

**MEREDITH
MOON**

**JUKEBOX IN THE
SALESMAN**

A Madrigal Comedy Libretto by Valeria Vasilevski

The Western Wind Vocal Ensemble

The Western Wind Vocal Ensemble

MEREDITH MONK

BASKET RONDO *(first recording)*

- | | | |
|---|------------------------|------|
| 1 | Basket A – High Basket | 3:02 |
| 2 | Bells A | 1:39 |
| 3 | Calls | 0:48 |
| 4 | Bells B | 1:52 |
| 5 | Basket B | 2:28 |
| 6 | Bells C | 1:09 |
| 7 | Bells D | 0:42 |
| 8 | Basket C | 1:45 |

ERIC SALZMAN

JUKEBOX IN THE TAVERN OF LOVE *(first recording)*

- | | | |
|----|------------------------|------|
| 9 | Storm | 7:01 |
| 10 | Brush Chug Shuffle | 5:02 |
| 11 | The Jewish Jesuit | 5:26 |
| 12 | Not Porcelain Dolls | 4:04 |
| 13 | Toast Love | 3:51 |
| 14 | Quodlibet | 2:55 |
| 15 | All That Is Left Of Me | 5:49 |

Libretto by Valeria Vasilevski



Executive Producer: William Zukof
Labor Records Coordinator: Heiner Stadler
Design: Max Franosch

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The Western Wind Vocal Ensemble

KRISTINA BOERGER

LAURA CHRISTIAN

sopranos

WILLIAM ZUKOF

countertenor*

TODD FRIZZELL

RICHARD SLADE

tenors

ELLIOT LEVINE

baritone*

**founding members*

THE WESTERN WIND VOCAL ENSEMBLE'S 45TH ANNIVERSARY

The Western Wind had its start in January, 1969, when a group of young singers united by their love of the great a cappella music of the Renaissance was invited to perform for the Renaissance Society of America. By choosing to name the ensemble The Western Wind (after the 16th century English song) employing the modern spelling rather than the antique *Westron Wynde*, the ensemble declared its intention to perform American music, both early and contemporary, as well as European music. The group's very first recording, 'Early American Vocal Music', (Noneusch, 1973) was nominated for a Grammy and was followed by many outstanding recordings. At about the same time, William Bolcom wrote his 'Satires For Madrigal Group' for the ensemble. Since then the ensemble has commissioned and performed works by many of America's outstanding composers including Bobby McFerrin, Robert Dennis, James Bassi, Matthew Harris, Charlie Morrow, Elliot Levine, Tania León, and Michel Camilo. This has been a parallel track to its exploration of Medieval, Renaissance, Early American, Judaica, folk, and pop and jazz music. For decades The Western Wind has integrated new works into nearly all its concert programs. This recording of Meredith Monk's 'Basket Rondo' and Eric Salzman's 'Jukebox In The Tavern Of Love' celebrates its 45th anniversary with two commissioned works that address contemporary issues in fascinatingly original musical styles.

www.westernwind.org

“Her vocal music is almost entirely wordless, and yet she uses the forms, the music, and even the communicative structures of nonverbal speech, mixing it up with equal parts of emotive sound, invented vocal ‘noise’ as well as her characteristic repeated and extended melodic and rhythmic forms, all framed by an overt and structured physicality. Finally, along with all the extended techniques, it should be emphasized that her musical ethos and her vocal inventions are fundamentally melodic in a direct and appealing mode.

Although her more recent work has tended to focus on purely musical and vocal performance, she has created a series of highly original music-theater works...”

