

NAXOS

John
CORIGLIANO

Conjurer
Vocalise

Evelyn Glennie,
Percussion

Hila Plitmann,
Soprano

Albany Symphony

David Alan Miller

Bronze mask, Benin,
from the collection of John Corigliano
Photo: Richard Howe



John Corigliano (b. 1938)

Conjurer • Vocalise

The American John Corigliano continues to add to one of the richest, most unusual, and most widely celebrated bodies of work any composer has created over the last forty years. Corigliano's numerous scores, including three symphonies and eight concertos among over one hundred chamber, vocal, choral, and orchestral works, have been performed and recorded by many of the most prominent orchestras, soloists, and chamber musicians in the world. Recent scores include *One Sweet Morning* (2011) written for the tenth anniversary of 9/11 and performed by mezzo-soprano Stephanie Blythe with Alan Gilbert conducting the New York Philharmonic, *Conjurer* (2008), for percussion and string orchestra, commissioned for and introduced by Dame Evelyn Glennie, *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, The Red Violin* (2005), developed from the themes of the score to François Girard's film of the same name, which won Corigliano an Oscar in 1999, *Mr. Tambourine Man, Seven Poems of Bob Dylan* (2000) for orchestra and amplified soprano, the Naxos recording of which (8.559331) won the GRAMMY® for Best Contemporary Composition in 2008, *Symphony No. 3, Circus Maximus* (2004), scored simultaneously for wind orchestra and a multitude of wind ensembles (Naxos CD 8.559601 / Blu-ray Audio NBD008); and *Symphony No. 2* (2001: Pulitzer Prize in Music.) Other important scores include *String Quartet* (1995: GRAMMY® Award, Best Contemporary Composition), *Symphony No. 1* (1991: Grawemeyer and GRAMMY® Awards), the opera *The Ghosts of Versailles* (Metropolitan Opera commission, 1991, International Classical Music Award 1992), and the *Clarinet Concerto* (1977.) One of the few living composers to have a string quartet named for him, Corigliano serves on the composition faculty at The Juilliard School of Music and holds the position of Distinguished Professor of Music at Lehman College, City University of New York, which has established a scholarship in his name. For the past fourteen years he and his partner, the composer-librettist Mark Adamo, have divided their time between Manhattan and Kent Cliffs, New York. More information is available at www.johncorigliano.com.



Conjurer (2007)

When asked to compose a percussion concerto, my only reaction was horror. All I could see were problems. While I love using a percussion battery in my orchestral writing, the very thing that makes it the perfect accent to other orchestral sonorities makes it unsatisfactory when it takes the spotlight in a concerto. For starters, a percussionist plays dozens of instruments. Again, this is wonderful if his rôle is to color an orchestral texture: but if he (or she) is the main focus, it is terrible. The aural identity of the player is lost amid the myriad bangs, crashes, and splashes of the percussion arsenal. Only the visual element of one person playing all these instruments ties them together. In addition, most of the instruments have no pitch at all (or very little), and don't sustain a sound (like a violin or trumpet). As a result, most percussion concerti I have heard sound like orchestral pieces with an extra-large percussion section. The melodic interest always rests with the orchestra, while the percussion plays accompanying figures around it.

David Alan Miller



Photo: Gary David Gold

David Alan Miller has established a reputation as one of the leading American conductors of his generation. Frequently in demand as a guest conductor, he has conducted the orchestras of Baltimore, Detroit, Houston, Indianapolis, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, San Francisco, Minnesota and Chicago as well as the New World Symphony and the New York City Ballet. He is also founder and Artistic Director of New Paths in Music, a festival in New York City dedicated to presenting the works of significant non-American composers who are not yet well known in the United States. As Music Director of the Albany Symphony, a position he has held since 1992, David Alan Miller has proven himself a creative and compelling orchestra builder. Through exploration of unusual repertoire, educational programming, community outreach and recording initiatives, he has reaffirmed the Albany Symphony's reputation as the nation's leading champion of American symphonic music and one of its most innovative orchestras. Further recognizing the accomplishments of Miller, the Albany Symphony was the only orchestra to appear twice at the Spring For Music Festival at Carnegie Hall. Other accolades include Columbia University's 2003 Ditson Conductor's Award, the oldest award honouring conductors for their commitment to American music, the 2001 ASCAP Morton Gould Award for Innovative Programming and, in 1999, ASCAP's first-ever Leonard Bernstein Award for Outstanding Educational Programming.

