



Michael Colgrass – Adventures of an American Composer by Michael Colgrass; Galesville, MD, USA: Meredith Music Publications, 2010; Language: English; ISBN: 978-1-57463-155-5; US \$19.95; 221 Pages.

Michael Colgrass's autobiography is not your traditional self-serving tome, praising the author's achievements and laying the blame for mishaps on others. Rather, it is an engaging collection of 89 vignettes describing mostly amusing episodes in the composer's life. It is in fact the adventures of an American composer in the tradition of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn.

Colgrass is a great storyteller, and the book races from one anecdote to the next. This is about a man whose life has been a whirlwind of musical activity since he was ten years old, and who writes with the same vibrancy that he has put into everything else in life.

After becoming fascinated with jazz at the age of ten, he was determined to be the world's greatest jazz drummer, and by the age of twelve he had his own dance band. By the time he was fourteen, he was regularly attending jazz concerts in Chicago, and by uniquely using another of his talents he was getting to meet the great jazz artists of the day, like Benny Goodman, Buddy Rich, Jimmy Dorsey, Lionel Hampton and Woody Herman.

His first experiences with contests and classical music are tales you will not forget, nor will you forget how a rebellious boy wishing to become a jazz drummer becomes a composer of classical music. Some of his stories about his work as a professional musician are priceless, and some, like "The Enchanted Triangle," in which he records one note, and "The Almost-Finished Concerto," in which a conductor becomes dependent upon a percussionist for a final cue, will bring a smile to your face long after you have read the book.

The film version of this book will probably receive a restricted rating in your country, since Colgrass's anecdotes include some rather racy tales about spies, strippers and aphrodisiacs. However, it is his encounters or in some cases almost-encounters with musicians like Dizzy Gillespie, Gene Krupa, Igor Stravinsky, Leonard Bernstein, Darius Milhaud, Henry Brant, Aaron Copland, and John Cage that are the most revealing. These illuminating sketches show the musical world as it really is.

When you finish the book, you have the feeling that you have had an encounter not only with a leading composer, talented percussionist, and inspiring and innovating teacher, but with a man with a tremendous zest for life. However, I must warn you that this book may have a serious impact on your job and marriage. Once you start reading it, you will not stop until you have completed it.

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