

# MindReader

the newsletter of Other Minds  
Autumn 1998

*"It was a very special time..."*  
*One Composer's Journey into Other Minds*  
Charles Amirkhanian interviews Julia Wolfe

*Julia Wolfe (b. Philadelphia, 1958), who co-founded the notorious and wonderful Bang on a Can Festival in New York, was a guest composer at the first Other Minds Festival in 1993, along with Conlon Nancarrow, Trimpin, Philip Glass, Meredith Monk, Foday Musa Suso, Jon Jang, Barbara Monk Feldman, Robert Ashley, Thomas Buckner, and Jai Uttal. In June 1998 she spoke with Charles Amirkhanian about her experience at the Other Minds Festival and her recent work with Bang on a Can. This interview took place in the rehearsal space of the Kronos Quartet — courtesy of OM board member and Kronos first violinist David Harrington. Her composition Believing — as well as her arrangement of a movement of Brian Eno's Music for Airports — will be featured in Other Minds' presentation of the Bang on a Can All-Stars at the Center for the Arts, October 21-22, 1998.*

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Other Minds Festival I composers at the Djerassi Resident Artists Program in November, 1993. (l. to r.) Philip Glass, Meredith Monk, Jon Jang, Julia Wolfe, and Trimpin discuss a Conlon Nancarrow score.

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**Charles Amirkhanian:** *I wonder if you can recall for us what the Other Minds Festival was like for you...*

**Julia Wolfe:** It was a very special time. I remember it completely. As a composer living in New York City — a very urban area — it's very dramatic to take this drive way out into the woods in this isolated, beautiful area of California and hang out with a bunch of composers, especially when a few of them [Nancarrow, Glass, Meredith Monk] are your heroes. I made friendships there that had a *big* impact on me.

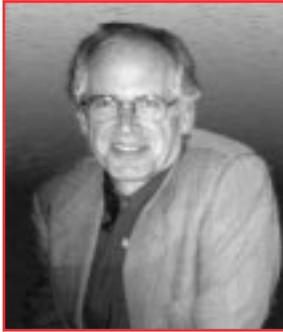


Continued on page 6



Dear Friends,

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *MindReader*, the newsletter of Other Minds. If you're reading this, you're already part of the growing mix of audiences, composers, musicians, and artists who are helping Other Minds to practice cultural clairvoyance.



Going beyond traditional divisions among disciplines, schools, and cultures, OM has strived to bring you the most interesting music and art of today. Our centerpiece event, the Other Minds Festival, brings an eclectic roster of composers — both emerging and established — to the Bay Area for a unique four-day residency, public symposia, and stimulating concerts. The four festivals to date have established this international gathering as the most important new music event West of the Rockies.

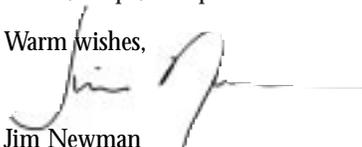
Now, Other Minds is growing into new territories. Earlier this year, I was delighted to announce the appointment of Charles Amirkhanian, formerly Artistic Director, as OM's full-time Executive Director. A composer of international stature, Charles has played an important role in mentoring other composers and artists throughout his career. Under his direction, OM is announcing a new, expanded concert season (look to the right of this page) that will give Bay Area audiences more opportunities to keep on top of today's music.

We are also launching *MindReader*. We aim to make this a twice-yearly publication that is more in-depth than most organizational newsletters. In each issue, you'll find interviews, concert news, and articles about the artists from all over the world who will be performing on OM's season schedule. In Phrenology (see p. 4), you'll find insider updates about the composer "alumni" who have appeared in past Other Minds events, and what they've been up to. For the most timely information about OM events, downloadable sample music scores, and other soundbytes, don't forget to visit our Web site ([www.otherminds.org](http://www.otherminds.org)). Selected discussion threads from our online forum (which you're welcome to join) may be reprinted here in the future. We also welcome your written comments.

Unfortunately, excellence and eclecticism come at a price. As Other Minds' programming has grown, so has our budget. OM is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization that needs your financial help to continue thriving. I urge you to join A Gathering of Other Minds, our donor society, by sending in a contribution with the form on page 11. There you'll find more information about our newest donor program, The Composers' Circle, which has a significant lure: two guaranteed tickets to all of Other Minds' music events in the coming season — from Brian Eno's *Music for Airports* to next spring's Other Minds Festival. It's a good way to stay a few notes ahead of the times.

What's new? For Other Minds, this is not just a greeting; it's a credo. We look forward to your participation as we help to define, shape, and predict the sound of times to come.

Warm wishes,



Jim Newman  
President, Other Minds

## Other Minds Events 1998 - 1999

### Brian Eno's *Music for Airports* The Bang On A Can All-Stars

In their first San Francisco appearance performing Brian Eno's *Music for Airports* and other works — all West Coast premieres

Two Performances — come to both!

#### Program #1 Wednesday, Oct 21, 1998, 8:00 pm

David Lang: *Cheating, Lying, Stealing* (1996)

Michael Gordon: *Trance IV* (1996)

Pamela Z: *The Schmetterling* (1998)

Brian Eno: *Music for Airports* (1978)

*Music for Airports*, 1/1, arranged by Michael Gordon

*Music for Airports*, 2/1, arranged by David Lang

*Music for Airports*, 1/2, arranged by Julia Wolfe

*Music for Airports*, 2/2, arranged by Evan Ziporyn

#### Program #2 Thursday, Oct 22, 1998, 8:00 pm

Julia Wolfe: *Believing* (1997)

Evan Ziporyn: *Tsmindao Ghmerto* (1996)

Dan Plonsey: *The Plonsey Episodes 1-9 (everybody does that)*,

*The Nostalgia of the Infinite* (1998)

Brian Eno: *Music for Airports* (1978)

Pre-concert talks with composers, 7:00 pm both nights

**The Bang on a Can All-Stars** are Maya Beiser, cello; Robert Black, bass; Lisa Moore, keyboards; Steven Schick, percussion; Mark Steward, electric guitar; Evan Ziporyn, clarinet.

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Theater, San Francisco

October 21 & 22, 1998

\$26/\$22 students/seniors — Tickets Now On Sale.

