

NEW YORK

## Music/Peter G. Davis

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ABOUT HALFWAY THROUGH AMERICAN Music Week earlier this month, it suddenly occurred to me that, in New York at least, business was proceeding more or less as usual. Those with a taste for new music can generally satisfy the craving instantly, since a contemporary-music concert takes place somewhere in town almost every evening, and a special celebration will hardly make much of a quantitative difference. Nor did I detect an unusually celebratory spirit at the pair of concerts I attended, given by two of the city's oldest and most solidly established new-music organizations: the **Group for Contemporary Music**, at the 92nd Street Y, and the **League of Composers—International Society for Contemporary Music**, at Carnegie Recital Hall.

Never mind. I enjoyed both concerts anyway. The Group had assembled a particularly strong program, one intentionally designed to show off the musicians' virtuoso skills, individually and together. David Starobin had the two plums of the evening, pieces written for him last year by Milton Babbitt (*Composition for Guitar*) and Elliott Carter (*Changes for Guitar*). Both these prickly scores brim with musical vitamins, and Starobin plays the notes brilliantly—hear them for yourself on the guitarist's splendid new recital discs, Bridge BDG 2004 (Carter) and BDG 2006 (Babbitt). Also well worth hearing again is Charles Wuorinen's *Archaeopteryx* (1978), for solo bass trombone (David Taylor) accompanied by a clutch of flutes, clarinets, horns, tuba, piano, and percussion. Wuorinen draws fascinating sounds from this unusual combination, which irresistibly suggests a flapping prehistoric bird soaring into flight.

The League's program honored the memory of the influential Copland-Sessions Concerts—a historic new-music series that the two composers sponsored in New York between 1928 and 1931—by including Copland's *Quartet for Piano and Strings* (1950) and Sessions's *Quintet for Strings* (1958). The Copland Quartet, of course, also paid tribute to the composer on his eighty-fifth birthday this month, and I'm glad someone remembered to play this pungent, curiously refreshing piece, which is much too seldom performed. One of the continuing pleasures of the League—ISCM concerts (and those by the Group for Contemporary Music, for that matter) is hearing so many superb musicians at work—it sometimes seems that New York's finest are all new-music specialists. ■