

Ken Thomson
www.ktonline.net

“The hardest-working saxophonist in new-music show business.”
- *Time Out NY*

“Mr. Thomson's compositions are **intricately wrought and incident-steeped**, even when they move in snowlike drifts. The **gutsy precision of the playing** calls for hearing this music in a performance setting.”
- Nate Chinen, *The New York Times*, on *It Would Be Easier If* CD



Naomi White 2013

“a virtuoso piece... a texture laced with power chords, screaming clarinet lines and cluster-laden piano writing. In the end it is **sheer madness, in a good, thrillingly visceral way.**”
- Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, on “seasonal.disorder” for Bang on a Can All-Stars

“Thomson's ‘Wait Your Turn’ is **as visceral as music can be**: While some composers struggle to give an orchestra rhythmic life, Thomson gave the orchestra jazzlike riffs. He also knows how to create tension with escalating chromatic lines, or to give himself and his punk/jazz group, named Gutbucket, a forum for its own showcase moments.”
- David Patrick Stearns, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, on “Wait Your Turn”

“Thomson’s original compositions **are as complex as a beehive**, filled with amber-hued nooks and crannies that **bear traces of jazz, world music, and classical, without succumbing to any of them.**”
- Silke Tudor, *San Francisco Weekly*

“a delightful affirmation that **counterpoint is still very much with us** and can still be powerfully relevant to musical expression.”
- Stephen Smoliar, *San Francisco Examiner*, on “Deafening Irrelevance”

“...an impressive amalgam of influences, ideas and inventiveness.... exciting and at times mesmerizing.”
- Bruce Lindsay, *All About Jazz* on *It Would Be Easier If* CD

“Thomson’s intuition and compositional prowess comes to the fore—his uncanny sense of musical architecture, pacing, and interestingly, portion size. *It Would Be Easier If* is a crazily engaging set of musical compositions that demand equally engaged listening. Thomson takes his listeners on a sonic joyride that proves **as meticulous and well-crafted as it is raucous and unpredictable.**”
- *PostPostRock.com* on *It Would Be Easier If* CD

“A reedman, composer, and bandleader as **a musical visionary without borders** on par with Bill Frisell and Dave Douglas.”
- Seth Rogovoy, *Berkshire Living*

Ken Thomson is a Brooklyn-based clarinetist, saxophonist, and composer. In demand as a composer and freelancer in many settings, he moves quickly between genres and scenes, bringing a fiery intensity and emotional commitment to every musical situation; *Time Out NY* called him “the hardest-working saxophonist in new-music show business.”

His latest project of exclusively his music, called **Slow/Fast**, released its debut CD “It Would Be Easier If” internationally on Intuition Records in 2010, garnering a feature review in The New York Times highlighting the “intricately wrought and incident-steeped” compositions and “gutsy precision of the playing.” A followup disc, “Settle,” will be released in 2014.

He plays clarinet for the **Bang on a Can All-Stars**, one of the world’s preeminent new music ensembles. He leads the **Asphalt Orchestra** – a 12-piece next-generation avant-garde marching band, called “coolly brilliant, infectious... top notch players” by The New York Times. He plays saxophone and is one of the 3 composers in the punk/jazz band **Gutbucket**, with whom he has toured internationally to nineteen countries and 32 states over fourteen years, and released CDs for Knitting Factory, Enja, NRW, Cantaloupe and Cuneiform Records. He is on faculty at the **Bang on a Can Summer Music Festival**.

As a composer, he has been commissioned by the **American Composers Orchestra**, Bang on a Can, the True/False Film Festival, and others, and has received awards from **New Music USA**, **ASCAP** and **Meet the Composer**. The New York Times wrote of his work “Wait Your Turn” for the American Composers Orchestra upon its debut at Carnegie Hall: “The concert ended on a high note.... the music offered a density worthy of the closing bars of a Led Zeppelin epic;” and of his work “seasonal.disorder” for the Bang on a Can All-Stars, “a virtuoso piece... a texture laced with power chords, screaming clarinet lines and cluster-laden piano writing. In the end it is sheer madness, in a good, thrillingly visceral way.” The Philadelphia Inquirer also noted: “Thomson’s Wait Your Turn is as visceral as music can be.”

