

Hidden structures never seem to underlie his music, nor does he seem to have any rigorous agenda. It's not what one would call intellectual music, but it is written with great care for detail and is often clever. His String Quartet no. 2 (2002), for instance, is subtitled "Flight," and it consists of six "fugues"; but he takes "fugue" in its original meaning of "flight"—while the instruments do somewhat imitate each other's lines in succession, their purpose is not so much polyphony as the building up of weightless textures that buzz through the air like insects, undulate like swings, or float like stars. The idiom is as gestural and as consonantly atonal as Berg's, but it doesn't take a new music expert to recognize the images. As is evident from a CDR of the work, his evocation of mosquitoes draws appreciative chuckles from the audience.

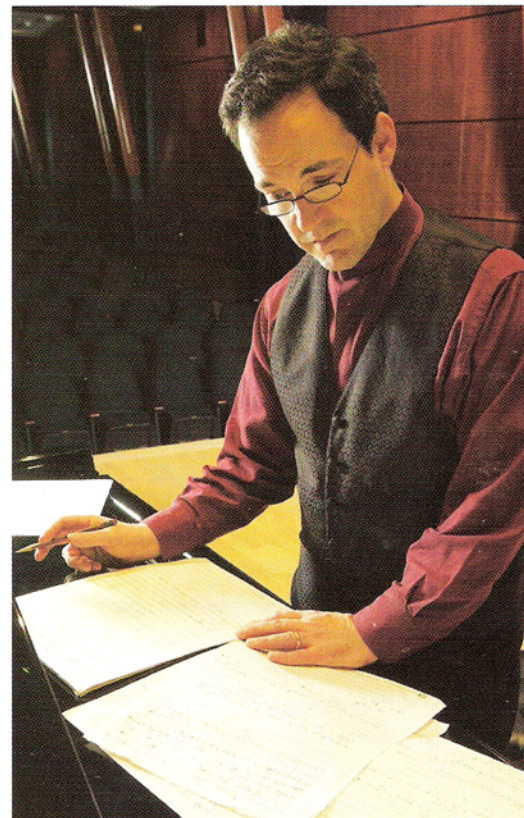
Chamber music dominates Dillon's output, though he's written a few concertos, one symphony, and that *Amadeus ex machina*, whose turbulent atonal patterns are devilishly revealed to stem from the angry opening theme of Mozart's G Minor Symphony. He's working on the fourth installment of a series of six string quartets based on ideas from Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*. Curiously enough, though, despite his literary imagination and appreciation of the other arts, when Dillon writes vocal works, he always writes his own text. The one of these I've heard, *Appendage* (1993), is a strange, nightmarish stream-of-consciousness for soprano and mixed ensemble, from the point of view of someone whose limbs seem to be mangled or missing, and ending with a sweet lullaby. It would be reminiscent of Schoenberg's *Erwartung*, except that it's Dillon's most tonal work, with a steadily thumping beat often in the piano and lots of impressionist filigree.

In fact, if there's anything that sets Dillon apart from the general run of

semitonal expressionists, it's his rhythm, which is propulsive and not afraid to settle into a groove. The slow movement of his *Furies and Muses* (1997) for bassoon and string quartet, one of his loveliest works, is almost entirely based on a slow 9/8 rhythmic ostinato too off-beat to ever quite sound regular, but always there until the final measures. Despite a tension, chromaticism, and angularity that seem entirely 20th-century, the music takes great pains to draw the audience in.

And so does his blog, which often seems more geared to listeners than to fellow composers. He loves to chart the creative process, explaining where he gets his ideas and what he does with them. Do we suffer any from having the composer out in public like this, finding his audience without intermediary? Certainly, composers less articulate than Dillon will have trouble competing in the same arena. The website [www.ludwigvanbeethoven.com](http://www.ludwigvanbeethoven.com) might not have made a very ingratiating impression. But what aristocratic patronage, orchestras, publishers, and record companies no longer do for composers, they now have to do for themselves, and at present the Internet is a level playing field. Acting as their own factotums, composers will be graded on personality; and spelling and punctuation count, too. Whether this is a good thing or not, perhaps it's a needed corrective to the Composer-as-Great-Man of the past. Luckily, music is not the only medium through which Dillon knows how to capture an audience's attention.

*Composer Kyle Gann is a professor at Bard College and the new music critic for the Village Voice. He is the author of The Music of Conlon Nancarrow (Cambridge University Press) and American Music in the Twentieth Century (Schirmer Books). His music is recorded on the Lovely Music, New Tone, and Monroe Street labels.*



LAWRENCE DILLON