Netting a Government Commission: MySpace Taps a New Musical Arsenal

by Alex Shapiro

The brass name plate on the door declared, “COMMANDER.” As I entered, my eyes grasped a wall of framed autographed photos featuring highly ranked officers. Bookshelves held an assortment of reading material, CDs, files, and a few momentos of stuffed animal toys. A combat helmet casually rested atop a coat rack in which camouflage jumpuits hung next to civilian clothes. I was inside the Fort Monroe Army Base in Virginia.

How did I, a chamber-music composer, end up here?

Blame it all on the serendipity of the Internet – and that MySpace page I put up a while back.

In the last week of June 2007, while reading messages from some of my newly acquired MySpace e-friends scattered around the world, I came across one that was longer than most. Most notable was that the photo of the writer was a man in a dark-blue military uniform, complete with an intimidatingly long sword, standing on a stern green field. Ruling out high-fashion battle dress, I went with the theory that this fellow was a band director. Additionally ruling out the possibility that anyone from the military would ever contact me, I assumed that this was probably a joke from a friend, since one doesn’t expect the U.S. government to go trolling for artists on MySpace. The writer’s name was Major Tod A. Addison, Commander and conductor of the United States Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Band.

As I read the words tucked within the tight MySpace box which framed them, the phrases “inquiry for a possible commission,” and “piece for concert band,” popped out. I still wondered whether this was for real, since some of my pals are famous for their senses of humor. Reading further, the writer stated his understanding of budget needs and scheduling restraints.

I put up a while back.

...continued on page 3

The Minnesota Orchestra Composer Institute: November 1-8, 2008

The Minnesota Orchestra Composer Institute offers a unique week-long immersion into the world of a major American symphony orchestra.

From a field of 162 applicants from 31 states, a jury chaired by composer Aaron Jay Kernis and consisting of composers Yehudi Wyner, Sebastian Currier, Shaler Mahoney and Minnesota Orchestra Assistant Conductor Sarah Hassuk. Hicks selected the composers and works to be featured in this year’s Institute. They are:

Antonio Defeo (Pulham Manor, N.Y.): “Four Portraits”
Ted Hearne (New Haven, Conn.): “Patriot”
Wang Lu (New York, N.Y.): “Wailing”
Andrew McManus (Rochester, N.Y.): “Identity”
Justin Merritt (Northfield, Minn.): “River of Blood”
David Schneider (Bloomington, Ind.): “Automation”
Ming-Huei Teo (Ann Arbor, Mich.): “Ten”

Under the guidance of Kernis, these seven composers will have their orchestral works rehearsed and performed by the Minnesota Orchestra and will participate in a series of seminars on musical career, business and professional development issues. Composers receive consultations with Kernis and Music Director Osmo Vänskä before and after the rehearsals. They will also meet with Orchestra members and attend small-group sessions with leading music industry professionals.

continued on page 6...
Then I read the writer's description of what kind of piece he was looking for, and yet another phrase popped out: his comment that he was seeking something with a "military theme." I began to wonder: was he attending the final rehearsal, heard all the notes from my head blasted at me by wonderful players. And it was certainly visually unique, everyone, including Maestro Addison at the podium, wore their camouflage utility jumpsuits, with pant legs tucked into rugged army boots. The musicians looked like at any moment they were ready to drop their obsoles and take there feeling remarkably well-protected, and tried to imagine the New York Philharmonic musicians in such attire.

Military personnel, even those who are artists, use a traditional language that is foreign to a civilian like me. These musicians possess a decorum of emotional detachment, and a remarkable lack of ego about what they do, referring to their musical work as assignments or tasks to be accomplished. Rank is very significant in this world, and I was careful to always address my new friend Ted as "Major Addison" when speaking with the musicians. Likewise, I was always addressed formally as "Ms. am" or "Ms. Shapiro." This sincerity and formality is striking, and charming, to a independent composer from the hippie West Coast.