Eric Salzman & Thomas Desi:
The New Music Theater: Seeing the Voice, Hearing the Body
(Oxford University Press, 2008)

I first met Meredith Monk in the late 1960s when I was working on the score to Daniel Nagrin's full-evening, anti-war solo 'The Peloponnesian War'. Meredith, whose creative work was already attracting notice, was a colleague, friend and neighbor of Daniel's and often turned up at his legendary Bleecker Street studio where I first got to know her. What I didn't know was that Meredith came from a family background that was remarkably similar to my own. My family roots were in the Yiddish theater – imported from Eastern Europe in the 19th century, gradually merged into the popular musical theater in the 20th and which, rather surprisingly, helped to foster new developments in music-theater and extended voice. Meredith's roots were focused on singing and the human voice. Her great-grandfather was a cantor in Russia and her grandfather was a bass-baritone whose career started in Moscow and ended up in the US. Her mother was a popular vocalist who also sang jingles live on the radio in the days before tape; Meredith's earliest memories were being dragged from one radio studio to another where her mother was performing soap commercials. What better background for the most original vocal artist/performer/creator of our time!

Around this same time, when Daniel formed his dance ensemble called The Work Group (which actually started life in Meredith's studio), I organized my Quog Music Theater (Bill Zukof of The Western Wind was a founding member) and Meredith started The House, a company devoted to creating music-theater works incorporating music, theater and dance. She was already known as a choreographer and creative force in new dance; now she also began to emerge as an original composer in her own right. Just as a dancer/choreographer like Daniel Nagrin created much of his work on his own body, Meredith used her body and voice as the medium for her own creative work and, in the process, evolved a new style of vocalizing and a whole new and original body of work. In her music-theater works and in her opera 'Atlas', she then taught the style and the musical approach to others – performers with non-

traditional backgrounds, jazz origins and even opera singers. Her process of creating what has become known as 'extended vocal technique' was developed by Meredith in a series of theater pieces and then later extended into purely musical/vocal pieces such as Basket Rondo.

Basket Rondo may seem like a prosaic title for a piece which, typically for the composer, combines resonant, spiritual overtones with off-beat humor and what we can only call, unblushingly, a social conscience. But this title has very specific meanings for the composer. She describes the opening section of the piece as a way of introducing different voices so that you can hear them weaving together but also so that, at the same time, you can hear "the uniqueness or individuality of each voice". The title was also meant to suggest a musical texture that was evocative of "a pre-industrial community of people working together, doing handwork together" as if this were a kind of work song. Other sections were based on what she calls "a natural kind of resonance" and meant to evoke "a sense of nature or space".

The Western Wind, although known for its performances of early music, has been equally dedicated to the performance of new music, much of it commissioned by the ensemble.

Even so, the Meredith Monk commission proved to be one of the most unusual and it took many years to come to fruition. The work was developed through a give-and-take between the composer and the singers. In its first phase, she gave thematic material – orally or on tape – to the members of the group and then guided them in improvisations based on this material. These first sessions were recorded, notated and then used as the basis for later sessions. After each session, Monk spent time alone composing new material and refining the overall form. The piece was constantly

changing, sometimes substantially at each meeting and new score pages were continually being created throughout the process until the final version was arrived at. The entire process itself had more in common with the creation and evolution of a jazz composition or a piece of choreography than with the traditional relationship between composer and performer. The connection with Monk's ideal of "a pre-industrial community of people working together, doing handwork together" is thus inherent in the process of the creation of the work.

There are some parallels between the origins of Jukebox In The Tavern Of Love and Basket Rondo. In Jukebox, Valeria Vasilevski and myself spent a certain amount of time analyzing the personalities of The Western Wind as well as their musical abilities in order to create roles that were suited to each of the six performers. In Basket Rondo, Meredith Monk composed material for their particular voices and the members of the group became part of the evolution of the piece. This process continued over a period of years before achieving its final form. The result is pure Meredith Monk as much as it is pure Western Wind!

– Eric Salzman



VALERIA VASILEVSKI

MADRIGALS MADE MAGICAL

by Randy Woolf, *New Music Connoisseur*

Jukebox In The Tavern Of Love: Madrigal Comedy by Valeria Vasilevski and Eric Salzman. Commissioned and performed by The Western Wind Vocal Ensemble.