Call (415) 978-ARTS

Presented by Other Minds with the generous assistance of Mosser Victorian Hotel of Arts & Music

### OPUS415 No.4 Bay Area New Music Marathon

**Ten hours — Over 25 composers — Come and go as you please.**

Including appearances by Henry Brant, Harold Budd, Ingram Marshall, Pamela Z, Miya Masaoka, Carl Stone, Charles Amirkhanian, Dan Becker, Mitchell Clark, and many others.

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Forum, San Francisco

Saturday, November 7, 1998

1:00 - 11:00 pm

\$15/\$10 students/seniors — Tickets Now On Sale.

Call (415) 978-ARTS

Produced by Common Sense Composers' Collective

Presented by Other Minds in association with

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts

### Other Minds Festival V

Presenting composers Linda Bouchard (San Francisco, b. Canada), Mary Ellen Childs (St. Paul), Luc Ferrari (France), Alvin Lucier (Middletown, CT), Julian Priester (Seattle), Sam Rivers (Maitland, FL), Margaret Leng Tan (Brooklyn, b. Singapore), António Pinho Vargas (Portugal) & Errollyn Wallen (England, b. Belize).

Cowell Theater, Fort Mason Center, San Francisco

Thursday, Friday & Saturday, March 25, 26 & 27, 1999, 8:00 pm

Presented by Other Minds in association with

Djerassi Resident Artists Program

**Join the Composers' Circle & get guaranteed best-seat tickets to all events! (See p. 11 for details)**

## The *New Other Minds*: Notes on Our 1998-99 Season

by Charles Amirkhonian

Mark Estes



The good news is *now* we have a season. Other Minds, which previously presented one festival annually and an occasional peripheral event, is doubling the number of its public concerts this year, starting a CD company, and expanding its web site to bring you more exciting music than ever before. As the Bay Area remains one of the most active sites for new music anywhere in the world, the need has become apparent for an annual international festival. Here's what the Other Minds concert season for 1998-99 has in store:

One of the most provocative groups in contemporary music is the **Bang on a Can All-Stars** of New York City. Consisting of six virtuoso players, the group currently is touring with a live concert arrangement of **Brian Eno's *Music for Airports*** (See interview with Julia Wolfe, page 6). Bay Area audiences will have their first chance to hear this music live, following rave reviews in the *New York Times*, *Village Voice*, and various London papers. On **October 21-22, 1998** (Wednesday and Thursday) at the Yerba Buena Center Theater we present two evenings of music written for the Bang on a Can All-Stars by **Pamela Z** and **Dan Plonsey** of San Francisco, as well as **Michael Gordon**, **David Lang**, **Julia Wolfe**, and **Evan Ziporyn**.

On November 7th, OM will co-present the **OPUS415 Bay Area New Music Marathon** — named, by the way, for San Francisco's area code, not the orchestral work *Music for Prague*, the Op. 415 of the prolific Darius Milhaud. For three years, the City has been the site of an all-day concert of new music produced by the **Common Sense Composers' Collective**. This fabulous event gives younger Bay Area composers a place to present their latest work in a professional setting. When I heard that the Collective was about to throw in the towel and abandon the event, I persuaded them to keep it alive with Other Minds' help. I hope to see all of you at this unpredictable and unforgettable event. The Yerba Buena Forum space will double the audience capacity. And some wonderful celebrity composers from outside the Bay Area will be there, including Henry Brant, Harold Budd, and Ingram Marshall.

Our season culminates with the annual new music extravaganza **Other Minds V**, which will bring nine extraordinary composers from throughout the world to San Francisco. Three concerts and several panel discussions will be held March 25-27, 1999, at Fort Mason's Cowell Theatre. Prior to that, the composers will spend four days in residence at the marvelous 637-acre retreat of the Djerassi Resident Artists Program in Woodside, which has hosted the residency portion for all the festivals to date. There composers will get to know one another, talk shop, and share ideas. This is a unique opportunity for composers to immerse themselves in thought-provoking discussions. Here's a look at the composers who will be appearing:

It will be a great pleasure to host French composer **Luc Ferrari** during his 70th year. Ferrari, the composer who has most thoroughly integrated environmental sound recording into instrumental music, will preside over the world premiere of a newly-restructured version of *Les emoies d'Aphrodite* (The Emotions of Aphrodite, first composed in 1986) for clarinet, piano, percussion, two sampling keyboards, and tape.

A new discovery will be **Errollyn Wallen**, a phenomenal composer of concert music, including a brilliant *Concerto for Percussion and Orchestra* and numerous chamber pieces. Wallen, who was born in 1958 in Belize, now lives in London where she studied at Goldsmiths' and King's College. Lately, she has been developing a casual interest — composing, performing and recording pop/jazz ballads and songs — into a highly refined art. The master tape of her still-unreleased CD, *Meet Me at Harold Moores*, is inspiring. In it, she ranges through a variety of styles of music with virtuosic flair. Her singing is reminiscent of the late Laura Nyro, her texts of Laurie Anderson. Her musical accompaniments include the languages of Bach, Schubert, Ives, Ligeti, gospel, rock, pop, jazz — you name it! But it's done with an assuring clarity.



Errollyn Wallen

OM will also feature distinguished composer **Alvin Lucier**, an ingenious experimenter who early in his career diverged from his traditional training with Aaron Copland and Lukas Foss. Lucier treats sound as a physical substance, to be addressed with the concerns of the compositional process. Since John Adams introduced Lucier's music on a memorable solo concert with the SF Conservatory New Music Ensemble in 1975, Bay Area audiences know that a Lucier performance is an event never to be missed.

**Linda Bouchard** is an exceptionally gifted composer from Montréal now living in San Francisco. Her viola concerto for Kim Kashkashian premieres in Graz in October, and we'll hear one of her most recent chamber works at Other Minds V.

Both a choreographer and composer, **Mary Ellen Childs** will bring CRASH, her ensemble of percussionists who play music choreographed onstage in riveting synchronization. This will be the first San Francisco appearance of CRASH.

When I was in Lisbon last summer, much of the new music buzz centered around **António Pinho Vargas**, a former jazz pianist who had studied with Klaas de Vries at the Rotterdam Conservatory. After performing with Kenny Wheeler and Arild Anderson, he began to compose concert works which incorporate his fluid rhythmic sense with the compositional rigor of Ligeti. Thanks to a grant from the Gulbenkian Foundation, Other Minds V will mark his first-ever San Francisco appearance.

