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Young Concert Artists, Inc.

DANIEL KELLOGG, *composer*

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Music

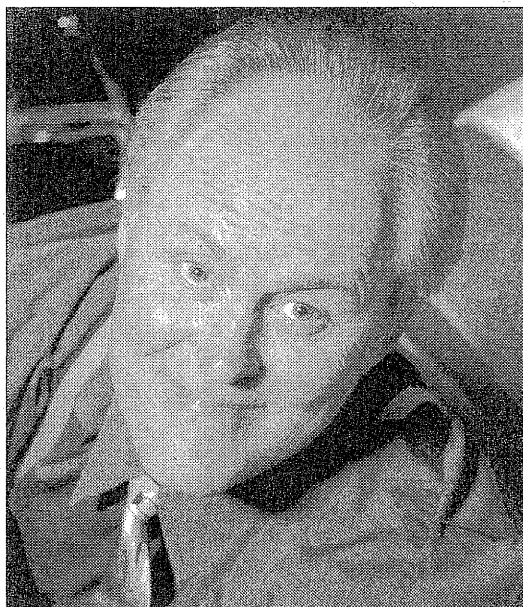
Lively World Premiere And Lithgow Perk Up NSO Family Concert

By TIM PAGE
Washington Post Staff Writer

Daniel Kellogg, barely out of his 20s, is one of the most exciting composers around — technically assured, fascinated by unusual sonic textures, unflinchingly easy to listen to, yet far from simplistic. While I wish the National Symphony Orchestra, which played the world premiere of Kellogg's "Pyramus and Thisbe" on Sunday afternoon at the Kennedy Center, had gone all out and commissioned a full work for its subscription season (as the Philadelphia Orchestra did a couple of years ago), it was nevertheless good to hear his music presented by the home team.

"Pyramus and Thisbe," with a libretto by Mark O' Donnell based on a scene from Shakespeare's "Midsummer Night's Dream," is a monodrama — a work for speaker and orchestra. To this taste, the form is distinctly limited: I want to hear the story for "Peter and the Wolf" only once or twice a decade, despite its charming music, and I can live without hearing Aaron Copland's "Lincoln Portrait" ever again. "Pyramus and Thisbe" was commissioned for a Family Concert, though, and the many children in the Concert Hall laughed uproariously through the 20-minute piece, as actor John Lithgow spun out this absurdist take on Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet" with deftly exaggerated and wildly divergent characterizations.

Kellogg handles an orchestra brilliantly. His overture sounded just like what might have happened if Richard Strauss had written the theme song for a comic film about bustling Manhattan in the early 1960s. Clarinets



Actor John Lithgow read the text that accompanied Daniel Kellogg's commissioned work.

squealed, drums pounded, sirens roared and a kazoo solo served as the preface to a comic kiss. It is highly theatrical music and makes one wonder eagerly what Kellogg might do should he turn his attention to opera.

Leonard Slatkin conducted with energy and expertise, and made a charming host. The program, entitled "Wherefore Art Thou, Shakespeare?," also included works by Otto Nicolai, William Walton, Vaughan Williams, Mendelssohn, Sibelius and Tchaikovsky (the placement of the Mendelssohn and Sibelius movements were swapped from the order in the program booklet). Lithgow told the story of Shakespeare's life, holding his hands up as quotation marks whenever he read the master's own words, which are music in themselves and were rendered as such by this eloquent actor.