The Flea Theater, New York, NY, May 29 – June 1, 2008

Repeated at Bargemusic, Brooklyn, July 8 & 10, 2009

We are in a New York bar during a huge storm and a Con Ed blackout. The bartender, a classic New York type, sets the stage. “And we’re in the dark, soaking wet, stranded, strangers in my bar on the worst night of the year. Then something happened... Hey you shoulda’ been there! Capeesh?” He tells the story of the night that the lights went out and a nun, a Rabbi, a “dame from Broadway”, a poet and a Con Ed worker all took shelter in his establishment!

This is not a joke but rather the premise of an elegant evening of theater and music. Jukebox In The Tavern Of Love is a melding of a modern life confessional scene and the form and manner of a Renaissance madrigal comedy, intricate and reflecting both contemporary sounds and the style’s distant origins. Salzman has succeeded in creating a smooth amalgam of virtuoso counterpoint and avant-garde effects that is fresh and provocative. The text by Valeria Vasilevski (who also directed the premiere) is natural and rhythmically poised, more in the manner of lyrics than high-flown poetry.

The work was commissioned by The Western Wind Vocal Ensemble to go with a ‘real’ 1605 madrigal comedy (‘La Barca di Venezia per Padova’ of Adriano Banchieri) and the two pieces were performed together at the downtown Flea Theater and subsequently revived at Bargemusic in July 2009. Each of the six singers in The Western Wind portrays one of the characters, taking turns as soloist while the remaining singers in each piece function as a Greek chorus, creating an emotional backdrop for the individual stories.

The first visitor to the bar is the nun who sings the 'Dies Irae' – 'Day of Wrath', in honor of the storm – which turns into a canon with the Italian-American bartender. The others enter one at a time, adding their voices to the mix which adds up to a madrigal of remarkable complexity which somehow never interferes with the simultaneous telling of each character's story. The Broadway dame's tale is next, set as a dance routine to old school Harlem jazz. It loses none of its rhythmic drive as the vocal lines overlap, augment and stretto against each other. When the sextet adds a hocketing handclap accompaniment, the combination suggests that Steve Reich and Cab Calloway have joined forces.

The most touching of the madrigals, "Do you know what a DP is?" is the Rabbi's story of his experience as a displaced person. A Holocaust survivor, he was orphaned at age three, moved from place to place with no idea of how he would get by without parents, family or home. To the simplest of guitar accompaniments, he sings of a childhood that "had no laughter, that tasted bitter, that had an enemy but not a God". Finally he is adopted by a loving American Catholic family and is more and more drawn in by his new religion, falling in love with all the rituals and a sacraments. When he decides to become a Jesuit priest ("maybe even a saint"), he is told "You can't... you're Jewish", which at first seems like a punch line. But, as it is repeated, it becomes an unsettling metaphor of his displaced person status. The effect of overwhelming inner feeling and its strangled outer expression is rendered perfectly.

The nun then takes her turn, gradually revealing the secret lesbian inner life of her late aunt. Although the nun never identifies herself as gay, it seems very much implied. She has found letters in a jewel box addressed to her in which the aunt explains how she realized that she was gay from early youth but suffered through the trauma of keeping her feelings secret. Salzman has set this with a tense staccato melody, evoking the repressed inner emotional world of the aunt. The staccato notes spread to the

other singers in a tootling circusy texture that is reminiscent of a calliope. This world of frozen feeling never becomes sentimental or manipulative. As the other singers continue, the nun's melody becomes more and more legato and moves into the higher registers. When the aunt's confession finally speaks of her devotion to her one great love, the accompaniment has become legato and the nun's line reduces to a handful of brief, isolated notes.

