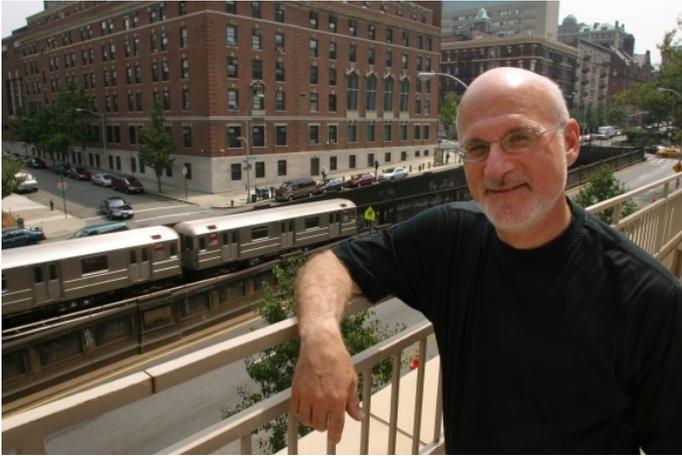


CLASSICALITE

EXCLUSIVE: Robert Sirota on 'Spindrift' with Sandbox Percussion, Concerts in Park Slope and Why He's Not Going on Nadia's 'Meet The Composer' Podcast

By Maria Jean Sullivan

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With both European bona fides (that Watson fellowship with Nadia Boulanger in Paris) and studies with composers that can sound European (those PhD lessons with Leon Kirchner at Harvard), American composer Robert Sirota remains precisely that: a quintessentially American composer. In his mature works, thorny chromaticism often plays nicely within rounded, deliberate forms. And there's always a true economy of means -- no motive where none intended. European-inspired, maybe, but his is a curious blend, no doubt informed by Sirota's many academic appointments up and down America's eastern seaboard (NYU, BU, Peabody, Manhattan School of Music). Not that Robert

Sirota is an ivory tower, himself. Case in point: Sirota's brand new, beguiling work for Sandbox Percussion, *Spindrift*.

Classicalite: *Spindrift*, your latest commission for Sandbox premiered last weekend as part of Concerts on the Slope at St. John's Episcopal Church. Can we get a brief origin story, at least for that piece?

Robert Sirota: Ben Larsen, the artistic director of Concerts on the Slope, introduced me to Sandbox Percussion. Ian Rosenbaum of Sandbox asked me if I would like to compose a piece for them, and I jumped at the chance. This group plays with incredible dynamism and nuance, and they are wonderful people, as well. It has been a real joy collaborating with them on this project.

Clite: And the accompanying *Fractured Atlas* fundraiser?

RS: This fell into place as an organic part of the collaboration. Once we all decided that I would create a piece tailored to Sandbox Percussion's talents and skills, I was happy to work with them to find the commission money. The central event of our fundraising for the commission was a preview reception in February at Sandbox's Brooklyn factory loft-studio in Sunset Park. On that evening, the quartet played about half of the new work-in-progress. The evening was quite successful financially -- total blast for everyone!

Clite: As this season's Concerts on the Slope composer-in-residence, we've heard a good lot of your chamber music. Regarding the premieres, were those pieces composed specifically for the space at St. John's? Or are those factors absent from your creative process?

RS: Actually, two of the nine works of mine being performed this season are premieres. *Spindrift* was definitely composed with the space at St. John's Church in mind. It is scored for two marimbas and two vibraphones, with the two marimbas separated by several feet on the altar platform. The two vibraphones are arrayed far to the left and right, about 20-30 feet from the marimbas, for antiphonal effect. The other new work, *Canticle/Cantilena/Canzona*, for guitar, was commissioned by the brilliant guitarist Jordan Dodson, before I was named this year's Concerts on the Slope composer-in-residence. We wanted to premiere it on the series because the acoustics of St. John's are very good for classical guitar.

Clite: Your recommendation of Samuel Z. Solomon's book *How to Write for Percussion* is an interesting read, indeed. I wasn't familiar. How long have you had your copy?

RS: I have known Sam Solomon for about 15 years, since he was an undergraduate at Juilliard. He worked closely then with my daughter Nadia, who actually took some of the photographs in *How to Write for Percussion*. His book has been out on my desk since it first came out in 2002, and I refer to it frequently.

Clite: Speaking of Nadia, we here at Classicalite don't miss a single episode of her always informative Q2 podcast *Meet the Composer*. You, Nadia and your son Jonah have collaborated before, but any chance you'll make an appearance on her WQXR program?

RS: Perhaps, but the emotional and professional dynamics of interviewing your own dad are unique. And there are a lot of great composers she should be interviewing right now. I couldn't be prouder of her for creating this remarkable series.

<http://www.classicalite.com/articles/19951/20150415/robert-sirota-spindrift-sandbox-percussion-concerts-park-slope-nadia-meet-the-composer-podcast.htm>