

hoc est corpus meum

By Julie Harting

My first exposure to music was from my father, a tuba player in the Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and Reading, Pennsylvania, Orchestras. He had a fairly large record collection of symphonic works. Every Sunday morning before church, while I was stretched out on the living room floor reading the Sunday comics, he would play one of his records. He favored symphonic work that used a lot of loud, lower brass—Rimsky-Korsakov's *Russian Easter* and *Scheherazade*, and Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique*. He also liked the symphonic works of Brahms and Beethoven. A special favorite was Brahms's *German Requiem*.

We had a variety of instruments in our house. My father had a tuba, a string bass, and a violin. One summer my older sister took piano lessons and we rented a piano for a few months; my brother had acoustic and electric guitars. I fooled around on all of these instruments, but my *instrument* was the tuba since our school district didn't have an orchestra or string program. I played in high school and local concert bands, stage band, dance band, pep band, a Dixieland band, a Pennsylvania Dutch folk band, and local community-college orchestras.

When I was eighteen I found myself working at the American Tourister Luggage factory in Warren, Rhode Island, as a foot-press operator, smashing metal attachments onto pockets that were to be attached to the side of the luggage. It was while working there that I decided to study music seriously, so I went to Boston, where I attended a summer session at Berklee College of Music.

Although Berklee is known as a jazz school, I was there "on a fluke." I was not a "jazzier," but a "legit" tuba player. I still remember the dumbfounded looks I got when in the school cafeteria at breakfast one morning, after listening to other students—mostly male guitar players—talk about Coltrane, I naively asked, "Who's John Coltrane?" Eventually I learned about and listened to Coltrane, Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk, Bill Evans, Gil Evans, Chick Corea, Keith Jarrett, Bud Powell, Art Tatum, Charlie Parker . . .

The most memorable experience for me at Berklee was listening to Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*. I was taking a jazz analysis class. The teacher's main concern was to open our ears. He would never tell us the name or composer of the piece we were listening to because he wanted us to listen without preconceptions. He played a slow movement of some strange music, unlike anything I had ever heard. As I listened, I

started contemplating Christ as a mediator between God and humanity. An image formed in my mind of Christ suspended in air, with one arm stretched upward to God and the other arm stretched downward to earth. I remember being somewhat embarrassed about having this image because I was too sophisticated to "believe in Jesus" and I never thought about God, except perhaps as some kind of vague "energy." It astounded—"astonished" is too weak a word—me when at the end of the listening period the instructor told us that we were listening to *Louange à l'Éternité de Jésus* from Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*.

This was my first introduction to twentieth-century music. I went to the Boston Public Library and listened to their entire collection of Messiaen records. Throughout the summer, I discovered Stravinsky, Bartók, Ives, Ruggles, Varèse, and Debussy. I also saw a lot of live music in Boston—McCoy Tyner, Sun Ra, and Keith Jarrett in concert, and Seiji Ozawa conducting the Boston Symphony Orchestra. I attended concerts at New England Conservatory, where I heard Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern, third-stream concerts, and Jaki Byard. My ears were opened and I was excited and inspired. I gave up playing the tuba and began studying composition, counterpoint, harmony, ear-training, and piano. My life as a composer had begun.

My first compositions were somewhat Ivesian in concept (combining simple tonal melodies with very dissonant chords) but lacking Ives's genius, expression, and great spirit. But shortly after I started composing, I stopped hearing tonal music. Or perhaps I should more accurately say I stopped *feeling* tonal music. Tonal melodies did not ring true to me anymore; I felt they were false. They did not correspond to truth or beauty or reality. When I sat down at the piano to "express" myself, or when I sang melodies quietly during one of my long walks, the melodies were not tonal.

Eventually I came around to tonal music again—through Schoenberg's *Theory of Harmony*. I did an exhaustive study of this book with Harold Seletsky, who studied with Josef Schmidt, a pupil of Berg. Studying Schoenberg's approach to harmony provided a working link between tonal music and *Erwartung*. This seemed to "fill me out." It was only after I studied Schoenberg's harmony book that I felt comfortable writing twelve-tone music.

As I continued to compose, I became more puzzled by the concept of form in music. I wasn't satisfied thinking of form as simply a modified version of ABA, or some other form that was imposed on a piece, but felt that form should be integral to each particular piece. Although he was referring to visual art, I was intrigued by Kandinsky's definition of form as "the outer expression of the inner content." I liked the idea that form depended on an inner "feeling."

