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# ALEA III: Composers Workshop Concert, February 10, 1989

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**ALEA III**

*Theodore Antoniou, Music Director*

III

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ALEA

**COMPOSERS WORKSHOP CONCERT**

*Friday, February 10, 1989, 7 p.m.*

*Boston University Concert Hall*

*855 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston*

*Alea III is the contemporary music  
ensemble in residence at Boston University.*

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### **ALEA III PERSONNEL**

Susan Downey, *flute*

James Bulger, *oboe*

Diane Heffner, *clarinet*

Jonathan Saylor, *bassoon*

Greg Whitaker, *trumpet*

Richard Flanagan, *percussion*

Susan Robinson, *harp*

Tison Street, *violin*

Mark Beaulieu, *violin*

Scott Woolweaver, *viola*

Mark Simcox, *violoncello*

Dennis Lambert, *trombone*

Greg Koeller, *double bass*

Carolyn Comfort, *French horn*

Sandra Hebert, *piano*

John McDonald, *piano*

**ALEA III** Theodore Antoniou, Music Director

**COMPOSERS WORKSHOP CONCERT**

**Friday, February 10, 1989**

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Terrane\* Theodore Saunway  
(b. 1940)

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Chamber Piece for Six Soloists Shirish Korde  
(b. 1945)

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Six-in-One: Robert Kyr  
In Twelve Winded Circles\* (b. 1952)

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Intermission

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High Art Martin Bresnick  
(b. 1946)

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Concerto Variations\* Jon Nelson  
(b. 1960)

Introduction—Largo Misterioso  
Theme—Andante Doloroso  
Var. 1—Molto Allegro Spiritoso  
Var. 2—Adagietto (ad libitum)  
Var. 3—Moderato Espresso  
Var. 4—Allegretto Giocoso  
Var. 5—Presto Agitato  
Finale—Allegro Maestoso

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Time/Memory/Shadow\* Robert Carl  
(b. 1954)

\*Written for Alea III

**NEXT CONCERT**

“Ongoing Panorama of Twentieth-Century Music”

Thursday, March 23, 1989, 8:30 p.m.

Prelude: “Meet the Experimentalists,” 7:15 p.m.

Boston University Concert Hall

Admission: \$6

### **ALEA III**

Because ALEA III is essentially a new music group, it has annually sponsored a Composers Workshop, for which it either commissions new works, performs old commissions, or introduces new composers to its instrumentalists.

The task is not an easy one. Commissioning is very much like buying a pig in a poke: one does not know what one is going to get and, given the much of a muchness of post-modernist music, to find fresh and individual voices is an aleatory affair—strictly improvisatory and a matter of luck. It was no different at the courts, royal or archiepiscopal, in the eighteenth century. Sometimes one fetched up with a Mozart. More often with composers whose name had long been forgotten—until the record companies started exhuming them as a form of musical Muzak to accompany commuters to work or play in office block elevators.

A recent article suggested that Pierre Boulez, the brilliant composer of thirty years ago, may have spent much of his creative energy in seeking the pinnacles of musical power—on behalf of new music, let it be said, but also on behalf of the politics of new music. The price paid for a new academicism has been high. The pursuit of style has sacrificed much of the individuality and personality that we had come to expect from composers from Haydn onwards. The means have often seemed to dominate over what could be done with those means.

The oldest composer in tonight's concert is a mere forty-eight, and we are therefore listening to a new generation. By presenting these workshops, ALEA III is living up to its reputation. It not only performs new music superbly well, but also brings it into being. No fewer than four of the six pieces on tonight's program have been written expressly for the group. They are each representative of different schools; they share some of the orthodoxy but also show how diverse that orthodoxy has become.

**THEODORE SAUNWAY (b. 1940)**

***Terrane***

Saunway's work for chamber ensemble, written especially for ALEA III last year, is true to the geological implications of its title, a word proposed by a Professor Gilbert in 1889 to be used to describe "a stratigraphical subdivision of any magnitude." In short, a layering. In Saunway's elaborate and ingenious score, this effect is achieved by the compacting of sets of seconds whose original density is compounded by rhythmical devices, alternately expanding and contracting.

Born in Ohio, educated musically in Boston and Seattle, Saunway now lives in West Berlin.

**SHIRISH KORDE (b. 1945)**

***Chamber Piece***

Korde's sextet is a serial work in which the original twelve-tone all-interval chord, in the composer's words, first collapses "towards a single unison pitch," descends "to the lowest regions of the chord," and then ends "in a noise-like section...in which the sensation of pitch is submerged." The second part sees "the reemergence of pitch," ascends and concludes "with a filtered version of the opening chord."

Korde is a product of the New England Conservatory and well-known as composer, theorist, and musical activist.

