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The Secret Garden – A New Opera Commission from San Francisco Opera

In late 2009, Nolan was introduced to David Gockley, the acclaimed General Director of San Francisco Opera. David was initially made aware of Nolan's skills as a pianist during a set of jazz concerts, though only tangentially aware of his identity as a classical composer. After receiving some nice compliments, Nolan felt emboldened to inform David of his more serious efforts, and specifically to relay his interest in the prospect of writing an opera. Happily, David was responsive – aided no doubt by his love of Pandora Radio, which offered him another reason to think well of Nolan's musical abilities. The two arranged to meet for breakfast shortly thereafter, during which Nolan went into greater detail of his background as a composer and musicologist, and reinforced his strong desire to write an opera for SF Opera. David agreed to consider the prospect and requested that Nolan send him a sample CD of his compositions, along with a set of proposed topics for the libretto.

One early advantage in this ambition was that Nolan had already selected his librettist, Carey Harrison – son of famed actors Rex Harrison and Lilli Palmer. Readers of this site will recall that Carey and Nolan had previously collaborated in the premiere performance at the Kennedy Center of Nolan's narrated symphony *Cosmic Reflection* (see related News item), where Carey performed the role of the narrator. From this collaboration sprung a close friendship, and the two almost immediately began devising ways to work together on a theatrical piece; Carey is himself a celebrated and prolific playwright and novelist, and has a lifelong love of the opera. The two imagined several potential scenarios for their opera, including one or two based on Carey's own novels.

A number of months passed, not surprisingly, after David received the materials. At long last, in August 2010, Nolan received an email from David with wonderful, though surprising news. He indicated that he had spent the previous months listening to his music, and loved it; he also liked several of the proposed libretto topics. The problem he had, however, was that the company was already too booked up with regular commissions – through 2015 – to take on another one, and thus an immediate working relationship could only happen if Nolan were interested in a different kind of production that David was envisioning for SF Opera: a children's opera. Though it was not something they had considered, Nolan and Carey immediately realized what a terrific opportunity it was, and instantly said, "yes". The wheels were then set in motion to select a source. Some serious deliberations went on regarding what the "perfect" source would be, with some fairly unusual sources, e.g., Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, presenting themselves – given the current interest in dark topics (vampires, graveyards, sorcerers, etc.) among children's books and movies.

In the end, however, all parties selected what all agree is indeed the perfect – and less macabre – source, Frances Hodgson Burnette's 1910 classic, *The Secret Garden*. This timeless and inter-generational tale of friendship, of loss and tragedy, of hope and renewal, and the healing powers of nature is an ideal vehicle for a family opera. Nolan and Carey are already at work devising the framework for the libretto, and have scheduled a "libretto retreat" in New York for the weekend of April 16-17. At the time of this writing, a couple of potential – and highly acclaimed – directors are being considered, and the actual composition will likely begin in May. As for the production, things are naturally still vague, with a premiere slated for the 2012-2013 season – meaning early 2013. As this is a chamber opera, the premiere will likely take place at Berkeley's Zellerbach Auditorium, and details will follow. Certainly, SF Opera is very excited about this venture, and the production will likely be a major civic event when it comes out – and who knows from there? Stay tuned!

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Cosmic Reflection - Baltimore Symphony Recording and Upcoming Release

As will be recalled by readers of this site, *Cosmic Reflection* is the second, and grander, of the two commissions I received in conjunction with NASA's Fermi (originally GLAST) space telescope, and was premiered at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington D.C. on November 2, 2009 as part of the Fermi International Symposium. The 40-minute work for orchestra and narrator depicts the full

history of the Universe (!), and was received with tremendous enthusiasm from the packed hall of physicists and non-physicists alike (e.g., called “a truly heavenly experience” by *Science News*; and “lush and delightful” by the *Washington Examiner*), with much clamoring following the concert for access to the work in CD and DVD – not least by the large number of science teachers in the audience.

Realizing this goal is no easy feat, but great progress has been made. In late 2010, *Cosmic Reflection* was recorded in a studio environment by the world-class Baltimore Symphony Orchestra under top conductor Marin Alsop, and produced by 15-time Grammy Award winner Steven Epstein. The final mix is now complete, and Carey Harrison will record the narration on April 15, 2011 in New York City. At this point, the video, perhaps in conjunction with Discovery Networks and/or under the supervision of celebrated science filmmaker David Kaplan, will begin production in both HD and IMAX formats. The full production and distribution – with prospects including several major labels and networks, as well as media outlets such as WGBH Boston – is being shepherded by Nolan’s new composition “rep”, Joe McKesson, a very talented and well-connected figure in the classical music scene. No date is set for release, but hopes are for early to mid-2012.

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Green Overture – A Commission for the Opening of Green Music Center

Since 1999, residents of Sonoma County have been anticipating the arrival of a truly state-of-the-art concert hall, the Green Music Center – initiated by a generous \$10 million founding grant by Donald and Maureen Green. After years of recession-led delays, some very good news was received in March 2011, in the form of a \$12 million grant from Joan and Sandy Weill – whose other arts philanthropy includes Weill Hall at New York’s Carnegie Hall. With this generous gift, the GMC is now officially slated to open in fall 2012. The center, which features a superb concert hall modeled after Seiji Ozawa Hall at Tanglewood, and designed by the same architectural firm, William Rawn Associates of Boston, will be the new home of the Santa Rosa Symphony under Maestro Bruno Ferrandis.

Nolan received some terrific news of his own in this regard as well, as the Santa Rosa Symphony and Maestro Ferrandis will be commissioning him to compose a special Overture to inaugurate this superb new hall! Details are still in the works, but Nolan has provisionally entitled his new work, *Green Overture*. The musical world will be watching this opening concert, and thus it will be a big moment for Nolan to flex his musical chops on behalf of his beloved Sonoma County.

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We’re All Musicians – A Book in the Works!