Next is a paean to lost love, led by the poet. The setting is the closest to its madrigal roots. Each of the singers is given a turn at it, singing over sliding chromatic harmonies that suggest both a barbershop quartet and a Schumann song. This is a showpiece for both Salzman and Vasilevski and a marvel of clarity and contrapuntal reflection. As in all of the text, Vasilevski achieves a natural and effortless flow that is inherently rhythmic and musical. The resulting prosody is seamless.

The final solo, sung by the Con Ed worker, begins with a cadenza of melismas, wonderfully performed by Richard Slade. It leads to the finale, based on a philosophical love poem of Rumi, sung as the lights come up again and six strangers depart.

Ms Vasilevski's text, ranging from the personal to the very comic, is always the equal partner of the music with a flow that is so natural and genuine that it passes almost unnoticed at first. Yet many phrases still echo in my mind, long after the performance. One almost needs to forget the music to realize all the magic of these lyrics.

Jukebox In The Tavern Of Love is a brilliant entertainment in both the deepest and lightest sense of the word. It occurs to me that I have barely mentioned the visual elements, the moments of dance, and the thoroughly convincing theatrical direction of Ms Vasilevski. The singers of The Western Wind are fantastic, as convincing as actors as they are as singers. Bravo to all.



MEREDITH MONK



ERIC SALZMAN



JUKEBOX IN THE TAVERN OF LOVE
Libretto: Valeria Vasilevski Music: Eric Salzman

Company (in order of appearance):

William Zukof: countertenor **Italian-American Bartender, Narrator**

Kristina Boerger: soprano **Catholic Nun**

Laura Christian: soprano **Broadway Dancer (with small dog in a basket)**

Elliot Levine: baritone **Orthodox Rabbi**

Todd Frizzell: tenor **Irish Poet**

Richard Slade: tenor **Utility Worker**

Place: A New York neighborhood Italian bar on the night
of a big storm that knocks out all the utilities.

NB: The Bartender embellishes his pseudo Italian with stylized gestures based on 'Gesture in Naples and Gesture in Classical Antiquity' by Andrea de Jorio. Each character has a solo accompanied by the ensemble and each has a distinguishing costume item or prop.

*"And that which the tongue cannot well express,
is conveyed in the mute eloquence of gestures." – T. Tasso*

An empty bar. Bartender in a white apron addresses audience.

Bartender

Buona sera, paesanos and bacigallups!

I gotta ask you something? Remember that big storm we had a cup-a-la years ago? Remember where you were? I was here! Stuck in the bar. Managgia!

No regulars showed so, hey!... I was finishing up, ready to row my little barca home when in comes a nun! A nun! Nice lookin', tall, next thing you know we're singing the Dies Irae! I was making up the words, but she was real good!

In the dark! with a nun! singing the Dies Irae! Madonna!

Then a Rabbi comes in, sopping wet! He's spouting Yiddish or was it Polish? Holocaust. He was a little orphan in the Holocaust and displaced. Yeah, a displaced little bambino. Oh yeah, then comes a dame right from Broadway, a chorus line veteran! And I think she had a dog or was it a cat...

in a basket. Dancing in the rain!

Then, with The Times Book Review to keep his head dry, enters a poet. Pale Irish guy, sad eyes. He lost his partner... you know how that is, right?

Oh yeah, how can I forget, before the poet this Con Ed type comes in; he had this big flashlight, a bear of a guy, but a valentine for a heart!

And we're in the dark, soaking wet, stranded, strangers in my bar on the worst night of the year. Then something happened... Hey you shoulda' been there! Capeesh?

Storm

(Over voices creating a stormy ambience.)

It must be the worst night of the year.
No one will come out in this storm.
I might as well close up.
That's it! I'll go home.

But then I'll get all wet.
I don't like having my shoes fill with water.

I better stay here.
And pass the hours solo.
'Na tavola di Paradiso
...con prosciutto
...and vino
...and fresca frutta

Bartender gestures *fame*, hungry.

Before Bartender gets out the last word – there is a huge clap of thunder and all the lights go out. Bartender in the dark (perhaps his apron is day glow).