I left rehearsal on the back in the company of Major Addison and Lt. Shann Toulouse, an impressive young woman who is the second or something that the band. Hailed for an anecdotally, the TRADOC Band herself. Apparently she liked my online audio files, hearing my work, and contacting me. Needless to say, this is not something that I would ever have dreamed would happen to me. Working with the U.S. Armed Forces bands, one is constantly presented with the uniformed soldiers flying missions and risking their lives overseas at some same time. Noting an array of emails splashing around the acronyms CCR, TPIN, DUNS, TP, NAICS, CAGE and TRADOC. Slightly dizzying, but the usual civilian commissioning agreement, beginning with my need to classify and take care of all the parts preparation. Most significantly, I retain non-transposed concert pitch score; the Army offices would have noted for pieces that elicit a lot of sound and timbral depth.

The experience of composing this piece for the TRADOC Band was a very rich one, I have never been more respectfully treated by a client. Anything you did and any question I had, were no problem at all. I even was able to set the delivery date for the musical score to be sent to the Army offices would take care of all the parts preparation. Most significantly, I retain the publishing rights for a piece with an extraordinarily brief 90- day exclusivity. The job itself could not have gone more smoothly.

Beginning the piece, however, was another issue, as I did battle with many of my many, slightly schizophrenic, moods. I had a broad stylistic approach, and as I worked to envision the piece before even writing a note, I wrestled with a myriad of choices. Unused to having such a sizable array of musicians from whom we happened to step foot outside just as 5:00 p.m. rolled around. Suddenly, a trumpet was playing taps and my companions abruptly froze right where we were standing, and held a salute. After taps, a cannon sounded, and then a military jet swooped overhead. I asked if the latter was a regular fly over, and Ted said no, just good timing. A flash of melancholy hit me, recalling the song, "Where is my country?" I have become friends via email and phone. Internet TRADOC Band herself. Apparently she liked my online audio files, hearing my work, and contacting me. Needless to say, this is not something that I would ever have dreamed would happen to me. Working with the U.S. Armed Forces bands, one is constantly presented with the uniformed soldiers flying missions and risking their lives overseas at some same time. Noting an array of emails splashing around the acronyms CCR, TPIN, DUNS, TP, NAICS, CAGE and TRADOC. Slightly dizzying, but the usual civilian commissioning agreement, beginning with my need to classify and take care of all the parts preparation. Most significantly, I retain non-transposed concert pitch score; the Army offices would have noted for pieces that elicit a lot of sound and timbral depth.

The experience of composing this piece for the TRADOC Band was a very rich one, I have never been more respectfully treated by a client. Anything you did and any question I had, were no problem at all. I even was able to set the delivery date for the musical score to be sent to the Army offices would take care of all the parts preparation. Most significantly, I retain the publishing rights for a piece with an extraordinarily brief 90-day exclusivity. The job itself could not have gone more smoothly.

Beginning the piece, however, was another issue, as I did battle with many of my many, slightly schizophrenic, moods. I had a broad stylistic approach, and as I worked to envision the piece before even writing a note, I wrestled with a myriad of choices. Unused to having such a sizable array of musicians from whom we happened to step foot outside just as 5:00 p.m. rolled around. Suddenly, a trumpet was playing taps and my companions abruptly froze right where we were standing, and held a salute. After taps, a cannon sounded, and then a military jet swooped overhead. I asked if the latter was a regular fly over, and Ted said no, just good timing. A flash of melancholy hit me, recalling the song, "Where is my country?"

