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the **transbay**  
Creative Music Calendar

February 2004

# John Gruntfest's Futurism

The Free Music Festival Orchestra Live at the Metropolitan Art Center

a reminiscence and review by Henry Kuntz

In a time before this time, in our same physical space, there was a musical era connected to our own but of another character and dimension. In calendar time, it was about twenty-five years ago. In musical time, it was like the day before yesterday; but it could also have been tomorrow, because its sound was the sound of tomorrow.

The music of this era strove to be larger than itself. Its musical freedom was no mere technical achievement but an open-ended exploration that had to do with the very fabric and freedom of life. This freedom was both invigorating and frightening: invigorating in its realization, frightening in its practical implications. For the logic of liberation is such that the established ground of being of every single orthodoxy, musical or not, must fundamentally be called into question.

There was, as well, an inherently spiritual dimension to this new music: spiritual in the broadest sense of the word, nothing to do with religion. Music was not only music; it was a spiritual journey, a spiritual quest. And though it may seem amazing now, a wide spectrum of players of this period more or less accepted a vision such as this as a starting point for what their music was about. Many quite willingly and openly gave utterance to this vision, a vision most pointedly personified in the music and writings of John Gruntfest.

As a musician, on alto saxophone, John was the wildest sounding, hardest blowing, and yet one of the most disciplined players around. The weight of his music lent weight to his words.

Nurtured in the free jazz lofts of New York's lower east side in the 1960s, John's experience provided a direct link to concepts which infused this new music at its inception. Drawing, as did many players, on Coltrane's later work, groundbreaking flights like *Ascension* and *OM*, Gruntfest's vision was of a music that could generate magic through its very intensity and focus, whose freedom would suggest a greater total individual and social freedom. What was important, John wrote (EAR, July-Aug 1979), is "that the music in some sense has got to transcend the limitations of its own existence... which also I think (can) help the individual to transcend the limitations of his or her own existence."

Further, that which seemed to John to be of "absolute necessity" (reflectively viewed as the one concept unifying and tying together virtually all of the area's free music trajectories), "is the idea that through the various energies being produced a direct effect on the universe itself is being made: the transformation of individuals, community, world, and universe; transformation as a state of being whereby unity, harmony, ecstasy, God are allowed to exist in a world which sorely lacks these qualities." (EAR, May-June 1980)

Free music, then, while it may happen to take place in a performance space (or not!) or to provide entertainment to those hearing it (or not!), contained within itself a deeper ritual necessity and impulse which was the essence and truth of its being.

*continued on page 2*

*ERRATUM. The Transbay sincerely apologizes for neglecting to credit the photographer of last month's cover shot of Anthony (sic) Braxton and Myles Boisen. Katherine Copenhaver of Kapture Image Photography is a great local photographer and long-time supporter of the music community, and we appreciate the donation of her work to the TransBay calendar. For more information about her services, call (510) 869-4267 or email "toygams@yahoo.com". An online gallery of her work may be viewed at "[www.Stuartink.com/kaptureimage/kaptureimage.html](http://www.Stuartink.com/kaptureimage/kaptureimage.html)".*



Such was the context in which John's grandiose "Piece for Forty Horns" (four versions of which appear on this CD), the amazing centerpiece of the 1979 Fourth Annual San Francisco Free Music Festival, took place. A review I wrote of it at the time noted the instrumentation as John Gruntfest, alto saxophone, composer and conductor; plus 23 saxophones, 4 clarinets, 4 trombones, 3 trumpets, 2 flutes, 1 oboe, sackbut, and tuba. This may well have been only the publicized or projected instrumentation, however, as John informs me that, in fact, between fifty and seventy musicians participated. The spacious (and on this particular evening, well packed) Metropolitan Art Center was a perfect venue for the orchestra's performance, with its golden wood floors and lively acoustics, around the perimeters of which the players formed a giant circle.

The basic instructions for the piece (as published along with the score in the July-Aug 1979 issue of EAR) were as follows:

1. The idea is to create a physical wave in the space which will hopefully establish a feeling of warmth, unity, and spirituality: SACRED SPACE, SACRED TIME
2. Repetition and speed are two keys to setting up the waves, As is playing with the totality of your whole being. Lots of Heart.
3. Each idea within the repeats should be repeated many times.
4. You may move from idea to idea in any order.
5. Create your own idea within the harmonic-spiritual framework.
6. USE THE HARMONIC SPRINGBOARD TO ACHIEVE ESCAPE VELOCITY AND FREEDOM.

