

Michael Dellaira was at the all-Richard Hervig concert at Merkin on November 24, 1997. Since Hervig's retirement 10 years ago from the University of Iowa where, incidentally, he founded the renowned Center for New Music, he's been living, teaching and composing in New York. If the program is any measure, he's been doing quite a bit of the latter – four of the seven pieces were from the 1990's, two written this last year alone. In addition, there was a 1953 "Sonata No. 1" for clarinet and piano, his Bi-centennial piece, "Chamber Music for Six Players", and the largish "The Tree", commissioned by the Cleveland Chamber Symphony in 1984. Intriguing were the back-to-back settings of John Milton's poem "The Subtle Thief", the first (1990) for flute, clarinet, violin, viola, and cello, the second (1997) for voice and piano; the title being the obvious point of reference, one succeeded in hearing musical connections that, in fact, may not have been there at all (wishful hearing?). Also new, his "Toccata" for solo piano is a short, spicy confection which works despite his claims that the piece is "tonal". (In a program note, Hervig makes the same claim about "most" of his music.) The performances by students at the Manhattan School, conducted by the ever-capable and oft-lauded Glen Cortese, were all really first-rate, played with a refreshing sense of enthusiasm and (yes) mission.

As I told an Iowa City newspaper reporter in attendance: It's rare but always a delight to hear music that sounds like the composer, and in Dick Hervig's case his music, like him, is warm, witty, and always a pleasure to run in to.