MUSIC MAKES A CITY

A FILM BY

OWSLEY BROWN III AND JEROME HILER

Robert Whitney

A Director's Journey

More than anything, the primary inspiration for making a film about something as remote and forgotten as the struggles of the Louisville Orchestra during its hard-fought early years was my abiding love for the music of that era. I love classical music, and by that I mean the music of what is called the "pre-classics" as well as the classics. I'm not too fond of the sweaty bombast of the late Romantics, and I'm eternally grateful to Stravinsky for throwing open a window which let in blasts of cool, fresh air. By some strange chronological convenience, all manner of musical masters created works that changed the way music sounded during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Now, under the simple rubric of "twentieth-century music" we have an unbelievable quantity of musical personalities.

As a young man of eighteen, I found my first job as a general gofer for Arnold Arnstein, who ran the premier classical music-copying house in New York. I got to meet and know most of the "name" composers of the time as well as a host of lesser-known but nonetheless wonderful men and women composers.

It was during this period, in the early 1960s, that the Louisville Orchestra recordings began to appear in record stores. I noticed that many of my acquaintances at work–the unknown ones–were represented on these recordings. "What the heck is this Louisville Orchestra?" I wondered. It didn't seem to record any known music. I must have felt that if recordings didn't come from the big cities, they were suspect. Thanks to the New York Public Library, I discovered that the Louisville records were wonderful and, since I didn't read music, a great way for me to get to know the music of Arnie's clients. I'm not a musician, but I have gone on to a life of intense listening and learning. No matter how distant those early days have become, I remember and love the great generations of American composers who have dedicated their entire lives–without much recompense–to their work, which is now almost entirely forgotten.

As far as I'm concerned, the time is ripe to take another look at and savor the indescribable richness of all that was written in the last hundred years of classical music. Amidst all the talk of the demise of classical music, there are more recordings of little-known twentieth-century music available online at this time than were ever available before. The Louisville Orchestra, through its recording project, led the way to this heightened awareness of non-mainstream music.

Sometime in the late 1990s, I had the pleasure of meeting Owsley Brown III. I was able to contribute some 16mm film footage to his film *Night Waltz: The Music of Paul Bowles*. Owsley was born and bred in Louisville, Kentucky and seemed to have a devouring interest in just about any subject that could be imagined. We became fast friends and it was a delight to share any occasion with him.

One night, as we left the Opera House in San Francisco after a particularly satisfying program of George Ballanchine ballets, we began talking about how society had an acute need of great leaders. I remember saying, "You people in Louisville know all about that, with the whole generation around Mayor Farnsley." Owsley, with that particular zest of his, said, "You should write a book about that period." And I replied, "No, we should make a movie."

Why a movie? The simple answer is: the music. With a film, we could bring the fruits of Charles Farnsley and orchestra conductor Robert Whitney's dream to life. Ideas began to spark: We could have little samplers of music set to simple imagery. We might actually be able to have the entire soundtrack come from the Louisville Orchestra recordings. I wondered which, if any, composers were still alive. Could we interview them? Would they remember? From these initial ideas we embarked on a six-year project. We were faced with a story that seemed at once too ephemeral and also too rich. We decided that we had to limit the timeline to the career of Robert Whitney.

During this early planning period, when doubts were greatest about whether this story could become a movie, I walked into the densely packed confines of Recycled Records on Haight Street in San Francisco. There, on the floor in the most remote corner, I saw nine boxes of Louisville Orchestra recordings at a phenomenally cheap price. I brought them to the register where I met the manager

"Why a movie? The simple answer is: the music."

Martha Graham

Michael Boul and told him the story of our film and the recording project. He seemed really interested. Our conversation was interrupted by a phone call from a customer, and I heard Michael say, "Well, I'm sorry, but those records were just bought by another customer about a minute ago." That was a close one! If I had come a minute later, who knows how long it would have taken to gather that much of the orchestra's recordings. That moment was like a sign from on high to have no doubt about the worthiness of our project. Those boxes became the basis of the film's soundtrack. It wasn't everything, but it was a start, and I labored in the following years to find moments in all that music that were suitable for our use.