From the review of the piece I published in my newsletter, BELLS (1979):

"The forty-horn orchestra piece, without question the most important happening of this year's Fourth Annual Free Music Festival, was simple enough in its construction: two sections based on modal centers and a third on a South African Venda duet, alternating rhythmic motifs rooted in the modalities of the first two parts. In the opening sections, certain ideas were written out for those who wanted to play them; those who didn't could use them as a springboard to work with their suggested harmonic implications and/or overtone series, the idea being to set a wave of sound moving in the large dance-floor space of the Metropolitan Art Center. It was, in a sense, an "Ascension" for the Seventies, but its sheer mass and density – certainly one of the biggest sounds ever

heard from an improvising ensemble – propelled it almost immediately beyond itself, transcending and breaking through its own built-in limitations at the same time as they were being adhered to. So rather than a wave of sound, there were waves – of every kind imaginable, each moving against and with and reinforcing all the others. At the same time, there was a definitely established "bottom", a huge grounding force which both gave way to and set the context for the innumerable high-pitched screams and cries and obligatory shouts for joy and, indeed, the whole spectrum of beautifully mixed-up sounds that emerged. It lasted only ten minutes, but it was a massive force – in truth, an incredible cleansing force – which was a life of its own over and above its individual contributors. The musicians both surrounded and stood among the audience of some five hundred people, and the piece was played side-by-side with an athletically demanding exhibition of Shintaido, a Japanese martial art which, from the sounds made by the movements of the participants, added some unexpected percussive underpinnings. There was, too, a tape made of this performance and of three rehearsals of the piece played earlier in the day, with each being considerably different from the others."

This CD is the first public release of those four versions of the "Piece for Forty Horns", the fourth being the one from the evening performance and the other three being the "rehearsal" realizations in the order they were played. It's the first time I've heard a recording of this music in its entirety, and the first time I've heard any of it in twenty-four years.

The sheer massiveness of the music is astonishing, even now. Each version of the piece is special, but the first and fourth are classic.

The fourth version, brimming with confidence, sends sparks flying off its edges. It perhaps best balances the boisterous mix of heady freedom and tonal reality. The mix shines bright, with a topping of brass on the reedy surface. The Venda finish spins triumphantly out of the colossal ensemble, most fully calling to mind its African origins. And the Shintaido dancers, in landing their high, leaping jumps, interpolate some occasional, just audible, thumping percussion.

The first, on the other hand – yet to have a precedent for itself – opens like a rocket hurling headlong through space. That rocket is an immense wall of sound whose tonal centers, when contacted, act like smaller booster rockets to propel it even further into the stratosphere. The Venda duet begins to try to assert itself just past the seventh minute, but this spaceship does not really want to ground, and it struggles mightily against the pull of the land dance. Gravity at last

asserts itself; and slowly, gradually, the piece fixates on the lights of a runway. It finishes its flight of glory as softly as it began raucously.

The second and third versions are shorter, more ostensibly yin-and-yang in quality. In these renditions there is virtually no transition between the piece's freer beginnings and the ensuing Venda conclusion; rather they coexist with each other, side by side. Yet while the opening portion of the second version nearly rivals the power of the first, the opening of the third is the slowest in tempo, with its tonal centers the most firmly established. Parts of that version are fantasia-like, rather like giddily floating in space.

This is stupendous music from another dimension, a dimension not so far away from ours, and yet light years away. The CD is a fundamental and essential document of the history of improvised music in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Henry Kuntz, December 2003

Order online from CD Baby (<http://www.cdbaby.com/>) or directly from WAVEMAN, 2156 Encinal Ave; Alameda, CA 94501.