I have become friends via email and phone. Internet TRADOC Band herself. Apparently she liked my online audio files, hearing my work, and contacting me. Needless to say, this is not something that I would ever have dreamed would happen to me. Working with the U.S. Armed Forces bands, one is constantly presented with the uniformed soldiers flying missions and risking their lives overseas at some same time. Noting an array of emails splashing around the acronyms CCR, TPIN, DUNS, TP, NAICS, CAGE and TRADOC. Slightly dizzying, but the usual civilian commissioning agreement, beginning with my need to classify and take care of all the parts preparation. Most significantly, I retain non-transposed concert pitch score; the Army offices would have noted for pieces that elicit a lot of sound and timbral depth.
Chapter Updates

San Francisco Bay Area

Another year of the Bay Area Chapter’s long-running Composer in the Schools (CITS) program culminated in a pair of public concerts. Since 1997, CITS has been placing composers-in-residence at Bay Area high schools and has helped dozens of student composers develop their creative voices. As part of the program, professional performers are brought into the classrooms to work on their pieces and to present their works at public concerts towards the end of each school year.

Berkeley High School students, taught by composer and violinist Katrina Wrede, had their works presented at Berkeley’s Triverk Chapel on April 23, 2008, performed by Wrede, Bay Area harpist Laura Simpson, renowned pianist Sarah Cahill, and several of the Berkeley students themselves. An enthusiastic audience heard new works each year and loves letting their colleagues know about their commission. The CITS class at Lowell High School, under composer Christopher Jones, had their works presented at the Presidio Chapel in San Francisco on April 25. An all-star group of instrumentalists, choral ensembles, and vocalists performed new pieces by student composers Deven Briner, Ian Fausign, Ben Hamilton, Chase Jackson, Scott Johnstun, Dylan Mattingly, Gabriela Smith, Mackenzie Sowers, Eli Wirtschafter and also a new work by Wrede, commissioned by the Chapter as part of her residency.

The CITS class at Lowell High School, under composer Christopher Jones, had their works presented at the Presidio Chapel in San Francisco on April 25. An all-star group of instrumentalists, choral ensembles, and vocalists performed new pieces by student composers Deven Briner, Ian Fausign, Ben Hamilton, Chase Jackson, Scott Johnstun, Dylan Mattingly, Gabriela Smith, Mackenzie Sowers, Eli Wirtschafter and also a new work by Wrede, commissioned by the Chapter as part of her residency.

The CITS class at Lowell High School, under composer Christopher Jones, had their works presented at the Presidio Chapel in San Francisco on April 25. An all-star group of instrumentalists, choral ensembles, and vocalists performed new pieces by student composers Deven Briner, Ian Fausign, Ben Hamilton, Chase Jackson, Scott Johnstun, Dylan Mattingly, Gabriela Smith, Mackenzie Sowers, Eli Wirtschafter and also a new work by Wrede, commissioned by the Chapter as part of her residency.

The CITS class at Lowell High School, under composer Christopher Jones, had their works presented at the Presidio Chapel in San Francisco on April 25. An all-star group of instrumentalists, choral ensembles, and vocalists performed new pieces by student composers Deven Briner, Ian Fausign, Ben Hamilton, Chase Jackson, Scott Johnstun, Dylan Mattingly, Gabriela Smith, Mackenzie Sowers, Eli Wirtschafter and also a new work by Wrede, commissioned by the Chapter as part of her residency.

The CITS class at Lowell High School, under composer Christopher Jones, had their works presented at the Presidio Chapel in San Francisco on April 25. An all-star group of instrumentalists, choral ensembles, and vocalists performed new pieces by student composers Deven Briner, Ian Fausign, Ben Hamilton, Chase Jackson, Scott Johnstun, Dylan Mattingly, Gabriela Smith, Mackenzie Sowers, Eli Wirtschafter and also a new work by Wrede, commissioned by the Chapter as part of her residency.

The CITS class at Lowell High School, under composer Christopher Jones, had their works presented at the Presidio Chapel in San Francisco on April 25. An all-star group of instrumentalists, choral ensembles, and vocalists performed new pieces by student composers Deven Briner, Ian Fausign, Ben Hamilton, Chase Jackson, Scott Johnstun, Dylan Mattingly, Gabriela Smith, Mackenzie Sowers, Eli Wirtschafter and also a new work by Wrede, commissioned by the Chapter as part of her residency.