Jazz also will be well represented by two legendary figures: **Julian Priester** and **Sam Rivers**. Trombonist Priester emerged in the early 1950s, playing with Bo Diddley, Lionel Hampton, and Dinah Washington, and later with Max Roach, Eddie Palmieri, the Duke Ellington Orchestra, Herbie Hancock, Sun Ra, Charlie Haden, and Lester Bowie. Priester will be appearing in duet performances with saxophonist, pianist, and composer Sam Rivers (b. 1930) who was a member of the 1964 Miles Davis Quintet, and has also worked with Cecil Taylor and Dave Holland. You can hear Rivers and Priester on their brilliant Postcards CD *Hints on Light and Shadow*, working with electronic composer Tucker Martine — who will also be accompanying them in their Other Minds appearance.

And among the most diverting participants this year will be the very gifted pianist **Margaret Leng Tan**, a native of Singapore, playing on her concert grand toy pianos (see profile on p. 7).



Tickets for our Fall events are now on sale by telephone at (415) 978-ARTS or all BASS ticket outlets — or join our Composers Circle and get guaranteed tickets to all OM events for the next year!

# Phrenology

of Other Minds

What's new with our composer "alumni"

by Charles Amirkhanian

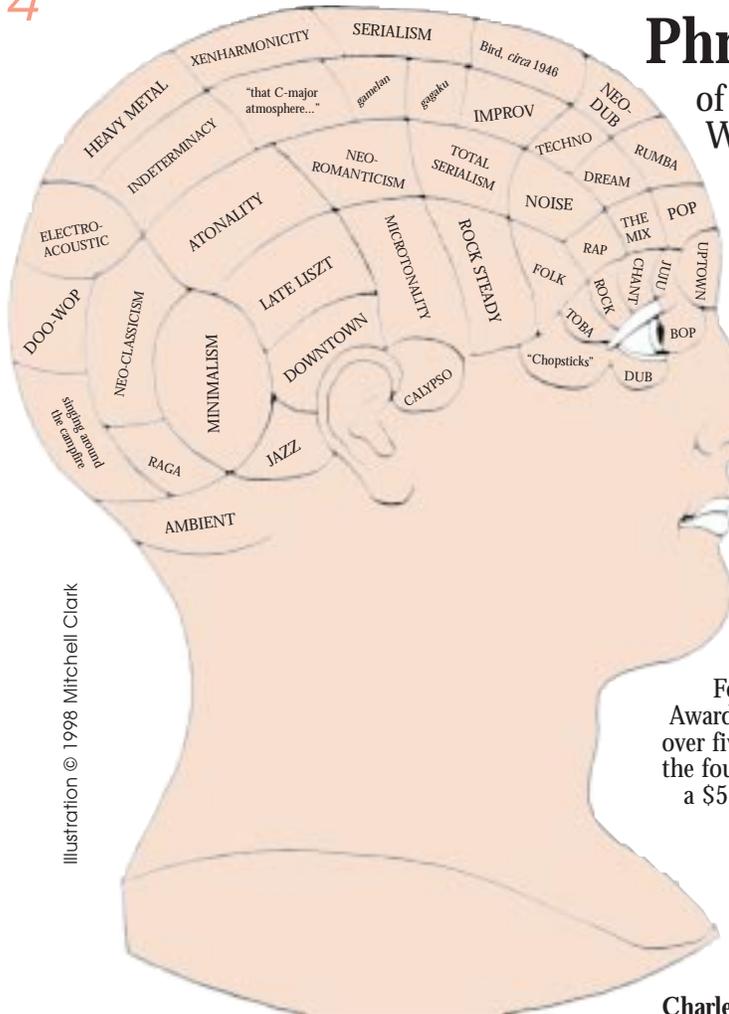


Illustration © 1998 Mitchell Clark

The previous four Other Minds Festivals have now played host to 41 featured guest composers. From time to time we will update you as to their current activities as news becomes available from them. **Laurie Anderson** has formed a production company called "etc." or Electronic Theater Company, in partnership with Interval Research Corporation, and she is working on a major production — a large new work inspired by Melville's *Moby Dick*. **Muhai Richard Abrams** is composing an orchestral work for conductor Dennis Russell Davies and the American Composers Orchestra, for the year 2000. Player piano virtuoso **Rex Lawson** has just finished recording a solo CD of Stravinsky's own arrangement for pianola rolls of *Les Noces*, which Other Minds plans to make an issue in its new series, Audio Documents in Contemporary Music — items which are obscure but so important as to merit limited edition release. Congratulations to inventor, performer, and composer **Trimpin** of Seattle, who was the recent recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship. Also to **Tan Dun**, winner of the prestigious Grawemeyer Award for Music Composition from the University of Louisville (\$150,000 over five years) for 1998, for his opera *Marco Polo*. And **Pamela Z** has received the fourth annual Cal/Arts/Alpert Award in music composition, which grants a \$50,000 cash prize.

**Meredith Monk** appeared on the San Francisco Symphony's very successful American Mavericks concert of June 14th, performing with three other vocalists her work *Three Heavens and Hells*. The work is written on a poetry text by Tennessee Reed, whose father is noted writer Ishmael Reed.

**Charles Shere** has moved permanently to Healdsburg in Sonoma County from his native Berkeley. This marks the first time in 100 years that Berkeley is not home to one or another member of the Shere clan, but Charles and his wife Lindsey still are actively on the board of the world-famous restaurant Chez Panisse, of which they, chef Alice Waters, and a few others are co-owners.

**Philip Glass** has a stunning new recording of his *Symphony No. 2* coupled with his *Concerto for Saxophone Quartet and Orchestra* on Elektra Nonesuch. Dennis Russell Davies conducts the Vienna Radio Symphony in the first work and the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra with the Rascher Saxophone Quartet in the second. Glass's *Monsters of Grace*, made in collaboration with Robert Wilson, will run April 13-17, 1999, at Zellerbach Hall on the Cal Performances series. **Terry Riley** will also appear on that series in Hertz Hall on February 28, 1999, in a solo piano concert. **Kui Dong** has moved from Palo Alto and joined the faculty at Dartmouth. She just has completed a work for flute and percussion to be performed at a concert of the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players later this year. Time now for Bay Area residents to mark your calendars.