He has recently released a CD of his compositions with the heralded JACK Quartet, entitled “Thaw,” on Cantaloupe Music.

His 2009 saxophone nonet, “Rut,” was featured on the Bang on a Can Marathon NYC; his 2012 work “Incoming” and 2013 work “Music for Trains” premiered at the Bang on a Can Summer Marathon at Mass MoCA, North Adams, MA in 2012-13. His through-composed rescoring of the 22-minute 1936 British film “Night Mail” was called “a masterful re-imagining of an old classic” by Indiewire.com upon its debut at the True/False Film Festival. His clarinet quintet “How to Play” has been played in the US and Australia by multiple ensembles. The San Francisco Weekly writes about his music, “Thomson’s original compositions are as complex as a beehive, filled with amber-hued nooks and crannies that bear traces of jazz, world music, and classical, without succumbing to any of them.”

As a saxophonist and clarinetist, he is a member of the next-generation chamber orchestra **Signal** (conducted by Brad Lubman), working directly with composers from Steve Reich to Helmut Lachenmann and a performer on CDs for Mode, Orange Mountain, and Cantaloupe Records. He is a frequent collaborator with many new-composed music groups including **Alarm Will Sound** (on their Nonesuch Records debut, “A/rhythmia”), **International Contemporary Ensemble** (ICE), **So Percussion**, and more. He has also worked as a music director, notably, directing composer Julia Wolfe’s “Traveling Music” at the Bordeaux Conservatory, France, 2009, and has conducted performances of “Music for Airports” with the Bang on a Can All-Stars, choir, and guest musicians in Melbourne and Buenos Aires.

He has performed extensively across the US and Europe at major jazz festivals including Jazz a Vienne, San Sebastian Jazz Festival, London Jazz Festival, Warsaw Summer Jazz Days, Rotterdam Jazz, Jazz Saalfelden, Copenhagen Jazz Festival, Belgrade Jazz Festival, etc. He is a Conn-Selmer Artist, and endorses Sibelius software.



Being part of a collective can be valuable for musical development, but often it does very little for an individual player's name recognition.

That's what Brooklyn-based saxophonist-clarinetist Ken Thomson has come to realize after more than a decade as a member of the successful punk-jazz outfit Gutbucket. Its 15th anniversary activities included recording a live album at the Stone in New York City, to be released on Cuneiform in 2015. So although Gutbucket is still going strong, Thomson felt a few years ago that the time had come to venture on his own and give free rein to other musical ideas.

As a result, the reedist assembled his own quintet of top-notch musicians: trumpeter Russ Johnson, guitarist Nir Felder, Australian bass player Adam Armstrong and drummer Fred Kennedy. The band is called Ken Thomson and Slow/Fast, and its debut was 2010's *It Would Be Easier If* (Intuition).

"I was identified as someone who makes somewhat punky, fast, loud, distorted music," Thomson said a few hours before performing at Sugar Maple in Milwaukee as part of a tour in support of the group's sophomore recording, *Settle* (NCM East). "It is a departure from Gutbucket, which is more fast than slow. I wanted a wider pal-

ette that we could use."

Because the members of Slow/Fast all have busy schedules, it can be difficult for them to all get together to play. To make matters worse, Johnson left New York for Milwaukee in 2011. The leader finds comfort in knowing that these musicians are ready to invest their time in his compositions.

So, what motivates them to play Thomson's music? "The challenge," said Johnson. "The music is physically and mentally very demanding to play, but you feel the payoff at the end. When you practice it, you only see the challenge, but once you are on the bandstand, the beauty actually comes out and you realize all these extremely intricate events have their meaning."

The most striking aspect of a Slow/Fast performance is how intently the band members look at the scores. However, as Johnson suggests, Thomson's compositions do not have the dry or cerebral quality that mars too many similar exercises.

