

“Why We Sing”: David Mahler’s Communities

AMY C. BEAL

Abstract

American composer David Mahler (b. 1944) has nurtured a career that is independent, diverse, and hard to classify. Democratic, inclusive, and community oriented, Mahler thinks deeply about sound in specific environments, and how music gets made, both by amateurs and professionals. Mahler’s work is thus integrally connected to places, to the people in them, and to the songs those people sing. He is influenced and inspired by U.S. traditions of band music arrangements, the ragtime of Joseph Lamb, the songs of Stephen Foster, the bitonality of Charles Ives, the simple harmonic motion of classic minimalism, and the indeterminacy of John Cage. His teachers included Harold Budd, Morton Subotnick, and James Tenney, and he has been an important influence on many composers of his generation, including Michael Byron, Peter Garland, Larry Polansky, Thom Miller, and Stuart Dempster. Defining himself as a “Listener-in-Residence,” he has composed, performed, taught, organized, and directed, all while remaining almost completely unaffiliated with academic institutions. This article provides a portrait of Mahler’s career in the context of the communities that have shaped his work and explores how his music responds to the world around him.

Shaker Songs African Songs Pete Seeger Ragtime Songs Folk Songs Composed Songs
Welsh Songs Waltzes State Songs Disney Songs Rounds Jean Ritchie Hymns Charles
Ives National Anthems Camp Songs Pathetic Ballads Lullabies Vocal Exploration Part
Songs Listening Duke Ellington Rhythmic Games Bach Chorales Bahamian Whaling Songs¹

American composer David Mahler (b. 1944) thinks deeply about two simple yet profound phenomena: “sound in the environment,” and “how music gets made.” First, Mahler asks how space affects our perception of sound, and what natural sounds one might encounter in certain environments. (He is not interested in the “environmental sound” practices of recording and amplifying the vibrations of insects, icebergs, or natural things we cannot hear with the naked ear.) Second, Mahler wonders about “how music gets made”—by both amateurs and professionals, and in what types of situations—and to what degree those factors affect our musical experiences. From these starting points, Mahler has nurtured a career and a body of work that are independent, diverse, and hard to classify. Inclusive and community-oriented, he is not interested in artistic isolation. As his friend (and fellow composer) Larry Polansky pointed out, Mahler’s work is integrally connected to places, to the people in them, and to the songs those people

The author wishes to thank David Mahler, Julie Hanify, Larry Polansky, Thom Miller, Stuart Dempster, Cameron Mozee-Baum, this journal’s anonymous reviewers, and James Rosenzweig of the Special Collections Division at the University of Washington Libraries. The title of this article, “Why We Sing,” is borrowed from the title of a round by David Mahler written on 14 February 2009.

¹ List of song types included in a flyer for Mahler’s Tuesday evening adult singing sessions (the Beacon Street Red Sox) in Squirrel Hill, Pittsburgh. He adds: “All are welcome—timid, bold, accomplished, rookie, clueless. We sing for pleasure, to explore, to discover.”

sing.² Mahler belongs to a historically significant group of composers in the United States who have yet to receive the scholarly attention they deserve. Offering a corrective, this article provides a portrait of Mahler's career in the context of the communities that have shaped his work: Hinsdale, Illinois; La Mott, Pennsylvania; Los Angeles; Seattle; Pittsburgh; and elsewhere. His seamless and fluid integration of many musical styles and activities arises not out of an explicit compositional approach that foregrounds hybridization or borrowing, but rather emerges from his immersion in the worlds in which he makes music. David Mahler's communities offer him places to sing.

Mahler's life and work are quintessentially American. His memories of his Midwestern childhood suggest images from a Norman Rockwell painting: a beloved piano-playing uncle; colorful characters in his neighborhood; nearby trains; Fourth of July parades; Chicago White Sox games on the radio; ubiquitous Lutheran hymns; the parlor music of a bygone era; the WLS Barn Dance (with songs by Bob Atcher and other country singers) on the radio on Saturday nights; the sound of crickets from his parents' porch; and much more. In particular, Mahler's father had a tremendous impact on how he would come to think about sound: Henry Mahler was a true listener, one actively engaged in paying attention to the sounds around him. The senior Mahler would have surely appreciated the designation "Listener-in-Residence," which his son David invented as a sort of idiosyncratic research position for several such residencies he enjoyed in the early 1990s.

During the fall of 1994 Mahler was given the extraordinary opportunity to live as a Listener-in-Residence for about three weeks in the small town of La Mott, Pennsylvania, in Cheltenham Township outside Philadelphia. In this town of just seventeen streets within a grid of three blocks by seven blocks, Mahler collected over twenty hours of tape while getting to know the sounds of this "consciously integrated community" and the stories of the people who lived there.³ He found La Mott to be "a community of great social harmony," and he interacted with the residents, talked with them, and encouraged them to sing and to participate in listening activities. He discovered that the people there had a particular sense of sound perspective, and that they possessed "the ability to hear things at a distance," which manifested itself in a practice of "calling" around the neighborhood. He was told about bells that used to adorn the schools and the firehouse. At the end of Mahler's stay, a final event took place at the La Mott Community Center. Titled "Sounding La Mott," the event featured pieces prepared by Mahler and his local collaborators that were meant to highlight the act of listening in this particular place. Mahler's residency there fed his interest in regional character, site-specific sound, community activity, modes of communication, and maximum participation by all levels of society. The activities of the residency also embraced the notion of what he frequently refers to as "Guerrilla Music"—music found and made in unexpected

² See Larry Polansky, "David Mahler's Place," preface to the liner notes for David Mahler, *The Voice of the Poet: Works on Tape 1972–1986*, Artifact ART 1019 (1997). Polansky has been the publisher and distributor of Mahler's music through the composers' collective Frog Peak Music (with co-founder Jody Diamond) since approximately 1987.

³ Quotations in this paragraph are from Mahler's interview with Melinda Whiting, NPR, WHYY Philadelphia, 7 November 1994.

places, far beyond traditional concert settings—a theme that remains central to many of his ideas today.

Mahler’s Youth: Hinsdale, VanderCook College, Portland

Born on 13 August 1944 in Plainfield, New Jersey, Mahler grew up in a Chicago suburb called Hinsdale. As a boy, he was steeped in the religious and musical rituals of Lutheranism, and an old upright piano at his grandmother’s house was the center of much singing and playing by the women in the family. A maternal great uncle’s visits have remained vivid early musical memories for Mahler, and his playing of popular songs by ear inspired Mahler to want to play himself. Eventually he learned piano, trombone, and other instruments. Stephen Foster songs were heard on the Mahler family’s record player; his parents also owned the 1946 John Tasker Howard edition of the collected Foster songs, which Mahler devoured at the piano. Other recordings in the Mahler household included Edward Elgar, Glenn Miller, and the barbershop music that his father favored. This eclectic sonic landscape, accompanied all the while by his mother’s hymn playing at the piano, was expanded by the explosion of rock and roll. Soon, a piano teacher encouraged creativity and writing music, and Mahler began arranging and composing. Some of these early pieces had German titles (like *Veränderung*, for a set of variations), “because I thought that’s what real music is,” he recalled.⁴ In high school, Mahler joined the concert and marching bands as a trombonist. The conductor, a talented teacher just finishing his master’s degree at Chicago’s VanderCook College of Music named David H. Krubsack, had a large influence on the young musician, especially in the areas of trombone technique, tone production, proper breathing, and principles of ensemble playing.⁵ In high school Mahler also engaged with other arts: music, acting, and writing all complemented one another as his creativity blossomed.

In 1962, Mahler enrolled in Concordia College, a Lutheran teachers’ college in Chicago, which “churned out teachers for Lutheran schools, and organists and choir directors.” There, a composition and organ teacher named Richard Hillert taught Mahler the dos and don’ts of academic composing; amazingly, Hillert also exposed his students to Edgard Varèse’s electronic collage *Poème électronique*, then just a few years old. Spoiled, however, by the high standard for musicianship David Krubsack had established for the young composer, Mahler was unsatisfied with the Concordia band director. To fill the educational gap, Mahler enrolled concurrently in instrumental technique classes at Krubsack’s alma mater, VanderCook College of Music. One of the few schools in the country at the time dedicated to training band conductors for high schools and colleges, VanderCook College was located on the South Side of Chicago in an old, three-story, non-soundproofed Victorian mansion: “You could hear everything that went on in there all the time, it was very Ivesian,” Mahler recalled. And like Charles Ives, Mahler had fond early memories of bands, which he remembers marching past his childhood home during the annual

⁴ Unless otherwise specified, the quoted material in this article is from a series of interviews conducted with David Mahler by the author in November 2010 at his home in Pittsburgh.

