



Orchestral Manuever

BY SASHA ANAWALT

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Composite by Kamil Vojnar
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I am thinking of Leonard Bernstein’s back and the musculature of his wing span, visible even through the cloth of his jacket. He was a force of nature, a modern dancer making fantastic pictorial images that in every sense seemed to me to be the music. The way some conductors move is fascinating. Esa-Pekka Salonen recently lead the L.A. Philharmonic through a Filmharmonic project that he and Peter Sellars conceived. It was a live performance of selected music by Sibelius, synchronized with a presentation of Victor Seastrom’s classic silent film

The Wind

. Salonen is one of the most beautiful dancers going. He is Apollo, white marble, purity and grace. When he extends his hands, think "Ellsworth Kelly lily." Simple line, astonishingly, breathtakingly, true.

Salonen was the perfect match for Lillian Gish, the star of *The Wind*, whose large, expectant eyes observe a thousand cruel and unjust things, and still maintain their innocence. Her face and Salonen’s hands are of the same

transcendent stuff. Salonen stood on the podium beneath her moving image projected onto a screen suspended above the orchestra at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. Their lithe bodies seemed attuned. Of course, it's a fiction – Gish's performance happened 70 years ago. But through Salonen and his mysterious dance of music, one could suspend disbelief. His, and Sellars', mastery is to have recognized the possibility for fusion, that music, film, and acting together can sometimes make one see what one ordinarily hears, and hear what one usually sees. *The Wind* project was not a total success, but on the level of dance – incidental though it was – it was bliss.

Unlike Bernstein or Salonen, whose dance is an unintentional byproduct of conducting, Yoshiko Chuma is committed to the conscious act of making music dance. She is by trade a choreographer and dancer, one whose reputation extends around the world, but she is mainly a fixture of New York's downtown scene. She presented her *Unfinished Symphony* for one night only at the Japan America Theater on November 7. For the piece's first five minutes or so, she conducted in the traditional sense of Bernstein and Salonen, after which she wreaked havoc with the seven members of her Crash Orchestra and the four members from Tokyo's Aska String Project.

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The string musicians wielded their bows and fought each other like fencers on a rampage; Robert Egan lay down and hid beneath his prone cello; the two pianists – Nicky Paraiso and Simon Deacon – engaged in an aggressive game of piano relay, one shoving the other off the piano bench and then sitting down and continuing to play the same piece of music, seamlessly, without any evidence that the music had changed hands, before he himself was shoved off and the game repeated. Periodically, the lights blacked-out except for a sharp beam on Paraiso's head. The action stopped and he sang out, "Why?"

Why, indeed. *Unfinished Symphony* lacks serious underpinning. But its charm is that you never know what is going to happen next. Drama infringes on the action, but not with enough force to hear an actual story trying to be told. The purpose of the piece is to have fun and revel in Chuma's keen sense of possibility and exploration. Although Chuma surrenders *Unfinished Symphony*

possibility and exploration. Although Oguri suffers *Cryogenic Symphony* to her dancers and musicians, she never completely disappears. She is a maniacal presence, a scamp and troublemaker. And she accomplishes something with movement I have never seen before. I swear there were times when one could see the back and the front of her at the same time. She flipped sides, imperceptibly, and so fast: front-back, back-front, with no time lapse in between. The feat was as absurd as it was amazing. It surely made the music dance.

Whenever Oguri performs, it is an event. Even if the house isn't big, you know something special is on stage. He's there. It's possible to imagine that he has a hundred antennae ranging over his body, picking up airwaves that transmit signals about how and when he is to move. He's as present as a performer gets, which is why, even though his actions are slow-paced, we are patient. And it is also why, when he titles a piece with an indication that he's going to cover a century, one recognizes the challenge involved.

