

## Ross worries that the concert-going ritual sometimes runs counter to the spirit of the music.

Between 15 and 20 CDs arrive in the mail daily, Ross reports.

His most pointed argument ap-

peared in a 2004 essay, "Listen to This." He aims his opening salvo at the very term "classical music"—arguing that "It traps a tenaciously living art in a theme park of the past...The phrase is a masterpiece of negative publicity, a tour de force of anti-hype"—and then makes a case for music appreciation based on emotional investment. "Music is too personal a medium to support an absolute hierarchy of values," he writes. "The best music is music that persuades us that there is no other music in the world." Whether that's a concerto, a pop song, or an electronic noise experiment is up to you. He concludes by imagining himself a 36-year-old who goes to the symphony for the first time and encoun-

ters a rigid ritual that seems designed to keep him from having fun. He coughs; people "glare." He applauds at the end of a movement; people "glare again."

Ross worries that the concert-going ritual sometimes runs counter to the spirit of the music. Mozart's operas draw on sounds both high and low. Beethoven's music is full of earthy dance rhythms. Gustav Mahler, Ross says, embraced just about everything. "It's ironic if we start taking those pieces and confining them in a space that's so regulated," he argues. "It almost betrays the spirit of those pieces." But despite these small irritations, Ross still believes that classical music—especially as heard in concert halls, with the resonances and overtones that are lost in recordings—offers something unique. "It's like escaping into some wide-open empty landscape," he says. "There's almost a spiritual dimension to the experience. At its best, it can be like religion without dogma—the feeling of a bigger presence looming above you, requiring nothing but a certain stillness."

## Anthologizing Yourself

Mary Jo Salter keeps her own (and others') poetry alive.

**A**FTER SQUEEZING nearly 1,000 years of creativity into the *Norton Anthology of Poetry*, Mary Jo Salter '76 began the smaller but still consuming task of anthologizing her own verse. The result, *A Phone Call to the Future*, revives selected poems from her previous books and introduces a handful of new ones. Her editing for W.W. Norton, where she sometimes had to whittle entire careers down to no more than a poem or two, helped her take a long view. "Anytime I was beginning to feel sorry for myself," she remembers, "I thought, 'You know, if you're lucky and you do get into posterity, you won't have nearly this many poems in front of readers.'"

*A Phone Call to the Future* begins with her

newest poems. Two appeared in *The Best American Poetry* series: the title work and "Costanza Bonarelli," an unnerving but expertly crafted meditation on a sculpture by Gianlorenzo Bernini. (After chiseling a bust of his mistress, Bernini sent a razor-wielding servant to do much the same to her face; rumor had it she was sleeping with the artist's brother, too.) Salter then guides her readers from her first book, *Henry Purcell in Japan* (1985), to her most recent, *Open Shutters* (2003). Along the way she visits a Kyoto hospital, rides in a hot-air balloon that she likens to a fire-breathing dragon, and winds up accidentally seated across the aisle from her former psychiatrist at a family restaurant. "Inevitably, with poetry, older books go



ROSS DOES his *New Yorker* writing in a Chelsea apartment or his office in Times Square. But writing a book, he found, required a different approach. To escape distractions, he ensconced himself in a coffee shop on Eighth Avenue whenever he could steal time away from his normal duties. In magazine pieces he tries first to grab the reader's attention, then provide context, and finally zero in on details. "That basic rhythm doesn't work for a book chapter at all," he reports. "You don't need to seize the reader's attention at the beginning of chapter seven."

The first draft, completed in 2005 after four years of work, was a whopping 390,000 words long. Ross e-mailed his final draft—half the original size—to his publisher from a Los Angeles hotel room overlooking the recently constructed Walt Disney Concert Hall, where conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen had reinvigorated the city's orchestra by injecting contemporary music into the program. "It was kind of nice looking down at Disney Hall, because it symbolized what the L.A. Philharmonic has achieved," he says. "It's what I try to achieve as a writer."

Ross's most common vehicle for highlighting new music is his critical column, which he writes at least once every few weeks. It may be as straightforward as a review of a new production at the Metropolitan Opera or as unexpected as a round-up of talented student composers. "I do feel that a big part of my mission is not merely to write these reviews, but to write intelligently and appealingly about classical music itself for an audience that may not know a lot about the topic," he says. "It's a wonderful opportunity to make an argument for music."



**Mary Jo Salter's anthology resuscitates "some poems I was still fond of."**

'79 (himself the editor of the *Norton Book of Ghost Stories*). But when Norton hired her in 1992 as an editor for its anthology, she had to balance her own preferences against poets' historical import. "Just because I'm not a huge Ezra Pound fan," she points out, "doesn't mean I can presume to take him out of the *Norton*." But she did take the chance to speak up for writers whose work she felt had been unduly neglected—Marianne Moore, for example. "There is something wonderfully shaped and new and strange about how she wrote," Salter says. Moore had just four poems in the third *Norton*; in the fourth, published in 1996, she had nine.