Thomson's knack for high-level intricacies and attention to detail are likely due to his keeping one foot in the New Music world. Until 2006, he ran the composer collective Bang On A Can's imprint Cantaloupe Music. Since he left that position, his ties with the organization actually have been tightening. He leads the highly physical,

12-piece Asphalt Orchestra, whose album *Plays The Pixies: Surfer Rosa* (Cantaloupe) features interpretations of the alt-rock band's compositions. Additionally, Thomson is a member of the Bang On A Can All-Stars, and in 2013 Cantaloupe released *Thaw*, a collection of his string quartet works performed by the Jack Quartet.

The bustling, hectic pace of life in New York City is another challenge for Thomson. He seizes any opportunity he has away from the city to write or flesh out his compositions. "I wake up in the morning and, unfortunately, the first thing in my mind is not writing music," he said. "The sad part is that our lives are 80 percent logistics and figuring things out [but only] 20 percent music. For me it's helpful to separate myself from the digital world."

Settle finally gives Thomson the opportunity to devote more time to the bass clarinet, an instrument he picked up well after he became proficient on the alto saxophone. (He also plays bass clarinet on the *Thaw* track "Perpetual.")

"I feel that the instrument is underutilized," he said. "It has a four-octave range that offers incredible possibilities. What I've realized with this band is that I can play unison or above the trumpet, and at the same time play down with the bass."

—Alain Drouot

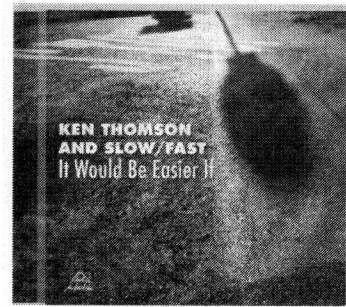
The New York Times

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NEW YORK, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2010

THE Arts

Critics' Choice: New CDs



Ken Thomson and Slow/Fast

"It Would Be Easier If"
(Intuition)

A striking thing happens about five minutes into the second track on "It Would Be Easier If," the studio debut of Ken Thomson with Slow/Fast. The track, which has a title just beyond the bounds of printability here — it's something you might say while shaking a fist at a Mister Softee truck — has already pinballed through a harrowing set of hyperactive fanfares tightly scored for Russ Johnson's trumpet and Mr. Thomson's alto saxophone. The thing that happens is an unaccompanied guitar solo by Nir Felder, who compresses the composition's wild chromatic sprawl into a single exhalation, his pealing phrases expressing proficiency as well as danger.

That pairing is by no means alien to Mr. Thomson, a multi-reedist and composer with a busy profile in new-music circles. He jointly leads both the Asphalt Orchestra, a resident marching band of the composer collective Bang on a Can, and Gutbucket, a jazz-rooted punk-rock band. Slow/Fast is his latest project, a spur to his long-form writing and an outlet for what he has taken to calling "21st Century third-stream music."

If you've been observing New York jazz culture over the last 20 years, you probably know enough to be wary of such a phrase. The marriage of detailed orchestration and bracing improvisation has become nearly commonplace. What used to get coded under the rubric "downtown" has now diffused into the water supply, so that Mr. Thomson's experiment sounds less like a discovery than yet another refinement.

None of which should cloud the effectiveness of the work. Mr. Thomson's compositions are intricately wrought and incident-steeped, even when — as on "Kleine Helmet", the album's impressionistic opener — they move in snowlike drifts. "Wander angst" begins with Mr. Thomson on bass clarinet shadowing Adam Armstrong's acoustic bass, in reverie; soon it's a frenetic chase sequence, with the drummer Fred Kennedy thrashing a pulse.

The gutsy precision of the playing, particularly by Mr. Johnson and Mr. Felder, calls for hearing this music in a performance setting, where its full impact can be felt. As it happens, Mr. Thomson has booked an album-release show for Friday at the First Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn Heights; musicatfirstsite.com.

