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Welcome, Alex Shapiro [Logout]

MyAuditions Member Post: August 01, 2006 07:19 AM. The August 2006 featured artist of the month is Alex Shapiro. Alex Shapiro is a composer of acoustic and electro-acoustic chamber music.

Alex Shapiro Platinum Member Post: August 02, 2006 04:56 AM. Hi everyone, I'm delighted to be here (at least...uh, virtually) and am happy to engage in any discussions or answer any questions you might have.

Cygnus Platinum Member Post: August 02, 2006 11:58 AM. Hi Alex, I have heard your stuff on mspace and liked it very much. Questions, eh? Sure, I got questions.

Alex Shapiro Regular Member Post: August 02, 2006 05:19 PM. Hi Cygnus, Thanks for your kind words. Starting at the post: Electro-acoustic means I'm integrating both electronics and live musicians within a piece. The blend of the sonorities and perhaps more importantly, the balance between the mechanical and the human, fascinates me.

Cygnus Platinum Member Post: August 03, 2006 12:03 PM. Thanks for the replies Alex, the Winogradsky site is really helpful. I have a CD coming out in a few weeks and I am just exploring the financial stuff. A few more questions:

Alex Shapiro Regular Member Post: August 03, 2006 03:33 PM. Hi Cygnus, Congrats on your upcoming CD. In light of your profile, I send you best wishes for mushrooming success with the disc.

DHP Heavyweight Member Post: August 04, 2006 03:58 AM. Hi Cygnus, Its great to have you here welcome! I have a few questions: 1) What is the hardest orchestral instrument to duplicate electronically? why?

Alex Shapiro Regular Member Post: August 04, 2006 05:43 AM. Hi DHP, No instrument can be duplicated electronically, and that's why I use live players. But I occasionally make high quality mock-ups of my new chamber works in order to help the ensemble absorb the gist of the music before the first rehearsal.

Cygnus Platinum Member Post: August 04, 2006 10:33 AM. quote: I would compose while they would decompose. An old joke but a good one.

Alex Shapiro Regular Member Post: August 04, 2006 01:26 PM. Ok, if you're gonna play sonic hard ball, sure: en guard! Many of us can effectively fool the most discerning ears with a 'passage' made from samples. I agree. I have been there, done that, countless times myself.

Cygnus Platinum Member Post: August 04, 2006 01:48 PM. quote: BUT, my dear Swan o' th' Northern Cross (I'm an amateur astronomer), I stand by the simplicity of my statement: no live instrument can be duplicated electronically.

Alex Shapiro Regular Member Post: August 05, 2006 12:53 AM. "...They sat a while in silence Then they turned at last to me we will call you cygnus, The God of balance you shall be..." You've asked me some excellent questions, and I enjoyed reading your dialogue with Daniel Ott from a few months ago.

DHP Heavyweight Member Post: August 05, 2006 03:14 AM. ooooooooooohk. So how many horn concerti have you written? Posts: 57 | Registered: September 05, 2005

Alex Shapiro Regular Member Post: August 05, 2006 03:26 AM. No horn concerti yet. Not a one. Are you a hornist, DHP? Posts: 24 | Location: Malibu, California | Registered: August 02, 2006

Cygnus Platinum Member Post: August 05, 2006 09:21 AM. quote: Do you split your time between being a violinist, an arranger and a composer? What lurks on your CD, beyond that shiny reflective layer? I'm the next Tomita. My big influences were Tomita and Mike Oldfield, I am seriously into overdubbing to the point of insanity.

Alex Shapiro Regular Member Post: August 05, 2006 04:32 PM. Maybe listened users will say that Tomita was just an early Cygnus :-). Woof! I really love getting older-- being in my forties has been a blast because I feel closer to knowing what it is I don't know, as opposed to constantly wondering what it is I don't know :-).

Kimberly Veteran Member Post: August 05, 2006 07:24 PM. Done any work with the harp??? Posts: 42 | Registered: April 18, 2004

Alex Shapiro Regular Member Post: August 05, 2006 07:47 PM. Hi Kimberly, Darn, I'm striking out once again: not much hard work in my catalog, except for a little Intermezze that can be for solo harp, or hard accompanying a soloist (clarinet and violin are two currently available harmonies, but it's a very simple, lyrical piece that would be well suited for almost anything except kazoo).

