ers filming Meiselas as she herself takes a photograph; there’s a cut of Meiselas struggling with a huge microphone, recording the soundtrack while Rogers films a garden party. Many scenes find Rogers editing film at his console. We see Meiselas, who produced Olch’s movie, unpacking old boxes of film—the very footage we have been viewing. Unsteady handheld shots add a home-movie feeling, as do the onscreen countdowns that partition sequences. “These are things you usually don’t get to see as a viewer,” Olch explains. “I want you to see the dust on the old film, to hear the crackles of the sound. It’s supposed to feel unexpected and messy. Pulling the curtain back on that is a metaphor for pulling the curtain back on Dick Rogers and his story.”

Olch made his first film in third grade and by middle school, he says, “I walked around with a trench coat and fedora, thinking I was Fritz Lang.” He began work on *Windmill* by “doing everything correctly, making just perfect cuts,” he says. “But it was so boring and so flat. I started looking at sequences I had rejected, and there seemed to be an energy in the reject pile; the movie’s style sort of grew out of that, and began to convey the experience I had going through all these boxes of film.”

The two filmmakers had bonded quickly as teacher and student; Olch first saw Rogers hanging open a metal door into a Harvard hallway, “discouraging like a tweed-jacketed studio boss from the 1940s, tufts of red hair flowing from the sides of his otherwise bald head.” Rogers’s first words to Olch were, “Seventy-fourth Street. Collegiate,” nailing both the home address and private school of his new student. (It turned out that the two men had lived in adjacent buildings on East 74th Street in Manhattan.) For two artists to join forces in this way may be unprecedented in cinema.

“Would that I could say there are ghosts or spirits where I will lurk,” intones Olch as Rogers, facing death, “but there is only this, this movie where, just for an instant, I will be alive in this little world, this little seance of flickering light and no one, not even the heavens, can take that away from me.” Shortly before Olch reads these words on the soundtrack, we see Rogers asking his wheelchair-bound father, who has lost some of his memory after a stroke, “Where do the memories go?” The *Windmill* Movie offers one, very personal, answer: they are preserved on film.

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**Music, Taken Personally**

*The memoir of John Adams*

by RICHARD DYER

Forty years ago, composer John Adams ’69, AM ’72, was conductor of the undergraduate Bach Society Orchestra. A *Crimson* critic creamed one of his concerts, and the experience rankled Adams so much that he quotes the review almost in full in his new autobiography, *Hallelujah Junction*.

That old controversy was forgotten last November, when Harvard’s Office for the Arts presented a special event honoring Adams, the University’s 2007 Arts Medalist. The “Bach Soc,” conducted by Aram Demirjian ’08, performed *The Wound Dresser*, the composer’s setting of one of the great poems Walt Whitman wrote out of his experience as a nurse during the Civil War. The New College Theatre was full and enthusiastic—and the *Crimson’s* subsequent account respectful.

Afterwards, there was a discussion of the text and the music among Adams, President Drew Faust, and Porter University Professor Helen Vendler. The grey-haired, softly bearded Adams was earnest, thoughtful, intense, and occasionally disarmingly modest. (Speaking of his most famous work, the opera *Nixon in China*, a collaboration with poet Alice Goodman ’80 and stage director Peter Sellars ’80, he remarked, “I’m not sure my music comes up to the quality of the libretto.”)

Adams said he was deeply moved by the performance, remarking that soloist John Kapusta ’09 was the same age as the slaughtered young men Whitman wrote about. “It is always older men who send
Off the Shelf
Recent books with Harvard connections

**Mothers and Others: The Evolutionary Origins of Mutual Understanding**, by Sarah Blaffer Hrdy '68, Ph.D. '75 (Harvard, $29.95). As she demonstrated in *Mother Nature*, the author (professor of anthropology emerita at the University of California, Davis) makes the enigmatic compellingly clear, beginning with the “Apes on a Plane” chapter that compares the “nods and resigned smiles” of human passengers on a cramped flight with the “bloody earlobes and other appendages” that would litter the aisles if chimpanzees were flying instead.

The **Lost City of Z: A Tale of Deadly Obsession in the Amazon**, by David Grann (Doubleday, $27.50). A *New Yorker* writer traces Colonel Percy Fawcett’s 1925 disappearance as he searched for a fabled civilization—and his rivalry with Alexander Hamilton Rice, A.B. 1898, M.D. 1904, explorer, Peabody Museum curator, and post-Titanic husband of Eleanor Widener, who used her fortune to fund competitive archaeological expeditions.