NATE CHINEN

The New York Times

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NEW YORK, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2010

WEEKEND **Arts** MOVIES PERFORMANCES

N C1

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2010

The New York Times

Jazz

KEN THOMSON AND SLOW/FAST

(Friday) A multireedist with a high profile in new-music circles — as a leader of Gutbucket and the Asphalt Orchestra and a central figure in the Bang on a Can festival — Mr. Thomson has a new album, “It Would Be Easier If” (Intuition), that draws a bead on his own chamber-jazz compositions. Here he celebrates the album’s release and reassembles its cast: Russ Johnson on trumpet, Nir Felder on guitar, Adam Armstrong on bass and Fred Kennedy on drums. At 7:30 p.m., First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn, 124 Henry Street, Brooklyn Heights, (718) 624-3770, musicatfirstsite.com; \$10. (Chinen)



2010 Year's Best Jazz

Posted on **December 17, 2010** by gtra1n

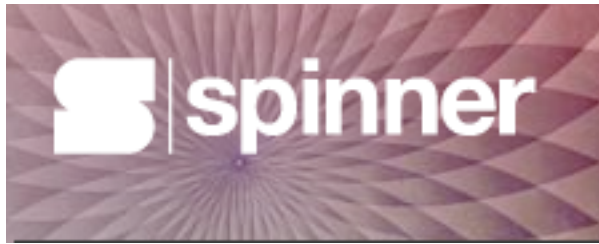
Best Debut CD

It Would Be Easier If- Ken Thomson & Slow/Fast: This could also be on the Top 10 list, but putting it in this category, where it belongs, allows the listing of one other excellent recording. Thomson is a musician's musician, an important member of Gutbucket and the Asphalt Orchestra and seen in innumerable new and classical music concerts around town and the country. He's also got his own band, a rich and beautiful bridge between jazz and new music. The sound of this band is very much like that of a particularly lauded trumpeter of the past decade, a fine player who has been especially praised for his compositions. But writing some contrapuntal lines for a jazz quintet, while never organizing them into any particular form or structure and hoping improvisation carries the day is not much in the way of composition. What Thomson does here is simply great: writing homophonic and polyphonic (and polyrhythmic) lines within the structure of real compositions that are thought all the way through. He favors long, complex lines, jazz 'endless melody,' and they always move purposefully towards a point, even if in the moment that point seems distant and mysterious. The music is compositionally interesting in every moment. But this isn't icy third-stream, Thomson's style is laden with emotional force, and the band is just great (live they build up tremendous fire). The improvisations are terrific and fit seamlessly into the overall aesthetic. This is simply one of the best examples of a truly non-jazz compositional method applied to jazz that one will ever hear. Excellent, memorable and with a power that will grow with each listening.

Top 10 Musical Events 2010

Posted on **December 22, 2010** by gtra1n

3. Ken Thomson & Slow/Fast at Music at First: I love Thomson's new CD, and the live show was even better. The power and energy that the band develops was gripping and moving. Well beyond the standard of a jazz gig.



Ken Thomson Turns His Reed Work to Chamber Jazz

by [Tad Hendrickson](#)

Improvisation is a big, if not the biggest, pillar of jazz music. For many, it's what gives the music its unique identity, separating it from pop and the rest. Musicians wax poetic about the experience of playing that way, and I've written extensively about it through the years, particularly applauding those groups that practice free playing in which little if anything is written out or composed ahead of time.



But in recent years I've become more patient with jazz musicians who emphasize the art of crafting great tunes. Nothing is more annoying than listening to a talented but unrehearsed band play a set where the formula strictly adheres to the head/melody – lead solo – secondary solo(s) – back to the head for the conclusion. Obviously, this works for the music's roots as a style refined during jam sessions, but this unswerving formula can get quite tedious when it's applied song after song.

Reedist [Ken Thomson](#) is never boring. He's a bouncing, twirling loose cannon when he plays live with the long-running band [Gutbucket](#), which has four albums out and a fifth coming in January. He also

is the co-leader of Bang on a Can's postmodern 12-piece marching band [Asphalt Orchestra](#), which plays everything from Mingus to classical avant-gardist Conlon Nancarrow to metal's Meshuggah as it marches, jumps and dances.

Thomson now returns with '[Things Would be Easier If](#),' a toned-down and thoughtful effort with Slow/Fast (Thomson, trumpeter Russ Johnson, guitarist Nir Felder, bassist Adam Armstrong and drummer Fred Kennedy). Like much of his work, the album is a combination of rock, jazz and modern chamber music, but whereas Asphalt defies easy categorization and Gutbucket is overtly punk jazz, Slow/Fast leans towards composition-heavy chamber jazz.