Madonna! Mamma Mia!
Ciuccio de Meds!
Faccia da brute!
Mmalora!

Bartender gestures *stupido*.

Bartender finds candles, maybe in dusty Chianti bottles. He lights one and over the course of the next few minutes he lights candles all around – and the rest of the piece is a candlelight concert (of course there needs to be other light but all in the spirit of candle light). Bartender continues cursing in Italian and is suddenly

interrupted.

Nun

Oh excuse me. I never go into a bar room but the streets are suddenly totally extremely dark.

Bartender

Sister, Sorella! Don't think of my humble tavern as a bar; it is a refuge, a shelter, a cave on the outskirts of Bethlehem. *(Hands her a candle.)* Ora pro nobis. What a tempest, eh? Must have blown all the lights! *(They sing together.)* Dies Irae! Dies illa! Solvet saeculum in favilla: Teste David cum Sibylla! *(Sister takes off her wet veil.)*

Dancer enters carrying a wet dog, followed by a Rabbi. If at any time the dog barks, it's part of the piece. The Bartender and the Nun keep singing the Dies Irae. The Nun is better at the words; the Bartender is a few words behind her. As they sing, they hand the Rabbi and the Dancer candles.

Rabbi

Shalom! So kind of you.

Whew! I'm geblitzed! *(to Nun)* May I have a small glass of red wine? *(Takes off his wet shoes.)*

Bartender gestures *piccolo*, small.

Dancer

Oh my darling little Martha! My puppy is all wet! Look at those soggy paws! Here's a cue tip; dry your ears... *(to Nun)* May I have an ashtray of warm milk? Now I'm missing my dance class!

Utility Worker

(Enters – he's rough but very soft. A Utility Worker with a BIG flash light.)

I saw the candles at the bar. It's so beautiful, man! All the people! All the candles! Very, you know, like New York! Like a community of all kinds of people coming together because the lights are out. Helping! And they will be out for a long time! Yep!! We blew a big one! A Jesus Christ of a whopper! *(to Rabbi and Nun)* Sorry! Zapped from the heavens. Nothing more I can do from this manhole; it's up to the Main Station now!

An Irish Poet enters, with (wet) books.

Poet

A night for a mulled port at least!
Good evening – no use waiting for the subway tonight! Subways are dark and underwater. Tonight we need a gondola, a golden oared bucintoro!! Beautiful bar! Claret glasses shimmering...

Bartender

A poet! Buon vino!
Prima se bevi, dopo cantiamo!

Bartender gestures *bere*, drink.

All

Wonderful! Bellissimo! Mazeltov!

Dancer

(Spoken very fast!)
Oh no, I never sing! Dance is my only love!
We'll dance instead!!

Bartender

(Correcting himself in his imitation Italian.)
Love! Salute amore! Prima se bevi,
dopo *(pause as he thinks of the word)*...
danciamo!

Dancer

Now just repeat after me:

Brush Chug Shuffle Step Stomp Stomp
Ball-change Shuffle Chug Chug Stomp!

They try slowly as she guides them in her love song composed of authentic tap vocalizations.

Brush Chug Shuffle Step Stomp Stomp
Ball-change Shuffle Chug Chug Stomp

BRUSH CHUG SHUFFLE

When I romp with my baby tonight:

Flap flap flap clap hold
Flap flap flap clap hold
Flap clap clap clap flap clap flap clap
Flap
Ball-change.

When I stomp with my baby tonight:

Heel dig brush
Heel drop
Heel dig brush
Heel drop stomp
Ball beat ball-change ball dig
Ball drop ball stamp ball step
Ball tap

We're gonna roll that congoleum floor.

Shim sham shimmy

Flap shuffle chug

Flap shuffle chug

Flap shuffle chug

Flap shuffle chug

Flap shuffle chug

Flap shuffle chug

Then I'm gonna break down the
dancehall door!