During the month of February 2011, Nolan was a Distinguished Visiting Fellow at the Sage Center for the Study of the Mind at UC Santa Barbara, where he was asked to make four presentations of his choosing. The invitation came from Nolan’s friend, the very distinguished Professor Michael Gazzaniga, the father of cognitive neuroscience and a great music lover. From the onset, Nolan saw this as a terrific opportunity to further explore his ever-growing interest in the intersection of music and science, with the vague dream of someday forging his thoughts into a book. Two of the four presentations given at UCSB were centered on topics related to this music-science confluence; a third concerned the mix of music and culture, and the fourth was a concert/lecture on the intersection of jazz and classical – for which Nolan brought up the other three members of the San Francisco Jazz Quartet (see other News item). Happily, all four were very well received, but the enthusiasm for his music-science discussions was surprisingly exuberant.

Nolan had presented the general theme of this intersection in several previous lectures, under the title, “Music, Science, and the Art of Living.” The opportunity to flesh out the topic in the UCSB lectures, combined with the encouraging response from faculty and students, allowed the idea of actually pursuing a book path to grow in Nolan’s mind. It then reached a culminating height when Mike Gazzaniga offered to put Nolan in touch with his own literary agent, the famed John Brockman – whose other clients include the

likes of Brian Greene, Steven Pinker, Leonard Susskind, Richard Dawson, and Brian Eno. To Nolan's delight, John responded with great enthusiasm that this indeed had the makings of a successful book – to be written for the general educated reader; Nolan thus began a set of communications with John and his wife and business partner Katinka Matson, upon which he began working on an actual book proposal.

The proposal has now been submitted, under the title: *We're All Musicians: Music, Science, and the Art of Living*. The book relates the myriad ways in which music is reflected in various disciplines of science – mathematics, physics, cosmology, biology, genetics, chemistry, etc. – all of which yields a simple truth: music is an inherent and inevitable product in our lives and in the universe around us, and indeed all of us are endowed with natural musical talent. In other words, we're all musicians, and it is thus incumbent upon us to realize an element of knowledge and proficiency in music in order to enjoy healthy and fully realized lives. The book explains the rationale for this claim, and empowers the reader with the confidence that they can reach their musical potential, providing tools to help them achieve it. This book-publishing thing is a new road for Nolan, and he isn't exactly sure what to expect; but he, John, and Katinka are optimistic that *We're All Musicians* will be available in bookstores near you before too long. Stay tuned!

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Benny & Joon: The Musical – Producer Deal Signed and Gearing Up

As reviewed in several past News updates, Nolan's first musical venture, *Benny & Joon: The Musical* is officially in the works. To quickly review, in 2008 Nolan was invited by MGM On Stage head Dean Stolber to select an MGM film property as the basis for a Broadway-type musical; he selected the 1994 film, *Benny and Joon*, starring Johnny Depp, Mary Stuart Masterson, and Aidan Quinn; he then teamed up with lyricist Mindi Dickstein to write and produce a demo of 4 songs – which was approved by Mr. Stolber in early 2010. The next step was to find a Producer, which they did in the person of Larry Hirschhorn, a veteran Broadway producer who recently won a Tony Award for the 2009 Revival of *Hair*. Larry heard the demo and happily loved it, and provisionally signed on to produce the musical – pending signing a deal with MGM. As these things go, finalizing a deal between a producer and a major entity like MGM is no mean feat – and this one took nearly 9 months of back-and-forth. But finalize it they did, in January 2011, and so now *Benny & Joon* officially has its lead producer as Larry Hirschhorn and H2H Productions. Next up is to sign a Book Writer – the last key step before Nolan and Mindi can begin writing the rest of the songs. The three of them have a terrific wish list, and hopefully soon will have a committed partner – and be one step closer to Broadway. Fingers crossed!

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Ode to Swing – A New CD by San Francisco Jazz Quartet

Fans of Nolan are likely aware of his long-time association with three great Bay Area jazz musicians, Roger Glenn (vibes, reeds), Terry Miller (bass), and Andy Eberhard (drums), who have worked together at various public and private gigs for nearly 10 years. As noted in the last update, the quartet decided to produce its first CD, *Ode to Swing*, which is now complete and available! The group, stylishly dubbed the San Francisco Jazz Quartet, is just now beginning its promotion and concert plans, and things are really starting to cook! They have a couple of concert dates set – including a CD release party on June 12 (see Events), and some big ambitions to bring their unique blend of jazz and classical elements to jazz clubs, colleges, and private events around the country. Their dedicated website – www.sfjazzquartet.com – is up and running, and the CD is now available on Amazon and iTunes. Please visit their website for more info, and if you're in the area, join them for their upcoming concerts. A swingin' time is guaranteed for all!

See also the [Performance](#) page for more on Nolan's performance activities.

Benny & Joon: The Musical – MGM On Stage Approved!

In the last update of this section, mention was made that Nolan had embarked on an unlikely project: to write a Broadway musical! Specifically, it was announced that Nolan had been asked by the head of MGM ON STAGE, Mr. Dean Stolber, to try his hand at writing a musical based on an MGM film property. A film list was delivered and scrutinized, and the 1993 film *Benny & Joon* (starring Johnny Depp, Mary Stuart Masterson, and Aidan Quinn) was selected. Happily, the perfect lyricist partner was found in Mindi Dickstein, a seasoned lyricist and writer based in New York – thanks to an introduction by friend Greg Pliska – and the two set off to work. The first, all-important hurdle was to create a 4-song demo of appropriate songs for the story, and submit it to Dean. Given Nolan and Mindi's busy schedules on myriad other projects, things progressed a bit slowly with the composing portion, and even more slowly with getting around to record the songs. But thanks to a trip to New York last December, the two were able to scramble and arrange for a group of talented young singers to record the songs at a hip, downtown recording studio (Dubway); a bit a time editing and mixing done at Nolan's favorite local studio, Prairie Sun, and by late-January, the demo for *Benny & Joon: The Musical* was complete.

