

The New York Times

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, APRIL 25, 2004

MUSIC

A Composer and a Poet Swim With the Fishes



HIGH NOTES

What is the connection between a parrot and a parrotfish? Officially, the beak. But the connection extends further in the fancy of the composer Bruce Adolphe. Mr. Adolphe, a lively writer and lecturer on music, is the proud owner of Polly Rhythm (as in polyrhythmic motets), a parrot that sings opera and jazz. He is also a principal in PollyRhythm Productions.

PollyRhythm's latest project,

What is the connection between a parrot and a parrotfish? Officially, the beak. But the connection

"Oceanophony," a multimedia presentation built around music and poetry, will be presented twice on Saturday in the Milstein Hall of Ocean Life at the American Museum of Natural History. Mr. Adolphe will join Kate Light, who wrote the poems, in reading them, and he will also embark on an unpromising career as a rapper in a ditty about cleaning-fish. ("Parasite accumulation?! Try our acupuncture./... I can cure life's alienation/and your fungal agitation,/ give your health amplification.")

Parrotfish, having obviously

caught Mr. Adolphe's imagination, loom large, with movements titled "Spotlight Parrotfish" and "Parrotfish Lullaby." Other sea creatures, including the pufferfish, the octopus and the seahorse, get only one movement; the sarcastic fringehead should be grateful to get that.

The punning reaches its depth in "Coral Music," with murkily or glitteringly rendered tunes from Handel's "Messiah" (the "Hallelujah" chorus, of course) amid a wash of vibraphone and piano. Mr. Adolphe's music, as agile and colorful as the creatures it describes, is highly sophisticated in a variety of styles, jazzy and Stravinskian.

This is one of several PollyRhythm projects carried out in conjunction with museums and schools, including "Tyrannosaurus Sue: a Cretaceous

Concerto" and "Red Dogs and Pink Skies: A Musical Celebration of Paul Gauguin." "Oceanophony" was first presented at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in La Jolla, Calif., last August, and it is to appear at the Museum of Contemporary Art in La Jolla on May 16. It is also to be used in schools in Rye, N.Y., next month.

At the Museum of Natural History, it kicks off a series of family programs this spring. The others — "Julie and the Wolves" on May 16 and "Dr. Nebula's Laboratory: Wind and Water" on May 22 — may have a hard time matching this one for sheer entertainment value (painless education aside).

No doubt a video awaits: a do-it-yourself double feature with "Finding Nemo."

JAMES R. OESTREICH



Marilynn K. Yee/The New York Times

The Milstein Hall of Ocean Life at the Museum of Natural History.