**Ionel Petroi**, living in Paris, writes that his *La musique de l'amour et du rire* for violin, cello, and piano was played at the Moscow Festival in November of 1997. **Lukas Ligeti** just obtained a green card, has married composer Chien-Yin Chen, set up house in Manhattan, and writes that he is working on a piece for Icebreaker, the London-based chamber ensemble, and new music for his group Beta Foly, based in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. He also played percussion on a new CD called "Yo Miles — Henry Kaiser and Wadada Leo Smith Play the Music of Miles Davis," due out on Shanachie in September 1998.

**Henry Brant** will receive an honorary doctorate this Fall from Wesleyan University in Middletown, CT. A concert of his music will follow the ceremonies. The entire archive of Dr. Brant's scores and memorabilia have been added to the world-famous collection of the Sacher Foundation in Basel, which also is home to the manuscripts and collections of Stravinsky, Boulez, Lutoslawski and many others. Brant is only the fourth American to have his entire collection housed there. In that distinction he joins Elliott Carter, Morton Feldman, and George Rochberg. On November 7th at the OPUS415 Marathon here, he'll make an Instant Music composition by mobilizing eight ensembles into the concert's grand finale. What a guy!

**Lou Harrison** is installing a new Sunda slendro gamelan in his Ives Room studio and revising his opera *Young Caesar* for a presentation at an upcoming Lincoln Center Festival. The work, originally a puppet opera, will comprise the original music plus no fewer than eight new arias. Lou reports he is delighted with Leta Miller's new biography published by Oxford University Press. It's called *Lou Harrison: Composing a World*.



by Kyle Gann

By the time I got there a crowd had already gathered. There, in the middle, was the body, stretched out with a reel's worth of high-grade tape wrapped around its neck, and still soiled with the muck of the East River. It was a ghastly scene, but nobody seemed particularly upset; in fact, several people were smirking. "If it had been united, it could never have been defeated," somebody chuckled near me. I looked up; it was Fred Rzewski. Alvin Lucier said nothing, but cordoned off the body with a long thin wire that hummed ominously. John Adams pushed his way through the crowd and grabbed my arm. "This is the work of Arab terrorists!" he snarled. That was a kneejerk reaction; he was still bitter about the Klinghoffer episode.

Classical music was dead. And I didn't need to call the American Symphony Orchestra League to know that they were going to want somebody to pin charges on. I needed answers.

When I got to my office, there was a livid message on my machine from Charles Wuorinen. "You know who did it!" he screamed. "Those damn minimalists! They've been out to kill classical music for thirty years!" Charlie's kind of a nut case, but hell, it was a lead. I popped around to Steve Reich's apartment. "Sure, I had a fling with classical music in the '80s," he admitted nervously. "But ever since *The Cave*, I've been strictly into electronics." "I buy your story, Steve," I crooned to calm him, "but the League's going to want to see proof. You gonna come out to show them?" "Come out to show them?," he repeated. I saw he had gone into one of his phases, so I left him there.

I knew Terry Riley was out of the loop, and Phil Glass had been pretty cozy with classical for the last few years; I made a mental walk-through of his entire output and couldn't find a motive. So I paid a visit to the Big Kahuna, La Monte "Hillbilly" Young. He had an alibi, too. Problem was, it was six hours long. Classical music died a quick death; Young couldn't have pulled off a job like that in under a month.

I waltzed around to Bob "Wolfman" Ashley's digs. I knew he hadn't done it — the guy never touched an orchestra in his life — but he was a big man in the underground, and he seemed to know things other people didn't. When I asked if he'd heard anything, he didn't even look up from his vodka, just moaned, "If I were from the big town, I would be calm and debonair. The big town doesn't send its riff-raff out." That didn't mean anything to me, so I kept mum. When he saw I wasn't going to leave, he drawled over his shoulder, "You ever know classical music to give a woman a fair deal?" I shook my head. "Cherchez la femme," he muttered bitterly. Then, more slowly, "She was a visitor."

Ellen Zwilich's landlady suggested I try her at the Pulitzer Club. After I stiffarmed my way past the bouncer, a blur in white gloves ran out in a hurry, clucking "Oh dear, oh dear! I shall be too late!" I saw enough to recognize David Del Tredici. Once in the street, he disappeared into a manhole. I resisted an impulse to follow, but that was suspicious. When I cornered Zwilich, though, sipping martinis with Joe "Fluttertongue" Schwantner and Jack "Jack" Harbison, the trio looked as morose as piano tuners at a synthesizer trade show. "You think we were involved?" she laughed sardonically. "That's right, we bumped off the goose that laid the golden eggs." Elliott Carter must have gotten wind that I was there, for suddenly two Columbia grad students appeared from behind and gave me an expense-paid whirlwind trip into the back alley.

I dusted my pants off and decided I had barked up the wrong tree anyway. The Pulitzer gang was high on classical music's payola list; as long as they kept their yaps shut, it'd come across with the occasional concerto commission. The only broad big and outside enough to pull a stunt like this was

Pauline "Ma" Oliveros. Oh sure, she talked peace and good vibes, but there was something about the way she squeezed that accordion — as if she meant it. But this time I wasn't going direct. I looked up an old connection named Annea "The Torch" Lockwood. I figured any dame who started out her career burning pianos wouldn't scruple to help deep-six an entire genre.

"It was just another random killing," she insisted when I tracked her down at a sleazy East Village gallery. "John Cage is dead, hon," I countered. "Try again." "Look," she stammered, "you're going after small game. Classical music was drowned out, right? You need a louder suspect. Know a schmo named John Zorn?"

Zorn had crossed my mind, but I had seen his victims before: so cut up that you couldn't tell what piece came from which body. This wasn't his style. I thanked her for the tip, though, and headed for the Knitting Factory in search of a joker named Branca. I could hear his electric guitars as far away as Washington Square. Word on the street was that he was calling his pieces "symphonies" even though he didn't use an orchestra. Sounded like a takeover. He had good reasons for wanting classical music out of the way. When I got there, an old guy named Nancarrow was guarding the box office. "Branca may be backstage and he may not," he stated mechanically, in two tempos at once somehow.

As I stepped into the back, the blast of a high-decibel shriek knocked me against the wall, where I got a blow on the back of my head that made me hear Stockhausen's *Zyklus* and Varese's *Ionisation* at the same time, with encores. When I came to, a harpy from hell with cavernous eyes and sharp claws was leaning over me. I made a quick grab for my .45 (I never carry a gun, but just for the heck of it I often make a grab for one), when the demon spoke: "Sorry, didn't mean to rattle you, sport."

