

## Charles Wuorinen: New Wine, Old Skins

By Kathleen Watt



*"By a very peculiar irony, the public which demands something new is the very same as that which is bewildered and mocking each time someone tries to get them out of their comfortable habits and routine. A work of art almost always appears like a personal offense to many people."*

— Claude Debussy, Why I wrote Pelleas and Melisande

*"No one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins."*

— New Testament Gospel of Mark (2:22)

With no less certainty and much the same authority, composer Charles Wuorinen holds forth on these and other aspects of art and culture:

"There is an unfortunate general conception among a lot of people that art is *elite*. There is an embarrassment about the idea of expressing interest in things of an artistic nature, or things of 'higher value.' People want to get down to the level of the street. I don't want that and [there are others who] don't want that either. Thus it is our *duty* to expand and assert the value of higher culture in life without apology."

Charles Wuorinen speaks with a patrician élan that belies his zip code of origin. Born June 9, 1938, in New York City, he proclaims, "I'm that rarest of beings - a genuine New York-raised Manhattanite." But he declines to speculate about how that urban authenticity may have left its stamp on his work, or for that matter, his persona. "I have always said that I'm not good at self-portraiture. Neither about my personality nor about my work am I really able to answer a question like that. That's for other people to say.

"My family was academic. My father was a history professor at Columbia University for 42 years and chairman of the history department during part of his stay there. My mother was a biochemist. She left her profession in her 30s to raise her children - which I think she probably regretted. It was a totally different time, of course. She was born in 1889, so this would have been in the early '20s. There weren't many careers in the sciences for women. She was doing what she felt she had to do. I have one brother, seven years older than I, an electrical engineer, retired now, who worked for many years at Bell Labs. He is not a musician - but we get along just fine!"

On the composer's official website, among professional headshots and posed candid photographs of the composer at work, is the incongruous deckle-edge of a Brownie snapshot. "1944" is penned in the margin. Standing for the camera against a woodsy backdrop, a fair-haired boy of 5 or 6 fidgets shyly in billowy shorts. "It's a little embarrassing," laughs Wuorinen, "but yes, that's about the time I began to compose. My brother was taking piano lessons - and not willingly." Feeling that he could do better, young Charles asked for and began piano lessons of his own. "I also started to write things to play. Having no special encouragement at that time, I kind of went along on my own. So I don't know but what it all began as part of my competition with an older brother.

"But at a certain point a few years later, when I seemed to be alarmingly serious about continuing, my father spoke to a friend of his at Manhattan School of Music on my behalf. 'Go and see Uncle Willard,' he said." Willard Rhodes, Ethnomusicologist at Columbia University at the time, was a friend of all the Wuorinen family. "'He'll tell you whether or not you should pursue this,' assuming that that would be the end of it. So I took my sheaf of compositions over to Uncle Willard. He looked them over and said, 'Well! I guess music is *your dish!*' The problem was that Uncle Willard had been given this big buildup as a musical authority by my father. When I went back and told my father that 'music was *my dish,*' he fumed, 'Well that's just what *Willard* said - that doesn't mean anything!'" Wuorinen tells this story with a theatrical gusto. "In any case my father's efforts to dissuade me didn't work. It's only now, late in life, that I realize my parents were quite right," he laughs. "I should have chosen something that would make some money!"

But music was more than Charles Wuorinen's 'dish' - it was his banquet. By the age of 12, Wuorinen had set his course. At 16, he won the New York Philharmonic's Young Composer Award. As an undergraduate at Columbia, Wuorinen took the coveted Joseph H. Bearns Prize three times. His four Broadcast Music Inc. Student Composer Awards are still unmatched by any other student composer in America. In 1962, already an accomplished pianist, Wuorinen co-founded (with Harvey Sollberger and Joel Krosnick) the redoubtable Group for Contemporary Music, setting an enduring standard for the performance of the most challenging music of its time. At Columbia, Wuorinen earned both a BA and an MA in music (1961 and 1963, respectively). And, in 1970 at age 32, Wuorinen became the youngest composer ever to win the Pulitzer Prize in music, awarded for *Time's Encomium*, an electronic composition written on commission from Nonesuch Records. He has since been awarded the MacArthur Foundation "Genius" Grant, and induction into both the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

One is inclined to wonder about the effect on a young artist of so many laurels so early in life. "The awards really didn't make any difference to me, because I've always had the attitude that you have to be realistic. I've always believed that to *be able* to achieve an award for writing music, you have to *keep doing* it. Everything else is extra. People have all these fantasies about making your name or fortune. You just don't get it, if you think composing will [make you rich and famous]. You're not a rock star! A friend of mine used to say to me, 'Composition isn't a profession; it's an addiction.' I've always known this. Of course one wants other people to like what you write, one wants to be recognized, one wants to be paid for it if possible, but none of those could possibly compensate for the void that would exist within if you didn't do it."