⁵ Krubsack taught largely from what was considered the key pedagogical text for teachers at VanderCook, *Expression in Music* (1929), written by Hale VanderCook, who founded the college in the early 1900s.

Fourth of July parade. The practice of arranging was nurtured at VanderCook, and Mahler took it very seriously. Following in the footsteps of great arrangers like Fletcher Henderson, Duke Ellington, Charles Mingus, Carla Bley, and others, Mahler continues to practice the art of arranging with great discipline, and it remains a central part of his musical activity. During the mid-1990s in Seattle, for example, Mahler established a group called the Volunteer Park Conservatory Orchestra, a dance band focusing on pre-jazz popular music scored by black arrangers between the 1890s and the 1930s. (Mahler now possesses some 750 such arrangements.) The Orchestra was a fifteen-piece ensemble of paid musicians, plus several singers.

After a year of student teaching in Pittsburgh (the city of Stephen Foster, which would become Mahler's home exactly forty years later), Mahler returned to Chicago in 1966, finished his final year at Concordia, and graduated with a BA in secondary music education. That summer, he married Irene Mervine, a fellow Concordia student, and in 1967 the couple moved to Portland, Oregon, where they had both been assigned teaching positions through the Concordia placement program. There, Mahler taught music, arranging, ensembles, and drama at Portland's Concordia High School and Junior College while taking courses at the University of Portland in piano technique and repertoire.

Mahler encountered American experimental music for the first time during the three years he spent teaching in Portland. The exposure came initially through *Source* magazine, which the assistant librarian at the school where Mahler taught had brought to his attention.⁶ Mahler also heard recordings of music by Robert Ashley, Pauline Oliveros, and others.⁷ In particular, Oliveros's *I of IV* and Morton Subotnick's *Silver Apples of the Moon* made strong impressions on Mahler. Although Mahler knew little of Charles Ives at the time, he heard a live performance of the massive Fourth Symphony during his time in Portland, and Ives's music helped Mahler envision the possibilities of large forces: "It opened my ears in a way, it just said music can be something that you hadn't thought it could be before." Around the same time, Mahler read John Cage's seminal books *Silence* and *A Year From Monday*, which proved to be equally eye- and ear-opening. Most significantly, Mahler became fascinated by tape music, and began experimenting with an Ampex recorder.

Increasingly dissatisfied with Portland's musical possibilities, Mahler became restless for a different kind of environment. In 1970, a new interdisciplinary arts program at the California Institute of the Arts (hereafter CalArts) was about to be launched in Los Angeles. Mahler applied to be a member of the first class, largely because Morton Subotnick was there, and Mahler was ready to do something "more

⁶ *Source: Music of the Avant-Garde* was published twice a year between 1967 and 1973. Founded by Larry Austin and others at the University of California, Davis, it was a particularly important disseminator of conceptual music, graphic notation, indeterminacy, text-based scores, and other experimental music of this fertile time.

⁷ Around 1967 composer David Behrman became the producer of the "Music of Our Time" series on Columbia Records's Odyssey label. Over the next few years Behrman produced a series of highly influential records of vocal, instrumental, and electronic music by Robert Ashley, John Cage, Morton Feldman, Toshi Ichihyanagi, Alvin Lucier, Richard Maxfield, Pauline Oliveros, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, and others.

serious” with electronic music, then an embryonic field within higher education. The focus on alternative forms of education appealed to him—the school offered no traditional class listings, no degree requirements, and no course catalog.⁸ Mahler was undecided, however, about which musical path he was most eager to take: the New England Conservatory in Boston had just started a new jazz program, and he applied to it as well. His application to NEC was rejected, but he was invited to audition for CalArts.

Compositional Awakening: California Institute Of The Arts

Mahler attended CalArts for two years, earning an MFA in music composition in 1972. These years were productive and important for Mahler’s development as a composer, and it is from this period that his first works exploring contemporary techniques were conceived. His teachers included composers James Tenney, Morton Subotnick, Richard Teitelbaum, Mel Powell, and Harold Budd, who served as Mahler’s de facto mentor. Charlemagne Palestine and Ingram Marshall were in residence as Subotnick’s teaching assistants. Mahler’s classmates included Michael Byron, Mario Castillo, Peter Garland, Thom Miller, Victor Spiegel, and William Winant. Mahler and Miller met in Teitelbaum’s class, “Collective Composition and Group Improvisation” and became friends right away.⁹ Byron and Garland became Mahler’s close friends during his second year. Mahler continues to cherish the longevity of these friendships, explaining: “The fact that Michael and Peter and I have hung on somehow, and just not stopped doing what we did, seems to me really important, and I take a lot of strength from the fact that they are out there.”

CalArts was a fertile and generous artistic community where Mahler was taken seriously as a composer from the very start. He took advantage of all the opportunities this welcoming environment had to offer, which included an active performance schedule, many guest artists—Harold Budd’s friend Barney Childs, who taught at the University of Redlands, was a steady presence, as was Daniel Lentz, who taught at UC Santa Barbara—and a multitude of world music ensembles, some of which Mahler participated in. Because there was no fixed curriculum, class offerings varied from year to year. During Mahler’s two years at CalArts, Tenney taught a class on Ives, Budd taught an improvisation class, pianist and Schoenberg authority Leonard Stein taught counterpoint and twelve-tone technique, Dick Higgins led a seminar that inspired Garland’s *Soundings* and Byron’s *Pieces* publications, Teitelbaum taught improvisation, and Allan Kaprow offered a class on Happenings. Mahler also studied filmmaking and critical studies, sang in the choir, and—working

⁸ Mahler mentioned two particularly influential books on alternative pedagogical models at the time: Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner’s *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* (1969), and Ivan Illich’s *Deschooling Society* (1971). Further, he recalled Subotnick’s “incredibly generous and liberalizing view of education and of the individual,” and quotes him as saying: “There is nothing that everyone needs to know.”

⁹ The first piece in the works list on Thom Miller’s website is a piece called *Inch, Time, Foot, Gem*, written in 1972, and dedicated to David Mahler, who also performed it. See <http://www.thomasmillermusic.com/works.htm>. Miller recalls Mahler singing the Scottish ballad “Wild Mountain Thyme” near the end of the “first class jam” during Teitelbaum’s improvisation course.

with good tape equipment and a Buchla synthesizer—created electronic music with Subotnick. Around this time, in 1972, the *Saturday Review of Literature* published an article on CalArts called “Disney’s New School,” and a photo of David Mahler in the electronic music studio appeared on the cover.¹⁰ He immersed himself in Ives and minimalism, and experienced an “instant conversion” upon hearing a recording of Morton Feldman’s *Piece for Four Pianos* in 1971. (Mahler wrote about this experience in notes accompanying a piece called *After Morton Feldman*, composed in 1987, following Feldman’s death.) During his second year at CalArts Mahler also composed a simple bitonal piano hymn called *A Rose Blooming, for Charles Ives*, which set the left- and right-hand parts of the German Christmas carol “Es ist ein Ros’ entsprungen” in two different keys and two different meters (Example 1). Homage pieces, as well as bitonality and polyrhythm, are common threads running through Mahler’s work since the early seventies, when the composer started to find his musical voice.

Clearly launched on an energetic compositional trajectory, Mahler wrote choral pieces, tape pieces, and instrumental ensemble pieces. One of his earliest tape compositions, a work of musique concrète called *Wind Peace*, captured and manipulated the tinkling sounds of crystal glassware in what he called “a pure sound piece.”¹¹ *Still Life*, a modified string quartet (violin, viola, cello, double bass) reminiscent of the influential third movement of Ruth Crawford Seeger’s *String Quartet* of 1931, was “about as minimal as you could get, just long tones with constantly varying dynamics so that out of the four pitches some come into focus and some go out of focus.” *Early Winters*, a two-keyboard piece dedicated to Peter Garland, is a good example of second-generation minimalism, in that the pitch material is extremely limited (a C minor seventh chord with an added A-flat), the pulse is steady, slow, and hypnotic (the quarter note equals 44), and the players repeat at their own discretion small cells contained in seventeen bars for ten minutes or longer (Example 2).

Several of these early vocal and instrumental pieces, like Mahler’s simple and open-ended *Wind Hymn*, were published in Garland’s *Soundings* and Byron’s *Pieces* anthologies in the years following CalArts, and are characteristic of a trend toward transparent and meditative music during the early 1970s (Example 3).¹²

¹⁰ “Disney’s New School,” *Saturday Review: The Arts*, 29 January 1972. Thom Miller described the photo in this way: “His long beard and what was left of hair hanging long, he was the perfect freakish poster boy”; written communication with the author, 13 August 2011.

¹¹ This piece is included on Mahler’s recording on Artifact Records called *The Voice of the Poet: Works on Tape 1972–1986* (1997).