CATEGORY: Best CD Release, 2003; Most Important CD Release, 2003, Pertaining to the Actual History of Improvised Music in the SF Bay Area

### THE FREE MUSIC FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA (Void Leaper Productions vl 1376)

Composed and Conducted By John Gruntfest Live at the Fourth Annual Free Music Festival, Metropolitan Art Center, San Francisco, March 24, 1979. "Dedicated to the Great SF Free Players of the '70s"

*Musicians (A Partially Reconstructed Listing): Saxophones: John Gruntfest, Larry Ochs, Bruce Ackley, Andrew Voigt, Robert Bluewater Haven, Kersti Arbams, Genevieve Boulet de Monrel, Harvey Varga, Steve Deutdch, Jim Warshour, Hal Richards, Alfonso Texidor, Jim Schwartz, Henry Kuntz, Asil Lasi, Phillip Friend, Niel Barkley, Ben Bossi, Henry Peters, Kirk Allen, Weldon McCarty, Dennis Saputelli; Flutes/Clarinets: Albert Kovitz, Patrick Wallace, Edward Ache, Richard Dworkin, Gail Edwards, Tim Lambert, Eugene Cash, Marcia Smith, France Fortier; Brass: Bobby Bueghler, Ron Heglin, Hal Hughes, Lea Merrick, Loren Means. And many others for now and forever mystery guests.*

COVER: Dori Seda's playful drawing, elephants roaring and raging above the orchestra, was made immediately following the performance. An artist of many talents, Dori left this planet some years ago at age 38. The whereabouts of her various paintings are unknown.

# 7

The 7th  
Annual  
Activating  
the Medium  
Festival  
2004

February 6 and 7, 2004  
SomArts Cultural Center  
934 Brannan Street, SF

**Friday, February 6: 8PM:**

Jean-Francois Laporte (Quebec)  
John Bischoff (Berkeley)  
Kenneth Atchley (Oakland)  
Works by Matt Heckert (SF)

**Saturday, February 7: 8PM:**

Solid Eye (Los Angeles)  
Thomas Dimuzio (SF)  
Michael Thomas Jackson (NC)  
Joe Colley (SF)  
Trevor Paglen (Oakland)  
Works by Matt Heckert (SF)

[www.23five.org](http://www.23five.org)

**Coming in March:**

**The Transbay interviews  
Vorticella!**

**...and who knows what  
else.**

## I am an Unrecognized Genius

I, the undersigned \_\_\_\_\_, do hereby notify the world of my status as an Unrecognized Genius. You are bound to owe me a living. In your ignorance of my manifold talents, you do yourselves a grievous injury, but, alas, you will never know it! Ha ha! I, of course, could care less, as what I have to offer is of such superiority that mere mortals of this time would never freakin' get it. Only in some better, future time will my name come to be regarded alongside the immortals of music/art/whatever. For now, could you loan me \$5?

As an Unrecognized Genius, I: (Check all that apply. Must have five or more checked to qualify for UG status.)

- am of the white race, male, areligious, and skinny
- do not talk to anybody during daylight hours
- am not alive during daylight hours
- subsist on a diet of Top Ramen and/or burritos and/or frozen pizza
- have a girlfriend who does my laundry for me
- sleep on a friend's couch (may be checked only if you do NOT have a girlfriend)
- bathe only during the full moon, or at similarly-spaced intervals
- scour Kinko's wastebins for paper on which to prepare grant applications
- use a computer as my music/art/whatever studio
- use a computer as my girlfriend
- have a free internet/email account. (broadband is for bourgeois yuppie scum)
- have never once changed my artistic focus, goals, ideals, race declaration or sexual orientation just so I could be eligible for a grant (*OK to leave unchecked*)
- get free STD treatments at the city clinic (only six more to go!)
- will finish my magnum opus as soon as I get my car out of the police garage

(signed) \_\_\_\_\_

sfSoundSeries

**Saturday, February 7**  
8pm \$10 suggested donation

An investigation into the theatrical possibilities in contemporary music and the musical potentials of contemporary theater.

Samuel Beckett / *Ghost Trio*  
David Bithell / *new work [2 tb, tr, & video]*  
Rick Burkhardt / *Simulcast [2 perc]*  
Kenneth Gaburo / *Mouthpiece [tr + video]*  
Vinko Globokar / *Dos a Dos [2 horns]*  
Petros Ovspeyan / *Now the shadow of the pillar... (Part VI) [solo piano]*  
**Plus Fluxus Interludes**

Community Music Center San Francisco  
544 Capp Street (between 20th and 21st)  
<http://sfsound.org/series.html>

David Bithell Christopher Burns Matt Ingalls Tom Yoder  
Christopher Jones Hadley McCarroll Toyoji Tomita



berio  
[thema omaggio a joyce]  
reich  
[it's gonna rain  
beatles  
[revolution?  
luc ferrari  
&  
more!