DHP Heavyweight Member Post: August 06, 2006 02:07 AM. Greater conjurer of ballet music? Stravinsky or Tchaikovsky? Posts: 57 | Registered: September 05, 2005

Alex Shapiro Regular Member Post: August 06, 2006 06:34 AM. Incomparable! Both brilliant! I've never been a fan of choosing between A and B and composer Y, especially if they lived in different times. How does one quantify beauty and expressiveness? Posts: 24 | Location: Malibu, California | Registered: August 02, 2006

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Kimberly
Veteran Member

Posted August 06, 2006 04:52 PM [Hide Post](#)

Reason why I asked was that working with the electro-acoustic harp sounds like it would be right up your alley. Talk about an instrument with a capacity for new sounds! It is in my long range plans to get one for myself to play and compose for, but that will probably be a couple of years.

Posts: 42 | Registered: April 18, 2004

Alex Shapiro
Regular Member

Posted August 07, 2006 01:03 AM [Hide Post](#)

I love electro-acoustic harp! An amazing instrument. I bet it would be heaven for you as a player to compose new works for it.

<http://www.alexshapiro.org>

Posts: 24 | Location: Malibu, California | Registered: August 02, 2006

DHP
Heavyweight Member

Posted August 07, 2006 04:33 AM [Hide Post](#)

Where is the oddest place that you had a compositional epiphany?

Thanks
DHP
\@()

Posts: 57 | Registered: September 05, 2005

Alex Shapiro
Regular Member

Posted August 07, 2006 04:23 PM [Hide Post](#)

What an interesting question! I've always lived on or very near the ocean, and water has consistently inspired my muses. However three opposite places immediately come to mind: music I wrote as I crossed about 500 miles of Mongolia's Gobi desert in a dilapidated school bus with six other equally crazy voyagers; a couple of years later, ideas that sprang up when I crossed the Sinai desert from Egypt heading into Israel, and a little more recently, an entire piece that welled up in my mind as I drove from California to Arizona and back again, across the Mojave. I don't necessarily think that deserts are odd places, but it's interesting to me that something about these open, arid expanses triggers expression. I don't think I could live full time in the desert, but I respond very deeply to it every time I'm in one.

<http://www.alexshapiro.org>

Posts: 24 | Location: Malibu, California | Registered: August 02, 2006

doublebass
Regular Member

Posted August 08, 2006 04:43 PM [Hide Post](#)

I noticed that you are writing a work for double bass and electronics. Have you found any unique challenges for this combination?

Posts: 26 | Location: Battlestar Galactica | Registered: February 23, 2006

Alex Shapiro
Regular Member

Posted August 08, 2006 05:24 PM [Hide Post](#)

There are [at least] two approaches I give thought to-- again, regarding the concept of frequencies, as I ranted about above :-)

Since the bass has an amazing range, I think in terms of offsetting it so that it can always be heard. Even if it's in its low end and I choose to surround it with low-end sounds, I can mix the track in a way where it pokes through enough to retain its voice. I had a similar challenge when I produced "Deep," for electronics and contrabassoon, linked earlier in this thread; that piece, as the title suggests, exploits the lowest octave of the instrument and the track is by and large very, very low as well, save for some high dingy sounds (there's a very technical term). The combination results in the listener being enveloped by soundwaves. Ooooh.

Second, since bass doesn't have as easy a time "cutting through" as a contra, I'm suggesting modest amplification (and reverb) for live performance of the piece. I've found that writing these works for electronics and soloist is very much like composing an acoustic concerto with orchestra, in that I need to create space for the soloist, in all directions, otherwise I'll end up with mush, or something boring to the ears. I've started another piece for santur, a Persian zither-like instrument which, in contrast, has a lot of mid-to-high frequencies and a decisive, plucked sound. So I'm envisioning ways to make the accompanying track compelling but in this case, not too abrasive. Every instrument is a new experiment and that's what makes all of this so much fun.

Say, in your profile I read that you used to play with Orquesta Filarmonica de GC-SPAIN-- a piece of mine was just beautifully recorded this year by a trumpet player in that orchestra who has a trio. Do you happen to know Ismael Betancor Almeida? We've never met, but like a lot of my work these days, we've been in touch via the internet. I was very impressed with the recording he sent me.

<http://www.alexshapiro.org>

Posts: 24 | Location: Malibu, California | Registered: August 02, 2006

CR
New Member

Posted August 10, 2006 02:44 PM [Hide Post](#)

Do you think you write better when you're happy or unhappy? And why do you think "serious" music is called that, and is that a good thing?

Do you think "serious pop music" would be popular?