"The idea was to do five 10-minute songs and to only have improvisation when it was absolutely necessary," Thomson explains. "I was using improvisation to inform the composition, which is different than the standard jazz model where you have your head and you have your vehicle for improvisation. For me, I wanted to have the improvisation be a vehicle for the composition."

The music has a energetic playfulness to it that runs counter to the Thomson's somewhat academic description of the album – most rambunctious is the shredding, odd-metered 'Goddamn You Ice Cream Truck,' which was inspired by the music emanating from a Mister Softee truck that sat outside his Brooklyn, N.Y. apartment.

According to Thomson, "The question I hear is that whether I incorporated the [truck's] jingle in the song and the answer is no. The title was actually done before the song was done. The windows of my apartment would be open because it's hot and I often write from my head to paper, and it happened a few

times where I was working something and then this jingle would come in and I would suddenly lose everything I was working on. It was the aural equivalent of my computer crashing."

Humor is an ongoing element in Thomson's music, but there is nothing funny about the elegant 'No No No.' This 11-minute gem is imbued with long tones that blend together like different colors on a painter's palette. Unlike Gutbucket's material, which tends toward spasmodic and to-the-point, 'Slow/Fast' methodically brings the song to a boil and then dissolves it into a Thomson solo that eventually fades out. While there is very little movement, Thomson and Co. create a taut piece that holds the listener's attention throughout.

Driven by the long dual horn lines of Thomson on alto saxophone and Johnson, 'Wanderangst' is probably the jazziest-sounding tune of the five. Again time signatures, melodies, moods and lead instrument shift from section to section in a way that suggests some heavy-duty arranging.

"I often feel disappointed when I hear a record where it seems like the guys just walked into the studio one day and recorded it," Thomson points out. "To me if I feel like I'm going more and more towards composition it's because I'm putting a lot of effort into my compositions because it really illustrates who I am and what I want it to be."

Thomson spends a fair amount of time arranging for different groups and commissions, as well – including a new Asphalt Orchestra track with [David Byrne](#) and [St. Vincent](#). He also plays in about eight other bands and is on the faculty for Bang on a Can's Summer Festival, so it's safe to say that Ken Thomson is working at full capacity these days.

"I don't know what else I could add right now," he says as he runs down his schedule, which includes live dates with Slow/Fast. "I'm maxed, for sure, but it's a good kind of maxed. It's maxed with the kind of stuff that I want to be doing, and I'm pretty happy about that."

"All the News
That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

Late Edition

Today, sunshine yielding to clouds, mild, high 49. Tonight, turning colder, clearing, low 24. Tomorrow, cold, blustery and mostly sunny, high 32. Weather map appears on Page A16.

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NEW YORK, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2008

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WEEKEND Arts MOVIES PERFORMANCES

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2008

Times



JULIETA CERVANTES FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The guest artist Iva Bittova performed with members of the Bang on a Can All-Stars on Wednesday at Merkin Concert Hall.

New Works That Employ Or Disregard Electronics

Bang on a Can's People's Commissioning Fund is a lovely idea. Concertgoers contribute whatever they can afford, and Bang on a Can, the new-music organization, commissions a few new works, usually from young composers. The scores are played by the Bang on a Can All-Stars at an annual concert and recorded for broadcast on WNYC-FM.

That's the theory, anyway, and it's mostly what happens. But the fine print in the program book shows that the grass-roots ideal is not easily reached. After the long list of contributors, the Greenwall Foundation and the Jerome Foundation are also thanked for their support. Not that there's any shame in that; it

Bang on a Can All-Stars
Merkin Concert Hall

In Mr. Perich's "All Possible Paths," the electronic component had the sharp-edged, undulating quality of the Farfisa organ in Philip Glass's music from the 1970s, and the ensemble's moves were the insistently repeating figures that drove Mr. Glass's early music as well. Harmonic movement was glacial until a long coda in which everything stopped except a gentle electronic sound playing a chord progression rather than single-chord repetition.

