

Malcolm Goldstein: a sounding of sources

Definitions: Structure in music is its divisibility into successive parts from phrases to long sections. Form is content, the continuity. Method is the means of controlling the continuity from note to note. The material of music is sound and silence. Integrating these is composing.

—John Cage, *Forerunners of Modern Music* (1949)

. . . FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT . . . A poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it (he will have some several causations), by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader. Okay. Then the poem itself must, at all points, be a high energy-construct and, at all points, an energy-discharge. . . . I take it that PROJECTIVE VERSE teaches, is, this lesson, that that verse will only do in which a poet manages to register the acquisitions of his ear and the pressures of his breath . . .

Let me put it baldly. The two halves are:

the HEAD, by way of the EAR, to the SYLLABLE,

the HEART, by way of the BREATH, to the LINE

—Charles Olson, *Projective Verse* (1950)

People always think of the beginning of the twentieth century as ushering in a “revolution” in the arts, which it certainly did (one need just recite a litany of names—Picasso, Pound, Stravinsky, Ives, etc.). Then they tend to skip to the 1960s, with its ferment of intermedia, improvisatory and performance-oriented arts, the irruption of popular (pop) culture into the canons and practice of High Art (*sic*), and the identification of much of the art of that period with social dissent (something not seen on such a scale since the 1930s). The 1950s are often seen as a “dry” decade—one of social conformity, the Joseph McCarthy persecutions, “cool” jazz, etc. But then again, the concepts of century and decade are artificial, unable to contain, limit, or define the authentic movement of history. Picasso’s *Demiselles d’Avignon* is from 1907, the *Sacre du Printemps* from 1913—so when did the twentieth century “begin?” One can ask that also of the 1960s. On a deeper examination it seems to me that the profound second twentieth-century revolution in the arts took place in the 1950s, not the sixties. The latter decade took people by surprise because (1) they were perhaps not paying attention and; (2) truly radical artistic innovation does not take place in the public spotlight anyway (despite what arts administrators and the corporate world would like us to believe). This fact once gave meaning to the terms avant-garde and underground, which have become so perverted and commodified nowadays as to have been rendered meaningless. The 1960s surprised people because the roots of radical artistic innovation had been planted so deeply in the 1950s, and in the early sixties along came a generation—not the “baby boomers,” but rather those born in the 1930s (a generation not ravaged by the Second World War)—ready to run with it. For my money, one of the greatest composers of that generation, and one who has held resolutely to that original radicalism (an avant-garde neither corrupted nor vitiated by the social-cultural forces of marketing or academic assimilation) is Malcolm Goldstein (born in 1936).

We are too quick to label things these days, labels that tend to simplify or too narrowly define that (people and art, in this case, music) which is in reality more complex and multi-faceted. So Malcolm has been labeled an “improviser” and a “composer-violinist” (or merely a violinist). What this CD once and for all shows is that he is indeed those things, but encompassing them all is the fact that, profoundly, he is a composer. People’s concept of him as a solo performer and violinist reflect more an economic and a musical-political reality than an artistic one. On the one hand it speaks of the ongoing failure of our contemporary music ensembles to program much of the most adventurous and cutting-edge music of our times (with only occasional exceptions)—settling instead for repertoire derived from academic familiarity and social networking. To this day, there are few things more gruesome and alienating than the majority of

“contemporary music” concerts. Malcolm’s peripatetic lifestyle results from necessity, and from the fact that in our part of the avant-garde, those composers do best who rely least on performers: that is, the solo improvisers or live-electronic composers whose musical self-sufficiency can be packed in a suitcase or two. Malcolm is that rare bird who started out in the academic world, and then *quit*—not because he was successful enough to do so, but because of conviction. This has involved far greater economic struggle and sacrifice, but the creative rewards are potentially greater: Living in the real world forces one to create music that matters—because your life (note: I did not say livelihood) depends on it. Given the dreary academic panorama offered by our musical institutions in this country, “Tune in, turn on, drop out,” remains pretty good advice (both for young composers or disgruntled professors aspiring to write “non-academic” music). And then, like Malcolm Goldstein: “stay tuned.”

Malcolm is really unique, because his violin is not merely his “axe,” as they say. More than any musician I know, his violin is like an extension of his physical self. This separates him from the legion of performers (“show horses in the concert ring,” Partch called them) with their dreary bag of tricks known as “extended techniques”—an idea that was perhaps still fresh in the late fifties and early sixties, but which has grown quite stale by now. Malcolm distances himself from this approach:

“Extended” performance technique then, for me, has to do with an embracing of all virtues/qualities. . . . For some people, though, this has become a technique to be achieved—the new virtuoso—“techniques” to be added onto the older techniques . . . this is not what is important to me.¹

I have known Malcolm’s violin playing for years—perhaps for some people, hearing him for the first time might be something of a shock. But once you enter his sound world, what he has called “a richness/multiplicity of one,”² you may start to think: Well, isn’t this perfectly natural, what a violin is supposed to sound like? Malcolm has achieved something more akin to Cowell’s and Cage’s “revolution of the piano”—instead of merely extending techniques, Malcolm’s approach opens up a whole new field of possibilities. I also hear an intimate affinity with folk fiddling, with its rougher articulation and more vigorous rhythmic drive. But Malcolm is not emulating folk music—by way of analogy listen to those great recordings of Charlie Ives banging out some of his piano music and singing (more like howling—wonderfully so). In both cases, the boundaries between art music and folk music are blurred: Instead, this is just the “real thing,” in a very honest and un-self-conscious way.