A gifted conductor of his own work and others', Wuorinen has never faced the kind of conflict that has confounded other brilliant composer-conductors. "Conducting and performing are completely different activities, whether I perform my own work or somebody else's. The distinction is really quite simple. In my experience, the decisions I make in the *processes* are different. I do know a lot of composers who change things on the fly when they're conducting, but I usually don't. I try to get it right the first time. You see, unlike many people who perform [their own compositions], I began as a composer, and added the performing to that, as I had the opportunity. So there's never been any question for me [about how to define myself]."

Author of *Simple Composition*, used by composition students throughout the world, Wuorinen is much in demand for lectures, having served on the faculties of numerous universities and conservatories, and now a permanent professor of composition at Rutgers University. He has strong opinions about the role of the music mentor. "So often people [who teach music] just try to justify what they do. They say 'practice this method' or 'I have a great message to give.' Well, *my* message is to *work*. And if enough people like [what you've done] and want it, and if enough

people find meaning and expression in it, that's good. If they don't, they don't. It isn't always fun. But meanwhile, *I've* been actively engaged in the exercise of writing music - because *I like to.*"

A self-described "maximalist," Wuorinen tacitly positions himself in opposition to minimalist composers such as Phillip Glass, Steve Reich and others. The post-tonal language of his work accommodates every form and medium, including ballet and the operatic stage, often acknowledging the inspiration of Indian *ragas*, the *gamelan*, the *shakuhachi* flute and Chinese and Arabic music. Wuorinen has grown weary of qualifying the significance of the electronic compositions of his early career. "Out of a catalogue of something like 230 works, I have a total of maybe half a dozen that involve electronics in any way. So I am not at all primarily an electronic composer. It just happens that this one work of mine [*Time's Encomium*], some 35 years ago, received a lot of attention. Thus, I have become identified with electronic music to a degree that isn't justified by my catalog."



The Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center (now called the Computer Music Center) was founded in the early 1950s, for electronic composition and research by Columbia University professors Vladimir Ussachevsky and Otto Luening, and Princeton University professors Milton Babbitt and Roger Sessions. Charles Wuorinen was there at the beginning. "Well, not quite – almost. You know, there were a lot of desultory – and not so desultory – attempts to do something with synthetic music right from the turn of the century. [Italian pianist and composer] Ferruccio Busoni spoke about it, as did others. There were various machines and instruments that people cooked up that never went anywhere. There were people in the '30s, when sound came into movies, who tried painting directly on the soundtrack, to make sounds that way. None of this went anywhere. It was the invention of the reel-to-reel tape recorder in World War II that got it started. Meanwhile, the *Radio des Étudiants Français* in the late '40s had something called *musique concrète* which involved mixing together the output of various turn tables. But the real electronic movement was begun by Ussachevsky and Luening at Columbia around 1950-51. I was involved with them a few years later, so I have seen it come. I did one analog tape piece when I was very, very young. And I did a couple of things with the old RCA synthesizer, which is rusting away." [Nicknamed *Victor*, the RCA Mark II Sound Synthesizer was the flagship piece of Center equipment, developed to Ussachevsky and Babbitt's specifications, and delivered to the Center in 1957. Babbitt's *Vision and Prayer* was realized on *Victor*.] "And, of course, I did the piece for which I received the Pulitzer Prize in 1969 and 70."

Wuorinen is likewise rankled by his sometime assignation as 'the high priest of serial music.' "Well, I do know something about it. My music is based on the 12-tone system and expansions of it. But I don't consider myself 'priest' of anything. I consider myself a general-purpose composer who is supposed to know how to do whatever it is he needs to do as it comes up in his work. And so I have done. In addition to the electronic music, I've written orchestra music, lots of vocal music, music for all kinds of chamber combinations, including the standard string quartet, of which I have four. It has been lots of things for all combinations of instruments, not just for a handful of specific groups.

