



*60th Birthday Concert
for composers William Bolcom,
John Corigliano, John Harbison,
Ellsworth Milburn, Joan Tower,
and Charles Wuorinen*

Friday, February 20, 1998

8:00 p.m.

Lillian H. Duncan Recital Hall

RICE UNIVERSITY

the
Shepherd
School
of Music

PROGRAM

Entendre III (for violin and piano) (1998) Ellsworth Milburn
(Premiere) (b. February 6, 1938)

Kenneth Goldsmith, violin
Jeanne Kierman, piano

Phantasmagoria (for cello and piano) (1993) John Corigliano
(on themes from **Ghosts of Versailles**) (b. February 16, 1938)

The Fischer Duo
Norman Fischer, cello
Jeanne Kierman, piano

Sonata No. 4 for Violin and Piano (1994) William Bolcom
Allegro brillante (b. May 26, 1938)

White Night

*A fitful sleeper recalls an early tune,
hoping it will soothe him to sleep.
Instead, it keeps him awake.*

Arabesque

Jota

Henry Rubin, violin
Scott Holshouser, piano

INTERMISSION

Epithalamium (for two trumpets) (1997) Charles Wuorinen
[Version I] (b. June 9, 1938)

Matthew Harding, trumpet
Brian Brown, trumpet

Très lent "Hommage à Messiaen"
(for cello and piano) (1994)

Joan Tower
(b. September 6, 1938)

And... They're Off (for piano trio) (1997)

Desmond Hoebig, cello
Jeanne Kierman, piano
Kenneth Goldsmith, violin

San Antonio (Sonata for
alto saxophone and piano) (1994)

John Harbison
(b. December 20, 1938)

The Summons
Line Dance
Couples Dance

Richard Nunemaker, alto saxophone
Scott Holshouser, piano

PROGRAM NOTES

1938 was a pivotal year of the twentieth century. Besides the building up to World War II, with imperialist expansion in Europe and Asia, the arts were in rare flourish and dramatic change. For example, Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* premiered, Frank Lloyd Wright set up Taliesin West as a school for architecture in Arizona, and showings of Picasso's *Guernica* were the rage in Europe. Music written during that year included Bartók's *Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion*, Stravinsky's *Dumbarton Oaks*, Prokofiev's cantata *Alexander Nevsky*, Shostakovich's *First String Quartet*, Amy Beach's *Piano Trio*, Vaughan Williams' *Serenade to Music*, and Copland's *Outdoor Overture*. There was also an asteroid named Hermes whose eccentric orbit brought it closer to Earth in January than any other observed minor planet (485,000 miles). So perhaps it was the asteroid, or the water, or some other circumstance that brought the United States an unusual crop of musical luminaries born in that year.

This concert is a celebration of recent music written by these eminent composers (presented in birth order, oldest to youngest) who will celebrate their 60th birthday during this calendar year. In the SYZYGY committee we have affectionately dubbed this program "The Geezer's Concert." (We were sadly not able to include a work by Frederick Rzewski who was born in Westfield, Massachusetts, on June 6, 1938.)

Entendre III (for violin and piano) Ellsworth Milburn

Ellsworth Milburn was born in Greensburg, Pennsylvania, and received his musical education at UCLA, Mills, and the College-Conservatory of Music at the University of Cincinnati. He was music director for San Francisco's improvisational theater company, *The Committee*, from 1963 to 1968 and composed music for radio, television, and film. As a composer he has received numerous grants and commissions from organizations such as the National Endowment for the Arts, the Presser Foundation, The Houston Symphony, Da Camera of Houston, and the Concord, Lark, and Blair String Quartets. He is Professor of Composition at The Shepherd School of Music. The composer writes about tonight's premiere:

Entendre III is based on two short melodic ideas used in my theater piece, *Ménage*, which appeared in the opening viola solo of that piece. These elements proved to be more durable than I originally thought and found their way into several later compositions, the first being *Entendre* for viola and piano. This became the foundation for a somewhat larger work for cello and piano, *Entendre étendu*, and again, these elements showed up in *Entre nous* for violin and viola. Perhaps this was my French title period.

Entendre III for violin and piano is a re-composition of the viola and piano piece (the original *Entendre*), using the basic structure and making the changes that a number of years of reflection and growth have brought to it.

It is a one-movement piece in several sections, virtuosic in nature, Romantic in spirit, with a twentieth-century vocabulary. It was composed for and is dedicated to Kenneth Goldsmith, who, like all the composers on this concert, is celebrating his 60th birthday in 1998.

Phantasmagoria (for cello and piano) John Corigliano

John Corigliano was the son of a professional violinist and born in New York City. He attended Columbia and studied composition with Luening, Giannini, and Creston. He has taught at the Manhattan School of Music and Lehman College of the City University of New York. He has become one of the more celebrated figures on the American scene due to the great success of such scores as *Symphony No. 1* and the opera *Ghosts of Versailles*. He writes about *Phantasmagoria*:

Phantasmagoria is based on music from my opera *The Ghosts of Versailles*. The opera takes place on three different planes of reality: (1) the world of eternity, inhabited by the ghosts of Versailles (including the playwright Beaumarchais and Marie Antoinette); (2) the world of the stage, inhabited by the 18th century characters created by Beaumarchais (Figaro, Susanna, the Count and Countess, et. al.); and (3) the world of historic reality, primarily the reality of the French Revolution itself, populated by the characters of (1) and (2). Thus, *The Ghosts of Versailles* represents a journey from the most fantastic to the most realistic.

