

Benjamin Boretz:

Downtime (2005) for piano and percussion originated in a request by Michael Fowler for a piece for Ensemble Sirius (Michael and Stuart Gerber). Stuart's temporary unavailability inspired the idea of an electronic percussion ensemble to interact with the solo piano player. The performance here is by the composer.

Group Variations II. I (version of 2004):

Group Variations I for chamber orchestra (1967) was first performed in 1967 and 1968 by the intrepid virtuosos who were gathered by Charles Wuorinen and Harvey Sollberger to form the Columbia Group for Contemporary Music. Before them, contemporary music was sometimes performed in New York; there were even some concert series and ensembles dedicated to it; but the Group was revolutionary, instigated a revolution in public-musical culture as radically progressive as the group-Rock revolution (grass-roots collectives of composers and performers taking full responsibility to create and determine the social interface of their creative work) and, inevitably, as abortive (as success attracted attention, money, and ultimately re-introduced the status hierarchies and specializations endemic to the global culture, academic as well as show-biz). Nevertheless, their presence in the 1960s created a cultural energy and geography whose effects have been permanent (for illustration, consider that the New York Times music critics in those days never reviewed any concerts given outside the perimeters of midtown Manhattan - which excluded both the Columbia Group's concerts on 116th Street and the pioneering new-music concerts conducted by James Tenney and others at

the New School on 12th Street - or any concerts given for free; these days, they even travel to Brooklyn...). So it was into this environment and for these players that *Group Variations I* was composed, and it's worth recollecting who these players were, if only for the nostalgia of those of us whose musical lives were so profoundly and interestingly affected by the horizonless visions opened by the adventures of those days: Charles Wuorinen, the primordial source of most of this energy, conducted; Harvey Sollberger, who basically reinvented the art of flute playing in our presence, played flute and piccolo; Josef Marx, guru and guide to this youth movement, out of his experience in the radical Berlin new-music world of the 1920s and 1930s, played oboe; the other stalwart regulars were Allen Blustine, Arthur Bloom and Jack Kreiselman (Eb clarinet, Bb clarinet and bass clarinet, respectively); Donald MacCourt (bassoon and contrabassoon); Barry Benjamin (horn); James Biddlecombe (tenor-bass trombone); Richard Fitz and Raymond DesRoches (vibraphone and glockenspiel); Joan Tower (celesta); Robert Miller (piano); Jeanne Benjamin (violin); Jacob Glick (viola); Fred Sherry (cello); Kenneth Fricker (bass). Their long and strenuous efforts on behalf of the performance of *Group Variations I* were astonishing to me then - still are - and have left me ever since with a sense of warm support and enthusiastic collegueship such as I have never again experienced, and will always hold precious.

The computer-synthesized recomposition of *Group Variations* was begun in 1970, working with Jim Randall and Godfrey Winham (in Godfrey's Music IV program) at the Princeton Music Department/Bell Labs computer-music facility; a later version (GV II), formulated with Barry Vercoe's help in his Music 360 program, was issued on a CRI LP in 1974; a new version (re-converted from the original digital tapes by Paul Lansky) was released on an Open Space CD in 1993; and this new version, resynthesized to more nearly reflect the sound and time qualities of the original orchestra piece, was

realized in 2004 with the help of Mary Lee Roberts. Russell Richardson has composed (2005) a video piece incorporating Group Variations II.1 which will appear during 2006 on an Open Space DVD.

O (2000) for piano is here because of Bob Morris's *Ode*, written for this occasion, in which *O* is fully embedded.

UN(-) for orchestra (1999) was composed for the players of the Woodstock Chamber Orchestra and their conductor, my longtime friend and teaching colleague Luis Garcia-Renart. My even longtime friend and colleague Harvey Sollberger and I rebonded, after many years apart (not quite since the Group Variations days), over the 2002 performance recorded here.