Shuffle hop hop

Shuffle ball-change clip walk

Clip heel drop step heel drop step

Clip toe drop step heel drop step

Heel drop clip toe drop

Step clip heel drop

Step clip toe drop;

When I romp with my baby tonight.

Brush Chug Shuffle Step Stomp Stomp

Ball-change Shuffle Chug Chug Stomp!

(All laugh and clap.)

Rabbi

Look how she made us all laugh!

“Where there's laughter, there's God.”

It's a Jewish saying.
I heard it in the war.

Poet

Where there's laughter, there's God...
nice!

THE JEWISH JESUIT

Rabbi

Do you know what a DP is?
Do you now what a displaced person is?
That's what I was: displaced, displaced
not once but twice.
My childhood had no laughter.
It tasted bitter. It had an enemy but
lacked a God.

Do you know what a DP is?
Do you now what a displaced person is?

I was a child with no North Star to guide
me.
A broken life was normal to an orphan
in a camp of broken lives.
I was only three!

Suddenly an angel carries me away
across the ocean to America.
I was hugged by an eager mother and

freckled father.

Deloused, scrubbed to a glow, I was
schooled at St. Ignatius Loyola.
Altar boy, choir boy. Pious acolyte.
I prayed. I dove into the Holy books,
inspired and profound.
I was becoming 'me'!

One night at dinner I said,
"I'm entering the priesthood.
I'm going to be a priest, a Jesuit, who
knows, perhaps a saint!"
Silence.
No one smiled or spoke.
Something's wrong. Very wrong.

Chorus

You can't, you're Jewish!
A Jewish Jesuit will never do.

Rabbi

And then I went to find myself.
I came to ponder Kabbala and then
rejoice.
People come and ask me "Rabbi, why 'are'
we?"
Why? It's a mystery!
We're all DPs.

We're all displaced persons just like me.
And in this mystery at last I found my
place.

Mysteries of the universe obsess me!
The Zohar! The Book of Splendor!
The Song of Songs!
I long to sway in the clear light of Ain
Soph Aur...

(spoken)

Where were we??
Who's next?

Bartender

Sister! Sorella! Sorella! Salute amore!!

Nun

My turn? Oh... well I don't... Well... When I
was fifteen my aunt Rosemary died. She
left me her old jewelry box. When I finally
got up the courage to open it, I was so
surprised because in it were some old
love letters, and a poignant confession
addressed to me. I remember just the way
she began... To My Dear Niece Kristina...

NOT PORCELAIN DOLLS

It was long ago.
My hair was red.
My skin as white as my hair is now.
Then a secret life I led.
Now it may seem silly.
If so, be kind, don't laugh.

As a young girl, I followed the boy's path.
My toys were soldiers, not porcelain dolls.
I was first in Chemistry, not French.
While dancing, I took the lead.

In a delusive, erotic state of young
excitement
I embraced... a woman.
For four years I embraced a woman.
I loved her as a God. My God!

To relieve my pain I married.

I embraced the housekeeper... the
governess... the chambermaid...
My sweet husband tried to rescue me
With a bicycle... a wooden sled...
vigorous walking trips...
My God!

Alone now, I turn to the letters of my first

love.

I cannot cannot cannot give her up!
Alone now, like a man, I do not weep.
Alone now, like a man, I do not weep.

Utility Worker & Poet

Oh that is very moving. Very lonely.
Imagine back then when love was shame,
like a jagged scar or a crusty scab—
a feeling you veil from everyone, even
from yourself! But it's love. Love is... love!
Am I right?

TOAST LOVE

Poet

Let's toast love!
Hot buttered love,
Warm puppy love.
Fresh day love,
Middle-of-the-night love,
End-of-the-road love!
To love that has a thousand names
And to un-namable love,
Love that opens the heart.
Love that slides-you-to-the-bottom love.
Love that jolts you straight up.
And love that straightens your tie.

