

PERFORMANCE CONTEXT: Two Reviews of Concerts including *Bolero*

The New York Times

CONCERT: A TRIBUTE TO PAUL PRICE

By TIM PAGE
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OVER the course of a career that spanned four decades, Paul Price introduced more than 400 new percussion works and distinguished himself as performer, a conductor and a teacher. Wednesday night at the Manhattan School of Music, where Mr. Price taught for many years, the Manhattan Percussion Ensemble, under the direction of Claire Heldrich, presented an apt, loving tribute to the late Mr. Price.

The program included works by Richard Trythall, Lou Harrison, Lukas Foss, John Cage and Frank Zappa; Mr. Cage was on hand as a guest. The works included the angular, pop-influenced symmetries of Mr. Zappa's "Black Page," the inexorable rhythmic buildups of Mr. Trythall's "Bolero," the gentle exploratory shadings of Mr. Harrison's "Song of Queztecóatl" and the ambitious percussion quartet by Mr. Foss that seemed a virtual glossary of looking at percussion.

One suspects that Mr. Price would have approved of this catholicity, of Ms. Heldrich's splendidly efficient timekeeping, of the spirited, accurate performances, and of the enthusiastic audience that shouted itself hoarse.

Chicago Tribune

David Byrne's Classical Crossover Shows Promise

By Dennis Polkow.
November 11, 1991

What happens when you cross David Byrne, new wave pioneer and Talking Heads founder, with a 44-member chamber orchestra made up of Chicago Symphony Orchestra players?

Well, for one thing, it means that Halloween came a bit late this year to Orchestra Hall. Although black was the color of choice for both orchestra and audience

members Saturday night, there were detractors. Such as the man in a black cowl with a red shawl, sporting white face makeup and mascara.

Byrne's "The Forest" began as a stage work of the same name done with director Robert Wilson for the 1988 celebration of the 750th anniversary of Berlin. Clocking in at nearly four hours, Byrne wrote 2 1/2 hours of music for it, which he subsequently reordered, pared down to an hour and recorded. He's been presenting it as a visiting guest of several orchestras around the country ever since.

Obviously owing much to Wilson's collaborations with Philip Glass, "The Forest" vacillates between pop music and minimalism without a specific point of view and with little motivic unity between its 10 movements, all supposedly having something to do with the ancient Sumerian "Epic of Gilgamesh." As a pop music collage that happens to incorporate the sound of the orchestra as its base, it is effective. Taken as a piece of serious music, it is static and derivative.

Yet taken as a first orchestral effort, "The Forest" shows much promise. Byrne is a talented and imaginative composer who suffers only from not understanding the genre he has chosen to wander into. He has said he plans to keep writing classical pieces, and if he does, and keeps absorbing and learning as he goes, it should be quite interesting to hear what he comes up with a few years from now.

Preceded by three powerful pieces for percussion ensemble by Christopher Rouse, Mantle Hood and Richard Trythall, the evening's eclectic program worked surprisingly well. Conductor David Alan Miller evoked effective playing from the CSO players, and while Byrne himself made his initial vocal entrance considerably off-pitch, once warmed up, his haunting syllabic dirges were quite effective.

Something that is difficult to overlook is the fact that the audience at Orchestra Hall was a far different one than would usually be there on a Saturday night. Most had obviously never been to Orchestra Hall and were hearing live orchestral music for the first time. If this experience somehow leads them back there, it was worthwhile in an immeasurable way.