

The 2009 ISCM Festival took place from September 24 through October 4, in 3 Swedish cities, beginning in the city of Visby, on the island of Gotland. Visby is an extraordinarily beautiful Hanseatic city. On this remote island in the Baltic Sea there was concern that it would be difficult to attract an audience for the many ISCM events that would take place there. Participants were very impressed with the remarkable strategies that the organizers employed to attract the local populations to ISCM events, which were very well attended. One strategy--alternate new music with a traditional Swedish male choir. The result was wonderful. This event took place in a church ruin, only somewhat enclosed and open to the cool autumn breezes. Blankets were distributed.

Concerts took place in many interesting locations all over the Island.

The most important matter of ISCM business was deciding upon how the ISCM would treat regions as opposed to countries. The case of admitting Flanders as a region was of interest, as Belgium has two distinct cultures and governments within the same borders. Determining how the compositional interests of these cultures would be represented at the ISCM opened many interesting questions about region and identity. It was clear that the issues of musical representation that came before the ISCM delegates were a fascinating microcosm of broader issues. There was a unanimous vote in favor of Flanders gaining full membership in the ISCM.

There was discussion of a possible problem in the future: what would happen if areas in the U.S. applied for regional memberships in the ISCM? China?

The second city of the 3-city festival was Växjö. In Växjö, the programming of Johan Talgren's *Tombeau Pour New York* was a brave and powerful performative statement. As the ISCM delegate for the U.S. this work was of particular interest for its crystallization of attitudes toward the U.S.

The work is based on the 1971 poem with the same title by the Syrian poet Adonis (Ali Ahmad Sa'id). Mr. Talgren, in his program note, quoted some of the choicest lines from Adonis' surrealist poem:

New York plus New York equal a funeral; New York minus New York equal the sun. The music was very compelling (somewhat pointillistic; Talgren studied with Ferneyhough in San Diego), and it was generally agreed that this work was of outstanding quality, and nevertheless I was struck by the blasé reaction to the work's premise. It seems that the composer was shooting for a stronger reaction.

Talgren's New York, a symbol of the oil-addicted neocolonialist *États-Unis*, creates a grinding discord with another seemingly long forgotten ideal--John Dewey's New York--the New York that is not suffering from an inflated sense of itself, a cult of the small, where interests form for specific needs and dissolve when their work is done. (Melville's *Bartleby*: "I choose not to write.") The *exact* opposite of "too big to fail."

I seriously considered programming Talgren's work on a concert at Bargemusic on February 26, 2010, next to the Brooklyn Bridge, in sight of the the former location of the towers (where now a beam of light shines upward at nighttime), but other composers involved in the event urged me not to do so. New York is not ready for this poem that conjures 9-11, thirty years before the fact. Discussion of Talgren's work in this connection invigorated what was already a very interesting *convivencia* -- composers from Muslim, Jewish and Christian backgrounds

(Mohammed Fairouz, Mario Davidovsky and Frank Brickle), all of whom were represented on this February 26 program.

The festival finally moved to Göteborg. I was unfortunately unable to stay for more than the first day of the Göteborg events. Göteborg held the largest concert hall of all the 3 cities. In Göteborg more works for larger forces were presented.

There is too much going on in all of the ISCM regions to really grasp the totality of contemporary music in any intelligent way. A composer from Eastern Europe made the comment that music gets better the further East you go from Germany. This perspective suggests that the goings on in Germany & Austria (musique concrète instrumentale, etc.) approaches the practice of a wonderful form of musica speculativa, while the Eastern European music is more of a musica practica, and therefor also a bit more bourgeois. It is all wonderful, the music and the tension & contention. The diverse mindsets could be correlated with Yeats's phases of the moon as he describes them in *A Vision*. The choral concerts were beautiful beyond my wildest expectations, suggesting that writing for human voices promotes a degree of commitment to succeed to communicate (a degree of practicality).

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