I went to Louisville for the first time in 2005 with Owsley and our producer Cornelia Calder and immediately immersed myself in the University of Louisville's library, which had bales of material of all sorts on the orchestra. This collection proved to be a treasure trove of major finds and minor tidbits. But the most important discovery was a massive dissertation on the very period we were investigating. The author was Sandra Fralin, and she had written a detailed account of the orchestra's early development, with an examination of every commission the orchestra played. I remember saying, "If we could use this, it would save us a year of research." In retrospect, I may have understated that. As it turned out, Sandy Fralin was a kind, public-spirited soul who worked and taught at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. She gave us permission to copy and use her dissertation. This favor gave us the basic roadmap for the story.

It was during that visit that we filmed our first interview with the long-time Louisville music critic William Mootz. Mootz was gravely ill and bedridden, but, with the help of his caregiver, he dressed up and planted himself in his favorite leopard-skin chair and held forth for an entire day, reliving decades of news, opinion, and gossip with a gusto that made us think he was as healthy as could be. He also oversaw the serving of a sumptuous lunch for our crew. His caregiver was astonished at his sudden return to life. If it weren't for Mr. Mootz's labored speech, we would have used his colorful, stirring account of the orchestra's story as our film's narration. We consider ourselves very lucky to have met this extraordinary man. Bill passed away within three months of our day with him.

Mayor Charles Farnsley (on left)

In December, Owsley, Cornelia Calder, and I were in Manhattan filming interviews with Lukas and Cornelia Foss and Ned Rorem. If there is one thing that we've learned during the course of this film, it is that there is no such thing as a typical composer. A more variegated group within the same profession is hard to imagine. Foss was terse and spare in his statements and extremely intense. Rorem was quite generous with his time and conversation but seemed uninterested in talking about Louisville. We did, however, learn many shocking details about musical personalities far and wide. Here, too, we met our cameraman Anthony Savini and sound recordist Jonathan Nastasi, who are responsible for the elegant look of the interviews; and both of them photographed the *Parable of Death* music sequence.

2006 was a very bad year for me. I had to take a medical leave from the film which kept me out of action for half a year. During this time, Owsley interviewed composers Chou Wen-chung, Harold Shapero, Norman Dello Joio, and Joan Tower. Beyond that, he interviewed all the Louisville musicians and personalities. I was able to help him prepare topics and questions. I also kept in close touch with Owsley and Marcel Cabrera as they filmed material for music sequences.

In the fall I joined Anne Flatté, our editor, in piecing together the growing mass of interviews and archival material. At last, we were all up and running. Later, I was able to travel and made several more trips to Louisville and New York to film and do research. In Louisville, I met Robin Burke, who became our producer. She has been "herding cats" from that day to this, and, also, has fallen in love with her city's noble history.

A sort of running joke during the entire course of the film's gestation was the issue of an interview with Elliott Carter. I approached him early on via a letter and phone call and was brusquely rebuffed. He claimed to have no memory of that era whatsoever. I took the attitude that "no" meant "no" and that was that. Yet, every person even remotely connected with our project, who had not been personally singed as I had, pressed to have him approached again. Ingenious routes to his good side were devised and tried. He wished us well, but couldn't see how he could help. Then, he suddenly said yes and just as suddenly fell ill for a period, and then we lost him again. It looked like finally a consensus was developing to regard the issue as closed. It was around this time that the Louisville Orchestra appointed a new CEO, Robert Birman, an ex-San Franciscan who was kindly disposed to our project. Robin asked him if he could help us to get an interview with Carter. In no time, we heard that Mr. Carter was looking forward to talking with us on whatever subjects we wished.