Ives and Goldstein share another fundamental source of musical and spiritual inspiration: namely, New England. Not the New England of Ivy League colleges (isn’t it a scandal that the various “Ives” Awards in American music have been hijacked by the Horatio Parkers?!), but rather the New England of Thoreau and Emerson, of Ives or Olson. Malcolm has earned his place among us (I am a Maine native myself)—and our New England, that of the long, harsh winters, exuberant summers; the New England of homespun democracy and town meetings (“Live free or die!”³—come to think of it, that might be good advice for composers!); the New England that Charles Ives so wistfully yet powerfully evokes in his music—that is Malcolm Goldstein’s New England now too. Malcolm also shares the classical Chinese poets’ rapture with the natural world, and how its many moods echo our own; and all his globetrotting travels ultimately lead him back to Vermont. Back in the late sixties Malcolm built his cabin in the woods by hand and from scratch—to this day I still wonder, how did a guy born into a Brooklyn family, who studied classical violin, end up like this? I insist: If you want to know the real Malcolm Goldstein, visit him at that cabin. He no

¹ Malcolm Goldstein, *Sounding the Full Circle* (self-published, 1988), p. 70.

² *op. cit.* p. 4.

³ The state motto of New Hampshire, with its unfortunate right-wing libertarian implications.

longer lives there year-round, but he is there every summer, cultivating his solitude and his garden (which I helped weed, the last time I was there, while he was “in town, doin’ errands”). At night in the darkness of his cabin, and the silence of the woods, when Malcolm brings out his violin and starts to play for you, you gain a deeper understanding of where his music comes from. I can say with some pride and a touch of humor recalling it, that Malcolm and I first met there at his cabin. It was a Livingston-Stanley kind of moment. Having been kicked out of my house (in Maine) for the weekend by my (soon to be ex-) wife, I had a car, but nowhere to go. This was in 1976, and Malcolm and I had already corresponded for several years. So I thought: “Well, I’ll go visit Malcolm.” I got directions to the small town and to the farmhouse where I was supposed to park the car and then I walked a quarter of a mile or so into the woods. There was his cabin, all by itself in a clearing. I knocked on the door; he opened it. “Goldstein, I presume? Garland, here.” The beginning of what’s now a thirty-one-year personal friendship.

As Malcolm points out, “At the core of Baroque music was the integration of composition and improvisation,”⁴ and Malcolm brings the perspective and focus of a seasoned performer to this undertaking. In this way his music represents a further evolution of that compositional-improvisational dialogue begun in the early 1950s in the aleatoric, “chance” pieces of composers like John Cage, Earle Brown, Christian Wolff, and Morton Feldman. These four composers have been lumped together under the perhaps too convenient label of the “New York School,” drawing a somewhat forced analogy to the Abstract Expressionist painters of the late 1940s and 1950s. Again the decade simplification blurs a more complex picture. If one wished to talk about New York in the 1940s, one would have to include Cage, of course; but also Lou Harrison. One could add Stefan Wolpe, and refer to those three as a “Black Mountain School,” similar to the famous movement in American poetry. Wolpe and Varèse are also a continuous presence in New York throughout this period. Beginning in the late fifties and all through the sixties, there are three other composers who share a similar affinity with the Cage-Varèse legacy as do Brown, Wolff, and Feldman: namely James Tenney, Philip Corner, and Malcolm Goldstein (there are others too—electronic pioneer Richard Maxfield and West Coast immigrant La Monte Young among them—but that’s beyond the scope of this article. I am just trying to point out how narrow labels are and how porous decade characterizations can be). It’s curious how a few years’ difference in birthdates can affect historical perception and how certain figures can fall into what one might call a “generational crack.” Such is the case with Tenney, Corner, and Goldstein, all born in the mid-1930s, whereas Brown and Feldman are from the mid-late 1920s (Wolff is a precocious exception to this—although of the same generation as Goldstein and the others, he had a fortunate encounter with Cage while still a teenager). Cage once expressed the feeling that if there was a New York School, it should have included Tenney, Corner, and Goldstein—but that there was resistance to this on the part of Feldman. The result was that Brown, Feldman, and Wolff became somewhat iconic figures in the American avant-garde—but mainly because they had an excellent publicist, namely Cage himself in his early books, which were widely read. (Malcolm has an interesting anecdote in that regard: “Cowell . . . loaned me Cage’s *Silence*, which I damaged & so bought a new one to return to him & still have his with his signed name.”⁵). They were already well-known “names” when I was a student in 1970, whereas Tenney, Corner, and Goldstein have remained in comparative—and undeserved—obscurity to this day. I was a student of Tenney’s, and early on he encouraged me to get in contact with Goldstein and Corner; and I will say that these three composers have had a far more profound influence on me than their three more famous counterparts.

