

Composer

MICHAEL COLGRASS
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f the week

Compiled by
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Colgrass working on Pulitzer Prize winning composition, *Deja Vu*, May 29, 1977.



Photo by Arnold Matthews.

Pulitzer Prize winning composer, Michael Colgrass

Jazz drummer, orchestral percussionist, composer, and clinician.

Composer Michael Colgrass got his professional start in the mid-1940's as a jazz drummer, before graduating from the University of Illinois in 1954. His degrees in performance and composition were supplemented by studies with Darius Milhaud at the Aspen Festival and Lukas Foss at the Berkshire Music Festival at Tanglewood.

As a percussionist, Colgrass has been part of some of the most memorable musical moments in history, including the original *West Side Story* orchestra on Broadway, the Modern Jazz Quartet, the New York Philharmonic, and the Columbia Recording

Orchestra's *Stravinsky Conducts Stravinsky* series.

His interactions with such an eclectic grouping of composers including Igor Stravinsky, John Cage, Edgard Varese, Elliot Carter, and Gunther Schuller undoubtedly influenced his own style. Harold E. Schoenberg of the *New York Times* has called Colgrass a "maverick" for his ability to mix serial techniques with bits of jazz, romanticism, or Ives-like dissonances.

Colgrass has been commissioned by the nation's top orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic, The Boston Symphony, the Minnesota Orchestra, and the Detroit Symphony. He has been awarded the Pulitzer Prize (*Deja Vu*, 1978), an Emmy Award for his work on *Soundings: The Music of Michael Colgrass* (1982) for PBS, and two Guggenheim Fellowships.

Now 75, Michael Colgrass still composes, and actively travels the world giving workshops on the psychology and performance of music. He resides in Toronto, Canada with his wife Ulla, a writer and editor on music and the arts.

Notable Works:

Deja Vu (1978), for orchestra, commissioned by the New York Philharmonic; (1986), for wind ensemble

Winds of Nagual (1985), for concert band, commissioned by the New England Conservatory

Three Brothers (1951), for percussion nonet

Colgrass' music has been labeled as part of the emergence of 20th century eclecticism as well neo-Impressionism.

"*Déjà Vu* evokes both personal and universal pasts. On the one hand, it recalls the composer's early career as a percussionist; on the other, it uses vague historical allusions, apparent when the unifying theme is transformed into styles ranging from classic to romantic to jazz to serial. Most important, his wild eclecticism - which might spell destruction in the hands of a lesser composer - never threaten the work's unity and integrity." - K. Robert Schwartz, *High Fidelity*