"Oh, it's you, Diamanda." Nice Greek girl from San Diego. Had a funny thing about makeup, though, and a voice that could bounce your eardrums off each other. "Geez, try not to sneak up on a guy."

"I'm going to save you a lot of trouble," she said, lighting a cig by breathing on it. "Nobody here had anything to do with classical music getting waxed. It was a suicide."

"Suicide?" I coughed, still carressing my noggin. "Think about it," she urged. "Tried to starve itself to death. A tiny, self-imposed diet of the same German and Russian food over and over. Cholesterol in the high 600s. Didn't want to grow. Refused to eat anything new. Kept trying to pretend the 20th century never happened. Severe personality disorder. It never established any roots here anyway — still obsessed with the old country, and acted so hoity-toity to cover up its insecurity. Suicide was the only way it could save face."

"You're sure of that, huh?" "Sure I'm sure. I could see it coming. That's why I quit playing Mozart concertos and singing Xenakis fifteen years ago."

Something about the way she said it - in a piercing wail three octaves above middle C - made me think that was the best explanation I was going to get. I went back to my office, and was greeted by another blinking light on the machine. It was Susan McClary; there was no such thing as classical music in the first place, she claimed, it was just a construct invented by white males to subjugate women and minorities. "Let her believe that if it makes her feel better," I thought, clicking her off in mid-sentence. I poured myself an inch or two of cheap whiskey, parked my loafers on the desk, and snapped my fingers to a kickass rendition of *433* that the city was playing in the street below.

Kyle Gann (b. 1955 in Dallas, TX) is a composer, assistant professor of music at Bard College, and new-music critic for *The Village Voice*, which first printed this article on January 21, 1997. He is the author of *The Music of Conlon Nancarrow* (Cambridge University Press, 1995) and *American Music in the Twentieth Century* (Schirmer Books, 1997).

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## WARM WORDS FOR THE BANGERS: A LETTER FROM BRIAN ENO

Although the Bang on a Can All-Stars had tried to get Brian Eno's feedback on their master tape from the recording session of *Music for Airports*, they received no reply and had to go ahead with the release as scheduled. While traveling in early 1998, Eno had been told by a radio producer from KCRW-FM in Los Angeles that the recording was tremendous and asked him what he thought about it. Eno confessed he hadn't heard it. The producer gave him a copy, which Eno thrust into his travel bag and forgot about as he boarded his plane bound for Nice. He settled down that evening in a guest room in Antibes, put on his newly-acquired copy of the *Point Music* CD at full volume, and stepped out into the garden to look and listen. He was so moved that he composed a letter of thanks to Michael Gordon, Julia Wolfe, David Lang, and Evan Ziporyn — who had arranged the work.

In New York City, these four composers were sitting around a table discussing the project, with occasional reference to the fact that Eno had never commented on the recording they'd sent him. A shiver of pleasure must have gone through that room as the three-page single-spaced letter from Brian Eno, part of which is quoted below, emerged slowly from their fax machine. About the recording, Brian Eno wrote in part:



Brian Eno with the Bang on a Can All-Stars

Antibes, 13 February 1998

. . . I put it on as the full moon was rising from the horizon, like a huge, dark orange over the bay of Cannes . . . I found myself unaccountably in tears. I don't know why this recording has moved me so deeply. In my jet-lagged and nomadic . . . state perhaps I was ready to be moved. But I think it's more than that. I think this is so very beautiful I'm almost embarrassed to say it, except for the fact that what I'm finding beautiful is the emotional quality you brought to it. I think it's what you've done that I'm moved by.

Thank you so much for the work and intelligence you must have put into this. When I made *Music for Airports* — almost exactly twenty years ago — I never imagined it would have such a long life, or such unexpectedly beautiful offspring. I think that may be where the tears came from — that “present at the birth” feeling.

Best wishes, and I hope this does well for you.

Brian Eno

(Reprinted by permission)

**Charles Amirkhanian:** *You live in New York where Philip Glass and Meredith Monk live. You must have known them already.*

**Julia Wolfe:** Well, they had been on the festival I run in New York, Bang on a Can, so I had said “hello,” or seen them at their sound check. But this was the first time I really had a conversation with either one of them. It was fantastic first of all just to hear the ideas they were thinking about and to tell them what I was thinking about. I think it takes that kind of isolation and separation from your normal hectic life for that to happen. For people to sort of let down their guard and just talk.

**CA:** *Could you say something about any particular advice you might have gotten at Djerassi or feedback from your performance in San Francisco?*

**JW:** Well, I remember each of us gave a small presentation [to the other composers] of something we'd written recently and I played this one piece called *Window of Vulnerability* — it was a short piece. And even before the tape started Philip Glass said, “Wait a minute! Wait a minute! There's no copyright sign on this score.” He almost had a heart attack about it. And I was kind of taken aback. Philip Glass was telling me I did something wrong. But it was a really beautiful moment because he really was concerned about me. He was saying you've gotta protect yourself. He just had an amazing respect for original work. Later he listened to the piece and was really complimentary about it. Then he pondered and said, “Let me see. Could this piece survive commercially?” And it was amazing to hear him talk about that because he's so brilliant about that part of music making — how to make pieces live and function in the world. Anyway, it was a great opportunity to let our friendship form.

**CA:** *Anything come out of that?*

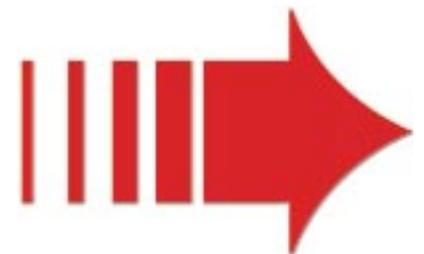
**JW:** Yeah, actually. I ran into him a couple of times on the street — he lives really close in New York — a fifteen minute walk. Our conversations would always come around to his saying, “Are you doing any recording?” I always thought he meant Bang on a Can compilations. But I finally realized he's asking me do I want to make a record? Duh! And so that happened. It was really great. It was my first solo disc. And it's such a huge boost for your work. It's called *Arsenal of Democracy* and it's on his label — Point Music.