"Let me give you the capsule version of my influences as I see them. I start out with the great figures of the 20th century – Igor Stravinsky and Arnold Schönberg – whose ideas I've tried to synthesize. And then there's Edgard Varèse, who was a friend of mine. Varèse had a kind of 'clenched fist,' which I possessed when I was younger (though not so much any more). Varèse was always looking for the expansion of resources, the breaking down of barriers – before it was

a cliché, before that meant just some more rock-n-roll. Now such phrases mean nothing, because they've been thoroughly co-opted by commercial music. But in those days they had an artistic connotation.

"In the next generation, Elliott Carter, Milton Babbitt and Stefan Wolpe were three very important influences on me – Carter for his ideas about form; Wolpe for certain separate characteristics – mannerisms, things like that; Babbitt for his ideas about harmony. Milton Babbitt is an enormously important musical thinker and a great composer who is still around, at 89. His ideas had a very strong influence on me when I was young. Not so much his actual compositional mannerisms, but his more generalized ideas about music and particularly about 12-tone theory."

Writing in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, composer Louis Karchin notes that "in the late 1960s, Wuorinen began to reconsider the premises of Babbitt's time-point system ...applying it in more global fashion...creating a unifying background structure... linked inextricably to the work's tone row." Wuorinen applied these ideas, with varying degrees of rigor, to most of his subsequent works. Elsewhere, Wuorinen cites his fascination with the pioneering work of mathematician Benoît Mandelbrot whose observations, in non-musical realms, confirmed his own intuition about deep structure and form in music.

"Again, it's up to others to say whether that is realistic, or true, or audible."

Urging this idea of "audibility," Wuorinen is determined that his influences, his musical ideas, disciplines and means, be comprehensible in the simple act of hearing the music – that is, comprehensible not just to the rarefied academic modernist, but alike to any attentive listener. How much acquaintance with serial theory – called "big-brain" music, by some – does the composer recommend, in order to fully prepare for and appreciate this music?

"Serialism! Fractal geometry!" he replies, exasperated. "Those are illusions, largely sponsored by journalistic cliché. *All* music is mathematical in the sense that you can't have your next note unless it relates to the previous one, and the one that follows, by a ratio. So what? *All* music is fractal, only because of the physical characteristics of composition. These are just tools of the trade. And proportionately, in the case of composers like me, more attention gets paid to the tools of the trade than to the result of the *use* of the tools. It would be as if you evaluated a house that someone built by examining the hammers, nails and saws that were used to build it. That's not the issue!"

"Let's face it, these are very superficial things and audience resistance to music that is not highly chromatic is just because of lack of familiarity. Just consider that 'The Rite of Spring' is now essentially a 'pop' orchestra piece, whereas Opus 16 of Schoenberg, which comes along at the same time, is not. Why? Because people have *played* 'The Rite of Spring' over and over and over again! So if you want any given kind of music to be accepted by a larger audience, you just play it many times. It's very simple. You don't need a lot of music appreciation. You don't need a lot of people telling you what to listen for. All you need is *familiarity*. Everybody hears music in his or her own way – and all that is required for that to take place, in a way that is individually meaningful, is for the person to *hear* the thing enough times.

"The 12-tone system was developed by Schoenberg well over 80 years ago, and further developed by Milton Babbitt, some 60 years ago. When I speak to, say, a symphony audience, prior to a performance of my work, I say, first of all, 'Sorry I'm not dead. I do apologize...!' No matter what, there's nothing that I could possibly say, or that anyone else on this planet can say, in two or three minutes, that can take care of the fact that *you don't know the music of the last hundred years!* It's as simple as that."

“And it’s not the fault of the public if they don’t know [this music]. It’s the fault of the presenters. In other words, when there’s a problem, it’s the result of lack of leadership. I’ve been an active professional for close to fifty years now. All my life I’ve heard various solutions to this problem proposed. You know, outreach and some kind of dumbing-down and this, that and the other. My response is, as I keep saying over and over again, all that is required is familiarity. To get familiarity the music has to be heard. To be heard the music must be played. For the music to be played – and I’m talking to the big institutions here – there has to be leadership. And there’s very little of that, artistically speaking. You don’t have conductors around like [Greek-American conductor] Dimitri Mitropoulos or [Hungarian-American conductor] Fritz Reiner or Stravinsky, or no doubt many others, all champions of the music of their times.