Upon first completing the demo, Nolan wanted to “test the waters” a bit, and sent it to a few friends and Broadway cognoscenti, including the master composer (and teacher) Stephen Schwartz (composer of *Wicked* among many others). To his relief, and mild surprise, the reactions were all favorable, many of them wildly so. A particularly good sign was the fact that Nolan's lovely wife, Lynn, became quite enamored of the CD – exclaiming, “This just has to get on stage!” – and frequently shifting her “favorite” from one of the four tunes to another. Now, normally having the enthusiasm of one's wife would not constitute a dramatic development, but Lynn is a huge Broadway fan, and with the emotion she displayed, Nolan felt that he might just have something.

At any rate, enough delay already – it was time to send the demo to Dean. Not surprisingly, upon hearing that the demo was on its way, Dean expressed surprise, given the long wait, but happily also expressed his eagerness to hear it. Knowing how busy Dean is (with such other MGM On Stage production as *Legally Blonde* and *Priscilla: Queen of the Desert*), Nolan wasn't expecting a rapid response. But on Friday, March 5, while on the phone, in fact, with the GM of the Baltimore Symphony (see next News item), a message appeared on Nolan's cell phone; not expecting anything in particular, it thus came as a complete surprise that it was Dean, and coming from his lips were the sweetest sound Nolan had heard in a long while, “I had faith in you when you I first heard your music, and I'm delighted that my instincts were right on – the songs are terrific; very, very beautiful – I'm so happy!” A follow-up conversation confirmed his enthusiasm, where Dean indicated how well the four songs play for the story and for the stage, and how excited he was to move the project to the next stage!

That next stage involves selecting a high-profile producer, book writer, and then director – all with top-tier Broadway experience. Some exciting names are being mentioned and already being courted by Dean and his team. Once selected, Nolan and Mindi will work with these key folks to begin composing the remaining dozen or so songs that will flesh out the complete musical. As Nolan says, “It's a long road to Broadway”, but now – believe it or not – it seems that the lights of that famed street just got a bit brighter! Stay tuned.

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2009 Kennedy Center Premiere of Cosmic Reflection, and 2010 Big-time Follow-up: D.C. Reprise and CD/DVD

The world premiere of *Cosmic Reflection: A Narrated Symphony* took place on November 2, 2009 at the beautiful Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington D.C., and was a smashing success! The concert was produced as part of the week-long International Fermi Space Telescope Symposium – celebrating the first year of data collection of the celebrated orbiting telescope. Readers of this site will recall the excitement experienced in the wake of the very successful premiere and dissemination of the *GLAST Prelude, for brass quintet*, in conjunction with the launch of the GLAST (now Fermi) Space Telescope from Cocoa Beach on June 11, 2008. The full story on the success of the music and the

accompanying video (more than 150, 000 hits on YouTube) can be seen on the *Cosmic Reflection* and *GLAST Prelude* feature page.

Cosmic Reflection was premiered by the wonderful Boston University Symphony Orchestra, under conductor David Hoose, with narration by Carey Harrison (son of Rex). The text – which poetically unfolds the entire history of the Universe (!) – was co-written by Pierre Schwob, the CEO of the Classical Archives (see News item below), and famed physicist Lawrence Krauss. Setting the science-rich text was an amazing challenge and opportunity for Nolan, who himself has become quite an impassioned cosmology “freak” over the past couple of years. The work is in three parts and runs just under 40 minutes. It is somewhat akin to Prokofiev’s *Peter and the Wolf*, in that the music is a leading force in the narrative, depicting or evoking the scientific descriptions within the text in sometimes strident, sometimes lyrical ways as the listener follows the amazing story of our Universe – from the Big Bang to the birth of Stars to life on Earth and beyond. The performance was then accompanied by a brilliant video assembled by the visual design team of NASA-Goddard.

The concert was received with tremendous enthusiasm from the packed hall of physicists and non-physicists alike (e.g., called “a truly heavenly experience” by *Science News*; and “lush and delightful” by the *Washington Examiner*), with much clamoring following the concert for access to the work in CD and DVD – not least by the large number of science teachers in the audience. The buzz soon made its way to Larry Bock, a successful financial executive and public science devotee, who saw *Cosmic Reflection* as a perfect vehicle to showcase at the upcoming USA Science & Engineering Festival, to be held this coming October (10-24) in Washington D.C. Specially, the current plan is to feature a taped audio-visual rendition of *Cosmic Reflection* upon an array of video screens and speakers upon the National Mall before some 100,000, as the closing feature of the festival’s featured public EXPO.

To make this happen, Nolan has joined forces with a great team – including filmmaker Thomas Lucas, whose credits include numerous science films for National Geographic, Nova, Discovery Channel, etc., to create a new and state-of-the art (super high-resolution HDTV) video to accompany a professional recording of *Cosmic Reflection*. The recording will likely be done by the top-tier Baltimore Symphony under Marin Alsop, along with a possible live performance by the BSO subsequently. The complete package will then be packaged and distributed by a top label – the details of which are now being defined.

This would naturally be a big coup for Nolan and his collaborators on *Cosmic Reflection*, with potentially huge dissemination across a variety of platforms and markets. So stay tuned!

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La Mirada Overture: A 50th Anniversary Commemoration

As some readers may know, Nolan is a native son of La Mirada, California, a medium-sized suburb of Los Angeles, on the border with Orange County, and some 15 minutes from Disneyland. It was a comfortable and nurturing environment in which Nolan was able to grow up and develop as a musician; indeed, he credits his eclectic musical personality – which has served him well in various capacities – to the formative position he held as pianist in the food court of the La Mirada Mall, from ages 11-16. In this capacity, he received requests for everything from Mozart to Scott Joplin to Led Zeppelin to Rogers & Hammerstein – which gave him an early sense that to become a professional musician, you had to do it all; only later did he realize that such a capacity was not so common.

