



The Kronos Quartet (above) Bob Ostertag, the Paul Drescher Ensemble and the Margaret Jenkins Dance Company collaborate on *All the Rage*.

Gay Rage Takes Center Stage at Center for the Arts

Silence = Death

by Mark Freeman

Homosexual men, conveniently, have always been viewed as sissified, passive and abject. Then how do works of art deal with us when we are enraged, when we choose not to disguise our pain, when we can no longer control our anger, confusion and grief?

There is a long precedent for such "gay" stories. Babylonian society was built around the myth of King Gilgamesh and his anguished pursuit of his hairy lover Enkidu into the underworld. The Hebrew hero (and Jesus' direct ancestor) David was a psalmsinger who went up against a giant and shared a love for Jonathan "that surpasseth the love of women." Then, of

course, there was Alexander's undying grief for the loss of his boyhood love Hephaeston — a bit of gay history which got left out of the Richard Burton film version. And more recently, there is Hong Kong's *Farewell, My Concubine*. Our pain, though often masked, is a recurrent theme in the world epic, and continues to be a resource for

narowicz to write the text, but the artist-activist never got well enough and died before he could do it. "So Bob asked me to stand in at the last moment, and I wrote it partly based on my experience and partly on Bob's — the gay bashing happened to a real person I know, the AIDS deaths were real. And I wrote it in a man's voice. I could have done it in a lesbian's voice, but musically we needed the pitch to be in a man's." The voice reading the text on the CD single Kronos released this month — and at the performance — is that of PoMo Afro Homo alumnus Eric Gupton.

Unusual Sources

Ostertag made new music in the past with Anthony Braxton, Fred Frith and John Zorn. But in 1980 he went to Nicaragua to record material for his label, became actively involved in its struggles, and gave up music for ten years. His current project is a trilogy. "The first movement was on grief, called 'Sooner or Later,'" he explains. "It is based on recorded samples of a boy in El Salvador burying his father, killed by the National Guard — the sounds of his voice, a shovel digging the grave, a fly buzzing." The second movement, on anger, is "All The Rage" and a third movement, on joy, has yet to be written.

"For me, as a gay man, to take something like the AB 101 riots," says Ostertag, "and have it performed by a group like Kronos — whose last CD

topped both the world music and classical Billboard charts — I'm pretty excited by that." When *All The Rage* premiered at Lincoln Center the *N.Y. Times* gushed: "it seems to be far the most powerful example" of AIDS musical composition.

David Harrington, Kronos' first violinist and music director, first learned of Ostertag three years ago when he was "taken with the intensity of his work. He played us the tape of the riot and we agreed there was a piece in it. What he didn't know probably until after it premiered, was that it expressed feelings we all had, especially our violist Hank Dutt, whose partner had AIDS and died on September 18. We haven't played it since. So these concerts will be a big moment for all of us, but especially for Hank."

Collaborative Effort

And for the first time, it will be danced. On stage Kronos will be hemmed in by 60 dancers co-choreographed by Remy Charlip, Margaret Jenkins and Ellie Klopp. As in several of his children's books and his solo works, Charlip based the movements on American Sign Language, stylized and personalized. Arriving to make notes. I was told to take my shoes off and join the others. At this early rehearsal each volunteer, most of us having no prior dance experience, was asked to find postures that evoked a series of words: Power. Rage. Demand. Love. Many of the gestures found their way into the choreography, in se-



Bob Ostertag: mercurial and ingenious.

quence and in unison. Text lines and riot chants had been set into Sign Language. "We're Here, We're Queer, We're Fabulous, Get Used To It" is one: "I Think We Should Burn the Fucking Place Down" another. Like the colored glass and dark leading of the ornament on the State Building that was destroyed when parts of it burned, groups of queers in bright colors gesturing these sentiments flung themselves at a cordon of dancers dressed in black, an antagonistic group the choreogra-

phers referred to as "the barricade" and who sign "Not Family — You Don't Matter. Die!" Here the process included "Margie Jenkins feeling that people who volunteered to dance wouldn't want to be the bad guys," Charlip recalls, "but I said, 'On the contrary — Bette Davis and Joan Crawford had the best roles.'"

Among the volunteers are a wide variety of folks. Eldest at 58 is Leon Setti, grey-bearded and with a great body, who studied with Contraband. Youngest is Rebekah Davidson, a 19-year-old escapee from

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Rage

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our artists. In fact, recently the San Francisco Symphony presented Benjamin Britten's heartrending *Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings*, written for his lifelong "companion" Peter Pears. As part of the text for this post-war song cycle, Britten sets a *Song of Experience* by Blake: "O Rose, thou art sick! The invisible worm/ That flies in the night/ In the howling storm/ Has found thy bed/ Of crimson joy/ And his dark secret love/ Does thy life destroy."

And this week, at the new Center for the Arts, a very queer dance piece for the '90s receives its world premiere. The epic subjects of Bob Ostertag's *All The Rage* are the very stuff of our lives today: AIDS, queer bashing, and our fury at enemies such as Pete Wilson. These unpleasant realities have strangely been transformed into a brilliant piece of experimental musical choreography that will be performed by Kronos Quartet and members of the Margaret Jenkins Dance Company. Sixty volunteer dancers have been drafted to dance the piece, which has been co-choreographed by gay dancer and writer Remy Charlip.

The text for the work has

been supplied by Sara Miles, a lesbian librettist and poet who's been a war correspondent in El Salvador and the Philippines. In a recent interview with the *B.A.R.* she described the inception of the 16-minute piece: "The Kronos Quartet commissioned *All The Rage* by Bob Ostertag, who does a lot of work with documentary sound, found sound, sampling. Bob went to the AB 101 riots [against Pete Wilson's veto of gay rights] and decided he wanted to get Kronos to play the riot. A great deal of what the string quartet plays are direct transcriptions of sounds from the riots, like Hank Dutt on viola playing a minute detailed version of a voice yelling, 'Burn it, burn it!' The group also plays CUAV whistles in several different ways along with actual riot noises. Bob also wanted a text," Miles recounts, "so that people would not get lost in the crowdness of it, but would feel the individual passion of this rage." Ostertag asked David Woj-

suburban LA. Someone with a red tuft of hair on his head and another on his chin is Douglas Moon, who has never taken a dance lesson in his life. They are led by experienced dancers from Jenkins' troupe, who perform several same-sex duets and solos.

The full program, to be presented three times this week, marks the 20th anniversary of Margaret Jenkins Dance Company. It includes another collaboration between Jenkins and the Paul Drescher Ensemble, a set by Drescher's avant garde group including compositions by Lou Harrison (coincidentally, Remy's first five-year live-in lover) and John Cage, plus new Eastern European works performed by Kronos.

B.A.R. readers who are curious about the new theater space at Center for the Arts will not want to miss this weekend's opportunity to catch a modern mythologization of gay rage. As Sara Miles put it, "I'm really happy that Kronos did this, and that they're playing a queer riot at Yerba Buena as a source of civic pride." ▼

Editor's Note: *All The Rage* is part of the full program at Center for the Arts Friday and Saturday, November 19 and 20 at 8 p.m. and on Sunday November 21 at 7 p.m. Tickets, \$15 and \$21, are available in advance at 415/978-ARTS. The CD single is available on Elektra Nonesuch. A CD release party takes place at Kiki Gallery and Red Dora's, 483 14th Street at Guerrero, after the Sunday performance.