

# MUSIC

## Sound of Today

### Alea III presents new, challenging works

By Fred Bouchard

Twentieth century music rarely appears so healthy in sound and spirit as when performed by Alea III. Whether in free concerts at its home base at Boston University or in its subscription series at Longy School of Music in Cambridge, Alea III can be counted on to present new and challenging music with maximum class and minimum neurosis.

The chamber collective, under the direction of its founder Theodore Antoniou, gave sturdy, fascinating performances at Longy (Nov. 19) of chamber pieces by five composers (three living, one of which was in attendance) that were level-headed, brisk, and provocative.

Nino Rota's *String Concerto* dates from 1945, long after the prolific composer had written his first film score (*Popular Train*, 1933) but before the first of his life-long collaborations with Federico Fellini (*The White Sheik*, 1951). Even for a listener steeped only in his wistful, dreamy, carefree film scores, the music was indelibly Rota, yet there were more idiosyncratic gestures, such as baroque figures mutated and spun out, and intense if sometimes murky emotions. The reading was supple and fair, though violin intonation sounded occasionally sour. It's certainly a pleasure to hear another side of such a delightful and familiar composer.

Ivan Tcherenpnin's *Solstice* replaced an unfinished piece by John Heiss, both works commissioned for Alea III by B.U. under a new works grant of the Massachusetts Council of Arts and Humanities. (Heiss may be excused if only for the tremendous effort he put into the Charles Ives Festival at New England Conservatory earlier this month.) The solstice here revolves on a B-flat chord, spinning a single moment into a brief work for small orchestra that weaves consonant harmonies and limpid textures in a strangely compelling way. The dynamics and tempo shifts are extremely subtle, yet despite using currently fashionable ostinatos on mallet instruments, the work maintains much more interest and integrity than most "trance music." Tcherenpnin, on hand for this world premiere, said in the program notes that *Solstice* "is like a slice of the



Founder and conductor of Alea III, Theodore Antoniou, with baton

present, taken to give a chance for the potential richness of each passing moment to blossom."

After intermission we heard a couple of works more closely identified stylistically with music written after 1900: Pierre Boulez' *Eclat* and James Drew's *Open/Closed Forms*. Both pieces, each about 15 minutes long, used an unusual assortment of instruments, prominently percussion, to effect angular juxtapositions of sound and silence, motion and stasis, surprise and tedium. Of those contrasting pairs, the Boulez was long on the former and the Drew on the latter. (Alea, which is Greek for "to roam" and Latin for "dice," applies its name to random or chance elements incorporated in contemporary compositions such as these.)

Antoniou, as comfortable a host as he is a competent conductor and expansive a proselytizer of the new music, gave helpful, easygoing comments between the pieces, and made the going smoother for those who are still having a little trouble coming to grips with music written in our and our fathers' time.

Alea III's next concert will be at Longy on Feb. 25 at 8 pm. For more information on this exciting musical collaborative, call 353-3340.