

Classical music died a few years ago.

A beloved, aging relative, we had watched it grow feeble and crotchety over the years: the titanic ruminations of Beethoven had, through endless commercialization, lost their power to the shock the dinner table guests or even disturb the sleep of the family dog. The enlightenment era humanism of Bach's F major Brandenburg Concerto was pressed into service as theme music for William F. Buckley's paleo-conservative PBS program, *Firing Line*. The great Italian revolutionary Verdi was relegated to providing background music for spaghetti ads. Endless loops of Mozart concerti piped into the Port Authority Bus Terminal and shopping malls conveyed, in the most tasteful way possible, the unspoken message which could not be openly declared by the facility's management: Whites Only.

What seemed to fare worst of all was what used to be called modern music: a demented uncle safely kept far away from the children, the intense pizzicatos, random fortissimi, sul ponticello bow scrapings and "emancipated" dissonance combined with a complete absence of a sense of humor or self awareness, all this began to seem merely pathological. Within a few generations, turn of the century expressionism once visceral and harrowing had morphed into a tedious farce.

The time had come for it to pass into the good night.

Classical music is dead. Long live post-classical music.

Admittedly, it's a bad name: when styles have a catchy name, it's a safe bet they are on their way to the grave. Whatever you want to call the style, (post-minimalism, totalism have also been suggested) one of its main roots extends into the Yale Music School in the early 1980s where a group of composers under the tutelage of the inspirational composer Martin Bresnick began to create a sound world drawn from our day to day musical experience in rock, jazz, world music, pop and industrial noise. Electric guitars, and basses, keyboards and drum sets spicing up conventional orchestras go back at least to Leonard Bernstein's *Mass* of 1971. These composers would invert the relationship making amplification and rock instruments and junkyard percussion the standard core, adding into the mix orchestral strings and oddball symphonic instruments like the bass clarinet.

Julia Wolfe, Michael Gordon and David Lang would eventually move to New York and work under the name of Bang on a Can, establishing a festival which is now well into its second decade. Their touring ensemble, the Bang on a Can All-Stars, best known for their cover of Brian Eno's *Music for Airports* a few years back, has brought the "downtown" sound to small towns in Indiana, to the European bastions of high artistic seriousness Darmstadt and Ircam and as far away as Uzbekistan.

The first generation of post-classicists led by the BOACers have now entered into musical history, and while they are by no means universally accepted, they have garnered their share of awards, foundation grants and prestigious commissions. BOAC is now

firmly ensconced in Lincoln Center, the belly of the arts establishment beast, a long way from their roots in the grunge of the lower east side (when it was still grungy.) And, it's natural that a reaction to them has also taken hold among the next generation of composers.

Part of this reaction is against the outlaw image which boomers equated with rock and roll. For post boomers, rock has long since ceased to be the music of counter cultural rebellion; it is, at best, your parent's music and at worst, the soundtrack provided by corporate entertainment behemoths like Clear Channel which market it and police its content.

Corporate rock now "sucks" even worse than when Kurt Cobain said it did and some composers don't want to have anything to do with it-it's adolescent volume, its brainless pyrotechnics, its crotch-grabbing insolence.

What all this means is that what you're likely to see at concerts like our excellent local New Music New Haven series, is a reaction to classical music but also a reaction to a reaction. On the concerts you will hear pieces by young composers like Judd Greenstein and Mark Dancigers whose Bang on Can lineage is apparent. Electronic and conventional instruments merge to create tapestries of gradually shifting patterns slowly guiding the ear into new and surprising places. But you will hear works by Nathan Williamson which exist in a serene, ethereal world untouched by the urban grit which became de rigeur for the Bang on a Canners. Or you may observe the ghost of high modernist neo-complexity in the music of Martin Suckling, enlivened, or perhaps subverted by ostinato patterns which would have been redpencilled out of existence by composition teachers a generation ago.

You will also hear music by comparatively traditional composers like Dan Kellogg for whom none of these issues seem to matter. Solid, imaginative and technically faultless, it is all the more compelling for its unwillingness to bend to fashion.

And you will also see guest appearances by nationally and internationally recognized composers now in their sixties and seventies. You may recognize some of their names, and that's because they made their reputation when the arts and culture were seen as an important pawn within cold war politics. Back then composers of modest achievement could count on public and private sector support receiving the attention and accolades of the agenda setting media.

In contrast, the current generation of composers, born during the Reagan administration and educated during the high water mark of market fundamentalism can't get arrested.

What they are doing is far below the radar screen owned and operated by a few entertainment conglomerates who now call the shots. As Sopranos creator David Chase recently remarked, what they want is entertainment that makes you go out and buy stuff. None of this music will make you want to go to the mall.

This revolution in music is definitely not being televised. But if you give it the time, it will make you think about the world very differently.