

MUSIC

Weekend Review

Supersoldiers, satire and a Renaissance madrigal; X Avant programmer Gregory Oh discusses how several of the Toronto festival's performers have wrestled with this year's theme: What is real?

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'Frankly, I believe a lot of Mozart's piano music is crap,' says **Gregory Oh**, pianist and programmer of this season's X Avant festival at the Music Gallery. But we all know Mozart was a genius, and the glow of that status burnishes everything he did, to the point at which we may no longer trust our ears when we hear his weaker compositions. "There's a real loss of our critical listening skills," Oh says. We want the real Mozart – that's why we bother with period instruments and such – but we're often distracted by the image, or (in other cases) the genre, or the performance tradition.

The tussle between the real and the apparent is at the heart of Oh's X Avant, the theme of which is: What Is Real? Here's how some of the programs get at this puzzle, with comments from the guy who put the shows together:

Jeff Mills

Oh first encountered the Detroit techno DJ at a club in Berlin, and was stunned to hear him open his set with a lengthy, virtually arrhythmic wash of sound that could have come from an electronic music lab. "I was ready to hear techno, and I got something completely different," Oh says. Saturday, SPK (206 Beverley St.)

Complete Récitations of Georges Aperghis

Most contemporary composers try to lock everything down in their notation, just as music scholars strive to come up with the definitive edition of everything written by Bach or Beethoven. "But Aperghis wants to be the vessel for the performer," says Oh, referring to the French composer's open-source attitude to his major musico-theatrical work, *Récitations*, here performed as a one-woman marathon by Montreal singer Donatienne Michel-Dansac. Music Gallery, Sunday

Will the Real Pierrot Please Stand Up? Arnold Schoenberg's arch cabaret cycle *Pierrot Lunaire* is such a modernist classic, it may as well have dried in amber. "If you start taking liberties with it, it becomes much more interesting," says Oh. His three-part, multilingual production recasts one-third of the piece as a Renaissance madrigal (arranged and performed by the Dallas Bergen Renaissance Madrigal Group), and another as a makeover project for the indie-classical-freestyle band, Deep Dark United. Music Gallery, Oct. 22

The 50-Minute Ring Even people who are bowled over by Wagner's Ring cycle usually find something unsettling in its power-worshipping myths and incestuous family melodrama. Myra Davies is a multimedia storyteller who looks at the epic four-part music drama with a sympathetic yet satirical eye, somewhat in the tradition of Anna Russell. Her 50-minute retelling, told with video, performance, a sound environment and excerpts from Wagner's music "doesn't condense the Ring, so much as it exposes it," says Oh. "Even if you've sat through the Ring, I don't think you know it unless you've seen this piece." Music Gallery, Oct. 23

Dance Dance Revolution

Halo is a madly successful series of video games in which a cybernetic supersoldier battles aliens and other hazardous beings. Oh, a determined player, had a hunch that the realistic yet stylized movements of the hero and his foes could support a kind of ballet, performed not by actual dancers but by game figures run by four veteran players following the instructions of a choreographer. Julia Aplin devised the movement, and Aaron Gervais provided a new score. "When it's live, to live music, it adds an element of danger," says Oh, for whom futuristic virtual combat is obviously not thrills enough. Music Gallery, Oct. 24

X Avant runs at the Music Gallery and other locations through Oct. 24. See musicgallery.org

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