¹² *Soundings* 3–4 (July–October 1972) featured a David Mahler text piece called “Very Much It Sleeps” on the back cover, written in Harold Budd’s calligraphy. *Soundings* 7–8 (July–October 1973) included four pieces by Mahler: the string quartet *Still Life*; a drawing of Mickey Mouse called “Whitman Sampler”; a transcription/arrangement of the folk song “Wild Mountain Thyme”; and a solo piano piece called *Children in the Grasses Without Knowing Colors*. Byron’s first *Pieces* anthology (1974) included three of Mahler’s early works: *Wind Hymn*; *Early Winters*; and *Illinois Sleep*. Other early pieces included *Smaller Circles* for guitar (1972); *The Wonderful One-Part Invention* for organ (1974); *Seven Songs* “to be sung, embellished, shared” (1974–76); and *Winter Man* for five B-flat trumpets and dedicated to Byron (1975). While at CalArts Mahler also wrote some contemporary folk music hymns (original tunes arranged as hymns and written in lead sheet form), two of which were included in a hymnal called *Hymns for Now (II)*, published by Concordia Publishing House in St. Louis.

A Rose Blooming, for Charles Ives

Piano

moderately (♩. = 52) sf throughout

mp

slightly faster

f

rit.

tempo

mp

f

tempo

p

slight rit.

pp

pp

*December, 1971
Revised, 1976 Daniel Mahler*

Example 1. *A Rose Blooming for Charles Ives* (1971; 1976).

An Abundance Of Music In Seattle

Upon completion of his MFA degree at CalArts, Mahler expected to teach, to continue taking on church jobs, and perhaps to run an electronic music studio. He applied for several dozen academic positions, with no results. Mahler and his wife decided to move to Seattle to be close to the newly founded Evergreen State College in Olympia, where he hoped he could establish a position (his hope was not

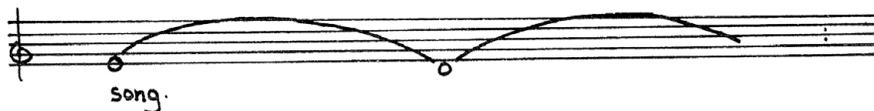
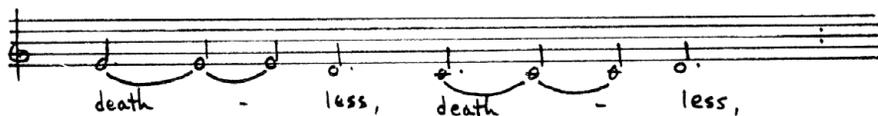
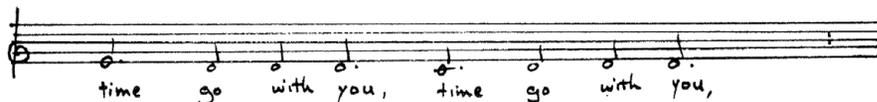
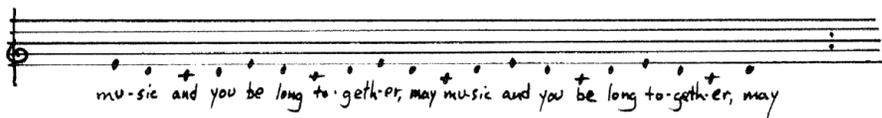
EARLY WINTERS

Example 2. *Early Winters* (1974). Score excerpt.

fulfilled). Arriving in Seattle in October 1972, and living some twenty miles south of the city, Mahler found work as a children's librarian at the Seattle Hebrew Academy; he also worked as a youth director at a Lutheran church in Seattle, and served as an occasional substitute organist. These early years in Seattle were difficult for Mahler, as he felt separated from a contemporary music community. In the summer and fall of 1974 his circumstances began to change: he was offered the opportunity to teach a summer workshop in electronic music at the University of Portland (for which he borrowed a Buchla synthesizer owned by the now-defunct independent new music organization in Seattle called *New Directions in Music*); his only daughter, Aviva, was born; and an important new performance space offered opportunities previously unavailable to the isolated composer.

For a social, collaborative, and essentially non-academic composer like David Mahler, the importance of "alternative spaces," especially during the 1970s, cannot be underestimated. In 1971, *The Kitchen* had opened in New York City, and was creating interest in interdisciplinary, artist-curated spaces for experimental art and music across the country. Galleries, factories, schools, churches, coffee houses, storefronts, and people's homes became welcoming places for composers and musicians

Wind Hymn



Begin on any pitch, using the above relationships.
Each line repeated many times before singing the next.

David Mahler
3-73

Example 3. *Wind Hymn* (1973). Score.

to try out new work in unconventional formats, and to have that music interact with other arts, and with its audience. The Seattle gallery called *and/or*, which opened in 1974, became the center of Mahler's musical world for about six years (Figure 1).¹³ He performed there frequently, running a small grant-funded program that allowed

¹³ Between 1974 and 1979, the *Seattle Times* published thirteen articles, reviews, or announcements about Mahler's activity at *and/or* and in the greater Seattle area.

<i>and/or</i>	<i>New Music</i>
Acme Composer Performers	John Adams
Beth Anderson	Laurie Anderson Robert
Ashley	Jules Backus LeRoy Backus
Martin Bartlett	David Behrman Broken
Consort	Harold Budd Michael Byron
Joseph Celli	Joel Chadabe Rhys Chatham
Jay Clويد	Robert Coburn Concert: No
Performers	Concert: Still No Performers
Alvin Curran	Stuart Dempster Paul Dresher
Electronic Music Classes	Electronic Music
Demonstrations	Dennis Evans (Ubu Waugh)
Rene Fabre	Five Corners Group Flute
Alone (Larry Decker)	Peter Garland Jon
Gibson	Tony Gnazzo Daniel Goode
Denney Goodhew	Peter Gordon Great
Aether Bank	Jay Hamilton Hard
Listening (with Eric Jensen & David Mahler)	
Ed Hartman, with Kundry Berger	R.I.P.
Hayman	William Hellerman High Art
Fiddling	Doug Hollis Inside Outside
Music Instrument Building Workshop, with	
Daniel Schmidt	Jaime de Angulo, a talk by
Peter Garland	Terry Jennings Eric Jensen
Tom Johnson	James Knapp Katrina
Krimsky	Jill Kroesen Lynn Lonidier,
with Jean Lyons	Alvin Lucier Made on
Tape	David Mahler Ingram Marshall
Thomas Miller	Meredith Monk Music
Plugged into the Wall	Music With Roots in
the Aether	My Music Is Music New Music
for an Old Instrument	New Records Phill
Niblock	Pauline Oliveros Open Pieces,
Open Rehearsals	Open Singing
Charlemagne Palestine	Thomas Peterson
Piano Christening	Jim Pomeroy Pat
Purswell	Virginia Quesada Recorded
Works	Terry Riley David Rosenboom &
Jacqueline Humbert	Frederic Rzewski
Alan Scarritt (installation)	Daniel Schmidt,
with Nancy Karp	Warren Shaffer William
O. Smith	Soundwork Anthology Concert
Studio Tape Sharings	Ned Sublette Morton
Subotnick	Synthesis Richard Teitelbaum
Turnings, with Michael Winkler	Peter Van
Riper, with Simone Forti	Waltzes, with
John Cobb & Don Gillespie	Wild Mountain
Thyme	Michael Winkler Adam Woog
Young Scientists	Zounds on Tape

Figure 1. *and/or* Gallery's A-To-Z "Bookmark."

him to produce concerts by other musicians; *and/or* also published a short-lived in-house newsletter called *SPAR* that featured many of Mahler’s writings.

For a period during the mid-1970s *and/or* hosted a public access electronic music studio, with the Buchla synthesizer, some tape recorders, and other basic equipment. Around this time Mahler met trombonist Stuart Dempster, who was teaching at the University of Washington, and who came to be one of Mahler’s closest friends in Seattle. Over the next few years Mahler began to connect with like-minded explorers across the vast continent, from Phill Niblock’s Experimental Intermedia space in Manhattan to the Western Front in Vancouver (where Mahler met Martin Bartlett, another composer who would have a great influence on him). These alternative spaces helped disseminate much of the new music in the United States that was not affiliated with universities. During my 2010 interview, Mahler reflected on these issues:

Maybe the sixties was like just taking everything that was in the landscape and picking it up and shaking it, and then in the seventies it all dropped down. Especially, I think, in the seventies, what impressed me was the combination of localism, if you will, and networking. So, *and/or* in Seattle very much related to local artists, and composers. *and/or* was multi-disciplinary, so there was a visual arts component, a music component, a bit of a literature component, they had a library and so on. But it was a haven for a lot of local creators. And the same was true in Vancouver—the Western Front—such a healthy thing to have this local activity, and then this influx of people from outside who can feed and also be fed.

