

# Lawrence Dillon

by Kyle Gann

Allow me to achieve a minor milestone on *Chamber Music's* behalf: for the first time here, I'm writing a column about a composer I know only over the Internet. I've never met Lawrence Dillon, never been to a concert of his music, never heard anything of his live, never bought a CD of his. He doesn't frequent the same real-world circles I do, doesn't get performed much in the area where I live. He does get performed, and widely: he was a guest of the St. Petersburg Conservatory when his orchestra piece *Amadeus ex machina* was performed by the St. Petersburg Chamber Philharmonic, he's had pieces played recently in Paris and in Ukraine. Aside from inside my computer, he lives down South, and is composer-in-residence and dean of music at the North Carolina School of the Arts. It might have taken many years before I ran into him in real life, but he's one of the regulars at a feisty little composers' site called Sequenza 21 (after pieces by Luciano Berio), at <http://www.sequenza21.com>. On top of that, Dillon blogs. Welcome to the 21st-century composer's new career paradigm.

Do I still, for this magazine's readership, need to define *blog*? I didn't know

what one was myself when I was asked to start one two years ago. Critic Alex Ross defines it as "public procrastination." That's certainly true, but it's also a public journal on the Internet, a record of events, observations, and opinions for those interested. Lots of young composers keep them; and Dillon, in his forties, is one of the oldest composers I know of doing so. Gone is the composer as man-behind-the-curtain, the mysterious celebrity whom we don't even see onstage until he takes his bow at the end of the performance. Now, on the Internet, the composer becomes something of a tasteful shill for his own work, and we encounter his personality even before we do his music. I learned a lot about Dillon from his blog at [www.sequenza21.com/dillon.html](http://www.sequenza21.com/dillon.html), from his website at [www.lawrencedillon.com](http://www.lawrencedillon.com), and from sparring with him at Sequenza 21, before ever hearing a Dillonesque note.

For instance, I know that he has been partially deaf from birth, that he was the youngest of eight children, and that in 1985 he became, at 26, the youngest composer to ever get a doctorate from Juilliard. He studied with Babbitt, Carter, Diamond, and Sessions, yet his early influences came from John Cage and the headily conceptualist *Source* magazine. Fundamentally, as his blog makes clear, he is not a taker of sides, nor a polemicist. He is both moderate and a moderator, impatient with battles of musical aesthetics in which one side of the coin fights the other for dominance. He cites all four Jungian modes of experience—sensation, intuition, intellect, emotion—as necessary and valuable in music. He reserves his anger for the intolerant, and seeks balance.

This is just as true in his music. In general it is as finely poised between tonality and atonality as anyone's I could name. Of the Jungian qualities Dillon cites, I would have to accuse him of having feeling and intuition dominant.