**The San Francisco Tape Music Festival**

<http://sfsound.org/tape.html>  
tapecenter@sfsound.org  
(415) 614-2434

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February 20, 21, and 22, 2004 8:30pm  
\$10 one night / \$25 festival pass  
email/phone reservations suggested  
CellSpace 2050 Bryant SF

16 loudspeakers  
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in  
surround  
sound

## Luggage Store Gallery New Music Series

Thu 2/5/04 8PM

Laptop music!

Jorge BlankStefanie Ku  
& Brian O'Reilly

Thu 2/12/04 8PM

Bryan Eubanks - soprano saxophone  
(Portland) Bob Marsh - cello/violin  
(Oakland) Hendrick Greidanus -  
contrabass (Vancouver)

Thu 2/19/04 8PM

Paolo Angelli (Sardinia)  
- solo modified

Sardinian guitar, voice

Thu 2/26/04 8PM

detritus.net night:

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Sunday Feb 15 8:15pm

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Solo



and

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John Laufenberger bass  
Garth Powell percussion

Sunday Feb 22 8:15pm

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He has developed  
his unique style  
allowing him to  
refine his own  
"prepared"  
version of his  
favorite instrument  
within the context of  
a solo and group performance.

with: Phillip Greenleaf  
Shoko Hibase, Tim  
Perkis & Gino  
Robair

# February Concert Listings

PLEASE GO TO [WWW.TRANSBAYCALENDAR.ORG](http://WWW.TRANSBAYCALENDAR.ORG) FOR DETAILS ABOUT THESE EVENTS, PLUS UPDATES AND SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

**Sun 2/1 8:00 PM Community Music Center [544 Capp Street Btwn 20th and 21st SF]** Large ensemble music of Scott Rosenberg and [Morgan Guberman](#)

**Sun 2/1 8:00 PM free Stanford University [Campbell Recital Hall Braun Music Center 541 Lasuen Mall Stanford, CA 94305]**  
Franklin Cox, cello

**Wed 2/4 8:00 PM \$5.00 The Jazz House [3192 Adeline @ MLK Berkeley]**

All musicians are encouraged to attend and participate in performing themes suggested by the audience.

**Thu 2/5 8:00 PM \$6-10 Luggage Store Gallery New Music Series [1007 Market St. @ 6th Street SF]** Laptop music! 8pm: Jorge Blank / 9pm: Stefanie Ku & Brian O'Reilly

**Fri 2/6 8:00 PM \$10 SomArts Cultural Center [934 Brannan Street San Francisco, CA 94103]**

The Seventh Annual Activating the Medium Festival: featuring Jean-Francois Laporte, [John Bischoff](#), Kenneth Atchley, and works by Matt Heckert.

**Sat 2/7 8:00 PM \$10 SomArts Cultural Center [934 Brannan Street San Francisco, CA 94103]**

The Seventh Annual Activating the Medium Festival; featuring Solid Eye, Thomas Dimuzio, Michael Thomas Jackson, Joe Colley, Trevor Paglen and works by Matt Heckert.

**Sat 2/7 9:30 PM El Rio [3158 Mission St, SF]**  
[Flying Luttenbachers](#) / [Spezza Rotto](#) / [Toychestra](#)

**Sat 2/7 8:00 PM \$10 sfSoundSeries [Community Music Center, 544 Capp Street, SF]** sfSoundSeries: theater - Beckett, Gaburo, Globokar, Fluxus, etc.

**Mon 2/9 7:30 PM FREE Mills College Songlines Series - Ensemble Room [5000 MacArthur Blvd. Oakland, CA 94613]** DJ artist and instrument builder Walter Kitundu performs and discusses developments in his recent work.

**Thu 2/12 8:00 PM \$6-10 Luggage Store Gallery New Music Series [1007 Market St. @ 6th Street SF]**

8pm: [Alexander Kort](#) (Electric Cello); 9pm: Bryan Eubanks (Soprano Sax from Portland) + [Bob Marsh](#) (Cello/Violin from Oakland) + Hendrick Greidanus (Contrabass from Vancouver)

**Fri 2/13 8:00 PM Maybeck Recital Hall [1537 Euclid @Hawthorne Berkeley]** Natto Quartet : Phillip Gelb (Shakuhachi), [Shoko Hikage](#) (koto), [Chris Brown](#) (prepared piano) and [Tim Perkis](#) on electronics