Oguri presented *thestreamofconsciousness (a century)* at Highways Performance Space from November 5 to 9, as part of the "Treasure in the House" series, which was established seven years ago to show work by Asian/Pacific-American artists, and which is curated by Dan Kwong. The piece unfolds without any apparent logic. Oguri enters in baggy pants, suspenders and a white shirt. His face is painted white, except around his eyes. This sometimes makes his head look like a skull, which is scary, but it also gives him the flexibility to appear comical. Such contradictions are the measure of the man. His music choices, too, take him through history and over the globe, from John Zorn's shattering-glass score, *Kristallnacht*, which conjures the Holocaust, to the rigorous, dull chanting of Kiowa horse-stealing songs. But it's also in the way Oguri handles the transitions, how his body breaks apart and he falls to the ground, the shin of one leg making an awful, dead clunk. And then he's up again, only to fall once more. The clunk, the pain of it, makes you think of people killed – millions of war dead. But there's another side, too, of course, and it never ceases to amaze me how funny Oguri can be. A Japanese Charlie Chaplin, he bounces around the room spreading a little hope.

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technique depressing – because it all seems to be about decay. Likewise, it’s understandable why others are almost fanatical about him. But I don’t know how anyone can deny him the vast skill he possesses to isolate his movements, to make clear works composed of complex juxtapositions and create unforgettable images. Solo, Oguri never bores.

Appearing on the same program were two works by a dynamic, athletic vixen, Li Chiao-Ping. *Fin de Siècle, Parts I and II*, for her company of four, revealed a sharp mind at work, willing to be reckless in order to find satisfaction and make a dance that ends up, finally, smooth-edged. Her solo, *Re:Joyce*, told a touching tale about her mother’s and sister’s difficult lives, but it seemed too pat to really cry over. Chiao-Ping is better off moving her dancers around. They were Emily Blacik, Walter Dundervill, Valerie Hollnagel and Yunchen Liu.



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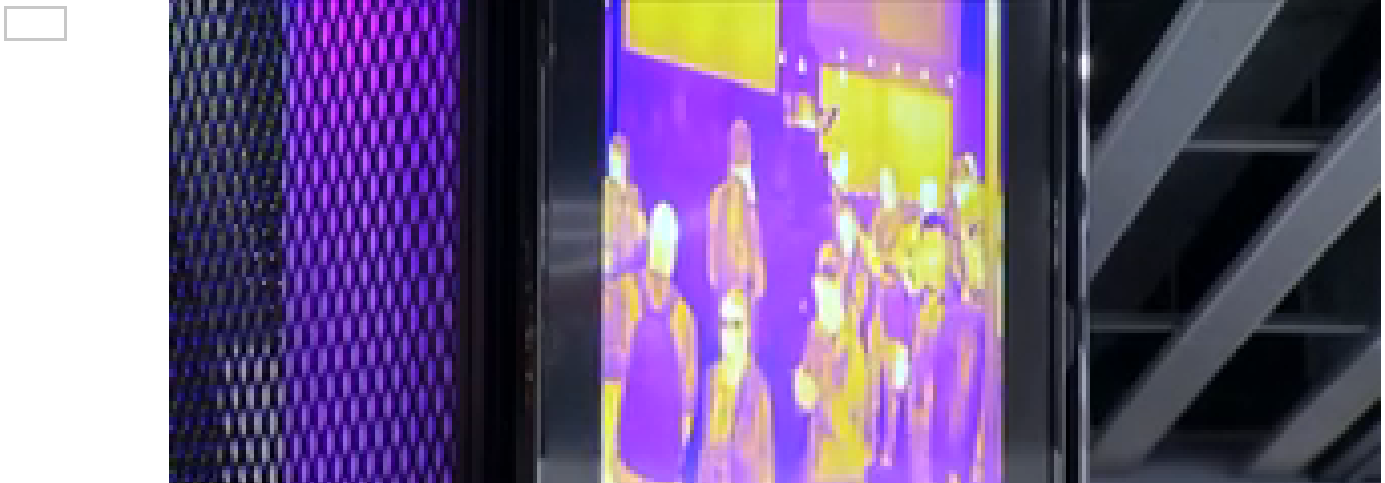
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