**Annie’s Ghosts: A Journey into a Family Secret**, by Steve Luxenberg ‘74 (Hyperion, $22.99). In a memoir-cum-investigation, a *Washington Post* editor discovers, after his mother’s death, the suppressed story of her sister, who was confined to a mental institution from the age of 21.

The **Innovator’s Prescription: A Disruptive Solution for Health Care**, by Clayton M. Christensen, Czik professor of business administration, the late Jerome H. Grossman, ’77, M.D., and Jason Hwang, M.B.A. ’06 (McGraw-Hill, $24.95). The innovation theorist and consultant, with colleagues, argues for wholesale changes in medical practice and organization, with strong doses of new technology and new business models, rather than attempts to achieve incremental reform.

**Can Poetry Save the Earth? A Field Guide to Nature Poems**, by John Felstiner ’58, Ph.D. ’65 (Yale, $35). From the Psalms to Gary Snyder, the author, professor of English at Stanford, interprets Anglo-American poetry attuned to nature, and assesses its ability to awaken readers to better stewardship of the planet.

**Fighting Cancer with Knowledge and Hope**, by Richard C. Frank ’85 (Yale, $28). A physician and cancer researcher offers a guide to the disease, to its diagnosis, and to therapies for patients, families, and—importantly—the healthcare providers who help them.

Yucky Pollution, Shiny Pretty, 2001, Hilltop Children’s Center, Seattle. From *Can Poetry Save the Earth?*

**How Professors Think: Inside the Curious World of Academic Judgment**, by Michèle Lamont, Goldman professor of European studies and professor of sociology and of African American studies (Harvard, $27.95). How do scholars, dedicated to excellence, originality, and quality in academia, judge the work of peers from different disciplines in awarding fellowships or research grants? Lamont, who now advises the Faculty of Arts and Sciences dean on appointments and diversity, probes behind the veil in a unique way, from a sociological perspective.

Faust spoke about Whitman’s focus on the suffering of individuals, through which he was able to suggest the scale of the national tragedy. Adams enthusiastically concurred: “What I love about the poem is its absolutely shocking, clinical veracity.”

Adams’s music is always personal; that’s why audiences take it personally. So he also spoke of some of the other currents that flowed into this work: the gradual disappearance of his father into the fog of Alzheimer’s and his mother’s selfless caregiving, and the loss of friends during the AIDS crisis. And because his music often explores or responds to issues that people care about, it therefore interests a public that is not necessarily drawn to contemporary music—while sometimes annoying the public that is, or critics who pen jibes against his “CNN operas” or suggest that he is the fast-food king of classical music.

The relationship of text to music matters to Adams; much of his music is bound to words. “I considered setting some poems of Wallace Stevens to which I was introduced in Hum 5,” he told his audience. (His section man was Neil Rudenstine.) “But his rhythms and textures were not right for me. I was attracted instead to the purely American utterance of Whitman, the flow of the language, the deep soul he was.”

Adams said he spoke the words of the text into a recording microphone to imprint the rhythms and resonances in his mind, and only then embarked on composing the music; most of his models for text setting come not from composers of opera but from popular music.

I grew up singing Rodgers and Hammerstein with my mother, and I listened to Joni Mitchell, the Beatles, Bob Dylan, Otis Redding, Janis Joplin. But I am not a vernacular composer—I’m a classical com-
composer who writes concert music, not a Bob Dylan kind of artist. I find a lot of contemporary classical music complex and self-referential. For me, though, inspiration comes from trying to connect with an audience. Music is fundamentally the art of feeling—in this instance my feeling, my take on Whitman’s feelings. Whitman was not ashamed of his feelings. Neither was Leonard Bernstein, who was accused of bad taste and vulgarity, of banality and sentimentality. I’d rather have that—after all we got West Side Story out of the deal. Some composers work towards an international style that transcends its national identity. I am drawn towards what is local and site-specific about art.

Adams’s remarks almost amount to a précis of Hallelujah Junction, the book. (He used the title earlier for a two-piano piece—the name comes from a tiny truck stop near his mountain cabin; the volume, partly assembled from his previous writings, would have profited from more careful editing.) More a memoir than a true autobiography, the book is about how he found his own voice and became the composer he wanted to be: his subtitle is “Composing an American Life.”