**Sun 2/15 8:15 PM Free, donations go to the performers ACME Observatory at The Jazz House [3192 Adeline Berkeley]** [Fred Frith](#), SOLO; and KLIP (Elliot Kallen, John Laufenberger, [Garth Powell](#))

**Thu 2/19 8:00 PM \$6-10 Luggage Store Gallery New Music Series [1007 Market St. @ 6th Street SF]**  
Paolo Angeli: solo Sardinian prepared guitar

**Fri 2/20 8:00 PM free Stanford University [Campbell Recital Hall Braun Music Center 541 Lasuen Mall Stanford, CA 94305]** Griffin Campbell, sax and electronics

**Fri 2/20 8:00 PM \$10 sfSoundSeries [CELLSpace 2050 Bryant SF]**  
San Francisco Tape Music Festival

**Sat 2/21 8:00 PM \$10 sfSoundSeries [CELLSpace 2050 Bryant SF]**  
San Francisco Tape Music Festival

**Sun 2/22 8:00 PM \$10 sfSoundSeries [CELLSpace 2050 Bryant SF]**  
San Francisco Tape Music Festival

**Sun 2/22 8:00 PM free strictly Ballroom [The Ballroom at CCRMA (The Knoll) 660 Lomita Drive Stanford]**

Eric Rynes, violin: works by Boulez, Xenakis, Maderna, Harvey, etc.

**Wed 2/25 8:00 PM \$10 The Jazz House [3192 Adeline @ MLK Berkeley]**

WHAT WE LIVE -- first Bay Area appearance in many years!  
[Lisle Ellis](#): bass / [Larry Ochs](#): saxophones / [Donald Robinson](#): drums

**Thu 2/26 8:00 PM \$6-10 Luggage Store Gallery New Music Series [1007 Market St. @ 6th Street SF]**  
detritus.net night: [Tim Perkis](#) and [John Bischoff](#), [Bob Boster](#) and [Lance Grabmiller](#)

**Thu 2/26 8:00 PM \$10 The Jazz House [3192 Adeline @ MLK Berkeley]**

WHAT WE LIVE with "Strings Attached". Part 1 with [Lisle Ellis](#): bass / [Larry Ochs](#): saxophones / [Donald Robinson](#): drum /special guest [John Schott](#): el guitar

**Fri 2/27 8:00 PM \$10 The Jazz House [3192 Adeline @ MLK Berkeley]**

WHAT WE LIVE with "Strings Attached". Part 2 / special guest [FRED FRITH](#): el guitar / [Lisle Ellis](#): bass / [Larry Ochs](#): saxophones / [Donald Robinson](#): drum

**Fri 2/27 9:30 PM \$6 Starry Plough [3101 Shattuck Ave @ Prince Berkeley]**  
[Crater](#); [Nels Cline Singers](#)

**Sat 2/28 8:00 PM \$10 The Jazz House [3192 Adeline @ MLK Berkeley]**

WHAT WE LIVE : "Strings Attached" Part 3: special guest [NELS CLINE](#): el guitar .., The Band: [Lisle Ellis](#): bass...[Larry Ochs](#): saxes...[Donald Robinson](#): drummer-man

**Sat 2/28 8:00 PM The Lab [2948 16th St SF]**  
Empire Ultra Extravaganza, w/ [Fuzzybunny](#)

**Sun 2/29 8:00 PM free Stanford University [Campbell Recital Hall, Braun Music Center, 541 Lasuen Mall, Stanford]**

Alea II ensemble: [Ferneyhough](#), [Rio-Pareja](#), [Thomalla](#), etc.



**February 2004**

**1510 8th Street, Oakland, CA 94607**

**<http://transbaycalendar.org>  
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The **Transbay Creative Music Calendar** is a volunteer-produced free monthly journal for non-commercial creative new music in the San Francisco Bay Area. In addition to our comprehensive listing of upcoming events, we publish articles and reviews about local music and the people who create it. We talk about a wide range of modern music, including: experimental, improvised, noise, electronic, free-jazz, outrock, 21st century compositions, and sonic art. Each month, 1000 copies of the Transbay are mailed to individuals and hand-delivered to over 45 performance venues and public locations throughout the Bay Area. Contact us for a FREE subscription!

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**!!!!!! February 15 !!!!!!**

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