

- [Home](#)
- [About Classical Voice North America](#)
- [Are you a music critic? Join the MCANA](#)
- [Contact the Editors](#)
- [Support us](#)
- [Around the U.S.](#)
- [Around Canada](#)
- [Music Critics Create Annual Opera Award](#)
- [International](#)
- [Digital](#)
- [Issues in the Arts](#)
- [Member Blogs](#)
- [RSS FEED](#)
- [Members on the Web](#)
- [Calendar Focus: Critics' Picks](#)

Navigate to

In With The New, Criers Plan Bold Series Of Firsts

[+](#) Share / Save [f](#) [t](#) [r](#)



The narrative of Elena Ruehr's new Piano Concerto is drawn from the immigrant journey of soloist Heng-Jin Park.
(Photo by Ed Slattery)

By **Keith Powers**

BOSTON — The string ensemble [A Far Cry](#) is hot. Crazy hot. A string of commissions this fall, performed at home and on tour along the east coast and beyond, is starting the Criers' second decade off at a hectic pace.

In September, the Criers premiered [Philip Glass's third piano concerto](#) with soloist Simone Dinnerstein. Coming in November, they ambitiously unveil [The Blue Hour](#), a multi-part setting of [Carolyn Forché's](#) poem featuring five composers, with vocalist [Luciana Souza](#). In between, with three performances in the Boston area in October, the group performed the world premiere of [Elena Ruehr's](#) Piano Concerto, part of a program entitled [Music in Migration](#). [Heng-Jin Park](#) was the soloist.

The conductor-less Criers follow the inspiration of different group members in creating their programs. These concerts — I heard the one Oct. 21 at [St. John's Episcopal Church](#) in Jamaica Plain — were conceived by violinist [Miki-Sophia Cloud](#) and included Telemann's suite *Les Nations*, the bracing Tenth Symphony of Mieczysław Weinberg, and the Ruehr premiere.



Composer Elena Ruehr explores musical roots by re-inventing them.
(Christian Steiner)

Each work contributed thematically to the *Music in Migration* concept, but in very different ways. The centerpiece musically was Ruehr's concerto, a 20-minute work with multiple moods, but framed as one movement. Ruehr's past compositions have frequently taken literary inspiration, with operas, songs, and instrumental work being set in motion by novelists like [Madison Smartt Bell](#) and [Margaret Atwood](#), or poets like [Adrienne Rich](#) and [Louise Glück](#).

This concerto's narrative comes from the life of Heng-Jin Park herself. Born in Korea, she came to the United States with her mother, under duress after the death of her father. Ruehr paints her journey musically, evoking Korean folk music and opera, moving on through piano exercises, and then tip-toeing through allusions to Park's personal touchstones as a mature musician: Bach, Chopin, Brahms.

Apart from the easily recognizable Korean influences, the bulk of the musical references are blended into Ruehr's own language. A new language, for the composer. Her work has often been characterized by approachable, accessible surfaces, which she layered over complex rhythmic structures – frequently stylized dance ideas.

Here, Ruehr engages in a bolder, more interactive approach. The opening moments gently recall Park's Korean past. Notably, the [Pansori tradition](#) – pairing a vocalist with a drummer – is evoked, with Park as the vocalist, and pizzicato strings as the percussionist. This opening effectively follows the personal, thematic narrative, but stands starkly apart from the ensuing musical ideas.

More than a dozen different moods follow in succession. Piano arpeggios end up in a pizzicato climax. Cloud, as concertmaster for this work, picks up a chordal progression from the piano and spins it into an elegant, legato line. Park's trilling sets off another gambit – a probing line from the first violins. A six-note, falling and rising phrase recurs, sometimes with a jazz rhythm underpinning it.



A Far Cry starts its second decade with a string of commissions. (afarcry.org)

A dramatic, new structure emerges midway through: the strings drone, then surge, as the the pianist carves out chords. The entire ensemble and the

soloist burst into a 32nd-note frenzy, which accelerates to a full stop. A lyric line in the violins causes the soloist to respond, and the six-note phrase returns again, in an altered guise. The percussive, pizzicato drive then returns, barreling toward the conclusion.