As far back as 2007, officials and civic leaders of La Mirada began thinking ahead to the festivities that might surround the 50th Anniversary of the city’s incorporation, in spring 2010. Chief among them was Ms. Patricia Ruiz, President of the La Mirada Symphony (which itself dates back to 1961); interestingly, Ms. Ruiz also happened to have been Nolan’s first grade teacher! Through various conversations and meetings, it was decided that Nolan would be commissioned to compose a *La Mirada Overture* to be played by the Symphony during a civic-oriented Pops concert on April 2, 2010; and thanks especially to a generous gift

from Mrs. Gloria Austin, Nolan began working on the piece in January of this year. His notion was to compose a 10-minute work that would celebrate the spirit and history of his home-town – from its Mexican roots to the early settlement by Andrew McNally (who coined the name La Mirada, “the view” – given that he could see both the mountains and the sea from his ranch home in what is now Neff Park) to the City’s growth in the 1940s and 50s, and finally its incorporation in 1960. Nolan also wanted the piece to include a musical “anthem” for the City that could eventually have words added to it.

Nolan spent the week prior to the concert in La Mirada, attending a symphony rehearsal and conferring with guest-conductor Richard Rintoul, as well as spending time with family and old friends. Given that it was a Pops concert, there were two performances, where the *Overture* was joined by music by John Philip Sousa, Henry Mancini, Lalo Shifrin, and even the Beatles! Happily, the *Overture* was a wild success at both concerts, and at the evening performance it was formally announced that the “anthem” would be the subject of a lyric-writing competition – to establish a new official anthem of La Mirada! Best of all, the symphony musicians, Nolan’s friends and family, and the citizens of La Mirada were excited and deeply moved by the new work, and the La Mirada Symphony now has a new work in its regular repertoire. And to say that Nolan’s parents, Jack and Marian, enjoyed a proud moment would be quite an understatement!

V'Samachta (Rejoice!): A Musical Dedication to a New Torah

In late summer 2009, Nolan received a call from Leira Satlof, the music director at Congregation Shomrei Torah, the principal reform synagogue of Sonoma County – where Nolan and his family are members. Leira informed Nolan that Rabbi George Gittleman wanted to schedule a meeting to discuss the prospect of commissioning a musical composition to commemorate the arrival of a new Torah, which was set to take place on November 15, 2009. In their meeting, the Rabbi discussed fervently his interest in celebrating this precious new arrival – a new “Sefer” (handwritten) Torah for his Congregation (in fact, “Shomrei Torah” means “keepers of the Torah”) – with an original musical work. After fine-tuning the parameters, and finding generous sponsors in congregants Marlene and Martin Stein, among others, Nolan began work on a chamber work for violin, clarinet, cello, and piano; the work would be about 10-minutes and was to be premiered at the Dedication ceremony on November 15.

In conceiving the work, Nolan constructed a quasi-abstract narrative, in which the clarinet would “embody” the enthusiastic new Sefer Torah, while the cello would “embody” an older Torah of the congregation – eager to remind the new arrival of its obligations to the traditions in this synagogue and the wider Jewish tradition; this followed upon Rabbi Gittleman’s own emphasis on the rich exchange between new and old that the arrival of the Torah would represent. Musically, Nolan also embarked on a self-study of the traditional Jewish chant, or cantillation formulas – called *ta’amim* – that he then co-opted into his own original melodic material, principally in the opening “dialogue” between the clarinet and cello. As the work progressed, a mix of more contemporary and “traditional” Jewish techniques and material was employed, culminating with an actual quotation of Torah cantillation – upon a specific passage chosen by Rabbi Gittleman: Leviticus 19:18 (including the famed line “Love your neighbor as yourself”) – which the clarinet had now “earned” as its honor to sing to the full congregation.

The premiere performance was happily a huge and emotional success, receiving a rousing response (a standing ovation in the synagogue, no less) from the congregation. Urged by Leira and others, the work was then recorded by Nolan and the outstanding performers who joined him in the premiere (Maxine Nemerovski, violin; Roy Zajac, clarinet; and Farley Pearce, cello) – under the engineering supervision of Nolan’s dear friend Mooka Rennick of Prairie Sun Studios, who volunteered his time and services for the project. The recording will be released on a forthcoming compilation CD of music from Shomrei Torah; and subsequent performances of *V'Samachta* are now being planned. You can enjoy an excerpt from this piece on the [Composition](#) page.

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[Pandora and Classical Archives Continue to Grow and Prosper](#)

Nolan's two Internet-related projects continue to survive – and indeed thrive, which in this economy is pretty miraculous. Pandora (www.pandora.com), which has now passed its 10-year mark as a company (originally founded as Savage Beast Technologies in January 2000, where Nolan was the 5th employee, becoming head of the music operation), has become nothing less than a cultural phenomenon! It recently gained its 50 millionth subscriber, and receives a dizzying amount of positive press and media attention. With the success of its App on the iPhone, and dozens of other mobile devices (including the new iPad), its integration into countless radios, sound systems, and DVD players, and the forthcoming integration into car audio systems (notably the Ford Sync system), Pandora is quickly becoming the new dominant force of radio in America. Critical too has been its striking business success, becoming profitable in the 4th Quarter of 2009, and with projections of earning over \$100 million in 2010.

Nolan is the Chief Musicologist at Pandora, and the principal architect of the Music Genome Project – responsible for designing and implementing each of the six Genomes (Pop/Rock, Jazz, Hip-Hop, Electronica, World, and Classical) that run Pandora – and thus is very proud indeed of the success and ubiquitous presence of Pandora Radio, and looks forward to its future growth. While no longer involved in day-to-day activities at the company, Nolan continues to be in close contact with the executive team, especially founder Tim Westergren, and periodically goes out on media and promotional tours – such as a recent and high-profile trip to Kansas City, where he gave a Pandora-oriented pre-concert lecture for the distinguished Kansas City Friends of Chamber Music series. Click here to see some of the media that came out of this trip. Many forthcoming ventures are planned, including a long-discussed Pandora concert with Wynton Marsalis and the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra – where Nolan would co-create and star in the production – are still in the works, though dependent somewhat on an improved economy. In any event, 2010 is certain to be Pandora's best year yet!