We made the earliest appointment possible and flew to New York. I was delighted and excited to see that, on the night of our arrival, Pierre Boulez would be conducting the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in Carnegie Hall. The program was entirely modern: Stravinsky, Varese, and Carter. Of course, we attended. Carter was there and acknowledged a standing ovation from his seat. He had recently celebrated his 100th birthday and this concert was one event among many that recognized the unprecedented achievements of this man. At intermission, Owsley managed to slowly press his way through the wall of people surrounding Mr. Carter's seat to say hello. The next day, we had our interview. I had carefully crafted a list of questions to pry memories of the Louisville commission out of him and lead him on to other subjects. But, as soon as the camera rolled, he took off on his own, talking about the commission *Variations for Orchestra* as if it were yesterday. Subject after interesting subject poured forth from this good-humored man. He went well over the time limit set by Sarah Baird, his publicist, who was naturally looking after his health. Afterward, Sarah took me aside and said that in her ten years of working with Carter she had never seen Elliott give such a good interview. "He said things that I've never heard before," she added. He was treating us so affectionately that it was hard to take our leave. But he had work to do. I told him that, as zealously as I collected his recent recorded pieces, I couldn't keep up with him, and he said, "I can't even keep up with myself, there's so much that I've done lately." Afterward, we filmmakers wondered at the day's events and felt that attending the previous night's concert might have served as one of the bonding elements with the composer. One can hear, on the DVD extras interviews, how his mind returned to that concert several times. Whatever the reasons, we couldn't have had a happier ending to the long quest for an interview with Elliott Carter.

"All great things disappear or change beyond recognition. Like children building sand castles, the important thing is the joy of the effort."

A final grace note for our interviews was sounded when Robin and I flew up to Boston and met with Gunther Schuller. This man

has to be the master of the overview as far as the post-war musical world is concerned. During my days at Arnstein's, Schuller had a number of radio shows that encompassed the century's jazz and classical music. He has always been a model for me of a creative artist who is also a scholar.

Back in the Bay Area, I filmed the material for the Carter music sequence and the end credits and rounded out my work on Chou Wen-chung's *And the Fallen Petals*. At about this point, all agreed that we had as much material as we needed, and it was left to Anne Flatté and Nathaniel Dorsky to compact, reorder, and shape the unwieldy contents of three decades of Louisville history and beyond. To this story they gave flow and drama while I showered them with choice snippets of music.

A debt of thanks is owed to so many people not mentioned in this booklet. We do have a rather lengthy credit sequence. Just about everyone whose name appears at our film's end could be singled out for special thanks. Everyone seemed to adopt the project as his or her own.

As the title of our film suggests, the story we tell shows an intrinsic relationship between the desire to promote cultural activity–here in the form of an orchestra–and the hope of building a strong civic life. The connection is both a discovery as well as something that seems very obvious. Music brings people together and then inspires them. Inspired groups make better communities.

Ultimately, our film is about civics and society. *Music Makes a City* actualizes our dream of honoring all the people, in whatever role they played, who gave their utmost to bring about a good society through music, dedication, and audacity. By looking at a moment in time, we instinctively compare and reflect. The next step is to awaken and rouse. I'm not sure that a lasting legacy is the sole criterion by which to judge a society. All great things disappear or change beyond recognition. Like children building sand castles, the important thing is the joy of the effort.

– Jerome Hiler

Musicians visit the schools

A Growing Passion

Lee Luvisi

As a Seminary doctoral candidate in musicology, I was expected to write a sacred music dissertation. But there was another kind of project that I couldn't put out of my mind. As a college music student in the 1960s, I had listened avidly to the Louisville Orchestra's recordings of new music. I wondered why the Orchestra, with its singular role in American musical life, was no longer in the public eye. It occurred to me that a comprehensive study was needed. And there I was, in Louisville, with so much material at my fingertips!

The idea became a creative urge that I could not shake off. To my surprise, my committee consented. I set out to prove that the Louisville Orchestra had started, in the mid-twentieth century, a movement that established the United States as the international center of new music (incidentally dispelling the outdated European notion of the United States as a cultural "backwoods"), and to bring attention to the Orchestra's continuing activities and influence. The result was *The Role of the Louisville Orchestra in the Fostering of New Music, 1947-1997.*

A venerable historian once said to me, "Research breeds like rabbits." How true! To prove my premises I had to look far beyond the original ten-year Commissioning Project. It was necessary to document the conditions that produced first the Orchestra itself and later the Project. Then came season-by-season accounts of events, and listings of the Louisville Orchestra's commissions, premieres, and recordings. Much time was invested in making a fifty-year chronological survey of works commissioned by United States orchestras. Living composers were asked to contribute personal reflections and views. In order to cite hundreds of source documents, it was necessary to compile itemized inventories of the materials in the Louisville Orchestra Archive, the Whitney Papers, and the Farnsley Papers. And more!

