kennedy Center Friedheim Competition for his String Quartet (1983), and the Boston Symphony's Mark M. Horblit Award. Mr. Martino has taught at The Third Street Music School Settlement in New York; Princeton; Yale; The New England Conservatory of Music, where he was chairman of the composition department from 1969-1979; Brandeis, where he was Irving Fine Professor of Music; and Harvard, where he was the Walter Bigelow Rosen Professor of Music, Emeritus. He was a guest lecturer and Composer-in-Residence at Tanglewood, The Composer's Conference, The Yale Summer School of Music and Art, The Pontino Festival (Italy), May in Miami, The Atlantic Center for the Arts, The Warebrook Festival, The Ernest Bloch Festival, and The Festival Internacional de Musica de Morelia (Mexico). Commissions for new works have come from, among others, the Paderewski Fund; the Fromm, Naumburg, Koussevitzky, and Coolidge Foundations; the Chicago, Boston, and San Francisco Symphonies; and a number of musical societies and organizations. According to the New Grove, "Martino's music has been characterized as expansive, dense, lucid, dramatic, romantic, all of which are applicable. But it is his ability...to conjure up for the listener a world of palpable presences and conceptions...that seems most remarkable."



Ronald Perera's more than seventy compositions include operas, song cycles, chamber, choral and orchestral works, and works that incorporate electronically generated sounds. Perera has received awards or fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, ASCAP, the National Association of Teachers of Singing, and the Massachusetts Arts and Humanities Foundation. His music is published by E. C. Schirmer, Boosey and Hawkes, Music Associates of New York, and Pear Tree Press Music Publishers, and is recorded on the Albany, CRI and Opus One labels. Perera retired in 2002 from a thirty-year teaching career at Smith College, where he was the Elsie Irwin Sweeney Professor of Music.