Similarly, 2010 will undoubtedly be a banner year for Nolan's most active Internet enterprise these days, Classical Archives (www.classicalarchives.com). Following a major re-launch in May 2009 (Classical Archives in fact dates to 1994, though in a very different format), the service has grown steadily in subscribers, content offerings, and user experience quality – to become without question the best online service for streaming and downloading of classical music. As Artistic Director, a position he's held since 2002, Nolan has overseen the creation of a state-of-the-art music database that stands to become the benchmark for the presentation of classical music online.

For a monthly fee of only \$5.99, subscribers have access to unlimited streaming (playing) of the complete classical label catalogues, all organized by Nolan and his team of musicologists according to the most sophisticated and proper methods of classical music metadata – in a manner found nowhere else. Non-subscribers can download the same properly organized catalogue – by work, movement, or album – in an experience that makes iTunes appear primitive (subscribers get a 10% discount on downloads). Further, Classical Archives has become a vibrant editorial “magazine”, by virtue of the dozens of exclusive interviews and features that Nolan has produced for the site – including superb and in-depth interviews with such marquee classical artists and composers as Hilary Hahn, René Fleming, Joshua Bell, Alan Gilbert, Paul Hillier, Stile Antico, Marin Alsop, Thomas Hampson, JoAnn Faletta, John Corigliano, and many others. The interviews have been gaining increasing prominence within the music industry for their intelligence, and for the depth of creative thinking and aesthetic philosophy they reveal about these leading artists of our time.

Still, in these tough economic times and given the highly competitive online music space, Classical Archives cannot rest on its laurels, and in fact is now in the process of another major re-design of the user interface. Working with Zaudhaus, a terrific design firm in San Francisco, Classical Archives has begun re-configuring the entire site in terms of the presentation of its material, the kinds of services available to the user on each page, adding a robust social media component, and much more. Nolan has taken a very prominent role in shaping the re-design, working very closely with the Zaudhaus team on every aspect of the new presentation. Given the design and engineering demands, it will likely be several more months before the new design is available on the site – projected now for summer 2010. In the meantime, however, Classical Archives continues to offer its excellent service and offerings – so if you haven't yet, go check out the [Classical Archives](http://www.classicalarchives.com), join, and then tell your friends!

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[Reminiscing: Nolan's Solo Piano CD Now Available](#)

Adding to the long list of projects on Nolan's plate has been the slow gestation of two new performance CDs, of two very different natures, the first of which is happily now complete – namely, a solo piano CD of principally Pop/Rock renditions, entitled *Reminiscing*. This solo piano CD came about via a request / commission from Mr. Jim Rohr of Pittsburg, PA, after hearing Nolan improvise a few Beatles songs in the summer of 2008. The two discussed some options and decided that Nolan would record semi-improvised interpretations of some of their favorite songs: principally by the Beatles, but also by Elton John, John Denver, from the musical *Les Misérables*, and others. The CD was completed and released last November, and has received terrific reviews from the friends and fans that have received it. Currently, the CD is available only through Nolan directly, but will soon be available on Amazon, and as downloads on iTunes. For more information, to hear track samples, and to purchase the CD, visit the dedicated [Reminiscing](#) page; you can also sample excerpts from the CD on the [Performance](#) page.

A second CD project has likewise been a long-time coming, and it too is happily nearing completion – namely, a new disc, called *Ode to Swing*, by the Nolan Gasser Quartet. The disc is a chance for Nolan and his pals Roger Glenn (vibes, reeds), Terry Miller (bass), and Andy Eberhard (drums) to commit something formal to “tape” – and hopefully kick off a set of new performance opportunities: high profile jazz festivals and club dates, a concert tour, etc. More importantly, the project would give the Quartet an opportunity to present a well-crafted and professional offering to the many generous fans they've met through the years – and will meet in the future. The tracks have all been recording, and the editing process is nearly done; following this, the tracks will be mixed and mastered, and hopefully a pressing will take by the beginning of June. The new disc will contain 11 tracks of standards, all arranged by Nolan, as well as two originals by him. In addition to the Quartet, the disc also includes guest appearances by trumpeter John Capobianco, as well as the superb Alexander String Quartet – which joins the jazz group on two tracks: Dave Brubeck's “Blue Rondo a la Turk” and the standard “Avalon”, the latter incorporating elements of Beethoven's “Ode to Joy” from the *9th Symphony*. Without doubt, it will be a swingin' album. Stay tuned!

See also the [Performance](#) page for more on Nolan's performance activities.

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[2009 Fermi Symposium: Premiere of *Cosmic Reflections* in Washington D.C.](#)

Readers of this site will recall the excitement experienced in the wake of the very successful premiere and dissemination of the *GLAST Prelude, for brass quintet*, in conjunction with the launch of the GLAST (now Fermi) Space Telescope from Cocoa Beach last June 11. The full story on the success of the music and the accompanying video (more than 100,000 hits on YouTube) can be seen on the [GLAST Prelude](#) page.

As has been noted, the *GLAST Prelude* was but the first of two musical projects associated with the Fermi mission, and over the past 5 months Nolan has been in heavy composing mode completing the second, more weighty companion, *Cosmic Reflections*. The new work, for full orchestra and narrator, will be premiered at the prestigious Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington D.C. on November 2 – as part of the week-long 2009 Fermi Symposium.

The text for *Cosmic Reflections* – which poetically unfolds the entire history of the Universe – was co-written by famed physicist Lawrence Krauss and Pierre Schwob, the CEO of the Classical Archives (see below) and a gifted amateur cosmologist. Setting the science-rich text has been an amazing challenge and opportunity for Nolan, who himself has become quite an impassioned cosmology “freak” over the past

year. The work is in three parts and will run around 40 minutes. It is somewhat akin to Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*, in that the music is a leading force in the narrative, depicting or evoking the scientific descriptions within the text in sometimes strident, sometimes lyrical ways as the listener follows the amazing story of our Universe – from the Big Bang to the birth of Stars to life on Earth and beyond.