Mahler was frequently the performer of his own work in his concerts at *and/or* and elsewhere in Seattle, and composed some of his most memorable pieces for solo piano, including the minimalist and deeply appealing *Only Music Can Save Me Now* in 1978 (followed by the equally haunting minimalist solo piano work *La Cuidàd de Nuestra Señora la Reinà de Los Angeles* in 1980).¹⁴ Around this time, his marriage dissolving, Mahler began a twenty-three year personal partnership with Anne Focke, the talented arts administrator who had founded *and/or*; from 1974 until around 1980, Mahler acted as the gallery’s music director.

During the *and/or* years, Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer’s influential book *The Tuning of the World* (1977) had a powerful effect on Mahler’s thinking about environmental sound. Mahler frequently describes the distinction between discrete sounds (a single birdcall) and “the long line of sound” (freeway drones) in Schafer’s terms. Some years later Mahler became involved with a semi-political group in Seattle called Sound Rights, a self-described “group of citizens who are concerned about the ever increasing intrusion of noise (and annoying sound) into our daily lives, especially with the deleterious effect it has on our health.”¹⁵ Soon after reading Schafer’s book, Mahler published the first of two collections of writings and drawings through the independent Wind-Up Press in Seattle: the first,

¹⁴ At present, none of the books considered authoritative sources on minimalism takes into account the large body of work created during the 1970s by composers like Peter Garland, Daniel Goode, Michael Byron, David Mahler, and others. A comprehensive historical consideration of this “second generation” of U.S. minimalists is long overdue. (Goode is frequently associated with this group, even though he was born the same year as Steve Reich, and is one year older than Philip Glass.)

¹⁵ Mahler wrote a short article for the group’s newsletter, in which the quote appears. See David Mahler, “Bicycle Sounds,” *Sound Rights Newsletter* 1/3 (Summer 1997): 2.

* SOME BASIC PLAYS AND THEIR RESULTANT SOUNDS *

pitcher tossing ball in glove

the pitch, and return of ball to pitcher

ground-out (g.o.) 3rd to 1st

g.o. 2nd to 1st

g.o. ss to 1st

doubleplay (d.p.) 3rd to 2nd to 1st

d.p. 3rd to ss to 1st

hardway d.p. 1st to 2nd to 1st

hardway d.p. 1st to ss to 1st

attempted steal, c to 2nd

attempted steal, c to ss

fly out left fielder, Runner tags, throw to cutoff man (ss) play at the plate.

fly out, centerfielder. Runner tags, throw to cutoff man (ss). Runner beats throw to the catcher.

throw from R.F. to C.

throw from C.F. to C.

throw from L.F. to C.

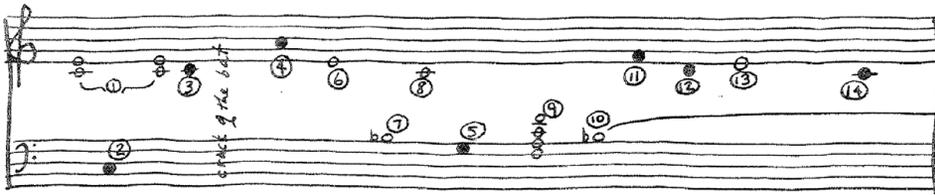
Example 4. "Some Basic Plays And Their Resultant Sounds," from *Scorecard* (1979).

called *I Didn't Want To Talk—15 Word Pieces* (1978), was published in a limited edition of 145, and included handwritten graphic and poetic pieces, many about love and lovemaking, "most to be spoken out loud, with care for the rhythms, in an appropriate form, with however many people, with movement or not, and with occasional musical embellishments"; the second, titled *Scorecard* (1979), was a pinstriped booklet of nostalgic writings and quirky ideas, mostly about baseball, one of Mahler's other great passions. In *Scorecard*, American locations and experiences are important; a metaphorical essay called "Roundtrip" (for Thom Miller) connects the physical geography of the United States with the idea of a baseball diamond and the action within it. Mahler also invented a method of composing with chance operations based on specific (yet unpredictable) plays occurring during a baseball game (Examples 4 and 5).

Scorecard also contains several compositions. In addition to Stephen Foster, Charles Ives, Lutheran hymns, band arrangements, and tape music, another of Mahler's musical passions is ragtime, especially the rags of Joseph Lamb. The original rags included in *Scorecard* were just two of many. Years later, in 1986, Mahler composed a rag for James Tenney, when Mahler's former teacher first fell ill with cancer: *A Rag of Hearts for Jim Tenney* was published in a special volume of *Perspectives of New Music* edited by Mahler's (and Tenney's) friend Larry Polansky (Example 6). This rag, along with an earlier piece dedicated to Tenney called *Triple A Rag* and several others, later appeared in the self-published and Frog

* HOW TO KEEP SCORE *

A Typical Scenario



- ① Runners on 1st & 2nd
- ② Ball is pitched
- ③ Ball back to the pitcher
- ④ Ball is hit to shortstop who gets his glove on the ball but can't hold on
- ⑤ Ball rolls out to centerfielder, in the meantime,
- ⑥⑦ runners have crossed 2nd & 3rd bases respectively
- ⑧ and batter reaches 1st base.
- ⑨ run scores.
- ⑩ runner from 2nd takes 3rd, beating the throw to
- ⑪ the third baseman.
- Batter tries to take 2nd on the play, and is tagged out by
- ⑫ the 2nd baseman, who puts the tag on the runner
- ⑬ sliding into 2nd base.
- ⑭ Ball is thrown back to the pitcher.

Example 5. "How To Keep Score: A Typical Scenario," from *Scorecard*.

Peak-distributed book called *Rags and Barbershops*, a publication providing further examples of Mahler's eclecticism, humor, and deeply American spirit.

Mahler first ventured away from Seattle as a touring composer in the mid-seventies, performing in Buffalo, Toronto (at the Music Gallery), the Washington Project for the Arts, and in New York City. Tom Johnson, the music critic for the *Village Voice* at the time, reviewed a concert Mahler gave at The Kitchen in March 1977:

David Mahler's concert at The Kitchen was also easy to follow. One tape piece was longish and static, but not to an extreme degree, and the rest of the program was quite straightforward. Mahler sang several simple, personal, almost pop-style songs, and he invited the audience to try out little sound-producing gadgets laid out at one side of the room. In one piece, which I liked a lot, he manually pulled a piece of tape back and forth across tape heads. The sound on the tape was one spoken word, "Aviva," which, of course, sounded almost the same when he pulled it the other way. The program was a short, modest, homey sort of affair, quite direct, and quite accessible.¹⁶

¹⁶ Tom Johnson, "Avant-Gardists Reach Toward the People," *Village Voice* (7 March 1977), reprinted in *The Voice of New Music: New York City 1972-1982* (Eindhoven: Apollohuis, 1989), 155.

for Jim Tenney
A Rag of Hearts © *Dan Mahler*

Example 6. *A Rag of Hearts* for Jim Tenney (1986). Score excerpt.

Mahler was invited by The Kitchen's director Mary Macarthur and music director Rhys Chatham to participate in the first New Music America festival (called New Music New York) in 1979; he played *Only Music Can Save Me Now* himself. He subsequently performed or had music performed in three New Music America events: 1984 in Hartford, CT (where Mahler performed his theatrical tape piece *Speech with Interpreter* and the piano piece [with voice] *Deep Water*, and Guy Klucsevsek performed *The Twenty-Second Street Accordion Band*); 1985 in Los Angeles (*Coast*, for gamelan); and 1987 in Philadelphia (where Stuart Dempster played Mahler's *Dempster's Fantasy on an American Theme*).¹⁷ The vibrancy of

¹⁷ Mahler's 4 August 1984, performance in Hartford was reviewed in a poetic manner by David Hicks for *Perspectives of New Music*:
"New Song Forms"
What I liked best here seemed odd even to me:

these small organizations and initiatives around the country invigorated Mahler. He appreciated the rich and creative do-it-yourself attitude of the late 1970s, and people’s willingness to help make things happen. New Music America tried to hold that community together, but eventually the support system deteriorated, as institutional conformity became a necessity for more and more artists.