Albany Symphony



The Albany Symphony celebrates America's great musical heritage. Through brilliant live performances, innovative educational programming, and engaging cultural events, the Albany Symphony enriches a broad and diverse regional community. In addition, by creating, recording, and disseminating the music of our time, the Albany Symphony fulfills its mission by performing, commissioning, and recording the work of established and emerging American composers and bringing new vision to time-honoured classical music. This marriage of new and old attracts a variety of music-lovers, from seasoned devotees to curious listeners discovering symphonic music for the first time. The Albany Symphony continues to lead all other orchestras in the promotion, performance and recording of adventurous American repertoire for an audience of committed and open-minded listeners.

Of course, one could limit oneself to writing for keyboard percussion: marimba or vibraphone, for example. Many concertos have been written like this, and the combination of using an instrument with definite pitches and restricting oneself to one instrument does focus the work on a single soloist.

I thought of all of this as I sat down to discuss my writing a percussion concerto. Obviously I had more than mixed views about this project, but something about the challenge fascinated me, too. Many of my works begin this way. I pose a problem and write a piece as the solution. In this case, the problem is the following: How do I write a concerto for a solo percussionist playing many different instruments in which the soloist is always clearly the soloist (even with your eyes closed), and how do I write a concerto in which there are real melodies – and those melodies are introduced by the percussionist, not the orchestra?

I. WOOD

The pitched wood instruments are the xylophone and marimba. To supplement this, I constructed a "keyboard" of unpitched wooden instruments (wood block, claves, log drum, etc.) ranging from high to low and placed it in front of the marimba. The soloist could play pitched notes on the marimba and then strike unpitched notes on the wooden keyboard.

The initial cadenza starts with unpitched notes, but gradually pitched notes enter and various motives are revealed as well as ideas based upon the interval of a fifth. This interval will run through the entire concerto as a unifying force. After a climactic run, the orchestra enters, developing the 5th interval into a rather puckish theme. Soloist and orchestra develop the material and build to a climactic xylophone solo, and finally return to the opening theme.

II. METAL

The cadenza is for chimes (tubular bells) accompanied by tam-tams and suspended cymbals. It is loud and clangorous, with the motivic fifths clashing together. The movement itself, however, is soft and long lined. The melody that will end the movement is introduced in the low register of the vibraphone, and the movement develops to a dynamic climax where the chimes return, and then subsides to a soft texture in the lower strings as the struck/bowed vibraphone plays its melody.

III. SKIN

The skin cadenza features a "talking drum" accompanied by a kick drum. The talking drum is played with the hands, and can change pitch as its sides are squeezed. Strings connect the top and bottom skins, and squeezing stretches them tighter – and raises the pitch. It provides a lively conversation with a kick drum: a very dry small bass drum played with a foot pedal and almost exclusively used as part of a jazz drum set. This cadenza starts slowly, but builds to a loud and rhythmic climax.

The movement then begins with the soloist and orchestra playing a savage rhythmic figure that accelerates to a blinding speed. A central section brings back the 5ths against a pedal timpanum that is played with the hands in a "talking drum" style. The *accelerando* returns, and leads to a wild and improvised cadenza using all the drums and a virtuoso finish.

Once it was complete, it occurred to me that the piece's cadenza-into-movement form characterizes the soloist as a kind of sorcerer. The effect in performance is that the soloist doesn't so much as introduce material as conjure it, as if by magic, from the three disparate choirs: materials which the orchestra then shares and develops; hence, the title *Conjurer*.

Vocalise (1999)

Vocalise was commissioned by the New York Philharmonic as part of an evening entitled *Messages for the Millennium*, presented in 1999 by Music Director Kurt Masur. Maestro Masur chose five composers from five countries and asked them what their message to the Philharmonic audience was on the eve of the new millennium. This was an interesting question to ask concert composers since we have been writing for an ensemble that grew in size and variety from the Baroque period to the beginnings of the twentieth century, but then froze around 1900. The size of the modern symphony is exactly the same as it was at the beginning of the twentieth century, and here we are entering the twenty-first.

