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## MUSIC REVIEW

### *Near or Far, the Primal Sound Is Om*

By PAUL GRIFFITHS

The number of recordings available suggests there is a wide audience for the music of the Italian composer Giacinto Scelsi, who died 12 years ago. But his work is not often heard at concerts, which could be because it demands special techniques, and special dedication, from performers because it is hard to program and because it addresses itself not so much to a large, gathered public as to the solitary listener.

At least the programming problem was soundly answered on Friday night, when the Carnegie Mellon School of Music brought an entire concert of Scelsi's music to Carnegie

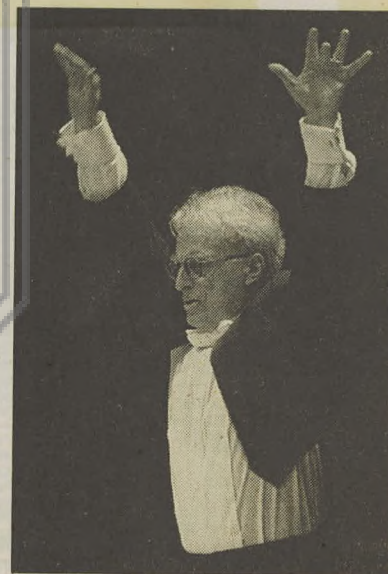
Hall. Orchestral pieces were interleaved with unaccompanied choral items and with some of the composer's "Canti del Capricorno," wordless chants for soloists with or without instrumental backing. The evening thus swung between massive scores, which in Scelsi's case often project sounds that seem to be coming from very far away, and incantations that had a fierce immediacy. No applause interrupted the ritual, and all the performers stayed onstage throughout. Then, finally, they joined together in one of the composer's last and biggest works, whose typically esoteric title, "Konx-Om-Pax," makes no secret of the Buddhist hum that was his primal sound.

One hears that hum, that "om," even when the only sound is coming from instruments, as in "Hymnos," the first orchestral work on this program. Scelsi discovered sounds extraordinarily like those of Tibetan monastic chant by assembling heavy

brass and low strings in unisons aggravated by neighboring notes, microtonal inflections and slow glissandos. Both "Hymnos" and "Konx-Om-Pax" are slow manifestations of such strong but occluded sounds, the latter piece being made even more solemn and strange — and beautiful — by the presence of choral voices and therefore, in this performance, by moments of magical uncertainty about the nature, vocal or instrumental, of the looming sound.

In the "Canti del Capricorno" there can be no such doubt. These are wild ululations that make a point of vocal activity by exploring its further reaches: in the samples included here, the soprano Pauline Vaillancourt obliged with grating, guttural sounds and the tenor Douglas Ahlstedt with a wailing falsetto.

Scelsi's ideal of the vocal orchestra, which makes its own throaty, droning sounds and its own weird whinings, was splendidly realized by the Carnegie Mellon Philharmonic



Chris Lee for The New York Times

Juan Pablo Izquierdo conducting works by Scelsi at Carnegie.

under Juan Pablo Izquierdo. With the essential contribution also of the school's Concert Choir, he carefully built and balanced the sounds that made the majestic and awesome performance of the final work.