Therefore some of the things one might expect from an autobiography are not present. His account of his first marriage, for example, is brief and reticent. We view his rise to his current eminence obliquely, as a progress from dorms to a shared house in Porter Square, to a $250-a-month apartment in Berkeley where he made four dollars an hour cleaning toilets and chasing drug dealers out of the doorway, to a cottage a block from Golden Gate Park, to a large four-story home in South Berkeley, and finally the acquisition of a 40-acre plot of redwoods on the Sonoma coast, where he built a studio.

Adams does not shrink from the misfires and embarrassments of his career, because they were necessary. His story is primarily one of self-education, although he does devote two chapters to his time at Harvard—the bookends for him were the Beatles’ Help! and “Let It Be.” He admits he favored “a contrarian route through the curriculum,” but speaks with respect and affection of such teachers as Luise Vosgerchian, Earl Kim, and Leon Kirchner.

Still, he writes, “I made more progress in my command of harmonic practice by reproducing these pop songs [by the Doors, the Beach Boys, and others] from memory at the piano than I ever did by my forced marches through the figured bass treatises.” Later he makes the same point about working through Miles Davis, Charlie Parker, and John Coltrane.

Adams was the first undergraduate allowed to submit a musical composition as his senior thesis. He has never heard a performance of that work, “The Electric Wake”—none could be prepared in that turbulent time. But he is amusing on the subject of one of the works he composed during his two years as a graduate student, a piano quintet that “sounded like it could have been composed in 1910 Vienna by a young man bent on committing a triple murder-suicide.”

Although both he and his admirers make crude distinctions between the “East Coast establishment” and the freedoms of California, Adams knows his time at Harvard was not wasted. The music department’s acquisition of a modular synthesizer and a pair of tape recorders in his junior year launched a fascination with the relationship between music and electronics that continues to this day—he fervently believes that artists should take charge of machines and “make them instruments of divine play.”

Adams realized at Harvard that he wanted to be a composer, not a clarinetist or a conductor; he was not seduced by an opportunity to work with Leonard Bernstein ’39, D.Mus. ’67, at Tanglewood. He had already learned to focus on what he needed to discover and to learn; he was already steadied by an interior gyroscope that would serve him well in the future—after his first successes, for example, he turned down the poet Thom Gunn’s suggestion that he write an opera about the serial killer and cannibal Jeffrey Dahmer.

Much of Hallelujah Junction is a record of serial enthusiasms: for the swing music his father played; for Mozart, to whom he was led by the clarinet; for early rock music; for jazz; for composers as diverse as Ives, Copland, Cage, Ellington, Boulez, Conlon Nancarrow, Frank Zappa, Michael Gordon, and more. (Curiously, for a man often described as the most successful composer of operas today, Adams doesn’t mention many operas by other people, although he does describe conducting The Marriage of Figaro in the Leverett House dining hall, in a 1968 production directed...
Mnemonic Masks
A craft recast

Twelve years ago, Phillip Charette, M.Ed. ’94, spent his days in an office, handling visa applications and other logistical concerns for international students, faculty, and staff at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Now he makes his living as an artist, crafting sculptures that combine elements of his Native Alaskan heritage with his own modern touches.

Charette’s French-Canadian last name comes from his father, but his mother is full-blooded Yup’ik, an indigenous group that today has an estimated 21,000 members spread across Alaska and Siberia. He grew up in Florida, but spent summers with his grandparents in Alaska; Yup’ik was his first language, and he was always interested in Yup’ik folklore. “When I was very young, I was kind of an odd duck,” he says. “When all the other kids were outside running around, I would be inside listening to the elders tell stories.”

As a boy, he was drawn to art, but his father, a federal agent, hoped that his son would choose a career with more financial security. So Charette pursued education administration, and managed to incorporate his interest in his Yup’ik roots: he worked at the University of Alaska, helping to develop a K-12 curriculum combining traditional and Western knowledge. He entered Harvard three years after finishing his undergraduate education, equipped with a master’s degree, he saw his path leading to higher levels of university administration.

A 1997 medical appointment changed his course. Working 12 to 17 hours a day at the Wisconsin job, Charette recalls, left him feeling even more exhausted than anyone on such a schedule might.