So how does Goldstein extend/amplify this compositional, aleatoric/improvisational tradition? In several ways, I think. First of all, I don’t think the term “aleatoric” applies at all to Malcolm’s music—his music is not about chance so much as ensemble interaction. Musical results may vary with different performers and

⁴ Goldstein, op. cit. p. 42.

⁵ Goldstein, letter to the author, August 13, 2007.

performances, but the fundamental character of each piece remains stable and identifiable: that is, there is also a strong composed element to his music. This composed aspect has to do with his choice of predetermined materials (for example folk song, quotations from Ives, certain sounds or musical gestures, or prerecorded sounds on tape such as are used in his magnum opus work, *The Seasons: Vermont*). Malcolm also frequently maps out a fairly precise temporal sequence for his pieces in his scores and instructions, thereby creating a definite, albeit somewhat transparent, structure or scaffolding in which moment-to-moment details can vary. Most fundamentally to the expressive power of his music, he brings a focus on timbre (sound) and gesture/breath (phrase) that comes from his experience as a performer. In very few other musicians I know are the functions of composer and performer so inseparable as they are with Malcolm. He is constantly playing (making) music, whereas with many composers (myself included) our early performing skills have tended to atrophy with time. This direct connection between composition and performance gives Malcolm's improvisational style an energy and individuality far more focused than many of his peers, and which explains why his music (and he himself) is so challenging and demanding.

His early experiences playing with dancers (notably the Judson Dance Theater) taught Malcolm a grounding in his body and breath (similar to what some others have learned through meditation). Movement grounded in the body-center and breathing translates with Malcolm into musical phrasing and gesture and has also influenced his unique vocal style. It is interesting to note that a composer-performer who has developed a very similar focused intensity to his improvisational style, the pianist Cecil Taylor, has also in recent years incorporated elements of movement and vocalization in his performances. Malcolm's vocal style is not singing per se, but rather something closer to trance and shamanism (I hesitate to use that latter word, because it has become so cheapened and prostituted in certain New Age circles these days). His "singing" is more like cries and utterances that spring from this grounded body-center and from the transformative energy inherent in music as a vehicle or technique of the sacred. Sound has been a vehicle for ecstatic journeys for millennia—perhaps as far back as the days when men first painted animals on cave walls. Malcolm in his avant-garde explorations has reached back (forward) that far.

Let us look at some specifics of this style. It can be argued that the early aleatoric scores of Brown and Cage and others (such as Cardew's *Treatise*) are perhaps still too much "score" music. This in no way detracts from their originality—in fact, quite the contrary. These pieces' emphasis on the visual element of the printed page leaves too much up to chance and the performers—which is why it has taken decades to establish a knowledgeable performance tradition for these seminal pieces of the 1950s. I once mentioned to Cage in the mid-eighties how moved I was by a German performance of a multi-orchestra piece of his—that along with the characteristic Cage-ian quality of stasis, there was almost a Varèse-ian expressive intensity to the music. I think my comment pleased him; he simply replied "That's because for once I got a good performance." (At this point he was already in his seventies!) The flip side of Malcolm's emphasis on musical breath-gesture is an intense focus on listening. Listening to oneself, but most of all listening and responding/relating to the other performers. Of course this is at the heart of all good improvisation, whether it be the melodic/harmonic approach of the jazz tradition, or the "noise" approach of certain live/electronic groups. Malcolm brings to this a very special focus on timbre—he seeks, both in his individual violin playing and his ensemble pieces "*melodies of timbre/texture/articulation: a new sense of melody of sound, rather than only pitch at root of the structure.*"⁶ He seeks "to create a new music of sound/texture with pitch-noise of any and all complex overtone structures."⁷ In this context he dismisses the idea of "microtones" just as he distances himself from the concept of "extended techniques": "And so, for me, there are no microtones; this implies a hierarchy of set tones, which are the points of reference for the microtones. . . ."⁸

⁶ Goldstein, *Sounding the Full Circle*, p. 4.

⁷ op. cit. p. 37.

⁸ Ibid. p. 37.