**CA:** *And that was a result of meeting him in this private setting?*

**JW:** Absolutely, yeah.

**CA:** *What about Meredith Monk? How did you and she get along?*

**JW:** Well, I totally love her. I mean it was an immediate bonding. She's just so open and easy. It's just wonderful to talk to her. I definitely felt a woman bond there. A lot of time during the festival she'd say, “What do you think about this women's issue? Do you ever run into walls? People giving you a hard time?” And at that time I didn't know what she meant. But over time I've gotten to see what she's talking about. It was a special first meeting. And since then we've been in touch, seen each other in New York. She's just a very unique person.



## Toy Piano Mania: The Artistry of Margaret Leng Tan by Mitchell Clark

Margaret Leng Tan's approach to the piano is a vast and inclusive one: she explores the instrument in its widest sense. Her interest is in a fundamental piano-ness, so that for all her diverse approaches and uses of technology that expand performance contexts, she is loathe to replace the piano with any kind of electronic keyboard. Margaret Leng Tan expands the piano's horizon, as many have said, but to put it another way, she expands the piano *horizontally* and does not replace it with technology *vertically*. As her uses of technology are to enhance — not to replace — she does not relinquish the physicality and physical involvement of playing the instrument. She relishes the *play* of playing the instrument, and her approach is indeed playful and intuitive, so that all her various activities relating to the piano are quite ingenious. She is one definition of a total performer.

Margaret Leng Tan's explorations include those into the "image," both physical and conceptual, of the piano. This has led her, in her playful way, quite naturally to the toy piano. As a performer who has focused on the works of John Cage, part of her repertoire has of course included Cage's groundbreaking (and breathtaking) *Suite for Toy Piano*, of 1948. Her embrace of that beautiful piece let the cat out of the bag, so to speak, for the toy piano. She has gone on to champion the instrument, performing what little repertoire there was for toy piano before she came along, as well as inviting and performing new works. She has also found that there is a healthy number of existing piano works which will lend themselves happily to adaptation to the toy piano.

Margaret Leng Tan's recent CD release, *The Art of the Toy Piano* (Point Music/Polygram), is unique. The album contains a dozen items for toy piano, consisting of original pieces (most of them written for Margaret Leng Tan) and arrangements (made by herself or by the composers). Some pieces call for piano and toy piano to be played together and others call for additional toy instruments, all of which are played by Ms. Tan. The list of the various contributing composers reads like a who's who of contemporary music: Philip Glass, Julia Wolfe, David Lang, Guy Klucevsek, Stephen Montague, and Toby Twining, to name a few. In two additional items — the third *Gymnopedie* of Erik Satie (set by Margaret Leng Tan for toy piano and piano), and Lennon & McCartney's *Eleanor Rigby* (in an arrangement for toy piano by Toby Twining) — the sound of the toy piano, pungent and sweet at the same time, effectively fits the

poignancy of these melodies. The program is a solid and varied collection of remarkable works. As of this writing, *The Art of the Toy Piano* is number 16 of the top 25 best-selling classical crossover albums, and has received major media attention from everybody from *All Things Considered* to *CBS Evening News*.

A native of Singapore, Margaret Leng Tan was the first woman to graduate with a Doctorate in music from Juilliard. She has spent years exploring and inventing extended techniques for the piano, shaping a totally individual style of performance which combines sound and choreography in a theatrical presentation. She was on many occasions John Cage's pianist of choice for the performance of his works. This included a memorable appearance at his 70th-birthday concert in 1982 at Symphony Space, New York City, where she and Cage alternated playing prepared piano and reading for over 45 minutes, in a brilliant opening performance to the event.

Ms. Tan, who has not performed in the Bay Area since 1984, will gather together her custom-made toy pianos and bring them to San Francisco for her west-coast toy-piano debut as part of the fifth Other Minds Festival. Several of the Other Minds V composers will be writing works for her to play on toy piano, and these new compositions will be given their world premiere performances as part of the Festival. And notably, we'll hear selections not on her recent CD, including Conlon Nancarrow's *Three 2-Part Studies* (1942), arranged by Ms. Tan, and Cage's *Suite for Toy Piano*.

As one listens to Margaret Leng Tan's performances on the toy piano, one finds oneself asking: where has this beautiful instrument been hiding?

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Michael Dames

The first four Other Minds Festivals have hosted:

- ➔ 41 invited composers from 14 countries (9 female / 32 male)
- ➔ three guest composers (1 female / 2 male)

To date, the Other Minds Festival performances have involved over 70 guest musicians, the majority from the San Francisco Bay Area. Included among these guest musicians have been:

- ➔ Kronos Quartet
- ➔ Paul Drescher Ensemble
- ➔ Abel-Steinberg-Winant Trio
- ➔ San Francisco Contemporary Music Players
- ➔ Masaoka Orchestra
- ➔ Onyx String Quartet
- ➔ Chromodal Consort
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- ➔ Sonus Imaginorem
- ➔ Alyeska Quartet
- ➔ Paul Hillier (voice)
- ➔ David Tanenbaum (guitar)
- ➔ Wu Man (pipa)
- ➔ Rae Imamura (piano)
- ➔ Beth Custer (clarinet)
- ➔ Greg Goodman (piano)

### ➔ Hewlett Foundation Increases Support of Other Minds

With the prospect of increased activity on the part of Other Minds, we have been awarded a generous \$25,000 grant for 1998-99 by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. Our sincere thanks for this generous gift which will enable us to grow over the coming two years.

### ➔ Aaron Copland Fund Supports Recording Project

We're delighted to announce a grant from the Aaron Copland Fund for Music to support the first project of our new Other Minds CD label — *A Conlon Nancarrow Miscellany* — to include previously unrecorded material such as the composer's *Piece for Tape, Study No. 29 for Prepared Player Piano*, and *Contraction No. 1* (composed with Trimpin and recorded live at Other Minds I in 1993).

Other Minds is seeking ushers for all our concerts, as well as dedicated volunteers who are interested in helping with festival and concert production, mailings, fund-raising, and event organizing. This is an ideal opportunity to learn more about the behind-the-scenes workings of an international music festival. To apply, please contact our office at (415) 834-1946.



## Julia Wolfe

Continued from page 6

**CA:** Regarding Conlon Nancarrow, who was rather ill at that time — he'd come down with the flu and it was his next-to-last trip to the United States — did you have any interaction with him at all? I remember one moment when all of us were listening to his Study No. 25 for Player Piano and following the score which had incredibly dense glissandi that go up and down the keyboard on selected white and black keys particularly, because he could do that with his control, by punching holes in pianola rolls. You know usually when you do that it's all white or black keys, but you could choose with his system. I remember seeing you and Phil and Meredith and others watching these pages go by in total disbelief.