Mr. Helvacioğlu built the electronic track for his "Lossada Taka" by processing recordings of the Bang on a Can players and adding other elements as well: at one point, a woman's voice. His writing was less overtly Minimalist than Mr. Perich's. Instead he created a hazy, atmospheric sound in which the ensemble wove guitar, clarinet, piano, percussion and bass lines in a stream of brief, varied and mostly disconnected episodes.

Mr. Thomson's "seasonal disorder" is a high-energy, angry work, inspired by reading the news every morning before composing. Mr. Thomson's alarm yielded a texture laced with power chords, screaming clarinet lines and cluster-laden piano writing. In the end it is sheer madness, in a good, thrillingly visceral way.

In the second half of the concert the Czech violinist and singer Iva Bittova offered an invitingly quirky vocal and violin improvisation, and was joined by the Bang on a Can players for her song cycle "Elida." Ms. Bittova gave the musicians plenty to do, but her riveting singing — which ranges from rough-hewn rusticity to eccentric leaping in the style of Kate Bush — remained the focus of the performance.

Three pieces commissioned by Bang on a Can.

always seemed unlikely that a few hundred small contributions could yield decent commissioning fees.

This year's crop — works by Tristan Perich, Erdem Helvacioğlu and Ken Thomson — were performed on Wednesday evening at Merkin Concert Hall.

Mr. Perich and Mr. Helvacioğlu provided works that mixed electronic sound and standard (although amplified) instruments. Mr. Thomson, the saxophonist in the punk-jazz band Gutbucket, wrote a virtuoso piece for the ensemble itself, with no electronic overlay.

The commissioned works by Tristan Perich, Erdem Helvacioğlu and Ken Thomson will be broadcast on March 19 on "New Sounds," WNYC, 93.9 FM; wnyc.org.

Mr. Thomson, the saxophonist in the punk-jazz band Gutbucket, wrote a virtuoso piece for the ensemble itself, with no electronic overlay.

Mr. Thomson's "seasonal disorder" is a high-energy, angry work, inspired by reading the news every morning before composing. Mr. Thomson's alarm yielded a texture laced with power chords, screaming clarinet lines and cluster-laden piano writing. In the end it is sheer madness, in a good, thrillingly visceral way.

"All the News
That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

Late Edition

Today, mostly sunny, unseasonably warm, high 78. Tonight, increasing clouds, mild, low 64. Tomorrow, limited sun, mild, showers arriving, high 75. Weather map, Page D10.

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NEW YORK, MONDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2007

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THE Arts

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MONDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2007

The New York Times



PHOTOGRAPH BY ERIN BASANO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The American Composers Orchestra with Ken Thomson's quartet, Gutbucket.

Hybrid Doesn't Always Mean Synthesis

Since its inaugural concert in 1977 the American Composers Orchestra has played an invaluable role in fostering the creation and promotion of contemporary

MUSIC REVIEW
STEVE SMITH
American music. Recent seasons have suggested a quiet tug of war among the elements of its name. Some initiatives, for example, questioned the meaning of "American" by emphasizing music from Latin America or music by immigrant composers of disparate origin.

The greatest source of flux in the group's profile lately has been a decreased emphasis on "Orchestra." Last season only one event featured a full symphonic complement; this season none do. Meanwhile "Composers" has gained prominence through an initiative focusing on



Anna Clyne and cello, during a performance of "paintbox."

Horse" opened the concert, is known for a small body of fascinating, precision-tooled works. Those qualities were missing here. The balance between Mr. Johnson's animated electric-guitar playing and the amplified orchestra was patchy; brass and wind entries were tentative, sapping momentum.

The urge to approve of a worthy composer's exposure is considerable. But the danger in a performance like this cannot be overstated. To the public an inept premiere is more likely to reflect badly on its composer than on performers acting under an authoritative name.

The playing was better in Susie Ibarra's "Pintados Dream," a simple, delicately scored modal reverie that provided a showcase for Ms. Ibarra's sensitive, poetic drumming and watercolor daubs by the painter Makoto Fujimura. But a murky account of Steve Coleman's "Illusion of Body" misrepresented its composer, a jazz saxophonist whose albums

American Composers Orchestra Zankel Hall

present a gripping alchemy of complex rhythms and globe-spanning mythologies. Mr. Coleman's cosmos-pondering concept was reduced to primordial ooze, rendering analysis pointless.