Therefore Malcolm's approach to structure is quite open and multidimensional, even if a certain temporal sequence is often sketched out beforehand. He explains: "There are certain things I am interested in. One is that the piece, though it will be recognizable as that piece of music, instant by instant will have endless varieties in it."⁹ In other words, structure is constantly fluid, "back and forth, a dialogue between gesture and sound"¹⁰ where melody (pitch), timbre (articulation), rhythm (time), and harmonic/contrapuntal relationships (musical space and texture) are inseparable elements, part of a constantly changing and evolving dynamic, that from moment to moment determines the overall structure of the piece. Arnold Schoenberg, of course, talked about tone color melodies (*klangfarbenmelodien*), but Goldstein takes this much further, into the atomic age as it were, of particle and molecular perception. His approach owes as much to the 1960s theoretical work of his friend James Tenney (in *Meta ≠ Hodos*) as it does to the more conceptual "action" approach of Philip Corner.

Bringing these three together again, there is one other activity of theirs in the 1960s that sheds light on Malcolm's own musical development and his (their) contribution to American music in general, beyond their individual achievements as composers. In 1963 the three of them organized the first concert, an all-Ives program, of what came to be the Tone Roads series (the name, again, after Ives). This was one of the most significant concert series in the 1960s, in what came to be known in New York City as Downtown (though the initial concert occurred uptown at Columbia University). The series featured the music of such 1920s modernist composers as Ives, Ruggles, and Varèse and juxtaposed them with 1950s avant-garde figures like Cage and Feldman, and eventually included music of the Tone Roads organizers themselves. Not since Cowell in the 1930s had such an inclusive and unified vision of an ongoing American avant-garde been so clearly delineated. This was in an era—people may not realize today—when Charles Ives's music was just being rediscovered; Ruggles's *Sun-Treader* had still not received its American premiere (that would occur in 1969); and at Princeton Roger Sessions was forbidding all discussion of Varèse's work (this, from a statement I read once by Sessions's student John Harbison). Cage too throughout his entire life had to deal with being labeled a "charlatan" by the academic music establishment. Tenney once told me a story of how the conductor Arthur Weisberg—who was to record an influential all-Varèse album on Nonesuch in the early seventies—once came up to him after a Tone Roads performance of Varèse and said wistfully, "how he wished he could conduct this music"(!). If the so-called American Experimental Tradition is today recognized as this country's most original and creative contribution to twentieth-century classical music, we have Tenney, Corner, and Goldstein to thank as much as anyone. Malcolm commented in a recent letter:

We copied out parts by hand (Philip & I, Varèse's *Octandre*—couldn't afford to rent it!, or me Ives' *In Re Con Moto et al* all the parts since it wasn't published; or the corrections from John Kirkpatrick & me with his photostat of the original score of Ives' Second String Quartet; and on & on). So, *no* director; all 3 equal guys doing it (& no money for us!)¹¹

The 1960s marked the beginning of a lifetime commitment to Ives's music on Goldstein's part. Most recently he completed a new and authoritative edition of the Second String Quartet for the official Ives Edition. One of Malcolm's earliest pieces, *Majority-1964*, has a collage-like structure with much of the material based on or literally quoted from Ives's music. Philip Corner wrote that "the idea, and practice, of

⁹ Ibid. p. 83.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 86.

¹¹ Goldstein, letter to the author, August 13, 2007.

collage was really around in that time and a lot of people were playing around with it.”¹² With Malcolm, it is a technique he still uses to this day (for instance, the use of folk melodies in *Configurations in Darkness* from 1995); but back then it represented an early foray into structural simultaneity and fragmentation that would lead eventually into the full development of his personal musical style that I have earlier described. In 1965, after the death of Varèse, Goldstein composed in homage his *Sirens for Edgard Varèse* for organ clusters, piano, and four automobile horns, which used recognizable motifs from Varèse along with ensemble improvisation within a sketched-out temporal structure—all this a hallmark of Goldstein’s own music. *Sirens* was recently revived in Basel, Switzerland, in 2006 in the context of a Varèse festival organized by the Sacher Foundation in celebration of their acquisition of the Varèse papers. Both scores were published in SOUNDINGS Press’s *SOUNDINGS: Ives, Ruggles, Varèse* (1974, out of print)—a book that represents almost entirely the Tone Roads perspective on these three figures (in an era when the major academic journal ironically bore that title, *Perspectives*, despite the fact that not all perspectives were welcome).

Another aspect of Goldstein’s creative work is that he is one of the most politically committed composers around; and although his music rarely, if ever, contains any polemical or propagandistic elements, many of his titles and his thematic subject matter make clear political statements. This is a mark of personal integrity in the context of the neoconservative climate that has gripped our country since the Reagan years; this, the “great nation that deserves great art” (the horrific slogan of the NEA). Malcolm’s politics are not one of protest so much as affirmation and international solidarity. Pieces with titles like *Hardscrabble Songs: My feet is tired but my soul is rested* (dedicated to the late Rosa Parks and the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and sixties); his current multimedia project, *Fragments of the Wall*, relating to the Arab-Israeli conflict (I personally thank Malcolm for turning me on to Palestinian poets like Taha Muhammad Ali)—all these exemplify a belief that “art for art’s sake” is not enough and that artists too must be socially conscious; in fact, must be in the vanguard of such a dialogue (even stolid New Englander and insurance executive Charlie Ives threw himself into the political debate in his day!). The music on this CD reflects this sociopolitical outlook—the Bosnian-Herzegovinan folksongs (transcribed by Bartók) which are part of the source inspiration of *Configurations in Darkness*; and the references to Ishi, the California Indian, whose tragic personal story sheds light on the genocide which is the dark side of our nation’s history.