“There’s only one man presently operating who is like that and that is [Metropolitan Opera Artistic Director] James Levine. I don’t see anyone else – certainly no American. [Levine] is a great leader and a manager. He has been that [in New York], and he’s now becoming one at the Boston Symphony,” succeeding Seiji Ozawa as music director and becoming the first American to head the venerable BSO. “Levine exerts leadership and, interestingly, the public follows him.

“When people say, ‘Oh, my audience will never stand for this or that,’ all they’re doing is being highly patronizing. As a result of that, audiences have no interest whatsoever in progressing toward new horizons. People don’t do it on their own; people have to be led. It has to be given to them – presented to them – and they have to be asked to attend. Why should audiences be blamed because their symphony offers performances as a matter of cultural recreation, instead of [risking a little bit of economic or political capital in order to offer higher art]? If you don’t ask something of people, you’re not going to get anything from them,” in the way of appreciation and support for the music of our own time.

Nevertheless opera companies face extreme financial challenges for the foreseeable future and must strategize carefully to meet them, often in uncharted waters. In the 2003-2004 season at Lincoln Center, for example, ticket sales were wildly uneven. Last season at the Met, some reliable warhorses lost money, while contemporary works and innovative new productions sold out. When giving out commissions, American opera companies typically turn to “accessible,” neoromantic composers, perhaps prudent in seeking a hedge against “difficult” music. Is NYCO being adventurous to program Haroun? Or wising up to what the market will really bear?

“Serious art is not a commercial commodity,” says Wuorinen, adding that he “wouldn’t mind having the royalties of Mozart, if Mozart could collect them. The fact of the matter is that serious art has always been philanthropically supported, and it doesn’t make money. One of the worst things that’s happened to our artistic institutions in the last generation or so is this pretense that they are in business, to which I say: What business stays in business when it spends twice the money it brings in? The orchestra or the opera house does not survive by ticket sales – even though they are outrageously expensive. Let’s get over this idea about the ‘marketplace’ because that’s not our work!

“Music does not survive because audiences want it, or because publishers or broadcasters or administrators want it. It survives because musicians want it. If musicians don’t like it, it doesn’t matter how popular it is. It fades away. In a generation it’s gone. The history of music itself is already filled with examples of that – even though this ‘populist’ disease is relatively recent. There are all kinds of composers of an earlier time that have simply vanished. Just because the musicians didn’t really want them.

“The same is true today, only more so. You should hear my colleagues’ remarks about some of the supposedly ‘serious music’ that they’re hired to play, which is supposed to be so marvelous and so accessible and so beloved of audiences. I tell you, in a generation you won’t even remember the names.”

Moreover, says Wuorinen, “none of this is any of the composer’s purview. The idea that the composer has an obligation to some unnamed group to provide some kind of unspecified form of – I don’t know what – titillation, pleasure, an anodyne of entertainment – is preposterous! How can I tell what you want?! All I can do is what I want. And hope that you will want it too.”

Wuorinen is on record as having no objection to “entertainment” per se, while insisting that there be a clear and unabashed difference between entertainment and art. “I make a very simple distinction between them. Entertainment is that which requires nothing of the participants to participate. Art of any sort is that which requires some effort initially, some active input from the participant that he or she then gets back many-fold from the experience. To refuse to make that distinction is simply irresponsible. As for accessibility, all that means is that they recognize it. If you want music to sound like old music, then get old music. Name me one opera that is in the antique style, or hyper conservative, or whatever you want to call it, that’s as good as Delibes! That’s the test. If you want music that sounds like music you’ve heard before, then listen to the music that you’ve heard before. The point is, that’s not the music of our time.”



On October 31, 2004, New York City Opera presents the eagerly anticipated world premiere of *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, with a libretto by James Fenton on Salman Rushdie’s fanciful children’s book of the same name. Wuorinen describes his score as “through-composed, but segmented into discriminable numbers.” To whet the appetite, about 25 percent of the complete score is already on offer as “The Haroun Songbook,” available on CD from Albany, featuring Elizabeth Farnum, soprano, Emily Golden, mezzo-soprano, James Schaffner, tenor, Michael Chioldi, bass-baritone, and Phillip Bush, piano.