During his New Music America years, the live tape piece called *Speech with Interpreter* (1981) garnered Mahler attention for its humor, theatricality, and inventiveness, and for its whimsical consideration of the simple possibilities of working with tape. Mahler states:

For me it was another way of using the tape recorder as an instrument, which I love to do, and presenting a little bit of theater, in the process, which I also love to do. I’ve been very fascinated not just by backward speech but backwards sounds in general. In a number of other pieces I’ve used little approaches to doing things backwards. I’m not sure where that comes from, but I do have a feeling that the tape recorder made it possible.¹⁸

Mahler performed the piece himself, giving a “speech” in an unknown language, simultaneously taping himself, and gesticulating elaborately. At the end of the speech, he reverses the tape, and plays it back. While Mahler dons a pair of Mickey Mouse ears, the audience hears a garbled version of the original Mickey Mouse Club March, a song familiar to all who watched television during the 1950s. Larry Polansky, Mahler’s colleague and collaborator since they met at Mills College in 1987, has written insightfully on the democratic stance of Mahler’s tape music:

To David the tape recorder is like the piano: a parlor instrument, inviting rather than exclusive. His music suggests that we should each have one at home, to gather around playing music together. In *Speech with Interpreter*, by learning to speak the Mickey Mouse club theme song backwards, the long, tendentious history of “tape techniques” becomes a game—hey, maybe we could try it at home! Funny, revealing, and virtuosic (in a way only David might attempt), it pierces the medium, and shows how David’s work teaching tape techniques to kids has had a bi-directional set of influences. Like *Negativland*, the Tape Beatles and other collage bands who have made simple, guerrilla uses of recording technology a kind of 70s–80s continuation of the guitar-based garage band, David’s tape work is about community and playing music together. It owes little to the European tradition (Stockhausen, Berio, Henry, etc.), but much to the early collages of Cage and to the vernacular traditions of American music.¹⁹

Perhaps as a nod to the Disney roots of CalArts, or just an acknowledgement of the power of symbols representing U.S. popular culture, Mickey Mouse looms large in

David Mahler played a song for voice and piano
(again in this heady atmosphere a nice change of pace);
(this after he mickey moused Mickey Mouse):
he’s getting into not getting into anything.
just hanging out overripe and over mellow;
not even killing time, just watching time die—its slow death, I tell you, like quicksand.”
See Hicks, “A Cross-Country Music Tour: New Music America, July 1–17, 1984 Hartford, CT,”
Perspectives of New Music, 22/1–2 (Autumn 1983–Summer 1984): 523.

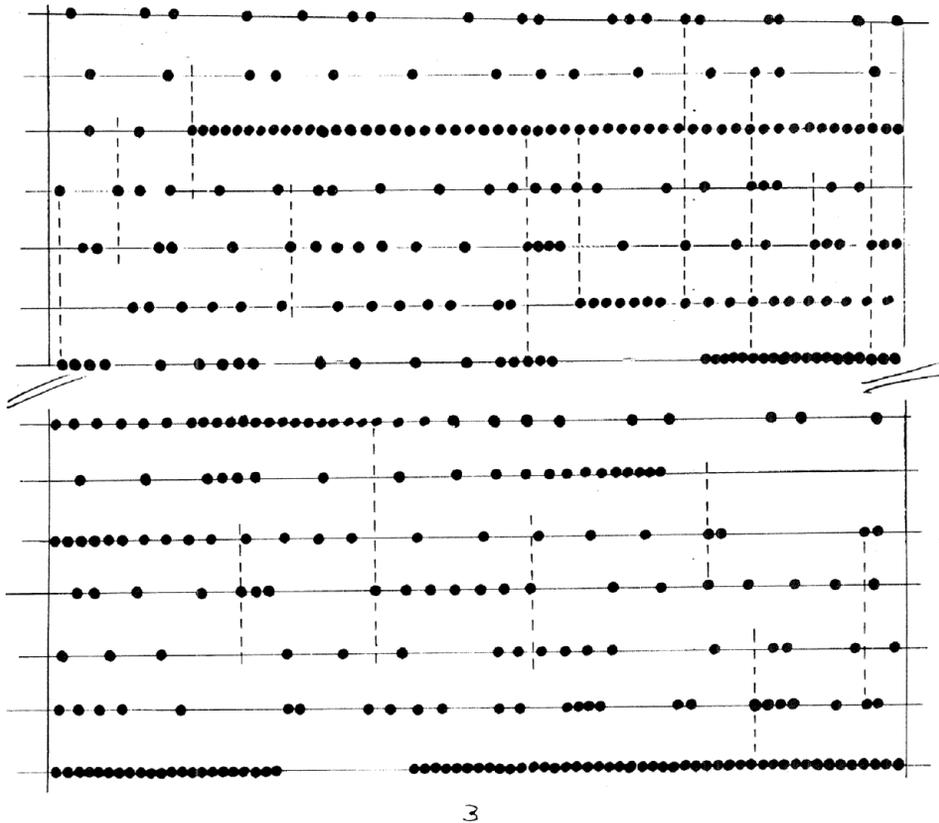
¹⁸ Mahler speaking with Melinda Whiting; recorded interview with David Mahler, WHY? Philadelphia, 7 November 1994.

¹⁹ Larry Polansky, “David Mahler’s Place,” preface to the liner notes for *David Mahler, The Voice of the Poet*.

Mahler's work, and was frequently a subject in Mahler's visual art, cartoons, and drawings contained in his other limited-edition publications like *Fancies* (1988). In 1981 Mahler also completed a piece entitled *Walt Disney*, which he described as "a tribute, for trombone, piano, toy piano, chorus of whistlers" and other supporting instruments.

Aside from his tape pieces, much of Mahler's work explores the human voice in thought-provoking and self-referential ways. Two pieces in particular are illustrative of this strain in his compositional output. The first, titled *Time Piece* (*Portland Review*, 1982), consists of a single sheet of paper with a typed script about the relationship between time and music. An indeterminate number of people read the text out loud, in unison at first, and then pause for a number of seconds indicated by numbers in parentheses. Upon the pause of the first number, the unison begins to dissolve, since the individuals reading the score/text will inevitably measure the seconds in varying ways. The text is a witty, self-explanatory description of what the reader is actually doing at the moment of doing it, and the effect reveals complex vocal polyphony that increases and decreases in tempo and density depending on the frequency and length of the "rests." The piece ends with each speaker counting fifty seconds between the first and last name of John Cage, thus effectively inserting a mini-version of his famous "silent piece" (4'33") into Mahler's own meditation on time. Another work of Mahler's that makes use of self-referential spoken text is a quartet titled *Two Voices*, which Mahler wrote in the mid-1990s for a performance on a live radio program for which he was a staff writer. The final version of the piece is scored for two unison speakers and two unison melody instruments. The two lines of music are angular and rhythmic. The humorous text explains that the speaker was born with two voices: "That's right, I said two unison voices," the unison speakers declare. The challenge for the performers is to execute the rhythms as accurately as possible, so as to maintain the quality of unison. This is difficult, yet poses worthwhile questions about ensemble playing and our differing perceptions of time within the context of a humorous and theatrical performance.

During the thirty-three years Mahler called Seattle home (1972–2005), he seems to have been something of a jack-of-all-trades, taking on any number of jobs and activities, including: teaching music at his daughter's school; teaching electronic music at the Cornish School; teaching workshops to disparate and flexible ensembles at Centrum in Port Townsend; conducting a weeklong listener residency at UC Santa Barbara; fulfilling commissions for the Richard Hugo House, a center for literary arts that sponsored performances; writing film music (in particular, for Ken Levine's *Northwest Visionaries*, a documentary film about Morris Graves, Mark Tobey, and other local artists); writing and performing comedy sketches and occasionally playing music on the weekly live KUOW-FM live radio show called "Sandy Bradley's Potluck" (from approximately 1989–95); establishing a storefront performance venue of his own, funded and administrated through *and/or*, called Pine Street Warbler, which hosted part of the 1982 annual conference of the American Society for University Composers; creating a performance duo called New Songs with singer Ann Obery; founding an inclusive, Tuesday night vocal ensemble called the Bright Street Red Sox named for the Montessori school where they rehearsed; and holding Sunday afternoon children's singing and composing workshops in the



Example 7. *Point* (1983). Score excerpt.

living room of friends Anne and Shirish Mulherkar (these gatherings, for about a dozen children and their parents, continued each spring over the course of ten years, with mostly the same families participating year after year). During this period he also composed some notable works for percussion, including the shockingly loud, graphically notated *Point* (1983), for seven suspended cymbals (Example 7), and *Coast* (1982–83) for American gamelan, a commission by Gamelan Pacifica in Seattle as part of a consortia with the Berkeley gamelan, Gamelan Son of Lion, and Lou Harrison and Bill Colvig’s homemade gamelan known as Si Betty.

