

ARTS IN REVIEW

FESTIVALS



HILARY SCOTT

Debut of Shulamit Ran's 'Birkat Haderekh (Blessing for the Road).'

At Tanglewood, Premieres Aplenty

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In the summer of 1940, Serge Koussevitzky, then the music director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, started a training program for young musicians at Tanglewood, his orchestra's summer home in the Berkshires. Then called the Berkshire Music Center (now the Tanglewood Music Center), it focused not only on polishing the technical and interpretive skills of young players and singers, but also on cultivating budding composers. Koussevitzky put Aaron Copland, Randall Thompson and Paul Hindemith in charge of the composition department that first year; Leonard Bernstein and Lukas Foss were among the inaugural class.

Since then, just about everybody who is anybody, among composers, has spent time at the center, either as a student (or fellow, as they are called here) or on the faculty, and in many cases, both. In 1964, the center sharpened its focus on the new by starting an annual Festival of Contemporary Music. And just as Tanglewood itself was a draw for listeners who wanted to hear the Boston Symphony and star soloists play the classics, the new-music festival became an important draw for listeners intent on keeping tabs on the music world's many flavors of modernism.

To celebrate its 75th anniversary

and string writing as a sort of connective tissue.

A Friday afternoon program included three premieres, all chamber works, including Mr. Harbison's "Seven Poems of Lorine Niedecker" (2014), a meditative set that unfolds as a continuous work rather than as seven distinct settings—a sensible approach given Niedecker's fragmentary, impressionistic texts. The soprano Sarah Tuttle projected the gently angular vocal line with a fine balance of energy and introspection, but the score's real charm is in the vividly descriptive piano writing, in which Ursula Oppens found a playfulness that offered an alternate view of Niedecker's poems.

Ms. Oppens was also part of the ensemble—along with Raymond Santos, clarinetist, Wendy Putnam, violinist and Mickey Katz, cellist—that gave the premiere of Shulamit Ran's mercurial "Birkat Haderekh (Blessing for the Road)." The piece uses the same scoring as Messiaen's "Quartet for the End of Time," but though its title refers to a Jewish prayer for travelers, Ms. Ran's piece sounds less freighted with religious mysticism than the Messiaen. Rather, it has a celebratory quality, captured in both the vivid solo writing for each instrument and the stream of brief dialogues between them.

Helen Grime, a member of this year's faculty, contributed "Embrace" (2015), a piece rooted in her experiences as a student at