*Haroun* is author Salman Rushdie’s gesture toward his own son, who was 11 years old at the time that his father went into exile under threat of an Islamic fatwa issued against him, to avenge ostensibly offensive ideas in his book, *The Satanic Verses*. The simple plot of *Haroun* follows the fantastical odyssey of a boy and his displaced father. At one level, *Haroun* is a profound meditation on the relationship of father and son. Perhaps something in Rushdie’s fairy tale had resonated with something in Wuorinen’s experience – something concerning his father or a father figure?

“In terms of personal experience, no. Salman himself has explained that when his son, Zafar, was small, he said, ‘Daddy why don’t you write something that I can read?’ Rushdie promised him he would, as soon as he finished *The Satanic Verses*. Then, of course, came the fatwa. *Haroun* is the book that Rushdie wrote during the worst period of that threat on his life. Salman said that when a bad thing happens to a parent, children often think it’s their fault, even though they’re completely innocent. In this case, he said, wouldn’t it be nice to arrange it so that the little boy could solve the father’s problem. Now that, of course, has very strong resonance with the situation in which Rushdie found himself at the time. So there is the father/son business in it, but that’s because it was designed for his own son. Salman said he had tried to write a book that would be as entertaining for the kid at 11 as it would be [meaningful] for him later, at 22. That turned out to be the case. An adult can read it for pleasure.

“But what I found in the work is somewhat different. What you have in Haroun is not only a wonderful fantasy, full of delightful inventions, but also—more important, I think—a parable about free speech and the necessity to resist those who would crush the imagination, who would enforce conformity and a toe-ing of the line.

“What I found impressive about the book, aside from its surface qualities of delight, is that here was Rushdie under mortal threat—there was no way of knowing that it was going to turn out basically alright, as it has. Here was Rushdie, writing a book in which there is not one trace of self-pity or bitterness. There is an entirely positive sensibility. I found that very impressive and very moving. That was one of the things that made the book so attractive as a setting for an opera.”

Across the breadth of Wuorinen’s work, the instrumental compositions are never programmatic, as he hastens to stress. But composing for the operatic stage surely demands a different approach. There, singers function not only as instruments in the larger orchestration, but also as carriers of plot line forward, of character development and dramatic arc. “When I set a text, the words, in a fundamental sense, generate the whole piece. Whether that means that I sometimes have programmatic content again depends upon [the listener]. I myself can’t really say whether I make an onomatopoetic gesture of some sort that goes along with a particular word (madrigalism, as it’s called) or something which seems to me to be appropriate to the meaning of the content or the mood of the poem (these are vague things—hard to pin down). The main point is that the words, being there first, generate the music, in some basic sense.”

Does Wuorinen then eschew the composers’ cardinal rule, *prima la musica; poi le parole* [first the music, then the words]? “Yes. Well, no. I mean, music is always first, in that when you set any text, you essentially destroy it. You transfigure it into something else. That’s what transfiguration is. The original isn’t there anymore.”

Wuorinen’s approach to composing for voice as an instrument differs little from composing for other instruments. “Any instrument or any voice has its own characteristics. This is especially true of individual voices. There are many more kinds of soprano, for example, than there are violins. Still one recognizes the fact that you handle whatever you have on the stage, consider each medium, and adjust accordingly.”

Wuorinen explains further that for several years he had been a boy chorister, first at St. Thomas Chapel in New York, while a student at Trinity School (the old Brownie snapshot springs to mind). After the inevitable voice change, Wuorinen sang counter-tenor, at both Church of the Heavenly Rest and at Church of the Transfiguration, in New York City. “So I know what it is to sing,” and how to follow a conductor and find a pitch, how to blend and when to breathe, and the peculiarities of high notes. That authentic empathy easily accounts for the enthusiasm Wuorinen’s music has found among many of the best singers on the scene today.

“We have an awful lot of smart singers. Especially at New York City Opera now, [Director of Artistic Administration] Robin Thompson is cultivating a marvelous group of extremely talented young people. I’ve worked with lots of other singers too – not just opera singers.” He names soprano Lucy Shelton, mezzo-soprano Phyllis Bryn-Julson, and “a good many young people who likewise are very fine musicians.

“You know, people who learn early-on a very narrow repertoire by rote never develop [into very competent musicians]. But I don’t think you can get by that way anymore. A lot of these voice

students are trained as musicians first and then specialize in voice. So we're going to have to retire some of the singer jokes that have been around for so long!"