While engaged with a wealth of diverse activity in Seattle during these years, Mahler’s dedication to community was particularly highlighted by his involvement with several civic public projects there. In 1985, Mahler was awarded a grant to create a work of public art in Seattle, and to date, it is the largest, most elaborate project he has undertaken. The compositional task, which took four years to complete and had its public dedication in 1989, resulted in the Washington State Centennial Bell Garden, intended as a permanent installation of thirty-nine bells on Pike Street at the Washington State Convention and Trade Center in Seattle. The bells came from churches, schools, trains, ships, farms, and other places—one from every county in the state of Washington: “Find a bell that isn’t in active service but could actually ring, and that has some historical significance to the county,” Mahler instructed the county representatives who helped him gather materials. Audio software developer

Phil Burk created a computer program that would allow the twenty-eight sounding bells to chime on cue as an enormous public instrument for which Mahler could compose. This computer system broke down in 1995, however; today, the bells still hang in their original location, but do not sound.²⁰

A second public project occurred when Mahler became involved with “In Public: Seattle 1991,” an initiative of the Seattle Arts Commission’s Art in Public Places Program. For his contribution, Mahler designed two bookmark-like glossy nine-by-four inch rack cards—titled “Seattle Sounds Downtown” and “Who Uses Their Ears When They Work”—that commented whimsically yet thoughtfully on the aural soundscapes of the city on Puget Sound: cars, birds, water, people talking in cafes, foghorns on the ferries, and more.²¹ Mahler had 37,500 copies of the first card and 25,000 of the second made by a commercial company that printed and produced them, and they were distributed all over the city in a guerilla-like fashion by the printing company in racks that held cards advertising hotels, eating establishments, and tourist attractions. Amid rampant capitalist materialism, Mahler’s cards simply offered some observations about sound, and an invitation to listen.

Recordings

To date, Mahler has released three solo recordings. The first, called *The Voice of the Poet*, includes tape compositions made between 1972 and 1986 (issued by Artifact in 1997). The second, *Hearing Voices*, includes four additional “tape” pieces made with the use of digital technology in 1999 and 2000 (issued by Tzadik in 2001). The most recent, a collection of solo piano works performed by Nurit Tilles (with a little bit of singing by Mahler, Tilles, and Julie Hanify), is called *Only Music Can Save Me Now* (New World Records, 2010).²² Mahler has also made two recordings with Julie Hanify and Larry Polansky of songs by Mahler himself and others (Buffy Sainte-Marie, Tom Paxton, Pete and Peggy Seeger, Ewan MacColl, among others), called *Too Late* and *I’d Like to Sing With You Tonight* (both produced by Frog Peak Music and released in 2005). These latter recordings in particular are a testament to how important singing is for his relationship with Hanify, and a tribute to how much Mahler enjoys making music with Polansky, who accompanies the duo on a variety of guitars and mandolins.

The Voice of the Poet makes use of a variety of sound sources including spoken voices (*Cup of Coffee*; *For Thom Miller*), a recording of Elvis Presley (*The King of Angels*), spinning objects like coins and metal washers (*Rising Ground*), a radio

²⁰ Mahler composed eight pieces for the bells, including *Remembering Hay* (a piece for Hay, Washington, where one of the bells came from), *Air Eccentrique*, (an homage to Erik Satie), and *Centennial Fireworks* (in the words of the composer, “a bombastic spatial piece”). Phil Burk also composed two pieces, *Now and Then* and *Bagels and Cream Cheese*. Mahler explains further: “Behind all of these pieces was the notion that with bells of a dynamically static nature, the spatial effect of having them spread far apart created a unique sound that more than made up for lack of dynamic variation.” Written communication with the author, 9 October 2012.

²¹ See Mahler, “The Composer Meets Sound in Public Spaces,” in *A Field Guide to Seattle’s Public Art*, ed. Diane Shamash and Steven Huss (Seattle: Seattle Arts Commission, 1991), 49–51.

²² Because I have written extensively about the music on this CD elsewhere, this recording will not be discussed further here. See Amy C. Beal, “Why We Sing,” liner notes essay for *Only Music Can Save Me Now*, Nurit Tilles, piano (New World Records 80702–2, 2010), 2–22.

interview between composer Ingram Marshall and announcer Jim Wilke (*The Voice of the Poet*), and crystal glassware and aluminum pie pans (*Wind Peace*). Several of the pieces used Buchla Synthesizer processing. This first release under Mahler’s name includes an eloquent and cleverly constructed essay by Polansky, one paragraph of which contextualizes Mahler’s vernacular attitude by amassing the prose almost solely through the use of titles of American songs.²³

Hearing Voices displays Mahler’s move into the digital age after perfecting his skills with magnetic tape and razor blades during the 1970s and 1980s. Here too, the attention to detail is revealed through virtuosic editing. The four pieces on this recording were made in Seattle, and he used the project to honor several artists in his community. Mahler describes his work in this way:

The base concept of these pieces was this: to record the voices of four artists who work in different media—dancer Sandy Silva, composer Thomas Peterson, novelist Matthew Stadler, and visual artist Sherry Markovitz—and then to use each of their voices as a sound source to create an audio piece reflective of and in the style of each artist’s own work. In the recording process, I had nothing I wanted the subjects to say, other than to talk in general about their work. (Not coincidentally, I hold each of these artists in high esteem and greatly admire their creations.)²⁴

Mahler acknowledged something disconcerting about the new technology as well:

What I have discovered is that composing on audio tape was like painting on canvas. Composing on hard disk is like arranging objects in a vacuum. There is no “place” in which these objects exist. [. . .] A disarming lack of presence underscores all digital recording.²⁵

The compositional decisions Mahler made in the manipulation of each artist’s voice provided him with dance steps, quarter tones, humor, and animal sounds, resulting in four very different yet equally stimulating pieces from both a technical and an aesthetic point of view, and ones that take into account special aspects of each of the artists’ work. A review of the CD by Steve Miller, published in *Computer Music Journal*, referred to Mahler’s “usual grace and sense of gentle humor,” and called the collection a “tour de force of digital editing techniques—often in micro-detail—by an unsung master of analog tape music.”²⁶ In an interview with Matteo Marchisano-Adamo, Mahler simply explained his techniques this way: “The interviews were made on a good quality DAT recorder; I transferred the recordings to my Mac and edited them using a program called Deck II.”

On the other side of the musical spectrum, the trio recordings *Too Late* and *I’d Like to Sing With You Tonight* celebrate Mahler’s down-to-earth, irresistibly friendly, “parlor rock ’n’ roll.”²⁷ Mahler’s strophic love songs, arranged for himself on piano and Polansky on plucked strings, are adorned with light-hearted titles such as “Angel Baby Love,” “One Night,” “No Sweeter Flower,” “Bring Me Morning,” “This

²³ Polansky, “David Mahler’s Place,” preface to the liner notes for *David Mahler, The Voice of the Poet*.

²⁴ Mahler, liner notes to *Hearing Voices*, Tzadik 7064; 2001.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Steve Miller, Review of *Hearing Voices*, by David Mahler, *Computer Music Journal* 25/4 (Winter 2001): 98.

²⁷ Mahler, in the notes to *Too Late*, Frog Peak 011; 2005.

Round Pittsburgh

for Julie
August 23, 2005
Here we are.

David Mahler

Who better to sing this in three parts than our pals, Ann, Cass & Debbie?

1.
Sum-mer morn-ings put on shorts, it's the Pitts-burgh thing to do, ___

2.
don't have to think a-bout it, it's au-to-mat-ic, sis-ter. ___

3.
Won't you please ex-pose ___ your knees?

Win-ter morn-ings pull on your sweat-er it's the Pitts-burgh thing to do, ___

don't have to think a-bout it, it's au-to-mat-ic, bus-ter. ___

Knees once tan fade un-der flan-nel.

Example 8. *Round Pittsburgh* (2005). Score.

Waiting Heart,” “Sailor’s Song” (“... your love is a harbor to me...”), “Too Late” (“You can tell me not to love you but I have to say it’s too late, too late, too late!”), and—as unlikely as it might seem to be for the title of a romantic song—“Elvis is Watching You.” Mahler approaches these songs in a more traditional (tonal, strophic, melodious, straightforward) manner than many of his rounds, which tend to be more playful and complex in terms of their musical riddles.