The concert will feature the Boston University Symphony Orchestra under Maestro David Hoose, along with the esteemed American Brass Quintet – who will reprise the *GLAST Prelude* and perform an early Baroque work as well. The BU Symphony will also perform Gustav Holst's *The Planets*, thereby providing the audience a “then and now” comparison of the music-cosmology interface. *Cosmic Reflections* will then close the program, performed by the BU Symphony and narrated by actor Carey Harrison, son of the famed Rex Harrison. The work will also be enhanced by an elaborate video presentation created by NASA Goddard, featuring some stunning scientific images.

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World Concerto Successfully Premiere – Next up: World Tour

On January 23 and 24, 2009, the virtuoso cellist Maya Beiser was joined by a trio of acclaimed international soloists – Jiebing Chen on erhu, Aruna Narayan-Kalle on sarangi, and Bassam Saba on oud – along with the Oakland Symphony under the direction of Maestro Michael Morgan, in the world premiere of Nolan's *World Concerto for Cello and Orchestra*. The two performances, at the Paramount Theater and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music respectively, were both extremely successful, and triggered an amazing outpouring of support and enthusiasm from the audience, the musicians, critics, and more.

A full account of the Concerto, including program notes, bios, audio samples, and reviews, can be found on the separate [World Concerto](#) page.

In the wake of the concerto's success, plans have begun to take the work to cities across the country and the world – given it's overriding message of cultural cooperation, discovery, and respect. A number of people – including the soloists themselves – have offered to help Nolan in his plans to create a sort of “tour”, to cities such as Washington D.C., London, Vienna, Cairo, Mumbai, Shanghai, and beyond. Given Nolan's intense composing schedule over the past several months, plans have been slow to get started; but now, with the completion of promotional materials (including those on this website), they will hopefully move into fast gear. Stay tuned!

For information on the tour, or to help with its production or realization, please contact Nolan, at ngasser@prs.net.

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Classical Archives Re-Launched & Rising to the Top

Although it took a bit longer to arrive than initially anticipated, the newly updated Classical Archives officially launched on May 19, 2009! Creating the perfect classical music website is no easy feat – and though it's still a work-in-progress (as it will surely always be), it's something that Nolan and the entire staff are very proud of indeed! If you haven't checked it out recently, please do so immediately after reading this short news article – at www.classicalarchives.com.

Indeed, the Classical Archives is well on its way to redefining the online classical music space, and giving iTunes a run for its money, as the saying goes. Shortly before the “official” launch, a terrific article ran in the Wall Street Journal that gave the Archives some wonderful validation, and has set the site off to a very good start. More articles are coming out, as well as flurry of blog, Twitter, Facebook, and other social networking activity – which is indeed what is needed to get the word out. The site offers downloads, but

most especially is a subscription streaming service, where for a mere \$9.95/month (or \$99.50/year), you can stream an unlimited number of tracks – the full classical repertory, performed by the world’s greatest artists!

Nolan has his hands full with the site these days, creating a series of Special Features pages, which are getting very good responses. He’s even started doing a few exclusive interviews (the first with the legendary baritone Thomas Hampson) – who knew Nolan would become a journalist? All this in addition to the endless job of cleaning and refining the musical data (metadata), along with his staff of musicologists, creating special concerts, working with the labels and PR firms, etc. It’s good to be the Artistic Director!

Okay, so now go check out the [Classical Archives](#), join, and then tell your friends!

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Benny & Joon: 5 Songs Written; Demo Next

In the last update, you may have read about the start of a new and unexpected project for Nolan – writing a Broadway musical. It started about a year ago, when veteran theater producer and head of MGM On Stage, Dean Stolber, approached Nolan with a proposition: how’d you like to write a Broadway musical? MGM On Stage is the entity behind the enormously successful musical adaptation of *Legally Blonde*. Needless to say, he said “yes”, and now only had to pick a film upon which to base the musical.

Eventually, Nolan made his MGM selection, the 1993 film “Benny & Joon”, starring Johnny Depp, Mary Stuart Masterson, and Aidan Quinn. Shortly thereafter, he found a fabulous writing partner, Mindi Dickstein, whose Broadway credits include being the lyricist for *Little Woman: The Musical*. Though on opposite coasts, Mindi and Nolan kept a fairly steady routine over several months, and completed an initial set of 5 songs – that both are very happy about! The procedure now is that a demo recording must be made and presented to Dean Stolber and the MGM On Stage team. A simple task on paper, but with Nolan’s busy composing schedule, arranging for a planned trip to New York to record the songs has proven hard to make materialize. The current hope is that in the early fall, likely late September or early October, a trip will take place that can move the exciting project of *Benny & Joon: The Musical* to the next level! Stay tuned.

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GLAST Prelude’s Surprising Success: Next-up: Cosmic Reflection

The much-anticipated launch of the GLAST Space Telescope finally took place – after numerous delays – on Wednesday June 11, 2008 from Cape Canaveral, Florida, and Nolan and his family were among the lucky ones to witness this breath-taking event. Their invitation came by virtue of Nolan’s *GLAST Prelude for brass quintet*, written in celebration of the GLAST mission – recorded by the world-class American Brass Quintet and accompanied by state-of-the-art visuals by NASA-Goddard Space Flight Center’s video design team. The result of this collaboration is the *GLAST Prelude* music video, which was premiered at the pre-launch reception on June 9.