**JW:** He's an amazing guy. First of all I love how he talked. You'd ask him some kind of ridiculous question and he answer, "Well, I don't really care about that." He was just totally up front. But he gave me one really special gift. My string quartet was played on the Other Minds concert in San Francisco and I remember walking back up the aisle and he was sitting there with his wife and he leaned out into the aisle and said to me, "Was that your string quartet?" and I said, "Yes," and he said, "I liked that." That was an amazing moment for me because I've always admired his work so much and to get one tiny piece of positive feedback that way is something I'll always remember.

**CA:** The idea of meeting in private is a little bit unusual for a music festival. Normally when you're having a piece played in a festival you fly in, the piece gets rehearsed, you supervise the rehearsal, and after the performance you leave town. And it's always struck me that it's more of a competitive atmosphere in that situation. You're hoping that your performance makes you look good, and you're dreading the fact that it might not. And so you might get testy about rehearsal time or wanting to go overtime. This is kind of a different feeling at Other Minds where you meet with people — you become friends. And I'm just wondering if from your point of view as a participant it had any changed aspect to it?

**JW:** Oh yeah, it was *totally* different. Compared to other festivals you don't even get to hear the other music necessarily. You only get to hear the concert you're on because they can only put you up for one night. So just to start with that you're all even in the same place within the same hour is pretty remarkable. You get to hear all the music. But the most important thing is that retreat where you're just hanging out, you're having dinner, you're talking about what you're thinking about. Something jells there that is so nice. I don't know why it doesn't happen in other places other times. But you need to separate this time out from the rest of your life. You're here with colleagues you might not otherwise come into contact with. I know it was incredibly informative not only to meet established people like Meredith Monk and Philip Glass but also young guys like Jon Jang and Barbara Monk Feldman. That was also really special because they're dealing with issues similar to those you're dealing with and it's reassuring. It's reassuring to hear someone else trying to figure out how to deal with a presenter or how to deal with commissions, what kind of tunings they're thinking about, and the kind of influences they have. It's something you just can't get from a program note or a bio. It's invaluable . . .

**CA:** Well it certainly is a surprise to hear Brian Eno's Music for Airports arranged by you and three other Bang on a Can

stalwarts. And I tried to find out when it would be coming out to



© 1993 John Fago

Julia Wolfe with Thomas Buckner, at Djerassi Resident Artists Program, 1993

the Bay Area, and I found out that wasn't. So I'm awfully glad that in October Other Minds is going to present this fabulous new rendition of a classic tape piece per-

formed with live instruments to San Francisco, along with other works that the Bang on a Can All-Stars are going to be performing. I wonder if you could tell us about the genesis of the project because it certainly was a brilliant idea to take the sounds that were essentially in a composition that was fixed in time and recorded in a studio and put them into a concert hall.

**JW:** Well, the original piece had a big impact on all four of the Bang on a Can guys (and gal) that did the transcriptions. It's a beautiful, amazing piece, and I think we all always loved it, but it was only when we started to do the transcriptions that we actually got closer to it and saw how it was put together. It was just a remarkable experience, taking the piece from this kind of beautiful, cold, perfect existence as it was made in the studio and bringing it to live musicians. You know, hearing the human touch added to it — it's a very different sensibility. It's the same notes — the same music really, pretty much to the letter. But hearing the bow against the string and hearing the timing of human breath . . . it's very emotional. I think it adds a different kind of emotional level. So it's been a very beautiful project. It was thrilling to be in contact with Brian Eno, and in the end he heard a live performance in Stansted Airport in England and was very moved and thrilled by it. So it was really satisfying.

**CA:** The piece is in four movements and the third of the four was the one which you arranged. I'm just boggled by how you could have done it for live instruments. What did you do exactly to dissect the original and transform it into a playable piece?

**JW:** I actually listened really closely over and over again. In the original of that movement is a keyboard sound and a chime-like vibraphone sound, made from synthesizers. But every note and every gesture has a certain kind of character. Either it is a sort of plucked sound or like a chime. I just listened to the volume and the attack and imagined it in relief — imagined it lifted up from that existence into live instruments. I picked that movement because it had the sounds of instruments and voices . . . So, I got my stopwatch out. I assigned a quarter note to 60 [beats per minute] so every beat equals one second, so everything would fall within that because it seemed like a really clean way to lay it down.

**CA:** Now did some of the notes come out to be very fractional rhythms that were hard to play?





**JW:** It's very clear and at first simple material. But it's put together in a fairly complicated way. In this movement there are over thirty tape loops of different length. One might be 29 1/2 seconds and another might be just one pluck and you'd hear that every 33 seconds, and they would phase in the overlappings. So it helped to figure out which were the basic elements and how often they looped. But I think one thing that keeps it from being boring, because it is a very limited group of gestures, is the construction. It's very unpredictable. You don't know when things are gonna swing back and return and when things are going collide and bump into each other. So even though you're lulled and mesmerized, you're pulled along by the lack of predictability.

**CA:** *The music surprised me because I think of Evan Ziporyn and Michael Gordon and David Lang and Julia Wolfe as being composers who have very aggressive rhythmic pieces in their arsenals, and here you have this very relaxed, almost mesmerizing composition. Wow!*

**JW:** Wow is right! It's good for us to lay back. It's a really different path for us to have done this piece. On the most superficial level in terms of the character of the piece, usually we are . . . and especially the group . . . are playing things that are way over the top. Sort of the Bang on a Can trademark. "Oh yeah, it's going to be loud and noisy, edgy . . . very urban." And this obviously is a totally different sensibility, but within the context of the whole festival it's a piece that doesn't fall neatly into a category. You find it in the New Age Rock section, but it's certainly as sophisticated a composition as any symphony you're going to find in the classical section. So it doesn't really belong anywhere. It doesn't have a home. And we like giving home to the homeless. So it was a very natural project to do in that way.