This brings up one other point—Goldstein’s relationship to violin playing outside of the Western classical and avant-garde traditions. The violin is one of the most widely distributed instruments in human culture, in a dazzling variety of physical forms and musical styles. Since the days of Henry Cowell’s *Music of the World’s Peoples* in the 1950s and poet Jerome Rothenberg’s (an old acquaintance of Malcolm’s since the early sixties New York days) and others’ work in ethnopoetics starting in the mid-late sixties, our generations have been more aware than any before us of this human cultural diversity (actually this goes back to the beginning of the twentieth century, with Bartók and the neo-primitivism of early Stravinsky—but classical music, being as conservative as it is, has been one of the last of the arts to catch up). I have already said that in his very physical and rhythmically-driven playing style, I see Malcolm as much a “folk fiddler” as a classical violinist, and I think his music comfortably exists on the continuum of world fiddle traditions. Over the years I’ve sent him tapes of numerous Mexican-Indian and mestizo violin musics—invariably he likes the more indigenous, rougher-sounding styles. An appreciation of all this rich violin heritage is part of the ongoing intellectual dialogue between us (I’ll let you in on a secret: If you want to irritate Malcolm, just start singing the praises of “vibrato!”).

Finally, anyone who has seen Malcolm’s writings and especially his scores cannot fail to be struck too by their calligraphic beauty. Even his essays are handwritten, in that simple, thick, black, elegant pen-and-ink

¹² Philip Corner, liner notes from the CD *On Tape from the Judson Years*, Alga Marghen 019.

style that is uniquely his own. His scores are often like Zen sketches, which visually help to project something of the spirit and mood of the music; and some are works of art in themselves. He has also written two books in which he has outlined his own artistic goals and methods, and at the same time has elaborated a very complete yet personal aesthetic—or better said, poetics—of improvisation, a major theoretical contribution to a subject which has often seemed to elude or eschew such theory. These two books, the exquisite *From Wheelock Mountain* (1975) and *Sounding the Full Circle* (1988), are essential documents for understanding Goldstein’s music and that musical revolution that emerged from the creative ferment of the 1950s and ’60s. Over four decades Malcolm has been a friend, collaborator, performer, composer, and teacher for me. Though the roads we have both traveled have been rough at times, I can assure you that his music, like his cabin and our friendship, is built to last.

Notes on the Individual Works

Configurations in Darkness (1995)

The basis of this piece, a structured improvisation-composition for unspecified instrumental ensemble, are several folksongs from Bosnia-Herzegovina meticulously transcribed by Bela Bartók. The work begins with a soloist (in this case, Goldstein) performing an improvisation (quite extended) on one of these melodies. What is interesting to me about these transcribed songs is that the ornamentation is so elaborate and pervasive and yet subtle, that it becomes as much “the music” as the core melody itself. In this way, I see an affinity with Malcolm’s approach to pitch, timbre, and rhythm; thus these songs are ideal vehicles for his improvisation and composition. (I think it could be interesting to create a piece where the core melody is eliminated altogether, and what remains is just the ornamentation—Baroque or folk music practice taken to an extreme). The opening solo by Goldstein is taken from a live solo performance at the Boulder (Colorado) Museum of Contemporary Art on August 24, 2002; and the ensemble recording with flute, bass clarinet, trombone, violin, and cello is from its world premiere at the TonArt series at the Kunstmuseum in Bern, Switzerland, on November 20, 1996. Goldstein describes the piece as “a kind of mobile landscape of sound . . . from which solo song evolves”¹³ and says that “It was written as a gesture of hope for peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina (and the many other war-torn lands of the world).”¹⁴

Ishi/timechangingspaces (1988)

This piece was created as a commission from West German Radio (WDR) and was put together there as part of their acoustic art/radio works series. The seeds of the piece are the voice and songs of Ishi, the sole survivor of his tribe, the Yahi, in California. He and a few others hid for years from the white men, until gradually all his companions died. Ishi created a sensation when one morning in 1911 he walked out into “civilization” and spent his last years more or less in the custody of anthropologists at the University of California, Berkeley. Ishi’s story became symbolic of the tragic human cost of Manifest Destiny (the westward expansion of the United States). Malcolm writes: “In 1914 Ishi recorded many songs on the wax cylinders of that time; a fragment of a culture’s sounding sustained in the voice of its single human remnant.”¹⁵ Ishi’s voice is carried into the present and future via Malcolm’s music, transmitted and preserved via electronic media. This work was created for radio broadcast—wouldn’t it be magical to hear *this* on the radio some night? In Ishi’s singing, we hear the archaic roots of Goldstein’s own vocalizings.