Posts: 1 | Registered: August 10, 2006

Alex Shapiro
Regular Member

Posted August 11, 2006 01:34 AM [Hide Post](#)

Great questions. First, I think the muses sprout from such a deep place inside, that my state of mind or mood seems to be irrelevant once I sit down to compose. The piece dictates to some degree what it will be, and there have been countless times when I write very dark, angst-filled music when my life is going wonderfully, and also times when things around me are bleak and yet out comes something comedic or sweet. As for whether I write better under one emotional circumstance or the other, I'd say that state of mind isn't so much the issue as is the ability to listen very carefully to what I'm hearing in my head and then honestly translate that. I think my best work comes from being very open with my musical choices, regardless of what mood I'm in.

The unfortunate moniker "serious music" has been the worst PR disaster for music imaginable. Blech! I'm hardly alone in this thinking; words are powerful and can predetermine how people will experience something. How could someone possibly expect to smile and have a good time listening to serious music? One member here at My Auditions, Drew McManus, cares a lot about this subject and has begun a tradition on his blog "Adaptistration" whereby he elicits essays from music professionals about how best to introduce non-musicians to the orchestra. I was delighted to be asked to contribute a little something on the topic this spring:

<http://tinyurl.com/mxna>

As for serious pop music, well, at least its saving grace is the word "pop!"

<http://www.alexshapiro.org>

Posts: 24 | Location: Malibu, California | Registered: August 02, 2006

DHP
Heavyweight Member

Posted August 11, 2006 11:11 AM [Hide Post](#)

who gets a 10 on the dry meter?

Richard Strauss conducting his own works or a lecture on music by Adorno?

Posts: 57 | Registered: September 05, 2005

Alex Shapiro
Regular Member

Posted August 11, 2006 04:08 PM [Hide Post](#)

Ha! Very funny. Well, I'll take someone making music over someone talking about it, any day. So I'll give T. Adorno today's prize for dryness.

<http://www.alexshapiro.org>

Posts: 24 | Location: Malibu, California | Registered: August 02, 2006

Cygnus
Platinum Member

Posted August 11, 2006 04:29 PM [Hide Post](#)

Let's get back to the Tchaikovsky vs. Stravinsky controversy. Who do you think would win, mano e mano in the boxing ring? My money is on ol' Pete, I bet he would probably fight dirty and hit below the belt. Surely I cant be the only one who thinks of stuff like this?

Posts: 425 | Location: Midian | Registered: June 27, 2005

Alex Shapiro
Regular Member

Posted August 11, 2006 04:48 PM [Hide Post](#)

Absolutely, my money would be on Petie T. After all, he was used to going below the belt...

<http://www.alexshapiro.org>

Posts: 24 | Location: Malibu, California | Registered: August 02, 2006

Alex Shapiro
Regular Member

Posted August 11, 2006 09:57 PM [Hide Post](#)

Just a note to everyone that I'll be traveling from tonight through Wed. night, and my internet access will be spotty (not quite the Alex Unplugged Tour, but almost). So if I don't hold up my end of the conversation quite as quickly as I do while I'm here in the studio (someone should do a study on composers' favorite procrastination techniques), you'll know why.

Alex

<http://www.alexshapiro.org>

Posts: 24 | Location: Malibu, California | Registered: August 02, 2006

DHP
Heavyweight Member

Posted August 12, 2006 01:36 AM [Hide Post](#)

Even if Igor brought his posse, is there a man in the ballet russe who could throw a punch? Probably not. Of course Pete would only be fighting one handed as the other would be holding his head up!

How about a tag team match...mighty 5 vs Les Six?

Posts: 57 | Registered: September 05, 2005

Alex Shapiro
Regular Member

Posted August 17, 2006 03:49 PM [Hide Post](#)

Greetings all,

I'm back in the saddle (although my luggage is not-- I may have the distinction of being the only person flying this weekend whose bag was lost on the way out of L.A. as well as on the return flight back, an impressive 0-for-2 record), and am happy to continue any conversations.

Cheers,
Alex

<http://www.alexshapiro.org>

Posts: 24 | Location: Malibu, California | Registered: August 02, 2006

Alex Shapiro
Regular Member

Posted August 18, 2006 04:37 PM [Hide Post](#)

Also...

It occurs to me that an online interview that just came out today on Tokafi.com could be interesting fodder for conversation:

<http://tinyurl.com/emtx>

Posts: 24 | Location: Malibu, California | Registered: August 02, 2006

Cygnus
Platinum Member

Posted August 18, 2006 06:45 PM [Hide Post](#)

Nice interview Alex.