The bulk of the concerto has a heightened complexity, virtuosically explored both by soloist and ensemble. There aren't many introspective or reserved moments, but the work remains tuneful, organically interactive. Like most successful premieres, it feels like the work that it is – not a sketch for a larger work, or a piece for a different instrumentation. As a one-movement, challenging piece that explores musical roots by re-inventing them, Ruehr's first piano concerto seems headed for an active performance life, apart from this particular thematic context.

The theme – music in migration – got a diverse exploration. [Telemann's *Les Nations*](#) suite creates a musical travelogue: after an overture and a clever minuet, musical side trips are taken to Turkey, Switzerland, Russia, and Portugal.

The premise is tried and true, but this execution was alert and bracing. The minuet, written ABA, with a unison middle section full of delight, showed off the Criers' seamless sound. The grand tour ends with two movements in a curiously unfair foot-race – first “Les Boiteux” (The Lamé), followed by “Les Coureurs” (The Runners) – the depictions characterized deftly.



Mieczyslaw Weinberg (International Mieczyslaw Weinberg Society)

Mieczysław Weinberg, contemporary and friend of Shostakovich, led an unrelentingly oppressed life as a persecuted Jew in Poland, then an exile from his native land, and later as victim of Stalin during the worst of the dictator's regime. His life was one of suffering and turmoil, but his prolific and under-performed musical output is finding more and more appreciators. The pianist [Marc-André Hamelin](#) has explored multiple sonatas in recent recitals.

Weinberg's Tenth Symphony (he wrote two dozen) was written in 1968. Breathtaking in scope, invention, and texture, the Tenth has extended solos for cello ([Rafael Popper-Keizer](#)), double bass ([Karl Doty](#)) and viola ([Caitlin Lynch](#)), and several especially coruscating solos for concertmaster [Robyn Bollinger](#).

It has five marked movements, but many shifting ideas. Several themes recur, but it's the texture and treatment of the themes that create the work's power.

A darkly contrapuntal “Burlesca” stood out. Strong uniformity of sound often defines string ensembles, and the opening movement's unison attack did just that. But the multi-part invention of the “Burlesca” showed a musical acumen built on a decade of collaboration, still enthusiastically pursued.

Keith Powers covers music and the arts for GateHouse Media and WBUR's ARTery. Follow @PowersKeith; email to keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com

Date posted: October 26, 2017

Add your comment

XHTML : You may use these tags : `` `<abbr title="">` `<acronym title="">` `` `<blockquote cite="">` `<cite>` `<code>` `<del datetime="">` `` `<i>` `<q cite="">` `<s>` `<strike>` ``

This is a Gravatar-enabled website. To get your own globally-recognized avatar, please register at [Gravatar.com](#)

Your comment

Your comment

Name

Email

Website

[« Seeking Eurydice, Via The Enigmatic Lens Of Sciarrino](#)

Search this site

Share / Save   

 [Get Classical Voice North America via RSS](#)

Now available from BRIDGE RECORDS...



Click on ad for more information

Events Calendar

« OCTOBER 2017 »						
M	T	W	T	F	S	S
25	26	27	28 ●	29	30	1
2	3	4	5	6 ●	7	8
9	10	11	12 ●	13 ●	14	15
16	17	18	19 ●	20 ●	21	22
23 ●	24	25 ●	26 ●	27 ●	28 ●	29
30 ●	31	1	2	3	4	5

THU

26

Philadelphia: Denève kicks off year-long Connesson project

October 26

THU

26

Boston: Charles Dutoit leads Berlioz's *Damnation of Faust*

October 26

FRI

27

Pittsburgh: New James MacMillan work honors Manfred Honeck's 10th season

October 27

FRI

27

NYC: Celebrating 30 years of Bang on a Can

October 27

SAT

28

NYC: Chamber Orchestra of New York delivers two new works

October 28

MON

30

NYC: China's Beijing-based NCPA Orchestra gives new work by Chen Qigang

October 30

Help Us Grow



Support quality coverage of the performing arts.

