

Raising Caine with Bach

Uri Caine's variations on the Goldberg's

BY BRETT CAMPBELL

Long ago, an insomniac Russian ambassador commissioned J.S. Bach to compose some variations on a tune for court musician J.G. Goldberg to play during the wee hours. Bach wrote 30 variations, a masterpiece of musical ingenuity. At this year's Oregon Bach Festival, listeners should have no trouble staying awake when Uri Caine does for Bach's variations what Bach did for his original tune — open them up, transform them into something quite different from their sources and keep everyone wondering throughout: What will happen next?

Caine's jazz cred goes back to early gigs with legends like Hank Mobley and Philly Joe Jones in his native Philadelphia where he was also studying classical composition with the great George Crumb at Penn. His musical projects have continued to swing back and forth across the spectrum, from tributes to Herbie Hancock and Thelonious Monk to arrangements of Mahler, Schumann and Wagner's music. A stalwart of Manhattan's downtown new music scene for years, he has played with Dave Douglas, Don Byron, Sam Rivers and many other jazz stars, but he has also received commissions from such classical and postclassical groups as the Beaux Arts Trio and Vienna Volksoper. He's performed with the Cleveland Orchestra and at the Monterey Jazz Festival.

Caine likes to research a composer's life and music and then remix its themes and influences into a new postmodern melange, sprinkled with liberal contributions of his own. For example, he added klezmer to his Mahler album to highlight that composer's Jewish identity. And because Bach himself delighted in using a variety of dance forms from various European cultures of his time, the Goldberg's provided Caine with a chance to incorporate contemporary dances from non-European regions, like the mambo.

On Caine's Goldberg CD, each track features a different ensemble, including various Baroque specialists; DJ Logic adding skittery beats; jazzy brass and clarinet combo; poetry and other vocalizations including drunken chants (where Bach had drawn on a drinking song); several violinists; all manner of keyboards (played by Caine); and much more, including new music interspersed among arrangements of Bach's originals.

Purists may carp that Caine has perpetrated more travesty than transformation, but jazzers have been interpreting the classics from the get-go. Some better-known examples include Ellington's swinging Tchaikovsky, Miles Davis and Gil Evans setting Rodrigo, and John Lewis preceding Caine in taking on Bach. To Caine, reimagining the Goldberg's is part of the jazz tradition, maybe even Bach's tradition. Is what Bach — a noted improviser in his day — did to his original tune really so different in nature from what jazzers do to standard songs all the time?

Caine won't be bringing the immense ensemble that helped him create such a varied tapestry on his Goldberg CD, but his veteran sextet for this show includes top musicians who boast not only sterling jazz credentials but also pop, rock and even Broadway resume items. They include DJ Olive, reed-man extraordinaire Chris Speed, violin, trumpet, bass and a "songstress." We're in for what any fine jazz performance promises: spontaneous musical creation, this time built on the foundation of one of the masterworks of Baroque music. It's guaranteed not to cure insomnia. ■

The Goldberg Variations Reimagined will be performed 8 pm Friday, July 7 at the Hult Center.

Purchase tickets for the Oregon Bach Festival
online at <http://bachfest.uoregon.edu>
or by calling the Hult Center Box Office
at 682-2700.

Paradise Achieved

Haydn oratorio tells story of the Creation

BY JOHN GINN

In the beginning, as the Christian story goes, the Earth, heavens and people were created in six days. To compose his telling of that story, Franz Joseph Haydn put in almost 18 months at the writing table, joking that he took so long because he wanted the work to last. Whether or not the length of the composition period affected the quality, his musical masterpiece *The Creation* has not only lasted, but its status as one of the great oratorios remains undiminished.

Based on the account of creation from the King James Bible (Genesis and Psalms) and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the oratorio breaks the creation story into three parts.

The first section evokes nothingness and chaos. The Archangel Raphael, with the help of the full chorus and orchestra, banishes the chaos with a powerful C major chord, bringing order to the piece and to the universe. The moment is often cited as being one of the most powerful and dramatic that orchestral music has to offer; at the oratorio's premiere in 1798, the audience responded so loudly that the orchestra had to pause for several minutes. The section continues with the telling of the first day and of a skirmish in Heaven, ending with Satan and his followers being cast out.

The second part depicts the creation of life on earth, the creatures of the sea, land and air, culminating with the creation of humans.

The third part tells the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden — skipping over the snake part — and ends with praise and celebration of all that God has wrought.

The story has another happy ending of sorts in that Haydn, a deeply religious man, had the satisfaction of seeing his oratorio widely accepted through the remaining years of his life, with ample evidence that his work would, indeed, survive the ages. In the terms that such things were possible back then, the work was a smash hit, which Haydn, per his custom, credited to the glory of God.

The oratorio will be explained at greater length in two Discovery Series lectures on July 12 and 13. The July 14 performance will be recorded for release on the Hänssler label. ■

The Creation, Part 1 will be discussed 5 pm Wednesday, July 12 and Part 2 will be discussed 5 pm Thursday, July 13 in the Discovery Series; the entire piece will be performed 8 pm Friday, July 14. All performances are at the Hult Center.

Helmuth Rilling