And don't forget the heavens, love that
sends you there,
Love that tracks an orbit.
Love that spins and weaves and swerves.
And love that unwinds the tangle of your
nerves.
And there's hell love too
When it's only you – and that's ghost love
too.

Ghost love.
But at least you can feel love
And that's all the proof you need!
So let's toast love,
Ghost love and all.

QUODLIBET

Rabbi

Salute amore!

Bartender

'na tavola di Paradiso
Amici miei, salute amore.

Poet

And I have not found the me who can live
without him.
And I never will.

He died of love.
And now I live with ghost love.
Ghost love.

Rabbi

Mysteries of the universe obsess me!
The Zohar! The Book of Splendor!
The Song of Songs!
I long to sway in the clear light of Ain
Soph Aur!

Dancer

We're gonna roll that congoleum floor!
Me and Merce and Martha and Fosse too.

Nun

As a bride of Christ,
My Love is His fire.
All thoughts are engulfed in this flame.
Just joy remains.

Utility Worker

Remember the great Sufi poet Rumi?

All

No.

Poet

Yes!

Utility Worker

Well let's drink a toast to Rumi.
It was Rumi who said: "Just as wine
intoxicates the body so love intoxicates
the soul."

ALL THAT IS LEFT OF ME *(finale)*

Wine is the balm of lovers.
Come pour a cup for me.
Then listen! Love as perfect as the moon.
Awaken lovers awaken!

"I can't sleep when my Beloved is next
to me."

"I can't sleep when my Beloved is not next
to me!"

In my heart beat there is union with the
Beloved.

Listen lovers, listen!

Intoxicated in the Tavern of Love,
Drinking distilled harmonies,
I taste the wine of long ago,
Then dream you are here, my Love.

Suddenly, I awaken and shake with joy,
Spin in ecstasy!

Orbit the sun! No! Beyond the sun!

A crazy drunk! Drowning!
Dissolving into my Beloved.

You are all that is left of me.
You are all that is left of me.
You are all that is left of me.
Nothing left... of me!

*As they sing the lights are restored.
They are happy, but the night was so
magical that they part with reluctance
and tenderness. While they are singing
they move farther apart until they all
disappear and nothing is left but their
voices.*



Elliot Levine



William Zukof

ON THE MAKING OF JUKEBOX IN THE TAVERN OF LOVE

A conversation between Valeria Vasilevski and Eric Salzman

At the Central Park Arsenal, New York City, 2010

VV About two years ago, Bill Zukof and Elliot Levine of The Western Wind met with Eric and myself to talk about the possibility of a commission for a new piece. The question was: What do we write?

Eric, who has at least one million ideas, thoughts and back-up material on just about any subject you can bring forth, immediately said:

“Why don’t we write a madrigal comedy like Banchieri’s ‘Boatride from Venice to Padua’. That was in 1605 and there hasn’t been much work done on the madrigal comedy since then. But instead of a boatride from Venice to Padua, we can... set it on the #7 subway from Manhattan to Astoria!”

Who else thinks like that!

Bill said: “That’s terrific!”

Elliot said: “Great idea!”

Valeria said: “What’s a madrigal comedy?”

In the meantime, The Western Wind allowed us to sit in on rehearsals so we could get a sense of how they worked together and what their needs are as individual singers and as a group. Actually, I was there for a third and secret purpose and that was to take notes on their interactions and banter and personal style so their ‘characters’ could evolve – if only ever so slightly – from something in their real selves. That’s when the setting was changed.

ES It doesn't matter where you set it, Valeria, but it must have dramatic purpose and distinctive characters in a situation.

VV So I said why don't we set the piece in an Italian bar in a New York neighborhood on the night of the great storm when all the electricity goes out and people who normally might never enter a bar, go in to find shelter. This also allows us to have all the lights go out in the concert hall for a candle light concert!

ES Yeah, then we could have a real candlelight concert!

VV Swell idea!