For me, the answer to Kurt Masur's question was clear. It was time for the acoustic world of classical music to come to terms with the worlds of amplification and electronic manipulation that surrounded it in the popular and film world.

The mention of amplification frightens many concertgoers, who imagine shrieks and howls tearing them from their seats. I wanted to write a piece using electronics that was beautiful to hear. Marshall McLuhan's famous saying is that "the medium is the message." I wanted to change that concept, and show that "the medium is the messenger." The composer sends his message – be it Bach or Boulez – through the performers to the audience. And if amplification and electronics are part of the language of the rest of the musical world, why shouldn't they be a part of concert music too?

**Recorded at Troy Savings Bank Music Hall, Troy, New York, on 13th March, 2011 (tracks 1-6),
and at EMPAC (Experimental Media Performing Arts Center),**

RPI (Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute), Troy, New York, on 22nd May, 2011 (track 7)

Produced and engineered by Silas Brown and John Corigliano

Assistant engineers: Doron Schachter and James Perrella

Electronic sound design: Teese Gohl (track 7)

Additional sound design: Angie Teo (track 7)

The shape of *Vocalise* was determined by my desire to write a piece that gradually led the audience from the natural lyrical sound of the human voice, through the acoustic natural sound of voice and orchestra. At a point where the growing intensity of the music and the low lyric voice would provide problems of projection, the singer moves to a microphone and is amplified through the hall (speakers are placed around the hall.) The piece can then grow even more in intensity, and at a peak, the singer sings a passage that is "caught" by the electronics and repeated again and again (a "loop"). Solo instruments in the orchestra add to this looping effect by playing into microphones next to them, and the peak of the work combines a full orchestral palette with both the treated and amplified voice and treated solo instruments, which then career downwards followed by echos from the electronics.

The piece becomes quieter and quieter, and ends up with the soprano humming the same melody she hummed acoustically on the stage at the opening of the work, but this time into a microphone which transforms the humming into an overlapping series of echoes that gently surround the audience.

John Corigliano

Dame Evelyn Glennie



Awarded Dame Commander of the British Empire in 2007, Evelyn Glennie is the first person in musical history successfully to create and sustain a full-time career as a solo percussionist. As one of the most eclectic and innovative musicians on the scene today she is constantly redefining the goals and expectations of percussion by creating performances of such vitality they almost constitute a new type of performance. She is the leading commissioner of around 170 new works for solo percussion from many of the world's most eminent composers. As a double GRAMMY® Award winner and BAFTA nominee she is in demand as a composer in her own right and records music for film, television and music library companies. The film *Touch the Sound* and her enlightening TED speech remain key visual and audio testimonies to her world of sound creation knowledge and understanding. Her most recent film score was *Golf in the Kingdom*, released in the United States in 2011. With over 86 international awards to date she continues to feed the next generation through advice and guidance. As a Consultant she offers prestigious and much sought after master-classes and lecture demonstrations to all types of instrumentalists. She also gives presentations to the sports world on visualisation techniques.

Hila Plitmann

GRAMMY® Award-winning soprano Hila Plitmann is known worldwide for her astonishing musicianship, versatile and beautiful voice, and the ability to perform challenging new works. She has worked with many leading conductors, including Leonard Slatkin, Esa-Pekka Salonen, and Thomas Adès, appearing as headliner with the likes of the New York Philharmonic, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the London Symphony Orchestra. Her varied recording career includes work on film soundtracks such as *The Da Vinci Code*, *New York, I Love You* and *Pirates of the Caribbean IV*. In 2009 she won the GRAMMY® for 'Best Classical Vocal Performance' for Corigliano's song cycle *Mr. Tambourine Man* (Naxos 8.559311). Hila Plitmann has also released a recording of *Yiddish Songs, The Ancient Question*, on Signum Classics, to high critical acclaim. Born and raised in Jerusalem, she received her Bachelor and Master of Music degrees from The Juilliard School of Music.