For the fifth edition, which appeared in 2005, Salter had to add more authors without adding more pages. Cuts, whether of poems or poets, were inevitable. "In the case of dead writers, they don't protest," she says. "In the case of living ones, that was a little more stressful." Still, she relished the opportunity to reconsider which threads best rep-

resented the whole tapestry of a poet's life. Salter dropped one of Moore's later poems and added two earlier ones that showcased her tendency to fit each poem into a brand-new verse form. "I didn't particularly like Moore myself when I was younger," Salter admits. "But I've become a big fan of hers in the last 10 to 15 years."

As *A Phone Call to the Future* demonstrates, Salter, too, invents new forms. The nine stanzas in "Costanza Bonarelli" are all seven lines long, and each line has three stressed syllables. Another poem, "Poetry Slalom," tries to look like someone flying down a hill on skis. Salter enjoys language games and favors words with double meanings. The first line of "Costanza Bonarelli" describes the sculpture literally as a "bust," but the word, in one of its more colloquial uses, hints at the awful violence ahead. She also likes words she can use in a variety of ways, in both verbal and adjectival forms, for example. In "Please Forward," she finds a postcard in a used book that she and the writer of the card, Salter surmises, thought equally unreadable: "So Gert/...had failed, like me, and stuck/the postcard in the early/scene where she got stuck."

Poetic form is also something Salter knows how to teach, along with the history of meter and the many uses of rhyme. At Harvard she took classes with Elizabeth Bishop (herself a Moore protégée) and Robert Fitzgerald, and was poetry editor of the *Advocate*, the undergraduate literary magazine. After graduation, she taught English in Japan for three years and, beginning in 1984, poetry at Mount Holyoke. What started as a part-time, annual contract lasted until last year, when she and her husband both accepted positions at Johns Hopkins University's Writing Seminars. They took the jobs to move closer to family—her father lives in Mary-

out of print," she says. *A Phone Call to the Future* "was a way of resuscitating some poems I was still fond of."

With her own poetry, Salter could pick and choose as she pleased, though she did take advice from her long-time editor at Knopf, Ann Close, and her husband, the poet and novelist Brad Leithauser '75, J.D.

**Ken Bresler requests** a source for "God looks down and judges."

**"tyranny of the left versus that of the right...dogs and cats"** (March-April). Thomas Owen for-

warded this unattributed anecdote from *Leo Tolstoy* (1946; page 651), by Ernest J. Simmons: "When asked 'Is there not a difference between the killing that a revolutionist does and that which a policeman does?' Tolstoy answered: 'There is as much difference between cat-shit and

dog-shit. But I don't like the smell of either one or the other.'"

**"Carving nature at her joints"** (May-June). Lydia Kirsopp Lake was the first to identify Plato as the ultimate source of this concept, seen (in Harold N. Fowler's trans-

## Chapter & Verse

Correspondence on not-so-famous lost words

lations for the Loeb Classical Library) in *Phaedrus* 265 d-e, "dividing things again by classes, where the natural joints are, and not trying to break any part, after the manner of a bad carver," and in

*Statesman* 287c, "Let us divide them, then, like an animal that is sacrificed, by joints."

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land and her husband's mother and two brothers live near Washington, D.C.—and for the chance to teach graduate students. Salter says she enjoys teaching, even though “there’s always a conflict in terms of time. There are inevitable periods when you feel resentful that you’re helping other people write their poems when you want to be writing yours.”

“But,” she adds, “I don’t think that most poets could only write poetry all day, every day. I certainly couldn’t. You need interaction with other people.” Her M.F.A. students at Johns Hopkins, in particular, seem more like peers than students to her: “It seems like we’re all in this enterprise together, trying to keep poetry alive.”

Not that it’s in any danger of disappearing, she says, but it’s certainly under pressure from the many other, flashier ways to spend an evening. She likes movies and TV, but their pleasures aren’t quite the same. “It’s hard to keep alive that excitement some of us feel when you see someone using a verb as an adjective. There just aren’t as many people out there who love to see that happen,” she says. “And I’d like to find those people and encourage them. ~P.G.

## Thoroughly Eclectic

*Performer Eisa Davis stays open to her many passions.*

SOMETIME between 6:30 and 7:30 P.M. every Tuesday through Saturday, Angela Eisa Davis '92 (she goes by her middle name, which rhymes with “Lisa”) slips through an alley on the left side of Broadway’s century-old Belasco Theatre. She opens a heavy, unmarked door, calls a joyful greeting to the security man who sits just inside the entrance, and climbs two flights of steep concrete steps to reach a dressing room that must have looked similar in 1907 (when Antoinette Perry was starring in the Belasco’s inaugural production), despite a few of Davis’s own touches—a rattan mat, a map of the world thumbtacked to the



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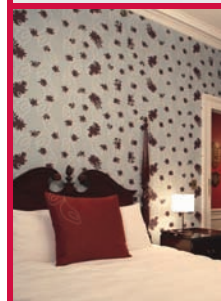
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