The earlier-announced date of June 3 determined their travel regiment, which had them arriving in Orlando on Sunday, June 1 and departing on Tuesday, June 10 – allowing for a healthy mixture of time on the Space Coast in conjunction with the launch events followed by several days at Disneyworld for the kids. But even before the plane landed, the launch date had slipped, whereby they reversed plans, and began with time at Disneyworld’s various theme parks – including two water parks (which given the heat was a welcome diversion). Finally, the launch date was fixed on June 11, whereby they adjusted their travel plans accordingly – and was it ever worth it! The pre-launch reception took place the Friday before in Cocoa Beach, hosted by Stanford University and General Dynamics, and to say that the “premiere” of the *GLAST*

Prelude music video was a success is a vast understatement; Nolan signed autographs of the DVD for two hours after the performance! Since then, the enthusiasm for the music video, and the concepts behind it, have taken hold in the press and the Internet in a big way. NASA will soon be featuring a dedicated webpage on the work on their site, as well as placing the music video in steady rotation on NASA TV; in addition, several articles will be coming out on this unique mix of art and science – including in the prestigious *Science* magazine!

As noted before, the *GLAST Prelude* is but the first of two musical projects associated with the GLAST mission. The second, and much larger composition – to be begun later this year – will be entitled *Cosmic Reflection*, for full orchestra and narrator. This will be a very ambitious work that attempts to relay the full history of the Universe (no less)! Famed physicist / author Lawrence Krauss, along with Classical Archives' CEO Pierre Schwob (a gifted amateur cosmologist in his own right), are currently writing the “libretto” for the work, which will form a kind of 21st century update to Gustav Holst's *The Planets* – with a nod to Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* by virtue of its quasi-theatrical nature. The new work will be premiered live at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington D.C. in fall, 2009, and will feature the Boston University Symphony Orchestra, along with visuals again provided by NASA-Goddard.

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American Festivals Successfully Premiered at 2008 Festival del sole

On July 4, 2008, the long awaited complete performance of Nolan's symphonic oratorio *American Festivals* – with poetic texts by Robert Trent Jones, Jr. – was premiered to great critical and popular success as part of the prestigious Festival del sole (produced by IMG Artists), in the beautiful Lincoln Theater in Yountville, CA. The performance was part of the July 4th festivities at the Veteran's Park in Yountville, and was the featured work in a concert performed by the Napa Valley Symphony and Chorus under Maestro Asher Raboy, and featuring a bevy of soloists, including Metropolitan and SF Opera stars Jill Grove (mezzo-soprano), Eric Owens (baritone), tenor saxophonist Lawrence Miller, native flutist Mary Youngblood, and famed actor Craig T. Nelson as orator. This was the premiere of the final movement, “Thanksgiving”, and the first time that this hour-long secular oratorio – which also includes “Oration on July 4th”, “Memorial Day” and “Black Suit Blues” (for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day) – was performed in its entirety. As the Napa Valley Register wrote, it was a “stirring world premier of an important new work... a rousing bit of Americana, delivering the same impact as the evocative quotations of Charles Ives.”

Putting all of this together was no easy feat, and there were many heroes to make it happen. Chief among them are Charles Letourneau of IMG Artists, who had the vision and enthusiasm to see this performance through, as well the entire staff and musicians of the Napa Valley Symphony, choirmaster Lynne Morrow and the wonderful chorale she put together, each of the outstanding soloists, and not least the generosity of Craig T. Nelson to take time out of his busy schedule to join in the performance. Nolan and his friend-colleague Robert Trent Jones, Jr. were ecstatic beyond words to see this take place, and the enthusiastic response by the capacity crowd – including a very rousing standing ovation – was a magical reward for the nearly 5 years of effort they put into this work! The performance was a true joy to experience, and Maestro Raboy did a fabulous job of pulling all the complexities together. The response of the audience and the critics give the authors proof that there is a desire for the kind of artistic and provocative account of our nation, and they are convinced that the work indeed has some serious “legs”, and will soon be making its way across the country. Much work still remains to realize the full vision of the work – including a complete video accompaniment – but with this success behind them, they are convinced that achieving this is now only a matter of time! Stay tuned...

Following the concert – which also included a stellar performance of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* by the piano prodigy Conrad Tao – the authors and their families, along with many of the performers and good friends, were treated to a great fireworks display out over the 7th fairway of the Vintner's Golf Club; a magical ending to a magical day.

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Cello Concerto Performance Dates Scheduled

Thanks to a generous commission from Jim Bell of Oakland's Bell Investment Advisors, Nolan is currently hard at work on his Cello Concerto, or its full title, the *World Concerto for Cello and Orchestra*: a three movement work that will incorporate elements of World music in the latter two movements, in part to reflect the nature of Bell Investment Advisor's new Worldwide Trends Fund – whose launch is the impetus of the commission. Internationally acclaimed cellist Maya Beiser will be featured in the premiere performances, along with soloists of various World instruments – including acclaimed Erhu player Jiebing Chen – all supported by the Oakland East Bay Symphony under Maestro Michael Morgan. The premiere performance will take place at the beautiful Paramount Theater in Oakland on Friday, January 23, 2009. A follow-up performance will then take place in the Concert Hall of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music on Saturday, January 24. Future performances will be scheduled later.

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3 Jazz Preludes Receive 2 Key Performances

The *3 Jazz Preludes, for piano* (2007) received two key performances within the past few months. The set was premiered at the 2007 Festival San Miguel de Allende (Mexico) by pianist Keven Fitz-Gerald (USC piano faculty) on December 31, 2007; they then received their US Premiere at Carnegie Hall (Weill Recital Hall) in New York by pianist Kimball Gallagher, a promising young competition winner.

Nolan traveled to enjoy both performances in person, the latter with his entire family. The trip to Mexico followed a week of concerts with his Quartet and singer Marcus Lovett in Idaho (Tamarack Resort) and Colorado (private concert). Thanks to a series of airline delays, Nolan literally arrived at the theater just as the concert began – with the help of friend Jerry Sherman and his wife, who were tremendous hosts. This was Nolan's first time in San Miguel – though he'll hopefully be back with his Quartet for the city's Jazz Festival in November.