**CA:** *What happened the first year of the Bang on a Can Festival? It must be memorable in retrospect.*

**JW:** Oh, yeah. It was a real turning point for all of us. Because we just put this thing together, and almost as a kind of joke we called it the First Annual Bang on a Can Festival, you know, not having any idea if there'd be another one. And I think about 400 people came the first year, and it was really wonderful. A lot of the more established people showed up like John Cage and Steve Reich and Milton Babbitt. And they spoke before their pieces, which was kind of amazing. They didn't necessarily meet each other. One came in, the other went out. But I think they thought the program was really strange because, certainly at that time — this was 1987 — composers from different worlds didn't show up on the same programs or even in the same venue. One of the main ideas we wanted to put across was, hey, it doesn't matter what the style is necessarily, it's "are the ideas interesting and is the piece interesting?" And so we just sort of broke the rules which were sort of unspoken at that time. John Cage hung out for four hours. In fact he didn't come for his piece because it was on too late at night, but he sat for some four-odd hours in the afternoon.

**CA:** *I found that both Cage and Babbitt would always spend lots of time at things like this, especially as participants officially in a festival. They'll sit from beginning to end and they always arrive on time, which is a lesson to younger composers.*

**...it's incredibly intense. Because you have these six really opinionated, really talented people. And they always played great together. But when you have that much fire you have to kind of figure how to deal with it.**

**JW:** Yeah, and also I remember one thing that John Cage did — he came to the door and insisted on buying his ticket. He had a piece on, so he didn't have to buy his ticket. And that was a lesson too, because he thought, hey, this needs support. I'm here to pay for the ticket. And he wouldn't come in. He literally wouldn't come in unless he bought his ticket. So he bought his ticket.

**CA:** *The All-Stars are an unusual mixed ensemble. Why that group of people?*

**JW:** Actually it's a good question because it is that group of people, as opposed to that group of instruments. They are basically a group because they showed up as soloists on many years of the festival, and after a while we said, hey this person's amazing and that person's amazing. And that's how they became a group, because we sort of hand-picked the six players and put them in a room together. They didn't know each other. Maybe a few of them had met but they never had played together.

**CA:** *Who are they?*

**JW:** They are Evan Ziporyn who plays reed instruments — clarinets and saxophones, Mark Stewart, electric guitar and banjo and thirteen other stringed instruments, Maya Beiser plays cello, Robert Black plays bass, Lisa Moore plays piano and keyboards, and Steven Shick plays percussion. The whole group is amplified.

**CA:** *So these guys all are virtuosos. You put them together as a group. Did it work from the beginning?*

**JW:** Well, it worked, but it's incredibly intense. Because you have these six really opinionated, really talented people. And they always played great together. But when you have that much fire you have to kind of figure how to deal with it. And it's been really amazing to watch that fire consolidate or jell into a really powerful ensemble fire. And especially in the past several years you can feel that it's a very tight group.

**CA:** *Why is it they haven't toured on the West Coast much? This will be only their second appearance.*

**JW:** They've gone to Europe a lot. And I think part of that is a support question. There's such a lot of support for new art and music in Europe so they wind up going overseas. Actually last year was the first time they toured the United States. And they've done that again this year.

**CA:** *When the Bang on a Can All-Stars come to the Bay Area, they'll play some of your music. Which piece of yours are they going to be performing?*

**JW:** They'll be doing a piece called *Believing* that I wrote for them. It's a kind of mesmerizing and more trance-like piece than I've written before. I guess the most remarkable thing is that in the middle of it they break into singing — soft, kind of mysterious song-like chant. I was pleased to find out they all have beautiful singing voices. And I guess the *Music for Airports* experience led me to mixing voices and instruments in this relatively relaxed piece for the All-Stars.

**Paul Dresher** is preparing his ensemble this Fall to present the world premiere of an evening-length theater work by composer Steve Mackey and librettist/performer Rinde Eckert titled *Ravenshead*. After its premiere at Penn State in November, the piece will be presented in March-April 1999 at the Florence Swimley Little Theatre in Berkeley.

**Robert Ashley** premiered his *Balseros* in Miami to enthusiastic audiences over seven evenings. The text, by Irene Fornes, an ex-Cuban living in New York, was based on interviews with 25 Cuban raft people who now live in Miami. ("Balsa" is raft in Spanish.) A bilingual work, the piece was enthusiastically cheered by English- and Spanish-speaking audiences. Four singers from Ashley's ensemble were joined by five Florida Grand Opera singers, two Spanish narrators, two Cuban drummers, and an orchestra on tape mixed live by Tom Hamilton. Ashley is preparing his newest opera, *Dust*, which will be premiered in Yokohama in November 1998, followed by showings in Spain, Portugal, and New York City. The work is based on the stories of Americans who are on the margins due to mental illness, disabilities, and age.

**Thomas Buckner**, new music's premier baritone, will appear with the Alvin Lucier Ensemble at Art Summit 1998 in Jakarta, Indonesia, then in Morton Subotnick's *Intimate Immensity* at ZKM in Karlsruhe, Germany, in October, followed by six November concerts in Japan, two of which will be the premiere presentations of Robert Ashley's *Dust*.

**Mari Kimura** has just finished mastering her first solo album, which includes *Six Caprices for Subharmonics* for violin solo. Her current projects include her first *Violin Concerto* commissioned by Callejón de Ruido in Guanajuato, Mexico. Starting September 1998, Ms. Kimura will teach a graduate class in interactive computer music at Juilliard.

Our senior composer alumnus **David Raksin** turned 86 on August 4, 1998, and reports he survived eight birthday parties in Southern California. This past January he conducted and sang (!) his music in what he calls the world's greatest orchestral hall, the recently-opened Opera City in Tokyo. The concert was organized by the late Toru Takemitsu, who selected works by Nino Rota and Raksin to be paired with his own for the opening of the new hall.

We lament the passing in Mexico City on August 10, 1997, of **Conlon Nancarrow** (b. 1912). Mr. Nancarrow was a guest at our first festival in 1993 and, in many ways, embodies the spirit of experiential experimentalism (as opposed to conceptual or ideological — see Steven Schwartz's book on California *From East to West*) that has inspired many Other Minds. A memorial symposium will occur in Mexico City sometime around his birthday, October 27th, organized by his widow Yoko and composer Julio Estrada.

In conclusion, we invite the 21 other alumni of previous Other Minds Festivals to send us news of their activities for the next issue of *MindReader*.



From front to rear: Tan Dun, Terry Riley, Don Byron, Alvin Singleton, Rex Lawson, and Bill Colvig in residence at the 1995 Other Minds Festival

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**OTHER MINDS**



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the newsletter of Other Minds  
Autumn 1998

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