Click here to help Classical Voice North America resound!

A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT



John Fleming
MCANA President

Welcome to Classical Voice North America, the online journal of the Music Critics Association of North America, of which I was elected president in July. I have been a member of MCANA for 25 years, joining after I became performing arts critic of Florida's *St. Petersburg Times* (now the *Tampa Bay Times*).

I remember fondly the first MCANA annual meeting I attended, organized around the Lyric Opera of Chicago's 1992 premiere of *McTeague*, with score by William Bolcom. That meeting gave me – then new to music criticism – the invaluable opportunity to get acquainted with leading journalists in a specialized field. Many newspapers and magazines sent their staff critics, a far cry from the situation today when traditional print is severely stressed. Still, our meetings continue to be a great way to exchange ideas and hear top-notch performers together.

Under Barbara Jepson, my predecessor as president, and other MCANA leaders, CVNA was launched in September 2013 to provide a new outlet for classical music coverage. With readers in 90 countries it has shown consistent growth, recently passing half a million page views on 1,100 stories by 123 authors, the great majority of whom are members of MCANA.

This year saw the first annual MCANA Award for Best New Opera, which went to composer Missy Mazzoli and librettist Royce Vavrek for *Breaking the Waves*, premiered by Opera Philadelphia. Click on an article about the award [here](#).

Thank you for reading CVNA, which seeks to convey the richness of musical life in North America and elsewhere, with reviews and commentary by expert MCANA members and occasional guest contributors. If you happen to be a writer with experience in classical music, please consider this an invitation to [join us](#).

Stories We Like: Recommended by MCANA members

'Cold Mountain,' the opera based on the beloved Charles Frazier novel, is first-rate production -- By Roy C. Dicks at the [Raleigh News & Observer](#)

At a moment of Racial Tumult, the Little Rock Nine inspire an opera -- By Michael Cooper at the [New York Times](#)

When classical music becomes another character in a movie -- By Anne Midgette at the [Washington Post](#)

Chicago's MusicNOW series to lead off 20th anniversary season with a rich retrospective -- By Wynne Delacoma for [Chicago Classical Review](#)

Conveying sounds through words: the classical music critic's challenge -- by Anthony Tommasini at the [New York Times](#)

Muti, Mutter, CSO combine for triumphant series opener - By Kyle MacMillan at the [Chicago Sun Times](#)

Years after 'Cold Mountain' was published, its beloved characters live on in a new opera
- By Roy C. Dicks at the [Raleigh News & Observer](#)

Gannett Axes Three More Arts Writers -- By Susan Elliott at [MusicalAmerica.com](#)

Cincinnati Enquirer Fires Sole Arts Critic -- By Susan Elliott at [MusicalAmerica.com](#)

Why do conductors seem to play behind the beat? -- By James Bennett, II at [WQXR](#)

Rediscovering Ives' legacy -- By Paul Frucht at [NewMusicBox](#)

Conductor Leonard Slatkin calls Minnesota Orchestra lockout "ugliest labor dispute" in U.S. orchestra history -- By Claude Peck at the [Star-Tribune](#)

Hear what makes Norma the Everest of opera -- By James Jordan at the [New York Times](#)

Glover Savors Bond with Music of the Baroque -- By Kyle MacMillan at [Early Music America](#)

How we can support the world's rich musical diversity -- By Huib Schippers at the [Smithsonian](#)

How to save classical music, according to Stephen Hough -- By Tom Jacobs at [Pacific Standard](#)

L.A. players ink new 5-year contract -- By C.K. Dexter Haven at [All Is Yar](#)

Deconstruction of the State: Golden Cockerel at Santa Fe -- By Rodney Punt at [LA Opus](#)

Staatsoper Berlin Finally Reopens. Sort Of. -- By Rebecca Schmid at the [New York Times](#)

Record Keeping: Cataloguing Seiji Ozawa's active musical legacy -- By Paul E. Robinson at [Musical Toronto](#)