The trip to New York was extraordinary, and included – beyond the Carnegie Hall concert – the thrill of seeing four Broadway musicals (two with the kids); this made for great “research” for his upcoming task to write his own Broadway musical (see the news on *Benny & Joon: The Musical*, below). The Carnegie concert was an amazing experience, and featured an exception performance of the *Preludes* by Kimball Gallagher; Kimball brought to them the perfect blend of great technical skills with the appropriate spirit and energy. Nolan is grateful for Kimball's openness to work together to understand the composer's thoughts and ideas, which the pianist then synthesized to make his own. The terrific audience reaction proved that the effort was well worth it. We look forward to future performances of the *Preludes* by Kimball, perhaps even a recording... (An audio stream featuring Nolan is available on the Composition page).

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Benny & Joon: The Musical Gets Underway

Nolan Gasser writes a Broadway musical? Who woulda thunk it?? Not something on his radar, until veteran theater producer and head of MGM On Stage, Dean Stolber, approached Nolan last summer with a proposition: how'd you like to write a Broadway musical? MGM On Stage is the entity behind the enormously successful musical adaptation of *Legally Blonde* (which Nolan and his family recently enjoyed in New York), as well as several others (*Prisilla Queen of the Desert*, *Saved*, *Desperately Seeking Susan*, etc.) that are now making their way to Broadway as musical adaptations of MGM films. Dean Stolber gave Nolan a list of good candidates of MGM films and told him to “pick one that moves you”. After watching a bunch of movies, he found one that did – the 1993 film “Benny & Joon”, starring Johnny Depp, Mary Stuart Masterson, and Aidan Quinn. A proposal/treatment was prepared and sent to Mr. Stolber, who

happily liked what he read. The next task: find a lyricist. Thanks to some connections to Broadway legend Stephen Schwartz (composer/lyricist of *Wicked*), ASCAP's theater guru Michael Kerker, and others – especially friend Greg Pliska – he found one; she is Mindi Dickstein, whose Broadway credits include being the lyricist for *Little Woman: The Musical*. Mindi has many high-profile off-Broadway musical credits to her name, has won numerous awards, and is on staff at the New York University Graduate Musical Theater Writing Program.

And things are moving along nicely: Nolan and Mindi have now completed two songs, and are fired up about both of them! When they complete another two or so, they'll present their efforts to Dean Stolber, and hopefully the project will kick into a higher gear. Certainly both Nolan and Mindi are convinced that *Benny & Joon: The Musical* will be Broadway-bound in no time! Stay tuned...

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Classical Archives' Revamped Website To Launch Shortly

The Classical Archives (www.classicalarchives.com) has been a premier classical music website for well over 10 years. The site, founded by Mr. Pierre Schwob, began in 1994 as a site to share and submit MIDI (synthesized) file versions of classical works, but in the year 2000 expanded to include some "live audio" recordings – principally by independent artists in Russia and countries of the former Soviet Union. Nolan came on board as Artistic Director of the site in 2002, and immediately set out to organize the vast classical content in a manner that would ease navigation and provide state-of-the-art musicology, as well as to enlarge the roster of independent artists. At the same time, Nolan and Pierre began to forge a strategy to expand the musical offerings on the site to include content from the Major and Independent Classical Labels. After nearly 5 years and much hard-fought negotiations, this dream is about to come true. Around July 15, 2008, the new and vastly improved Classical Archives will launch its new streaming and downloading services, and the differences will astound the user. At last will be an online music site that truly appreciates the challenges and opportunities for classical music online, and provides its users – from the classical newcomer to the scholar – with the best navigation and search capability anywhere. They have signed nearly all the Major Labels and many Independents, and the expected intention is to become the dominant site for classical music (and soon thereafter Jazz, Theater/Film music, and World Music) online, and a singular source for all aspects of the classical music world – including concerts, merchandise, etc. Stay tuned here, and keep checking out www.classicalarchives.com

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Pandora Classical Launch Party – Next Up: Major NY Jazz and Classical Events

Last summer, Nolan worked furiously at his old stomping grounds, the Oakland offices of Pandora Media, Inc. – where he has been the chief architect of the Music Genome Project, the backbone of the hugely successful Pandora Internet radio service, and is still the company's Chief Musicologist – to complete the final Music Genome, the Classical Genome. This was a long-sought goal of Nolan's, to see the rigorous power of the Musical Genome Project applied to the granddaddy of musical genres, classical. With enough Pandora users getting empty results from their queries of Mozart and Beethoven, the powers-that-be said, "okay, it's time". Then, after months of workshop with a highly-trained team of Pandora classical analysts, the Classical Genome launched in November 2007 – to rave reviews. To celebrate the occasion, Pandora organized an extravagant Launch Party at the beautiful Regency Theater in San Francisco. Nolan and Pandora founder Tim Westergren wrote and starred in a humorous, quasi-theatrical "realization" of the Classical Genome, featuring Nolan conducting the Jubilate Orchestra with such guest soloists as famed trumpeter Jens Lindemann (of Canadian Brass fame). Nolan portrayed the role of the "little conductor inside the computer" trying to please and understand the tastes of the first classical user, played by Tim Westergren. It was a great success and a quite a hoot. Bose, a key partner of Pandora, sponsored the event.

With such success, there has been non-stop talk of a reprise of the Classical Launch Party – on an even larger scale – as well as to extend the quasi-theatrical musical event to other genres, especially Jazz. To that end, some new developments are under way. First, Pandora has now scheduled its first Pandora Jazz Event, with none other than famed jazz trumpeter and director of Jazz at Lincoln Center, Wynton Marsalis. At this point, only the date and location – December 7, 2008 at Lincoln Center, NY – has been solidified; exactly what the program will consist of is something that Nolan, Tim Westergren, and Wynton Marsalis will have to work out – but it will surely be pretty amazing. In addition, there are varying discussions concerning the reprise of the Classical Event. Initial discussions with the New York Philharmonic went well, but led to no specific schedule so far. On the other hand, another type of event is coalescing in the minds of Nolan, Tim, and others – involving a smaller chamber orchestra and some world-class soloists, including the likes of Joshua Bell, diva Renée Fleming, etc., with Nolan conducting. Stay tuned for further developments in this exciting story.

For more on Pandora, which now boasts more than 13 million subscribers, visit www.pandora.com