One understands, however, the instinct among singers – especially those musicians who come late to the discovery of the instrument – which craves the music that allows the voice to luxuriate in pear-shaped tones, spun-out phrases, cascades of effervescent hemidemisemiquavers. "Short of distorting the shape of the composer's musical intention, there is always the expectation of individualized expression; there is always room for rubato. But what one cannot expect is to be able to apply the musical or dramatic conventions of, for example, a mid-nineteenth century bel canto performance style to music of a completely different historical era and cultural milieu."

When the words become the composer's business, he must balance his collaboration with the writer of the underlying work – often a prose form like a novel or a play – and with the librettist. In the case of Haroun, Wuorinen collaborated with both novelist Rushdie and poet James Fenton, who created the libretto. "Before Fenton wrote the libretto, which was my proposal to him, I had, of course, read [Rushdie's] book and digested it thoroughly. Fenton also knows the book well – he's a friend of Rushdie. So it all sort of 'stayed in the family.' But neither Fenton nor I consulted Salman about the libretto until after it was done. On the other hand, I had a couple of conversations with James [Fenton] about what kind of text we should have. Among other things, there was the important question of what to leave out. In many ways it was the hardest part of the task, because even though this is the shortest of his novels, you'd be there all night if you tried to include it all in an opera. So we had to leave out lots of nice things like Blabbermouth and the Shadow Warrior and more, in order to keep to the bones of the story.

"We decided to start out with the stage director, involving him for the purposes of advice. That's where Mark Lamos came into the picture. When we were thinking about who we could have write the libretto, he suggested Fenton, whom he did not know. Because I did not know Fenton's work at that time, I got hold of some of it and thought it was just what was needed. Then I contacted him and it went from there."

Officially commissioned by the Works in Process program at the Guggenheim Museum, Haroun was further funded by "several other sources and friends, in an effort coordinated by my representative, Howard Stokar, who deserves great credit for making it all happen."

At New York City Opera, "[former General Director, the late] Christopher Keene and I had had a plan for a collaboration completely unrelated to Haroun. But Christopher was at that time very sick. Although we had started on this thing, it became clear after awhile that he was not going to be able to actually write a libretto. He then died. When [current General Director] Paul Kellogg was appointed to succeed Christopher, I told him about my situation and said, 'Oh by the way, I've had my eye on Haroun and the Sea of Stories. He liked that idea and we proceeded on that basis.'"

But Haroun's journey to the stage has been anything but smooth. Finished in the spring of 2001, Wuorinen's score predated the world-altering calamity of 9/11, but was twice postponed for financial reasons. In the interim, a global anxiety over terrorist threat has attached to Haroun an unexpected gravitas and an aura of prescience. "Rushdie and I have talked about this. In an odd way, though by complete coincidence, it now has different meaning. Those 9/11 people [who attacked New York's World Trade Center on September 11, 2001] are precisely the ones who wanted to kill Rushdie – did kill a couple of people close to him – and want to kill all of us. Without being too ponderous, the opera does have that element of a cry against those who want to



shackle the imagination, who want to cut everybody up and kill those who disagree. These are people who can't be reasoned with, and have to be defeated."

There is reason to wonder whether this multilayered work of art could, in time, be appropriated for unintended sociopolitical purposes. The composer again avoids speculation: "Well, I have no idea. That's not for me to say. I wrote it as an artwork. It also means something to me (as the underlying book does) in terms of an outcry against the essential blocking of imagination, forcing of conformity, etc., etc. But, I don't see how it could be 'used' in any other way, except in the expression of those ideas." He reflects a moment. "I must say that, quite by chance, it does have a kind of resonance with the war that we now find ourselves in."

Director Mark Lamos plans to make generous use of video projections, both as set design, and integrated drama, following a recent trend in stage productions large and small. In the case of Haroun, Wuorinen explains, "the projections and all of that have come about partially because my score moves in a way typical of film. There is no time for scene changes. So all of that is done with light. We have discussed some basic ideas for Haroun – some 'Wizard of Oz' concepts. I have every confidence in him."

Composer Karchin writes of composer Wuorinen, in the New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, "Wuorinen's large corpus of significant work, and his willingness to explore in a profound way every important genre of Western music, makes his achievement a powerful compendium of late twentieth century musical thought. An innovator professing to care more about the evolutionary than the revolutionary character of musical progress, his most important contribution may lie in the adapting of the highly sophisticated language of the twentieth century to the grand musical visions of those centuries preceding." Lest this heady new wine burst those worn-out skins.

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