The architecture of the three-hour opera is mirrored in microcosm in *Phantasmagoria*, which begins with spectral ghost music and a

melodic fragment from Marie Antoinette's first aria that reappears throughout the work. Sliding harmonics and cluster chords create a liquid tableau behind this melody.

*The world of the stage is highly stylized; as the characters would suggest, it is set in the world of 18th-century opera buffa. The next section of **Phantasmagoria** comprises parts of Figaro's Act I aria and the many chase scenes that occur throughout the opera. Subliminal quotes from Mozart, Rossini, and even one from Wagner are interspersed with rhythmically eccentric passages of great virtuosity for both cellist and pianist.*

Throughout the work, the ghost music floats in and out, binding the other sections together. After the buffa reaches a climax (with, of all things, the Tristan chord), we arrive at a setting of the septet (Quintet and Miserere) from Act II. This highly lyrical ensemble is set in the Conciérgerie prison and unites the Almaviva family (the world of the stage) with Marie Antoinette (the world of ghosts) in the very real French Revolution (the world of historic reality). The end of the septet flows into the ghost music and Marie Antoinette's melodic motto leads to a conclusion of liquid repose.

This work had its premiere performance by Yo-Yo Ma and Emanuel Ax at the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., in May 1993, and was commissioned jointly by the Freer and the Library of Congress.

Sonata No. 4 for Violin and Piano William Bolcom

*Pulitzer Prize-winning composer William Bolcom was born in Seattle and studied both composition and piano from age eleven. A student of Milhaud, Messiaen, and Leland Smith, Bolcom's music has a great eclectic style easily embracing ragtime, electronic, world, popular song, and serial methods into his works. The **Fourth Violin Sonata** was commissioned for Henry Rubin by his wife, Cynthia, for Rubin's 50th birthday. The work is virtuosic and a powerful showcase for the violin. Henry Rubin writes:*

From his wide background in many types of ethnic music, Bolcom greatly expands the tonal and coloristic range of the violin with special effects in harmonics and percussion to suggest various mental as well as geographical landscapes."

Epithalamium (for two trumpets) Charles Wuorinen

*Charles Wuorinen was born in New York City and received his degrees from Columbia University. He received the Pulitzer Prize for **Time's Encomium** (1969) and also received a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship. In 1962 he founded with Harvey Sollberger the Group for Contemporary Music, the oldest new music ensemble in America. Wuorinen's craggy, early style gradually evolved into total serialization (the "time-point system") and works from that era include **Duo for Violin and Piano** (1966), the **First Piano Sonata** (1969), and the **First String Quartet** (1971). Now his music is considered more approachable, or as Wuorinen prefers to say, he has "clarified" his style by being interested in earlier musical traditions. An **Epithalamium** is defined as a "lyric ode in honor of a bride and bridegroom," and Wuorinen's was written for Mary and John Libby in May 1997.*

Très lent “Hommage à Messiaen” (for cello and piano) Joan Tower
And... They're Off (for piano trio)

Joan Tower was born in New Rochelle, New York, spent most of her childhood years in South America and studied with Chou Wen-Chung and Otto Luening at Columbia. In 1990 she received the prestigious Grawemeyer Award, and since 1972 she has taught at Bard College. **Très lent** is written for André Emilianoff, long-time colleague from the Da Capo Chamber Players, and is an homage for Messiaen. It alludes to the slow movements from the **Quartet for the End of Time** and, as Emilianoff writes:

Tower demonstrates effectively in **Très lent** that rhythmic energy does not depend on fast tempo. The forward motion of the tolling bells and piano frissons suggests an inner propulsion that is compelling even at the sostenuto tempo that she has indicated.

The radical speed pairing of **Très lent** and **And... They're Off** was an idea of Tower's when she attended the Scotia Festival in the summer of 1997. **And... They're Off** is dedicated to Desmond Hoebig and his violinist sister Gwen and tips its hat to the horse race.

San Antonio (Sonata for alto saxophone and piano) . . . John Harbison

John Harbison was born in Orange, New Jersey, and is a long-time resident of both Boston and Token Creek, Wisconsin. Harbison studied composition with Piston (Harvard), Blacher (Berlin), Sessions, and Kim (Princeton) and has been the recipient of the Pulitzer, the MacArthur, and Friedheim Awards. His style has been influenced by early work in jazz and has explained, according to the Harvard Biographical Dictionary, “his approach to thematic materials in a context of developing variation, in which a single ‘formal impulse is generating and ordering everything.’” Harbison provides the following program note for **San Antonio**:

I. The traveler has a free afternoon in San Antonio. It is August, 105 degrees. Expecting to start with the cool promenade along the river, he is instead lured by a sound. He follows it up a long stairway and finds himself in a little fiesta: a hot square, many people, no shade, a few people dancing to a fast beat, the band playing and singing in Spanish.

II. The first dancers finish, exhausted. Then, as if on cue, the whole crowd gets into a line of people of all ages, nine to ninety. They all know the steps, which change with the phrases.

III. The music changes again becoming slower. The people continue on in couples. No one seems to feel the heat, and the band hardly stops. Everyone, the traveler included, sinks into it. Towards the end, a young girl asks the traveler to dance. He declines.

But a year later, when the tourist puts down the memory of the sounds, something about a saxophone, and a few rhythms in his distorted memory, he accepts.