It was a labor of love. As I worked a narrative developed and played out in my mind like a movie–a survival tale with vigorous characters, an intriguing story line, and an extraordinary soundtrack. And as I watched *Music Makes a City* for the first time, it seemed again that the history in which I had become so immersed passed in panorama before me. It was an emotional experience. I was especially moved by the interviews with composers and others, some of whose voices I had not heard before, and by the realization that these might be the last recorded words of some of those esteemed elders.

My document was just one of thousands in the archives. Yet Jerry found it, and he and Owsley were able to use it toward the purpose for which it was intended. *Music Makes a City* not only documents a significant segment of American cultural history–it also celebrates the city on the Ohio River that helped herself recover after a disastrous flood *by making a symphony orchestra.* Equally important, in my view, is that the film brings the Louisville Orchestra back into the public eye at a time when many orchestras are facing budget cuts or worse. The Louisville story serves as a reminder that art can survive and even flourish wherever inspired and determined people are willing to make the effort.

– Sandra Fralin

Reflections on the Film

If I tried to write a composer fairy tale, a "once upon a time" story, I could not think of a more amazing one than that related in *Music Makes a City.* The film beautifully documents as unlikely and idealistic a story as a child's fantasy. Louisville, the city administration, the orchestra, and the musicians somehow pulled together to commission, produce, and record new music on an unprecedented scale, all in order to keep their orchestra in business. Who would have possibly thought that playing new music of all styles would work to accomplish that? Even more unlikely, this happened in a time and place where new concert music was totally unfamiliar. But the idealistic idea took hold, and it worked, allowing a platform for American music and art to flourish.

Like any idealistic idea, it has an element of sincerity and truth in it. In today's world, from what I can observe, people associated with concert music, whether performers, composers, or producers and administrators, are faced with serious fears about the future of concert music, as it seems increasingly marginalized. Honest efforts are being made to reach a wider audience. One attempt that is often made is to try to produce and sell classical musicians like pop or movie stars. The Louisville story is far removed and very different from those commercial approaches now commonly used to attempt to reach a wider audience.

Why and how it worked is a mystery to me. Perhaps it was the idea that "serious" new music did not have to be boring but could be exciting and fun, even without featuring the big music stars of those days (e.g., Toscanini, Stokowski, and Horowitz). The work itself became the star and the center of the focus.

Of course everyone always loves stars, both in art and in entertainment, but this film spurs thought on how it is possible to make new art, and life, so much richer and more exciting. The filmmakers have made a beautiful film and created a fable for our time.

– Justin Dello Joio

A Composer's Thoughts

Chou Wen-chung

Music Makes a City carries a resonant message to any community in the world: however small, a community can achieve eminence in cultural history by dedicating itself to the creation of music for its time. The Louisville commission series was exactly the shot-in-the-arm needed for an explosion of musical creativity in this country. My role in this story is miniscule–I was simply one of the many composers commissioned. But beyond composing a work, I had the great privilege of knowing Farnsley, Whitney, and others, from whom I learned how to turn a dream into living reality.

– Chou Wen-chung

Composer Biographies

Elliott Carter (1908 –)

From his teenage years, Carter fell in love with modern music through hearing Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* at its first New York performance. He was also befriended by the great American composer Charles Ives, whose experiments with multiple orchestras were challenging the ears of music listeners of the time.

Carter studied with Nadia Boulanger in Paris, returning to the United States in the late 1930s to write works steeped in the neo-classical mold with flavors of the burgeoning American identity. By the mid-1940s he abandoned these efforts to find his own voice through investigating new, freer methods of form. He also carried forward the harmonic experiments which developed in the early twentieth century. His fascination with the possibilities of musical form and freedom continued and produced a remarkable body of work through the entire second half of the century. In the 1990s, a new playfulness of spirit imbued his works. To this day, his output has accelerated, marking him as a phenomenon of nature.