ES It's a perfect Renaissance madrigal comedy idea. Just like 'The Decameron' of Boccaccio: tales of love in a time of plague! In candlelight.

VV The characters, all strangers, enter to escape the storm but can't go anywhere. So they talk of love and bond as a community as their songs move from love on the material plane to love in the mystical sense of union with the Beloved. Here we can quote Rumi. In the Sufi tradition, intoxication with wine is the metaphor for the intoxication of spiritual love – hence the title Jukebox In The Tavern Of Love.

ES I love the title!

VV Each character has his or her own language. We work with the language of tap dancing, the language of James Joyce, the false Italian of the bartender (based on Banchieri), the pretend Yiddish of the Rabbi, the Victorian dignity of an old letter, etc. All slightly exaggerated. In addition, it'd be fun to add a metalanguage of gestures based on a book of Italian gestures called 'La Mimica Degli Antichi, Investigata Nel Gestire Napoletano' or 'Gesture in Naples and Gesture in Classical Antiquity'. There are some wonderful gestures in this book that are even used today in southern Italy.

My favorite is the gesture to express anger known as “to bite one’s elbow!” Can we incorporate the gestures right into the score?

ES Sure! Sing and bite your elbow at the same time. Only The Western Wind could manage to do that!

VV I have to interrupt to say that Eric is every artist’s ideal composer because he does not keep his head in the sands of music but thinks in terms of theater, of movement, of lighting possibilities, of character and conflict and leaves no detail unnoticed because he is a brilliant man of the theater and it’s always a joy to collaborate with him.

Now, tell me again what’s a madrigal comedy?

ES I guess it’s something like a Renaissance vaudeville or what they used to call an Olio – a bunch of routines and songs for the ensemble on a more-or-less dramatic subject. Say, a vocal storm. love in a blackout, earthly love, drinking wine in a bar, spiritual love according to the great Persian poet Rumi.

VIVIR EN NY – BERNAT DEDEU'S BLOG

Vivir in New York – about the music of Eric Salzman

My colleague Eric Salzman invited me to the premiere of his new opera at the Tenri Institute, a precious cultural center dedicated to the study of Orientalism (on 13th Street near Sixth Avenue). Eric has written a marvelous piece for vocal ensemble entitled *Jukebox In The Tavern Of Love* (libretto by Valeria Vasilevski) that tells the story of six strange individuals who meet unexpectedly in a bar when there is a blackout during a huge storm: a Hollywood (Broadway) dancer, a nun, an Orthodox Rabbi exchange dialogue about love and solitude that could have been written by Ionesco. The truth is that Eric has created a perfect modern madrigal comedy (as he defines it himself) with palpable influences from his beloved Weill but also with notable influences from the operas of Britten. It's a pleasure to listen to The Western Wind Ensemble interpret contemporary music with such conviction, thus putting to rest the stupid prejudice (sustained by many operatic critics today) that there are neither new operas nor competent interpreters of the same.

BASKET RONDO

Publisher: Meredith Monk Music (ASCAP)

JUKE BOX IN THE TAVERN OF LOVE

Music: © Eric Salzman

Libretto: © Valeria Vasilevski

Commissioned by The Western Wind Vocal Ensemble

Engineered, mixed and mastered by Ted Spencer

Recorded 2009 at Ted Spencer Recording in New York City

Recording session producers: Allison Sniffin for Basket Rondo,

Mark Johnson for Jukebox In The Tavern Of Love

Basket Rondo editing: Ted Spencer with William Zukof,

Meredith Monk and Allison Sniffin

Jukebox In The Tavern Of Love editing: Ted Spencer with William Zukof

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Valeria Vasilevski: LA Times

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William Zukof & Elliot Levine: Ted Spencer

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J U K E B O X I N T H E
T A V E R N O F L O V E

A Madrigal Comedy Libretto by Valeria Vasilevski

The Western Wind Vocal Ensemble