On the joys of Chopin, our most cat-like composer -- By Jeremy Denk at the [New York Times](#)

A Conversation with Harvey Sachs, Author of *New Arturo Toscanini Biography* -- By Christopher Purdy at [WOSU](#) (audio)

Berg Composes a World in Chaos -- By Jason Victor Serinus at [Stereophile](#)

'Street Scene' highlights Brevard Music Center's Kurt Weill Festival -- By Ted McIrvine at [Classical Voice North Carolina](#)

Heroines and heroes -- Anne Akiko Meyers and Richard Strauss at Eastern Music Festival -- By Peter Perret at [Classical Voice North Carolina](#)

Trump is wrong if he thinks symphonies are superior -- By Anthony Tommasini at the [New York Times](#)

John Adams reflects what it means to compose music in 'a small cultural arena' -- By John von Rhein at the [Chicago Tribune](#)

Time to Sing the Praises of Opera Librettists -- By Barbara Jepson at the [Wall Street Journal](#)

Cultural controversy swirls around Seattle Opera's 'Madame Butterfly' -- By Jason Victor Serinus at the [Seattle Times](#)

The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs, Santa Fe Opera, New Mexico — high-powered -- By George Loomis at the [Financial Times](#)

A Visionary (*R*)evolution of Steve Jobs at Santa Fe Opera -- By Rodney Punt at [LA Opus](#)

An Elusive Cold War Star -- By Tim Page in the [New York Review of Books](#)

Dresden Music Festival Explores Light and Dark Themes -- By Rodney Punt at [LA Opus](#)

Dresden Fest II: Beethoven's 'Eroica' at the Frauenkirche -- By Rodney Punt at [LA Opus](#)

What happens just before showtime at the Met Opera, in 12 rooms you'll never see -- By the video team at [TimesVideo](#)

Visit These Classical Music Websites



>> Bay area events, previews, reviews and news.



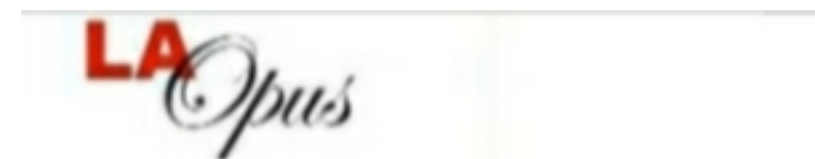
>> North Carolina's statewide arts journal



>> Windy City music and theater, classic and new



>> Promoting classical music in Northeast Ohio



>> Reporting on music and the lively arts



>> News Roundup | Industry News | Special Reports

Classical Voice North America is on Twitter

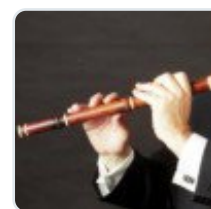
Tweets by @Classical_Voice



Classical Voice
@Classical_Voice



NY Early Music: High Season For The Low Countries, writes @AnneEJohnson:
classicalvoiceamerica.org/2017/10/24/ny-... #classicalmusic



NY Early Music: High Season For The Low Countries
classicalvoiceamerica.org

♡ ↗ 2h



Classical Voice
@Classical_Voice



'Wozzeck,' Chamber Scaled, Still Packs Its Violent Punch, writes @schmidr17:
classicalvoiceamerica.org/2017/10/21/woz... #opera

[Embed](#)

[View on Twitter](#)

Member Recommended Websites

- [Musical Toronto](#)
- [Opera Today](#)
- [San Francisco Classical Voice](#)
- [The Rest is Noise](#)
- [NPR Music](#)
- [La Scena Musicale](#)

- [Parterre Box](#)
- [Chicago On the Aisle](#)
- [New Music Box](#)
- [Opera News](#)
- [Cleveland Classical](#)
- [Musical America](#)
- [The Wholenote](#)
- [Cleveland Classical](#)
- [Arts Journal](#)
- [Miami Clásica](#)
- [Opera Chic](#)
- [Notes on Notes](#)
- [CVNC Arts Journal](#)

Navigate to

u