Anna Clyne's "paintbox" dispensed with the orchestra altogether. Ms. Clyne sat motionless, cross-legged with her cello in her lap, while Joshue Ott, a computer artist, illustrated her dense, playful electronic mash-up of sustained cello tones, plinking music-box sounds, stuttering speech and layered vocals. "Revelations," a 1955 work by the restlessly inquisitive jazz bassist and composer Charles Mingus, positioned him as a spiritual forebear.

The concert ended on a high note, literally, with the frenetic saxophonist Ken Thomson's "Wait Your Turn," an animated battle between the orchestra and Mr. Thomson's punk-jazz quartet, Gutbucket. The groups took turns playing frenetic chords and explosive rhythms; when they came together, the music offered a density worthy of the closing bars of a Led Zeppelin epic.

However the American Composers Orchestra decides to address the troublesome issues raised by this concert, it should do so quickly. One obvious solution would be to offer fewer premieres and rehearse each more thoroughly. What was presented here served the best interests of no one, least of all the composers whose works were so poorly represented.

**A focus on artists
who both write
and perform.**

artists who both write and perform. Of the six works the ensemble played at Zankel Hall on Friday night, four were premieres in which the composers participated.

Audacity is admirable. But execution also counts, and in this the ensemble, conducted by Steven Sloane, fell short, right down to the awkward set changes and handling of multimedia components.

Scott Johnson, whose "Stalking

Wait Your Turn
October 2007
Zankel Hall @ Carnegie Hall
Annenberg Center @ University of Pennsylvania

The Philadelphia Inquirer

Review Music

Like exegesis with that?

2 new-music concerts show perils of over-explaining.

By David Patrick Stearns
INQUIRER MUSIC CRITIC

The key to keeping mainstream audiences from fleeing new and edgy classical music lies, it would seem, in feeding listeners more and more information. That, at least, seemed to be the game plan in Morton

Feldman's famously meditative 1971 masterwork *Rothko Chapel* by the Philadelphia Singers on Saturday, and, to a lesser degree, at Sunday's opening concert of the New York-based American Composers Orchestra's residency at the Annenberg Center.

See **CONCERTS** on E5

Thomson's *Wait Your Turn* is as visceral as music can be: While some composers struggle to give an orchestra rhythmic life, Thomson gave the orchestra jazzlike riffs. He also knows how to create tension with escalating chromatic lines, or to give himself and his punk/jazz group, named gutbucket, a forum for its own showcase moments.

artsJournal

the daily digest of arts, culture & ideas

Greg Sandow

... in an article about collaborations with orchestra including Sufjan Stevens, Ben Folds, Nick Cave:

And then there was a piece by Ken Thomson, *Wait Your Turn*, a fabulous romp for Thomson's band gutbucket (again no capital letter) and orchestra, which I heard and loved at an American Composers Orchestra concert in New York not long ago. gutbucket plays a wild mixture of punk, jazz, and -- to my ear, and I really loved this -- metal. The orchestra part doesn't sound difficult; here's a piece that any orchestra could program, and have lots of fun with the new young audience Thomson might attract, or at least delight.

www.classicalsource.com

[*Wait Your Turn*] came off as an exuberant and entertaining pie in the face of traditional sonata form. The work begins with the strings sawing away on sixteenth notes in octave unison, percussive punctuation on (or off) the measure, woodwinds (in the high range) and brass blaring dissonant but tonal-centric chords, seeming to build to a climax and then ... continuing. Eventually, the orchestra hits a dynamic climax and Gutbucket enters - playing exactly the same music with which the orchestra began, but arranged for saxophone, electric guitar and bass, and drum kit, an unrelenting wall of rhythmically tight, machine-gun jazz-punk noise. Gutbucket demonstrated their well-earned reputation for high-energy avant-rock fusion - especially Thomson, who is a particularly extroverted player. Conductor Steven Sloane and the orchestra mirrored his amped-up euphoria as they joined in the work's final barrage of aural mayhem, trading blasts of virtuosic energy, a heavy-metal post-Bernsteinian musical rumble that received a rousing ovation and brought an adventurous evening of music to a riveting close.