**ROBERT KYR (b. 1952)**

***Six-in-One: In Twelve Winded Cycles***

Just completed on January 23, the "wind" in Kyr's title might seem to refer to the breathless, winded composer finishing a commissioned work at the last moment! In fact, it refers to the element air and to the construction of this sextet, which is the sixth of a twelve-work cycle, and itself (the Catholic overtones are evident) divided into twelve sections "braided" into three sets of different "musics": six "quick musics," three "wind dances," and three lyrical canons. The basic harmonic twelve-note pattern is established in a brief introduction and is then developed metrically and harmonically in progressive complexity (the canons expanding and the "wind dances" contracting).

An Ohioan, Kyr was educated at Yale, at the Royal College of Music in London, and at the University of Pennsylvania, where he was a student of George Crumb. A Junior Fellow at Harvard between 1978 and 1981, he is currently a teaching fellow at Harvard and Director of Composition at the Longy School of Music.

**MARTIN BRESNICK (b. 1946)**

***High Art, for piccolo solo and toy piano***

If the thematic material in post-modernist music is somewhat uncompromising and not always readily accessible to the untrained ear, several ways out of the impasse have suggested themselves to a new generation of composers. A goodly number reexamined the basic metrics of music and found ways to expand and contract time. It was noticeable in Berlin in the early seventies, at a time when Ligeti and Cornelius Cardew were in residence, that other ways out were possible: one could strike backwards to a radical simplicity (as Cardew did and others have done since, to the considerable acclaim of audiences) but also, and more interestingly, one could explore hitherto unexplored potentials in the various instruments. The stringed instruments had already been opened up by Bartok; the woodwinds and brass were to follow.

Bresnick's *High Art* is based on the potentials of the flute family explored in Robert Dick's *The Other Flute*: overblowing, open fingerings, whistle tones, unfocused tones. These produce harmonics and make vertical chords possible. The resulting sound, known to the musicians of the Japanese imperial court for a millennium, has its own oriental resonances. Like an unaccompanied partita for violin, the melodic thrust is contained in single notes (here strongly accented), while the accompaniment is built around harmonics (the equivalent of double or triple-stopping or arpeggios) which, in the flute, are necessarily imprecise.

A New Yorker, Bresnick was educated at the High School of Music and Art, at the University of Hartford, and then in Vienna. His principal teachers have been Ligeti, John Chowning, Gottfried von Einem, and Friedrich Cerha. He is currently Professor of Composition at Yale, and was director of ALEA II, founded by Theodore Antoniou when he was teaching at Stanford University.

**JON NELSON (b. 1960)**

***Concerto Variations***

Another ALEA III commission, Nelson's work is virtuosic in conception and should bring out the best in the ensemble's highly skilled instrumentalists. What is evident throughout the variations is craftsmanship of a high order combined with a voice that gives some answer to the question of academic conformity raised earlier, for this is music without pre-prepared formulas: the instruments are treated as individual voices, and though the writing is rigorous, the parts are not submerged in some theoretical whole.

The minor sixth figures as a sort of harmonic leaping-off point. Adumbrated first in the Introduction (*Largo Misterioso*) and then restated by the 'cello in the Theme (*Adante Doloroso*), it engenders its own traditional con-

sequences. This prevailing thematic lament is set against two other motifs (which the composer all-too-fashionably calls "gestures") which are sharper and more antagonistic in nature, and lead to five variations in which the ten instruments, and the three motifs, dispute their primacy.

The first is sprightly and fragmentary. It leads to the irruption of a violin cadenza (*Adagietto ad libitum*) which bit by bit involves mimicry from the other instruments. The third (*Moderato espressivo*) contains a finely worked and intensely lyrical duo between horn and trumpet. The fourth (*Allegretto Giocoso*) contains, in the composer's words, "a nervous scherzo over a jazz-influenced bass," while the brief fifth is a characteristic *presto* which leads to a finale in which the theme reappears as *cantus firmus*.

Nelson currently teaches at Berklee College of Music and is completing a doctorate in composition at Brandeis.

**ROBERT CARL (b. 1954)**

***Time/Memory/Shadow***

As the title suggests, Carl's double trio is recapitulative in nature, and its thematic material is based on a brief march he wrote in college and which recurs nostalgically at the end of the piece: a tonal interruption from the past of a piece which fully exploits the idea of two trios in which the second, as the composer says, "not...antiphonally and simultaneously, but rather as a 'ghost' which exists in a different time-world, which echoes, prefigures, and comments upon events as they occur in the first trio."

Playing with time — metrics within the work, rhythmical time as an element of counterpoint — has become a favored technique in the past several decades. Carl has carried this idea into a conceptual dimension. The work itself has its origins in a Tracy-Hepburn film with "insets which showed simultaneously the results later in the film of various actions and bits of dialogue," and the result is a dialogue in time and a "juggling act where diverse, sometimes loopy materials still seem to project connections that only become obvious at the end, when the performer shows his hand and reveals the trick."

Carl was trained at Yale and at the Universities of Pennsylvania and Chicago. Among his teachers were Crumb, Penderecki, Betsy Jolas, and Xenakis. Winner of a number of prizes and foundation awards, Carl now teaches at the Hartt School of Music at the University of Hartford, and also heads the Extension Works music ensemble of Boston.

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Alea III is in its eleventh season at Boston University.



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