(A) Round Pittsburgh

Since Mahler’s move to Pittsburgh in 2005 he has created a new version of his Tuesday night singing group called the Beacon Street Red Sox, named for the Squirrel Hill street where he and his wife Julie Hanify live. Since 1999, when he met Hanify, a singer and Carnegie Library music librarian, singing has blossomed as an important part of his life, and in recent years he has composed and arranged a tremendous amount of vocal music, including—as of late 2012—some seven-dozen rounds, including one written on the occasion of moving to Pittsburgh (Example 8).²⁸ These often funny, yet erudite rounds are catchy and pleasant,

²⁸ Mahler’s rounds can be found at http://music.dartmouth.edu/~larry/scores/other_peoples_scores/rounds/. Mahler’s “Some Thoughts on Writing Rounds” can also be found on that page.

ahead of his time, behind his time

remembering Tom Peterson

david mahler
pgh, jan. 2007

Beginning tempo ♩ = c. 120

Example 9. *Ahead of His Time, Behind His Time* (2011). Score excerpt.

sometimes thorny and difficult, and cover a wide range of musical ground from concise simplicity (the four-bar, C major “Squirrels Go to Work”) to great complexity and scope (“Studs,” a bluesy concert round for four voices “or, with appropriate transposition, four saxes or four slide guitars”). They often include speaking, stomping (or other body percussion), other instruments, quotation, and found texts. This large number of rounds was perhaps stimulated by Polansky’s cumulative publication called *A Small Book of Rounds* (Frog Peak Music) in which Mahler’s (and Polansky’s) rounds play a large part.

Mahler’s other recent work carries on in the tradition of the methods he employs in many of his compositions, and in his need to keep that work personal: *A Song That Will Linger* (2011), is a bitonal and impressionistic piece dedicated to Polansky, and is based on Stephan Foster’s haunting song “Hard Times”; *Martin Bartlett at the Claremont Hotel* (2011) is a stylistically adventurous six-movement piano solo written for Nurit Tilles. *Ahead of His Time, Behind His Time* (2007; rev. 2011), dedicated to composer Tom Peterson who died in 2005, is an indeterminate ensemble piece written for two or more of any instruments playing in pitch unison. In a musical game of “Follow the Leader” (with the leader switching each time through the two-page score), the musicians are allowed great freedom in how they execute and interpret the melodic material (Example 9).

In Pittsburgh today, Mahler continues his independent activities: church jobs, singing groups, private lessons (See Figure 2, below), music groups for children,

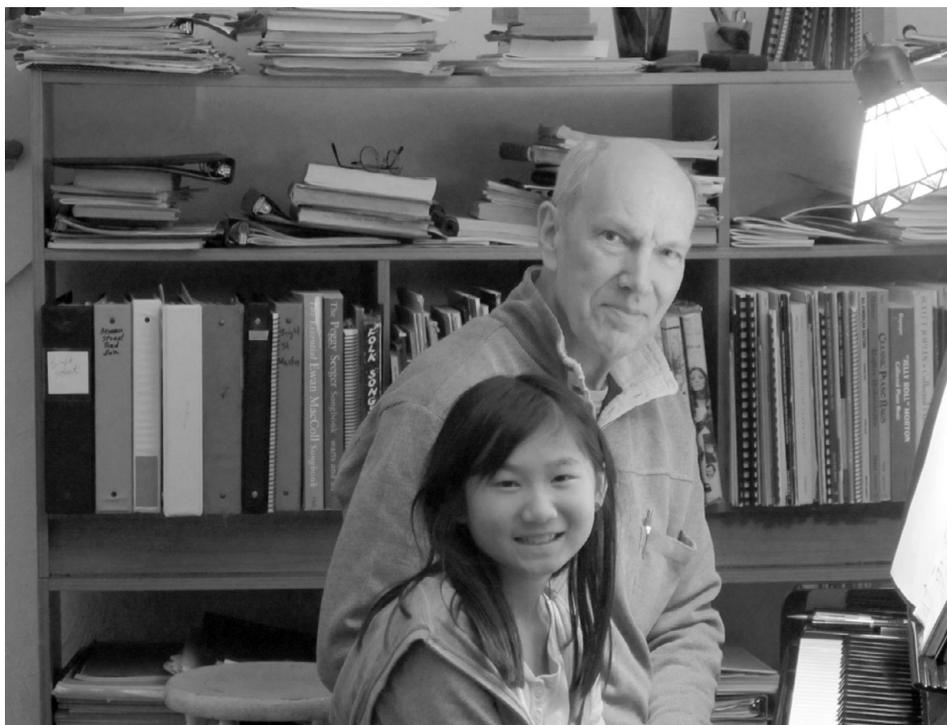


Figure 2. David Mahler during a piano lesson with Evie Curlee in his Pittsburgh home, November 2010 (photograph by Amy C. Beal).

occasional teaching opportunities, residencies, and commissions, and continues to explore “how a composer who is not affiliated with an institution finds the space and tools with which to do his or her work.”²⁹ In the words of Thom Miller, Mahler also continues to love “poking holes in pretension.”³⁰ He writes vocal music for himself and those in his various musical communities (and beyond), as well as diversely scored ensemble pieces on request, and continues to arrange nearly everything that comes down his path. He cultivates musical relationships with and writes tributes to everyone from George Ives (Charles Ives’s father) to W. C. Handy to Hazel Felman, composers and arrangers from the past who also constitute important parts of his sense of community. In short, his music responds to the world around him, be it local, situational, pedagogic, civic, personal, communal, or just in celebration of the simple charms and deep beauties of daily life. If we consider our current musical context to be some variation of a *post-style* world, then David Mahler offers a singularly sincere and engaging model of how to live in this diverse house of music.

²⁹ See “Pauline’s Questions,” *Arcana: Musicians on Music*, ed. John Zorn (New York: Granary Books, 2000), 241.

³⁰ Thom Miller, written communication with the author, 13 August 2011.

Appendix

Recordings in Mahler's Name

- The Voice of the Poet: Works on Tape 1972–1986*. Artifact ART 1019, 1997.
Hearing Voices. Tzadik TZ 7064, 2001.
Too Late. Mahler, with Julie Hanify and Larry Polansky. Frog Peak FP 011, 2005.
I'd Like to Sing With You Tonight. Mahler, with Julie Hanify and Larry Polansky.
 Frog Peak FP 012, 2005.
Only Music Can Save Me Now. Nurit Tilles, piano. New World Records 80702-2,
 2010.

Individual Pieces on Other Recordings

- The Twenty-Second Street Accordion Band*. On Guy Klucevsek, *Guy Klucevsek with Ain't Nothin' But a Polka Band: Who Stole the Polka?*. Guy Klucevsek, accordion. Eva WWCX 2037, 1991.
One Banned Man. On Paul Taub, *Oo-ee*. Paul Taub, flute. Periplum P0070, 2001.
La Cuidàd de Nuestra Señora la Reinà de Los Angeles. On Various Artists, *Cold Blue*. Bryan Pezzone, piano. Cold Blue CB0008, 2002.
For My Daughter Who Loves to Travel. On Trimpin, et al., *Klavier Nonette*. Jack Straw, 2003.
Lost and Palindrome: Inside Out. On *Soft Rains*. Pacifica Choirs. Private recording, 2005.
Maxfield's Reel. On Miwako Abe, violin; Michael Kieran Harvey, piano, *Works for Violin by George Antheil, Johanna Beyer, Henry Cowell, Ruth P. Crawford, Charles Dodge, David Mahler, Larry Polansky, Stefan Wolpe*. Miwako Abe, violin. New World Records 80601-2, 2006.

*Selected List of Compositions*³¹

- 1971
A Rose Blooming, for Charles Ives (revised 1976). Piano solo.
- 1972
Wind Peace. Recording created on tape.
Smaller Circles. Guitar solo.
- 1973
 Mass text setting. Choir, two keyboards, and percussion. Commissioned by Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, Portland, OR.
Wind Hymn. Indeterminate ensemble.

³¹ A list of Mahler's scores published by Frog Peak Music can be found at http://digitalmusics.dartmouth.edu/~larry/scores/other_peoples_scores/david_mahler/index.html. Mahler's compositional output also includes a large number of original songs, and dozens of arrangements too numerous to list here.

1974

Illinois Sleep. Organ solo.

Early Winters. Two pianos.

The Wonderful One-Part Invention. Organ solo.

1975

Winter Man. For five B-flat trumpets.

1976

Seven Songs. Indeterminate ensemble and arrangement.

1977/78

The King of Angels. Recording created on tape.

1978

Only Music Can Save Me Now. Piano solo.

1979

Fantastic Slides for Thurman Munson. Violin and cello. Commissioned by Bumber-shoot, Seattle.

1980

Rising Ground. Spinning objects and magnetic tape. Private commission, Madison, WI.

La Cuidàd de Nuestra Señora la Reinà de Los Angeles. Piano solo.

Cup of Coffee. Recording created on tape.

1982

The Voice of the Poet. Recording created on tape.

1983

Coast. Gamelan. Consortium Commission by Gamelan Pacifica, Seattle; Berkeley Gamelan, Berkeley, CA; Gamelan Son of Lion, New York.

Point. Seven suspended cymbals.

Maxfield's Reel. Violin solo.

1984

Speech with Interpreter. Solo performer and tape recorder.

Deep Water. Piano solo with voice.

Canons in Defense of the Sound. Indeterminate ensemble.