Two questions were really hard to answer, in fact you really didnt answer one :

True or false: People need to be educated about music, before they can really appreciate it.

True or false: The cultural subsidies doled out by governments are being sent to the wrong kind of people and institutions.

As for the first, I would perhaps disagree. I wouldnt expect my nonmusic friends to appreciate my geek music without some knowledge of music and form. Likewise, I wouldnt expect Joe Shmoe to appreciate The Bartok Concerto without knowledge. Comments?

As to the second, a lot of goofy stuff gets grants. I dont wanna come off as Jesse Helms, but I could think of quite a few NEA funded projects that were garbage, whilst the symphony oldskool stuff got a pittance of what they should get.

Posts: 425 | Location: Midian | Registered: June 27, 2005

Alex Shapiro
Regular Member

Posted August 18, 2006 09:55 PM [Hide Post](#)

Hi Cygnus,

Glad you liked the interview; I thought it was one of my more succinct and direct ones, and was happy to be asked those questions.

Ok, so we probably differ on our answers to those two questions, above. With all respect to you, I stand by my initial response to the first one: If a piece of mine isn't emotionally connecting with a non-musician, then it's very possible that I didn't compose a successful piece. Like you, I don't "expect" people to respond to my music, but I do think it's very possible for them to without prior "inside information." I really believe that if music of any style is well written-- including "high-brow academic" stuff-- then it comes across in a visceral manner. No education or preparation necessary. It reaches us on a mammalian level; our ears and hearts hear and feel something. Feeling is, to me, what being a composer is all about. Although praise is always wonderful, I am even more delighted when I receive heart-felt accolades from non-musicians than I am when I get the knowing approval of my educated colleagues. I don't want to be validated for doing something intelligently and well, I want to be appreciated for touching someone emotionally. Obviously the two abilities are often intertwined, but the most treasured one to me is the latter.

As for funding, I think that if the government is going to fund any art whatsoever (and there are many art lovers who can make a compelling argument against such funding sources), then there will always be many projects that people don't feel are worthy of such support. Without a doubt, there's a lot of questionable art out there that's been funded with our tax dollars (I have a continuing rant going about 98 percent of the public art I see these days here on the west coast). But that's really what the making of art is all about: subjectivity of taste, and risk. Lots of creators take lots of chances and lots of time there's a lot of crap. The odds demand this. But artists keep making the stuff, and people keep checking it out, because every now and then--sometimes when we least expect it-- there's a gem. There's no way to discover that gem without traipsing through a lot of mud.

Here's an essay I wrote last year on the subject:

<http://www.alexshapiro.org/ASEssay3.html#Dustbuster>

Posts: 24 | Location: Malibu, California | Registered: August 02, 2006

Cygnus
Platinum Member

Posted August 20, 2006 02:02 AM [Hide Post](#)

Excellent essay. In addition to fine music skills you have excellent writing skills, something many composers have.

quote:

Ok, so we probably differ on our answers to those two questions, above. With all respect to you, I stand by my initial response to the first one: If a piece of mine isn't emotionally connecting with a non-musician, then it's very possible that I didn't compose a successful piece.

How bout for other composers?

I remember playing a CD of Stravinsky for some non-music friends. One got very agitated and begged me to turn it off, so I did and put on Eight Songs for a mad King by Peter Maxwell Davies. Maybe I am wrong, but I dont see how the average Joe can appreciate or understand music like this without a substantial amount of education.

Personally, nothing would thrill me more than writing a song like Embraceable You or She's Leaving Home. I just can't do it. I can mix 100 tracks of audio without sweating but a 3 minute song is outta my league. Have you had any success with "songwriting"?

Posts: 425 | Location: Midian | Registered: June 27, 2005

Alex Shapiro
Regular Member

Posted August 20, 2006 04:38 AM [Hide Post](#)

Hi Cygnus,

Ha! Now I know how you like to treat your friends-- torture them! Naw, jus' kiddin'-- I adore "Eight Songs for a Mad King," but I think that like most dramatic, operatic pieces, it's far better and more deeply affecting when experienced live than it is when those hysterical rants are heard, disembodied, on CD.

But still, just to use your [purposely extreme] example to prove my point: I think that a non-musician listening to that Davies music would come away with exactly what the composer was trying to communicate! Between the title and the musical content, the intense, raw sentiment and emotion of the piece comes across quite obviously, no Ph.D required.

I've written and produced quite a number of pop tunes, including several new ones this summer in the midst of all my... uh... serious (!!!) music composing. Whether I've had success with any of them is questionable: a few have been used in low budget movies over the years, but I haven't yet tried to get anything on the radio or into a wider market (this may change shortly with the new batch; I'm gettin' bold in my old age).