Chou Wen-chung (1923 –)

Chou grew up in China and came to study in the United States in the 1940s. Although he came to study civil engineering, his love of music changed the course of his life. In New York, he studied and worked with the great French-American composer Edgard Varese as well as Otto Luening–both exponents of electronic music. This new world put him in touch with all the avant-garde movements which were to be found in Manhattan in the 1950s–including the Electronic Music Center at Columbia University. To this mix, Chou added his long-standing love of traditional Chinese music. He has been able to develop a fusion of all the ideas he has encountered. He has been teaching at Columbia for many years and is active to this day with projects which take him to every part of the world.

Norman Dello Joio (1913 – 2008)

Norman Dello Joio came from a long line of church organists. He began his musical career at age fourteen as the organist at Star of the Sea Church in New York. Eventually he became fascinated by the magic in the notes and staves he saw on the printed page of the musical score. From that point on he was determined to become a composer. His main teacher was Paul Hindemith, who appreciated his special gifts and steered him toward self-discovery.

Dello Joio's lyrical style won audiences for him from the start, and by the end of the 1940s he was acknowledged as a leading American composer. His fame soon became worldwide, and he has won numerous awards, prizes, and citations. His output ranges across every musical genre: church music, choral works, orchestral pieces, ballets, operas, and numerous piano and chamber pieces. He also contributed a large number of scores for television documentaries, all attesting to the remarkable versatility of this man.

Lukas Foss (1922 – 2009)

Foss's family was forced to flee Nazi Germany in the 1930s. They eventually settled in the United States when Lukas was fifteen. He had studied music since childhood and made many early tries at composition. He studied composition and conducting at The Curtis Institute, where his conducting teacher was Fritz Reiner. He continued to pursue these two careers at Yale and Tanglewood: composition under Hindemith and conducting under Koussevitzky. He went on to achieve great success in both fields. Soon, in the early 1950s, he himself was teaching, replacing Arnold Schoenberg at UCLA. His compositional style went through as many transformations as the times he lived through. Beginning with an "American" sound, he went on to experiment with serialism, improvisation, minimalism, and much more, all the while retaining his individuality. As a conduc-

tor, his tenures were marked by adventurous programming and exciting performances. He left his stamp on the Buffalo Philharmonic in the 1960s, the Brooklyn Philharmonic and Jerusalem Symphony in the 1970s, and the Milwaukee Symphony in the 1980s.

Ned Rorem (1923 –)

Born in Chicago, Rorem studied composition at numerous schools, including The Curtis Institute and Juilliard. He studied with and befriended the major composers of the day, including Aaron Copland and Virgil Thomson. The ultimate cosmopolitan, Rorem lived in New York, Paris, and Morocco amongst a galaxy of notable artists. He is proficient in all forms of composition from symphonies and concertos to opera and chamber pieces. But his large output of expressive and elegant songs set to very well chosen words are the works for which he is most well known. He has also written many books of diaries and observations filled with his searing and waggish memoirs.

Gunther Schuller (1925 –)

Gunther Schuller leads an extraordinarily active musical life as a composer, instrumentalist, and conductor. In the 1950s, as he was conducting ensembles in new music and playing jazz, he earned his living playing horn in the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. Alongside these practical activities, he distinguished himself as a teacher of enormous influence in numerous venues. In the late 1950s he was mostly known for his experiments integrating jazz and classical idioms, which he called "Third Stream Music." From that time to the present, however, his output has spanned all the musical forms. He has written over 180 orchestral works, which have been performed by orchestras all over the world. He rightly described himself to the interviewer as "the busiest man in the world."

Harold Shapero (1920 –)

Harold Shapero studied with Nicolas Slonimsky, Ernst Krenek, Walter Piston, and Paul Hindemith (alongside his fellow student Norman Dello Joio). He studied further with Nadia Boulanger. His compositions mostly belong to the neo-classical tradition. They delight the ear and engage the mind. As a teacher, he founded the music department at Brandeis University and soon became its chair. He also founded the Electronic Music Center there. Since his retirement, he has remained very active in musical activities and continues to compose to this day. In recent years, there has been a resurgence of recorded and live performances of his works.

– J.H.

Louisville musicians leave for Carnegie Hall