1986

Powerhouse. Strings, brass and percussion. Private commission for a celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Georgetown Steam Plant, Seattle.

For Thom Miller. Recording created on tape.

A Rag of Hearts for Jim Tenney. Piano solo.

1987

Cadent Remarks. Flute, cello and percussion. Commissioned by King County Arts Commission, Seattle.

The Twenty-Second Street Accordion Band. Accordion, voice, pre-recorded tape, and props. Invited by Guy Klucsevsek, New York.

Dempster’s Fantasy on an American Theme. Trombone solo.

1987–88

After Morton Feldman. Piano solo.

Frank Sinatra in Buffalo. Piano solo.

1988

Ty Cobb. Brass quintet.

1989

Not Again in this Flesh. Voice and piano. Commissioned by New Songs, Seattle.

1990

Three Pieces After Charles Ives. Chamber orchestra. Invited by the Olympia Chamber Orchestra, Olympia, WA.

1993

Wicked Sounds. (Text by James Purdy.) Voice, two trombones, and violin. Private commission for a celebration of James Purdy, Seattle.

1994

Scenes of Sacred Peace and Pleasure. Flute, oboe (English horn), alto saxophone, bassoon, viola, bass, piano, and percussion. Invited by Relâche, Philadelphia, PA.

1995

Day Creek Pianoworks and The Teams Are Waiting in the Fields. Piano solo, with voices. Private commission, Sedro-Woolley, WA.

1996

Handy. Voice, piano and two percussionists. Commissioned by Music in Motion, Philadelphia.

1998

Cornet Bouquet. Cornet and piano. Commissioned by Rick Pressley, Seattle.

After Richard Hugo. String quartet with voice. Commissioned by Richard Hugo House, Seattle.

1999

Let Every Voice Prepare a Song. SATB; and Jukebox Christmas Eve. Unison voices. Private commission, Seattle.

One Banned Man. Flute solo. Commissioned by Paul Taub, Seattle.

A Chorale That Ludvig Lindeman Wrote. Recording using the voice of Thomas Peterson, created on computer.

Wagnerian Opera. Recording using the voice of Matthew Stadler, created on computer.

2000

Two Voices. For two unison speakers and two unison melody instruments.

Who I Just Adored. Recording using the voice of Sherry Markovitz, created on computer.

The Priest from Cape Breton. Recording using the voice of Sandy Silva, created on computer.

2001

Panorama. Soprano saxophone, bassoon, trombone, tuba, and treble voices. Commissioned by Richard Hugo House, Seattle.

For My Daughter, Who Loves to Travel. Nine toy pianos. Commissioned by Trimpin, Seattle.

2002

After Richard Hugo. Adapted for flute, clarinet, trombone, piano, voice and plucked strings. Invited by the Downtown Ensemble, New York.

2003

Tuning the Years. Voice and violin. Private commission, Seattle.

2004

Lost and Palindrome: Inside Out. SAB. Commissioned by Pacifica Children's Chorus, Seattle.

2006.

An Alder. A Catfish. Piano solo, with added trombone, voice, or other.

2007

In Celebration of Stuart Dempster. Solo performer, piano, props.

2008

Three George Ives Instructional Pieces. Indeterminate ensemble.

2011

Martin Bartlett at the Claremont Hotel. Piano solo.

A Song That Will Linger. Piano solo.

Ahead of His Time, Behind His Time. Two or more players, any instruments in pitch unison.

2012

Band. Percussion music for five players.

Selected Writings By David Mahler

Mahler, David. *A Celebration of Audio Tape: Writings, Pieces, and Reports of Pieces*. Frog Peak Music special projects, 1989.

———. "Bicycle Sounds." *Sound Rights Newsletter* (Summer 1997): 2.

———. "Blind Jurying in Music Composition Competitions." Unpublished, 1991.

———. "Both Sides of the Record." *SPAR* (November 1981): 17–18.

———. "The Composer Meets Sound in Public Spaces." In *A Field Guide to Seattle's Public Art*, ed. Diane Shamash and Steven Huss, 49–51. Seattle: Seattle Arts Commission, 1991.

- . “Conversation with Mardy Mavor.” Unpublished, 1998.
- . “David Mahler.” *In Public: 1991; Artists From Seattle—Documents Northwest*. Seattle: Seattle Art Museum (1991).
- . “Fancies.” (1988).
- . “I Didn’t Want to Talk.” *15 Word Pieces*. Seattle: Wind-Up Press, 1978.
- . “Lamb” (two-act play). Unpublished, 2002.
- . “Listening to the Sounds Around Us.” Lecture prepared for the Tacoma Art Museum. Unpublished, date uncertain.
- . “On the Radio.” *SPAR* (February 1982): 13–14.
- . “On the Radio, Part 2.” *SPAR* (March 1982): 22.
- . “Pauline’s Questions.” In *Arcana: Musicians on Music*, ed. John Zorn, 238–49. New York: Granary Books, 2000.
- . “The Plateaux of Mirror (A Review).” *Soundings* 11, ed. Peter Garland (Santa Fe, NM: Soundings Press, 1981): 18–19.
- . “The Prime Minister: Ferde Grofé Talks About His Father.” *The American Society of Twenties Orchestras Newsletter* (Seattle, 1994): 1–9.
- . “A Rag of Hearts for Jim Tenney.” *Perspectives of New Music* 25/1–2. (Winter–Summer 1987): 528–33.
- . “Reflections on a Festival.” *Poets, Painters, and Composers* 1 (Seattle: Joseph Keppler, 1984): 19–22.
- . “Scorecard.” Seattle: Wind-Up Press, 1979.
- . “Sounding City Spaces.” *SPAR* (December 1981): 21.
- . “Soundings: An Appreciation.” *Poets, Painters, and Composers* 2 (1985): 7–8.
- . *Word Pieces* [“Composed Outbursts”; “Pacific International”; and “Time Piece”]. *Portland Review* 28/2 (1982): 62–65.

Secondary Sources

- Beal, Amy C. “Nature is the Best Dictator’—Twentieth-Century American Violin Music.” Liner notes for Miwako Abe, violin; and Michael Kieran Harvey, piano; *Works for Violin by George Antheil, Johanna Beyer, Henry Cowell, Ruth Crawford, Charles Dodge, David Mahler, Larry Polansky, Stefan Wolpe*. New World Records 80641-2, 2006, 2–22.
- . “Why We Sing.” Liner notes for David Mahler, *Only Music Can Save Me Now*. New World Records 80702–2, 2010, 2–26.
- Childs, Barney. “1982 A.S.U.C. National Conference.” *Perspectives of New Music* 20/1–2 (Autumn 1981–Summer 1982): 600–603.
- Cummings, Robert. “Review: David Mahler, The Voice of the Poet: Works on Tape, 1972–1986.” *Computer Music Journal* 23/1 (Spring 1999): 88–90.
- Goode, Daniel. “Rock Music Redefined.” In *Frog Peak Rock Music Book*, ed. Daniel Goode, n.p. Lebanon, NH: Frog Peak Music, 1993.
- Hicks, David. “A Cross-Country Music Tour: New Music America, July 1–17, 1984 Hartford, CT.” *Perspectives of New Music* 22/1–2 (Autumn 1983–Summer, 1984): 519–31.

- Johnson, Tom. *The Voice of New Music: New York City 1972–1982*. Eindhoven: Apollohuis, 1989.
- Levy, Herb. "Serious Fun: Music and Humor." In *New Music Across America*, ed. Iris Brooks, 72–74. Valencia, CA: California Institute of the Arts in conjunction with High Performance Books, 1992.
- Marchisano-Adamo, Matteo. "David Mahler's Voices [interview]." Posted online 13 December 2010. <http://matteomarchisanoadamo.com/12/>
- Miller, Steve. Review of *Hearing Voices*, by David Mahler. *Computer Music Journal* 25/4 (Winter 2001): 98–99.
- Palmer, Robert. "Master Eclectician in the Kitchen." *New York Times*, 31 December 1976.
- Polansky, Larry. "David Mahler's Place." Preface to the liner notes for David Mahler, *The Voice of the Poet: Works on Tape 1972–1986*, Artifact ART 1019 (1997).
- Polansky, Larry, and John Levin. "The Mills College Center for Contemporary Music's Seminar in Formal Methods Series: A Documentary Survey." *Leonardo* 20/2, Special Issue: Visual Art, Sound, Music and Technology (1987): 155–63.
- Rockwell, John. "Music: 53 Composers in 9-Day Festival." *New York Times*, 18 June 1979.
- Schafer, R. Murray. *The Tuning of the World*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977.
- Whiting, Melinda. Recorded interview with David Mahler, WHYY Philadelphia, 7 November 1994.