With the handful of private victims... uh, I mean, students I've enjoyed over time, when one comes in-- still wet behind the musical ears, so to speak-- showing off a piece that strives for some sort of "academic" impressiveness that falls short due to the simple reality of inexperience, here's what I tell them: your assignment is to come back at the next lesson with a melody that will make me cry. I think that regardless of the style which a composer will ultimately choose as their own voice, having the tools available to be able to express themselves broadly or-- wow-- maybe get hired for a good paying gig in pop music, jingles, musical theater, or cabaret-- is extremely helpful. Groundbreaking visual artists like Pablo Picasso or Mark Rothko were exceedingly talented traditional sketch artists long before they delved into their new and unique territory. One skill doesn't negate the other.

I bet you could write a pop tune if you put your mind to it, and I would also bet that it might end up being a really interesting one, given your wider harmonic background.... try it sometime! It's a lot of fun, and who knows? Maybe you'll create a hit that can subsidize your continuing bad habit of creating non-pop music

<http://www.alexshapiro.org>

Posts: 24 | Location: Malibu, California | Registered: August 02, 2006

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Cygnus
Platinum Member



 Posted August 20, 2006 10:23 AM

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quote:

I've written and produced quite a number of pop tunes, including several new ones this summer in the midst of all my... uh... serious (!!!) music composing. Whether I've had success with any of them is questionable: a few have been used in low budget movies over the years, but I haven't yet tried to get anything on the radio or into a wider market (this may change shortly with the new batch; I'm gettin' bold in my old age).

This brings up another question:

Do you actually want that kind of success? I hear the term "selling out" all the time, I think it's hogwash. MacCartney once said something about this to the extent of "Hey John, let's write another swimming pool"

I would love to write the big K-Fed single, be musical director for Paris Hilton, be Larry Fortensky's librettist or Ashlee Simpson's air-violinist I don't think I can, much to my amusement. I sit down on the keyboard and that stuff just doesn't come out of me. Can a Ned Rorem or Corigliano write a Paul Simon song? Is it all technique?

BTW, I will send you a message on Myspace to hear my geek arrangements.



Posts: **425** | Location: **Midian** | Registered: **June 27, 2005**



Alex Shapiro
Regular Member



 Posted August 21, 2006 04:36 AM

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I enjoyed your MySpace clips! Your CD may very well do for these composers what Emerson, Lake and Palmer did for Mussorgsky, which would be fabulous. New approaches to get new audiences excited. Congrats! Your playing on the Suite is especially great.

Of course I'd love to see my pop songs reach the top of the charts and make me oodles of money. How else can I assist charities, set up foundations, and do what I can to improve the quality of other people's lives? That's a better incentive than a swimming pool.... :-)

<http://www.alexshapiro.org>

Posts: **24** | Location: **Malibu, California** | Registered: **August 02, 2006**



thecap
New Member

 Posted August 27, 2006 12:10 AM

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Hi, Miss Shapiro. If anything on this post looks weird, I'm new to this part of the site. You seem to write for a variety of instruments—how about percussion? Oh—you are knock-dead gorgeous.

Posts: **4** | Registered: **August 26, 2006**



Alex Shapiro
Regular Member



 Posted August 27, 2006 01:30 AM

[Hide Post](#)

Aren't you kind! Well, I haven't killed anyone yet, so no need for worry :-)

One of my favorite pieces in my catalog is for piano and two percussionists, titled "At the Abyss":

<http://www.alexshapiro.org/AttheAbysspg1.html>

One player is on marimba and vibes and the other is on a rash of metal percussion—crotales, gongs, tam tam, suspended cymbals, cowbells.... one of the most fun things was having the opening main melody of the second movement played on bowed crotales. And the mallets are in the lead throughout the jazz-oriented third movement. You can hear clips on the web link.

I love percussion and am always looking for ways to use more of it. Last month a comedic piece that I recorded which was originally for violin and harpsichord, just begged for percussion from, in this case, all parts of the world. So I spent a couple of days in the studio with a great player here in L.A. and we laid down 21 tracks of percussion that I've mixed with the original duet, and it sounds very cool! If it were done live with the violin/harpsichord duo, it could be performed with two players very easily. I'm excited to get it out there. I'd post a clip, but I haven't done the final mix yet.

<http://www.alexshapiro.org>

Posts: **24** | Location: **Malibu, California** | Registered: **August 02, 2006**



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