

Contrast... Music Director Steven Schick



It is safe to say that I learned how to play percussion music by playing the pieces of Iannis Xenakis. I loved (and still love) the percussion music of John Cage and Lou Harrison, of Karlheinz Stockhausen and Pierre Boulez, but it was through Xenakis that I learned a basic truth about percussion music: percussion is not about rhythm; it's about sound. This might make more sense once you know that Xenakis, a composer of Greek origin who lived his adult life in Paris and who died there ten years ago this week, was an engineer and an architect by training. To Xenakis sound was the material of musical construction. It had physicality and impact. Sound was not simply the means of conveying a musical idea; it was the idea.

We'll hear and feel his sounds again this weekend with the U.S. premiere of the original (Alpha) version of Xenakis's early orchestral masterpiece *Metastasis*, a work which is often cited as Xenakis's first mature composition. The seeds of *Metastasis* gestated at about the same time as Xenakis was working on the design of the Philips Pavilion at the 1958 Brussels World's Fair. It was a team led by the famed French architect Le Corbusier, but the sweeping arcs and hyperbolic trajectories of that building were all Xenakis. In a remarkable act of translation, the shapes of the architectural structures became the instrumental lines and massed sonorities of *Metastasis*, the piece of music. You'll hear more than forty independent string parts arc upwards and back, just like the ascending and descending lines of Xenakis's Philips Pavilion blueprint. And, you'll hear nearly opaque musical clouds of sound, which serve as the weight-bearing pylons of the musical structures, just as concrete served those functions in the Philips Pavilion.

The mythology of Xenakis represents him as a resistance fighter, architect, mathematician, and ancient Greek exiled to the 20th century. All of these things are true, but Xenakis was also fundamentally a French composer. Sentenced to death in Greece in absentia, Xenakis fled to France where he lived for a while as an illegal immigrant. There he was adopted, spiritually speaking, by two great French artists: Le Corbusier and the mystical French composer Olivier Messiaen. Although Xenakis's general aesthetic is loud, boisterous, and even rude—a far cry from the prevailing images of French music—he is in fact a perfected extension of early 20th century French ideals. Several decades earlier Claude Debussy, like Xenakis, fell in love with the power of sound itself. Debussy was criticized in the contemporary press for his "bizarre" creations and "experimental" tendencies. In fact the word "impressionism" itself was originally satirical, coined by art critic Louis Leroy to describe what he claimed were the superficial tendencies of certain painters—theirs was not real art, he averred, but merely impressions. But from impressionist and fauvist painters to

In this issue...

- Contrast
- News from the Executive Director
- Calling all alumni
- Critics among us
- Member spotlight
- Congratulations Peter!
- Article Watch



symbolist poets like Stéphane Mallarmé to composers like Debussy and Maurice Ravel, the material surface of art—sound, color and impact—was getting unprecedented attention. In Debussy we hear this fascination with pure sound in the veiled textures and colors of *Nuages* or the brilliant enunciations of *Fêtes* from *Nocturnes*. And we hear in *Jeux* a fascination with the suppleness of line and color. The number of tempo changes in this seventeen-minute work surpasses sixty, which means that every few seconds Debussy redirects us. The temporal flux robs us of a consistent and on-going rhythmic or metrical basis for perception and in turn relocates our focus towards color and shape. The harmonic language may be quite different, but the process of shaping the music around its sounds is remarkably similar to Xenakis's work forty years later.

In the midst of this love affair with sound we also present Phil Kline's *A Dream and Its Opposite*, commissioned by the Muzik3 Foundation for the slightly unusual combination of three soloists—piano, cello, and percussion—with full orchestra. Kline's earliest reputation was made as a composer/performer for massed boom-boxes, a compositional engagement that culminates every year in his "Unsilent Night," a procession through the streets of New York of more than a thousand people, each carrying his or her own boom-box. The result is a moving sound installation, a giant stereo system with legs. And in Kline's music, as with Debussy and Xenakis, sound has plasticity and texture.

So sound is at the center in these concerts—sounds that can seduce us or buoy us or even batter us. In the vision of Edgard Varèse, another great composer with roots in France, sound is an oxygenated medium with intelligence all its own. So dive in deeply this weekend. Dive into vastness of sound, into the universal ether of musical language.

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News from the Executive Director... Diane Salisbury



Happy New Year, everyone! As we prepare for our first subscription concert of 2011 on February 5-6, I am pleased to report the concert is receiving very good media buzz. We were included in a "tweet" by Alex Ross (music critic with The New Yorker) that said "Amazing programming from La Jolla Symphony" and directed his 5000 followers to our web site. And the League of American Symphony Orchestras has requested a follow-up story and photos, particularly of the Phil Kline premiere.

e-Postcards on the Web

Just a reminder that e-mail versions of each of our concert postcards are posted on our web site for easy access. Go to the 2010-2011 Concert page. A link to e-postcard pdfs is at the bottom of each concert description.

Date Announced for Wine Tasting

A date has been selected for our annual wine tasting. This popular fundraiser will take place on Saturday, May 7 at 2:00 p.m. at the Del Mar home of patrons Bob Engler and Julie Ruedi. This year's theme is still to be decided, but sparkling wine is definitely in the running. Robert Whitley returns to lead the blind tasting and wine raffle. Joan Forrest continues as chairperson.



2011 Gala to be Held October 15

Save the date for next fall when we celebrate our 4th annual gala on Saturday, October 15, 2011. Watch for more details to come soon.

