

Gregory Salmon 1961-1991

About a year ago, four graduate students were sitting in a cafe near U.C. Berkeley, planning their strategy for launching a new journal. One of these would-be editors was Gregory Salmon. It was easy to identify Greg, because his enthusiasm—as demonstrated in the gradual rise of his voice—permeated the room. Even the howling of the cappuccino machine couldn't compete, especially when we all got going.

Greg never missed one of those meetings; he always had his comments and proposals written out. You could clearly tell that he *believed* in this venture and knew that the hardest part would be keeping the motivation going.

When Greg was doing research in the now-defunct Soviet Union, he sent us all picture postcards bearing the two words: "publish *repercussions!*" He even sent a longer message to the Music Department at large with the same sentiments, perhaps with the hope that peer-pressure would add its own push.

Later that fall, the editors learned that Greg had been killed in an automobile accident in what was then still Leningrad. Grief was painfully added to process of producing *repercussions*, and with it, urgency. It was imperative that volume 1, number 1 come into the world.

It has, and we dedicate it to the loving memory of our co-founding editor and dear friend.

kbm

(...*editorial*)

As musicologists become intoxicated with their new interpretive possibilities, great risks also arise....Once leaving the confines of the discipline, practitioners are vulnerable to all manner of temptation....The test for musicology is how it will define itself without traditional boundaries, and how it will transform the art to which it is devoted.

— Edward Rothstein in *The New York Times*, 17 November 1991

This musing is placed at the end of our inaugural issue for what one generally assumes was the same reason Debussy gave the explanatory titles of his piano preludes only after each piece: to soften the imposition of a hermeneutic—an *editorializing*, if you will—on a text which would perhaps be better served by allowing it the aesthetic freedom of some transitory indeterminacy. This is not the place from which to attempt a manifesto for the “new musicology.” What *we* think that is should be abundantly evident from the contents of this journal. What might be worth a few moments valedictory consideration is what Edward Rothstein (and, by extension, some large portion of the “real world” outside of the academic study of music) thinks it is—or fears it is.

The fascinating passage quoted above appeared in a *New York Times* report on the 1991 meeting of the American Musicological Society in Chicago. The article, generally positive, if wary in tone, was titled “The Politics of Sharps and Flats.” The sentiments expressed are, in the abstract, unexceptionable. But the pattern formed by imagery and diction leaves a strange sense of unease—and dis-ease. Innocent musicologists who

stray beyond the “confines” of their “discipline”(d) environment run the “great risk” of becoming “intoxicated” and falling prey to “all manner of temptation.” As one of our editors tellingly remarked, the tone is reminiscent of nothing so much as a Medical Officer delivering the obligatory hygiene lecture to unruly sailors before a night of liberty: “Watch out, boys!”

Hermeneutics as promiscuity; meanings and interpretations as (socially-transmitted) disease—this discourse would certainly surprise the readers of Scripture who developed our Western pedagogy of interpretation. It is ironic that what was once a sacred duty is now a sinful indulgence. But Rothstein’s warning is an echo of voices raised within the academy and our own discipline against the “temptations” presented by scholarly practitioners of, to take the most obvious targets, feminist and gay/lesbian sexual politics. It is perhaps no accident that several of the new interpretive possibilities broached in music scholarship deal explicitly with alternative sexuality, since to the austere formalist congregation, *all* interpretive work on music is transgressive, implicating the critic in a project that is intoxicating, but irretrievably seductive and irrational. Those whose very subject position is defined and marginalized by pleasure in physical (or intellectual) transgression appear to have less fear of infection from the activity that Roland Barthes sexualized once and for all as ‘*le plaisir du texte*.’

The editors of *repercussions* propose to recapture a slightly less menacing view of hermeneutics, which, after all, is closely linked—in the religious tradition from which it sprung—to the study of *ethics*. Hermeneutics need not debase our apprehension of music by making it intellectually irresponsible. It actually leads the way to a new *respons*-ibility, grounded in a new-old *respons*-iveness to the political and ethical implications of musical experience.

(...rwf)