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## Music-making for the Dance

By  
Scott Timm

There is no question that the 20th century has produced a remarkable amount of fine music, but it is surprising to consider that some of the century's greatest music has come from commissions by dance companies. Serge Diaghilev's Ballet Russe commissioned a score from a young composer named Igor Stravinsky, and the resulting collaboration ushered in the modern age of music. Since that time, dance has continued to inspire and engender great music.

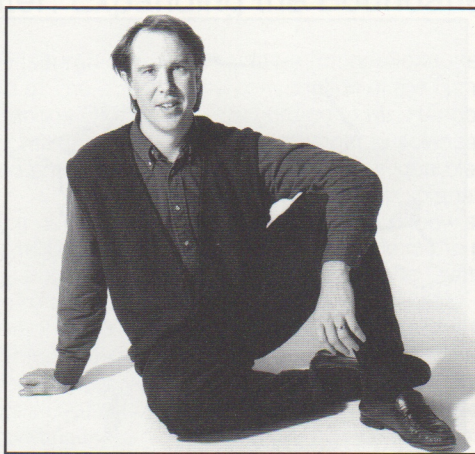
A catalogue of musical works created for the dance turns out to be a listing of great 20th-century music. In addition to Stravinsky, the list would include *El Amor Brujo* (Manuel de Falla), *Parade* (Erik Satie), *Daphnis et Chloé* (Maurice Ravel), *The Miraculous Mandarin* (Bela Bartók) and *Romeo and Juliet* (Serge Prokofiev). This commissioning of great music is not just a European tradition; consider the dance music of Americans Roy Harris, Virgil Thompson, Howard Hanson and Norman Della Joia.

However, the most inspired work seems to come from a relationship built over time between composers and choreographers. Would Stravinsky have composed the scores for *The Firebird*, *The Rite of Spring* and *Petroushka* without the driving force of Serge Diaghilev? Would we be blessed with *Appalachian Spring* without the close working relationship of Aaron Copland and Martha Graham? Closer to our own time are the collaborations of John Cage and Merce Cunningham.

These partnerships have created daring and memorable music, but it is not with this in mind that choreographers and composers embark on their collaborative journey. They work together in the belief that dance performed to live music has a special excitement that everyone feels—the dancers, the musicians and the audience.

This commitment to live music is a priority for Mark Taylor, the new artistic director of Pittsburgh's Dance Alloy. Since 1979, when he first presented his work in New York City, Taylor has worked with many contemporary composers, among them Elise Tobin, Paul Brady, Guy Kluscevek and John Zorn. "I've become very interested in working primarily with music by living composers," Taylor said. "It's been interesting to follow the new music scene in New York, where a lot of really creative and exciting work is going on. As a result, because I had warm-blooded composers to work with, I started asking them to perform the music live."

Taylor's former company, the New York-based Mark Taylor and Friends, recently performed at New York's Joyce Theater, where three of the five works on the program were danced to live music. In an economy where limited budgets make it difficult to use live music, Taylor



Mark Taylor

has had to keep the number of musicians small

Two weeks after the successful Joyce season, Taylor accepted the position with Dance Alloy and moved to Pittsburgh. He replaces the outgoing Elsa Limbach as director of this contemporary dance company, in residence at The Carnegie.

Why would an artist with a wide following and critical acclaim leave New York to move to Pittsburgh? Taylor says it's not what he gives up but what he gains in the move. He enjoys the level of activity in New York, but the working conditions for artists there are difficult, and he feels

Pittsburgh is a more productive city for his artistic goals.

Taylor is excited about working with other artists in the Pittsburgh community, and has already taken steps to bring more live music to Dance Alloy performances. Elise Tobin, a New York-based composer with whom Taylor has frequently collaborated, will come to Pittsburgh in April to perform her score for *Devotion*, a Taylor work that received its premiere last January.

Dance Alloy's April concert at the Fulton Theater will include a new work by Ysaye Barnwell, arranger and performer with the Afro-American vocal group Sweet Honey in the Rock. The work will be performed by Glorius Rebirth, a Pittsburgh-based gospel chorus.

In addition to cultivating new musical sources, Taylor is ever-vigilant for choreographic inspiration. He recalls his first visit to The Carnegie in 1986 to create a work for the Dance Alloy: "While walking to rehearsal, I would pass the bone rooms—the big bone room, the little bone room—and there were dinosaurs lying around. I was working on a piece that had to do with the potential extinction of mankind through atomic arms, and I started to make the connection between the dinosaurs and the arms race. I thought of that as an interesting metaphor, and in my next work for the Alloy I used inflatable models of dinosaurs and other props from the Museum of Natural History gift shop, and movement images drawn from the Hall of Dinosaurs."

Taylor looks forward to similar projects. "One of the things I enjoy is site-specific or room-specific work," he explains. "There are certainly enough nooks and crannies in The Carnegie to produce something that uses these resources in a creative way."

Taylor's commitment to the meeting of music and dance will offer Pittsburgh audiences many exciting collaborations—perhaps even a musical work of enduring power. ■

Scott Timm is a free-lance writer and assistant managing director of Dance Alloy.