Ishi/“man waxati” Soundings (1988) is a solo improvisation that evolved from the previous radio piece. Goldstein refers to many of his solo improvisations as “soundings.” “man waxati” in the Yahi language means “spring,” like a source of water. Hence also the title of this CD, *a sounding of sources*—relating both to the cultural sources of Goldstein’s inspiration (folksongs of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the songs and voice

¹³ Goldstein, from program notes to *Configurations in Darkness* (no date).

¹⁴ op. cit.

¹⁵ Goldstein, from program notes to *Ishi/timechangingspaces* (no date).

of Ishi), and the idea of flowing water, a spring or “source,” as a rich poetic metaphor “fundamental in my thinking about improvisation.”¹⁶ The word “Ishi” also happens to mean “man” in the Yahi language, so there is a double meaning implied there. Goldstein: “The violin is retuned to relate to the vocal qualities and tonal structures expressed in the singing of Ishi.”¹⁷ This live performance was recorded in a cave in southern France—talk about “cathedral acoustics!” (and forget the cheap studio trick of “adding reverb!”). This is deep roots music—both literally and figuratively. This question of caves and acoustics brings up another point: Music is not just sound, it is also its reverberation in the air and acoustical space, its sounding. Here in this cave, Malcolm is truly sounding the sources.

—Peter Garland, Winnegance, Maine, August 2007

Despite having been shown the door innumerable times in regard to commissions, grants, awards, and other ephemerae of the American composer’s life, Peter Garland is the proud recipient of the 2006 Skowhegan (Maine) Quilters Association Door Prize, for which he is deeply grateful.

¹⁶ Goldstein, letter to the author, June 26, 2007.

¹⁷ Goldstein, from program notes to *Ishi* / “*man waxati*” *Soundings* (no date).

Composer's notes

From *Configurations in Darkness* (1995)

An improvisation on one of the Bosnia-Herzegovinan folksongs in the ensemble composition, as an overture to the complete music.

Configurations in Darkness (1995)

The music focuses on several folksongs from Bosnia-Herzegovina that are the basis for solo/melodic improvisations by the musicians within the structured improvisation-composition. There are other musical materials as well (various pitch-gamuts with harmonic implications, rhythmic structures and sound-texture qualities) that serve as a framework within which the musicians explore, through improvisation, so as to create settings for the solo song material.

It is a kind of mobile landscape of sound, created by the musicians in the moment of performance interaction, from which solo song evolves, “. . . discovered as something that re-emerges from where it lay buried in the memory, inaudible as a melody cut in a disc of flesh.” (Jean Genet, *Prisoner of Love*) Each performance is unique, as realized by the improvisation sources/talents and interplay of the various musicians.

The music was composed for the TonArt series, Switzerland, with the premiere at the Kunstmuseum Bern. It was written as a gesture of hope for peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina (and the many other war-torn lands of the world).

Ishi/timechangingspaces (1988)

The music was created at Studio Akustische Kunst of the West German Radio, Cologne.

Layers of time embedded in noise. The fleeting gesture of song (the human voice of Ishi in 1914); the resonance of a culture, our living, extended as a memory into future time. (Reflections on Rainer Maria Rilke's poem-cycle *Duino Elegies*)

Ishi was the sole surviving person of the Yahi, a Native American people of Northern California who were destroyed by force of white intrusion in the nineteenth century. (Reflections here on Thomas Merton's book *Ishi Means Man*) In 1914 Ishi recorded many songs on the wax cylinders of that time; a fragment of a culture's sounding sustained in the voice of its single human remnant: *Song for Woman's Dance; Foot Song Against Tiredness in Travel; Fish Song; Dancing Song of Dead People in the Other World; Flint Doctor's Song; Deer Song (not for dancing); etc...*

These songs are now transformed through time and into multitudes of spaces; from the resonance of human voice (the line of song embedded as scratches within the waxen cylinders, revolving), transformed in this radio/acoustic art work, through magnetic tape electronics and transmitted out into the new time/space of radio (the world of its future), heard always as now.

Ishi/"man waxati" Soundings (1988)

The structured improvisation/composition evolved out of a radio piece created at the West German Radio, Cologne (Studio Akustische Kunst), titled *Ishi/timechangingspaces*. The violin is retuned to relate to the vocal qualities and tonal structures expressed in the singing of Ishi, the last surviving person of the Yahi people, as recorded in Berkeley, California, in 1914. The retuned violin then serves as the basis for the unfolding of the music; both the pitches as well as the sound quality of the strings create the sound-structure for the music.

Silence Has Its Own Sound

By Klaus Schönig

Between 1984 and 1998 the composer and violinist Malcolm Goldstein created eight sound compositions for the Studio Acoustic Art of the WDR Cologne: *Marin's Song, illuminated; The Edges of Sound Within; Ishi/timechanging spaces; Topography of a Sound Mind; Between (two) Spaces* (Prix Ars Acustica 1994); *Windowhiskusounding*, an homage to John Cage; *Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule* (after Leopold Mozart); and *as it where, another*, in memoriam John Cage.

The titles of these compositions contain key words of Malcolm Goldstein's musical and sound-poetic aesthetic, which tends to be on the *edges of sound* and *between (two) spaces*; his *illuminated soundings* are tracings of a *topography of a sound mind* and are invitations to imaginary journeys of *changing times and spaces*. His nearness to the spirit of Tao and Zen relates his work and thinking to the cosmos of John Cage. His meditative compositions for radio and the exciting process of their realization by combining his live improvised performances with an artistic treatment of the electronic equipment in the studio has influenced the development of the *Ars Acustica* as a new genre of intermedia, with the fusion of sound, voice, and music as equal components.

Ishi/timechangingspaces, which he realized in 1988, is a living document and an impressive acoustic testimony to the art of the composer and performer. Ishi was the last survivor of the Native American tribe of the Yahi, which lived until the end of the nineteenth century north of the Bay Area, near San Francisco. In August 1911 Ishi came out of the woods because he was starving and all the other people of his tribe were dead. The anthropologists Alfred L. Kroeber and Thomas T. Waterman, who were engaged in recording the remnant Indian languages and cultures, took care of Ishi in the Museum of Art and Anthropology in Berkeley, California, where he lived until he died on March 25, 1916. In 1914 the first recordings of songs by Ishi were made on wax cylinders. Twelve of the forty songs and two of his discourses about nature, traveling, and earthquakes were later copied onto cassettes. The technical quality of these ancient recordings is poor, filled with noise and scratches.

It was just this poor quality, however, which fascinated Malcolm Goldstein because of its highly musical components and its documentary representation of past time and space. "The voice of Ishi covered up with these scratches and then coming through the ages: It's a fusion of past and future." These acoustic treasures are an analogy to the phenomenon of the palimpsests in visual art.

In the studio the original recordings were altered by various filtering processes, looped and superimposed in different layers into a multiphonic composition of a complex rhythmical and musical structure. The repetitive character corresponds to that of Native American songs and their understated but very powerful meaning. This electronically realized part of the composition was then accompanied by a live performance in the studio with Goldstein singing and playing his violin, simultaneously listening with headphones to the voice of Ishi. The extraordinary performance became an imaginary encounter between the two of them through multidimensional perspectives of time and space, stimulating the listener's imaginative space and offering various paths of access.

"Ishi has taught me something deeply about things in our human way and illuminated for me sensitivities within myself as well as in other people. It's a matter of what another culture teaches me. I am thankful to the sound of Ishi's voice. It taught me actually how to hear qualities in his voice to affect the tuning of my violin, so that the violin began to sound in new ways I'd never heard before. The music ripened within me and I played my song for him with him, in which we shared our music together—and possibly Ishi is somewhere enjoying it."

Klaus Schöning was the director of Studio Akustische Kunst/WDR Köln.

Malcolm Goldstein was born in 1936 in Brooklyn, New York, and received an M.A. in music composition from Columbia University in 1960. As a composer/violinist/improviser he has been active in the presentation of new music and dance since the early 1960s in New York City as a co-founder with James Tenney and Philip Corner of the Tone Roads Ensemble and as a participant in the Judson Dance Theater, the New York Festival of the Avant-Garde, and the Experimental Intermedia Foundation. Since then he has toured extensively throughout North America and Europe, with solo concerts as well as with new-music and dance ensembles. His “Soundings” improvisations have received international acclaim for having “reinvented violin playing,” extending the range of tonal/sound-texture possibilities of the instrument and revealing new dimensions of expressivity.

Since the mid-1960s he has integrated structured improvisation aspects into his compositions, exploring the rich sound-textures of new performance techniques within a variety of instrumental and vocal frameworks. Numerous ensembles such as Essential Music, Relâche, Musical Elements, The New Performance Group/Cornish Institute, L’Art pour l’art, Quatuor Bozzini, and Klangforum Wien have performed his music, as well as the Ensemble for New Music/Hessischer Rundfunk, Frankfurt, of which he was the director in the 1990s. His music has been performed at several New Music America festivals, Meet the Moderns/Brooklyn Philharmonic, Pro Musica Nova Bremen, Acustica International/WDR Cologne, Invention ’89 Berlin, Wittener Tage für Neue Kammermusik, De Ijsbreker Amsterdam, Maerz Musik Berlin, Köln Triennale, Sound Culture ’93 Tokyo, Neue Horizonte and TonArt, Bern, and in France at Musique Action and Festival Densités.

He has been awarded grants from the National Endowment for the Arts/Inter-Arts, the Massachusetts Council on the Arts, and the Canada Council for the Arts, as well as numerous commissions from Studio Akustische Kunst/WDR Cologne. In 1994 he received the Prix International award for his acoustic art/radio work *between (two) spaces*. He has written extensively on improvisation as in his book *Sounding the Full Circle*. His critical edition of Charles Ives’s Second String Quartet, which was commissioned by The Charles Ives Society, is now being prepared for publication.

Composer/trombonist **Radu Malfatti** was born in Innsbruck, Austria. Since the 1970s he has performed with most of the outstanding improvisers of the European scene as a member of such ensembles as the London Jazz Composers Orchestra, Grubben Klang Orchester, and King Übü Orchester, as well as his own Radu Malfatti Ohrkiste, and has been heard at most of the major festivals in Europe. After more than thirty years of improvised music he now focuses on his own music composition work and is a member of the composer’s group Wandelweiser. He lives and works in Vienna. For further information, go to <http://www.efi.group.shef.ac.uk/mmalfatt.html>.

Composer/improviser **Philippe Micol** (clarinet, bass clarinet, soprano and tenor saxophones) currently resides in Duisburg, Germany. Classically trained, his way led him through the new music, experimental, and jazz traditions to get involved with improvised music. In 1982 he founded WIM (Werkstatt für Improvisierte Musik) in Bern. His main compositional works are the “Improvisationsstudien.” He has collaborated with U.P. Schneider, Malcolm Goldstein, Jim Staley, Michael Lytle, Fred Lonberg-Holm, Markus Eichenberger, Ikue Mori, Erhard Hirt, Thomas Lehn, Martin Theurer, Melvin Poore, Paul Lytton, Uwe Oberg, and others. Since 1994 he has been working with video-artist Ruth Bamberg. Upcoming projects include a duo with Claus van Bebber and a Quintet focused on the music of Ornette Coleman. He has several recordings on Unit Records and NurNichtNur. For further information, go to www.nurnichtnur.de/frameset_nav_mailorder.htm.

Philippe Racine studied the flute in Basel and Paris. He has established a reputation as a brilliant and innovative flutist among music lovers of the traditional classical repertoire, and is also an advocate of contemporary music (including improvisation and jazz). His talent and versatility are reflected by the musicians with whom he has worked: Ernesto Molinari, Heinz Holliger, Jürg Wyttenbach, Thomas Demenga, Andràs Schiff, Bruno Canino, Brigitte Meyer, and others.

Mr. Racine performs as a soloist and chamber musician throughout Europe, Canada, North and Latin America, and the Middle East. He has also devoted himself to writing music, and his compositions have received public and critical acclaim. His violin concerto *Promenade* had its successful premiere at the Lucerne Festival with French violinist Raphaël Oleg in September 2001. Philippe Racine lives in Paris and teaches at the Musikhochschule Zurich. He has appeared on numerous recordings.

Beat Schneider is a violoncellist living in Basel, Switzerland. He is a member of Ensemble Phoenix and is active in the performance of new music.

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All compositions published by the composer (BMI).

Configurations in Darkness

Recorded by Russ Schissker

Produced by Giotto Media and Malcolm Goldstein

Recorded on August 24, 2002, at the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, Colorado.

Configurations in Darkness

Recording engineer: Andy Mettler

Produced by Thomas Adank, TonArt concerts/DRS

Recorded on November 20, 1996, at the Kunstmuseum Bern, Switzerland.

A production of Swiss Radio DRS

Ishi/timechangingspaces

Recording engineer: Benedikt Bitzenhofer

Producer: Klaus Schoening, Studio Akustische Kunst, Westdeutscher Rundfunk Köln, broadcast in 1988

Ishi/"man waxati" Soundings

Recorded by Thierry Collins

Recording Assistant: Isabelle Branchaud

Produced by Thierry Collins/espace ouvert

Recorded on May 4, 2005 in the Lombrives caves, Ussat-les Bains, France.

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Francis Goelet (1926-1998), Chairman

1. *Configurations in Darkness* (1995) 10:11
Malcolm Goldstein, solo violin

2. *Configurations in Darkness* (1995) 26:38
Malcolm Goldstein, violin; Radu Malfatti, trombone; Philippe Micol, bass clarinet; Philippe Racine, flute;
Beat Schneider, violoncello
(a production of Swiss Radio DRS)

3. *Ishi/timechangingspaces* (1988) 20:13
Acoustic art/radio work
(produced by Westdeutscher Rundfunk Köln, broadcast in 1988)

4. *Ishi/"man waxati" Soundings* (1988) 13:16
Malcolm Goldstein, solo violin, voice

TT: 70:25

Ishi/timechangingspaces P 1988 WDR Köln

Configurations in Darkness P 1996 Schweizer Radio DRS

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