



presents

THE CALIFORNIA E.A.R. UNIT

Thursday, February 17, 2005

8:00 p.m.

Lillian H. Duncan Recital Hall

RICE UNIVERSITY

the
Shepherd
School
of Music

PROGRAM

Squint (2000)

Amy Knoles
Video: Richard Hines

Suspicious Motives (1999)

Eric Chasalow

Go (1999)

James Sellars

INTERMISSION

Cave (2000)

Eve Beglarian
Video: Clifton Taylor

Cendres (1998)

Kaija Saariaho

Coming Together (1971)

Frederic Rzewski

THE CALIFORNIA E.A.R. UNIT

Dorothy Stone, flute
Marty Walker, clarinet
Daphne Chen, violin
Erika Duke-Kirkpatrick, cello
Vicki Ray, piano
Amy Knoles, percussion

The reverberative acoustics of Duncan Recital Hall magnify the slightest sound made by the audience. Your care and courtesy will be appreciated. The taking of photographs and use of recording equipment are prohibited.

PROGRAM NOTES

Squint Amy Knoles

It is my guess that there is nothing that can be so strongly labeled as "Californian" as traffic. I've found that in order to survive Los Angeles, I've needed to, from time to time, try to view things differently, transform them a bit. When I was a young girl, I once found that if I would squint at the rector during the Sunday service, I could see Christ... the epiphany didn't last for very long, but the notion that I could quite easily change what I saw never left me. I've found this also possible in the sonic world. Thanks to Henry Brant, when I hear someone else's car stereo blending with mine, I am reminded of his pieces with many different groups spread throughout a hall forming a constantly changing, bizarre orchestra (often, I am given to imitate those soprano solos along with it all).

This is a piece about not only blurring linearity, but is also about the combinations of these unpredictable, constantly shifting lines creating something new, and the imaginings found in the cracks.

— Note by the composer

Suspicious Motives Eric Chasalow

Suspicious Motives was composed at the request of Boston Musica Viva for a November 19, 1999, concert — one in their two-season series of concerts celebrating the ending and approaching millennia. Given this context, I find myself looking back at how and why I have spent twenty years struggling with the media of electro-acoustic music.

The first of my pieces for traditional instruments in combination with pre-recorded electronic sounds was *Verses and Fragments* for horn, percussion and tape (1979). With a National Endowment for the Arts Composers Fellowship in 1983 (the first NEA program cancelled), I composed three more pieces — *Hanging in the Balance* for cello and tape (1983), *The Furies* for soprano and tape (1984), and *Over The Edge* for flute and tape (1986). All were realized in the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center. At the request of various performers, I continued composing in my home studio and latter at the Brandeis Electro-Acoustic Music Studio (BEAMS), creating *Fast Forward* for percussion and tape (1988), *Out of Joint* for trumpet and tape (1994), and most recently, *Scuse Me* for electric guitar and tape (1998).

Over the years, the technology available to me has changed dramatically, from the hand-made cutting and splicing of the analog studio, to MIDI automation and, currently, graphical computer-based sound editing environments. While the newer tools have made the process of realizing electronic music much easier, my fundamental musical approach to these pieces has not changed much. At the core is the tradition created by the work of Mario Davidovsky. In this tradition, one uses pre-recorded sounds to expand upon the acoustical characteristics of the live instruments — the real origin of the "hyperinstrument" concept. What may be obvious is that the timbre of a traditional instrument in performance may be changed by adding electronic components — a kind of heightened orchestration. Less obviously, the envelope characteristics of each note (attack, sustain, decay) may also be changed by electronic sound. The later technique leads to nothing less than a new level of counterpoint, where the succession of changing kinds of attacks (hard and short or long and sustained, for example) transforms the shape of phrases.

While my studio technique derives from Davidovsky, the musical character is quite different. My instrumental writing is often at an energy level drawn from my experience with improvised jazz. My recent electronic music reflects this as well. By adding layers of manipulated recordings of spoken or sung text, the sound of the human voice often emerges in surprising ways. *Suspicious*

Motives, like the concert series for which it was composed, looks both backward and forward in time. It is an homage to Davidovsky, relentlessly saturating the texture with two motives from his music – primarily the opening to *Synchronisms No. 6* for piano and electronic sound. It also recapitulates old motives from my own music. The electronic portion often sounds quite classical, as if it had been made in an old analog studio, but these sounds are layered with and enriched by vocal samples, including one word extracted from an interview with Davidovsky.

The electronic part to *Suspicious Motives* was composed using software from Soundforge, Cakewalk, Waves, and a Kyma workstation from Symbolic Sound Corporation.

– Note by the composer

Go James Sellars

For the most part, *Go* verges on atonality, or, perhaps I should say, neotonicity to the point of no tonality. There are virtually no cadences (stopping-off places) until the very end. In fact, one of the primary compositional problems I wrestled with in working out the form was how to get *Go* to stop! There occurred in the work a degree of momentum that searches in vain (like freeway driving in L.A.) for a rest area. But even at such a fast speed, there are perceptible changes of musical scenery, the violin or piano prominent here, the drums prominent there. In the big picture, *Go* falls into two large sections, the second being a re-composition, or alternate view of the first: the same drive at different times of the day. Near the end, a coda sneaks in an exit ramp: one must sooner or later reach a destination.

– Note by the composer

Cave Eve Beglarian

Cave was commissioned by the St. Louis ensemble Synchronia for a program investigating the theme of America in Y2K. It is the third piece in the last year I have been asked to write on this subject, and I'm noticing that I know less about the meaning of the millennium, or the future in general, the more I'm asked to write pieces about it. I have, however, had several excellent conversations about souls with Ansel Elgort, who is six, while I've been writing this piece, so I dedicate it to him with love and thanks for his friendship.

Text by Eileen Myles, from *Not Me* (1991)

now
more than
any other
time in
history, you
really ought
to please yourself
because
in mysterious
winds a
cave inside
your soul
might be
the only
place
to go

Cendres was written for alto flute, cello and piano. It was commissioned by the Wolpe Trio by the Society for New Music of the Ruhr and the Bureau of Culture of the City of Essen. It was premiered in 1998. The composer has written the following note on the work: "I found the basis of the musical material for this piece in my double concerto ... a la fumee for alto flute, cello and orchestra. The name of the piece also derives from this.

While writing *Cendres*, I was mainly concentrating on the interpretation of particular musical ideas by the three different instruments of the trio, each of which has its unique character and palette of colors. Musical tension is created and regulated by sometimes bringing the instruments as close together as possible in all ways (pitch, rhythm, dynamics, articulation, color, etc.), or, at the other extreme, letting each of them express the music in their most idiomatic fashion. Between these two extremes there is an unlimited number of possible ways to create more or less homogenous musical situations. The consciousness of this variety was the rope on which I was balancing whilst working on the piece.

– Note by the composer

Coming Together Frederic Rzewski

Coming Together was written in November and December of 1971 in response to an historical event. In September of that year inmates at the state prison of Attica, New York, revolted and succeeded in taking possession of a part of the institution. Foremost among their demands was the recognition of their "right to be treated as human beings." After several days of fruitless negotiations, Governor Nelson Rockefeller ordered state police in to retake the prison by force, justifying his action on the grounds that the lives of the guards whom the prisoners had taken as hostages were in danger. In the ensuing violence, forty-three persons, including several of the hostages, were killed and many more wounded. One of the dead was Sam Melville, a prisoner who had played a significant role in organizing the rebellion.

In the spring of 1971, Melville had written a letter to a friend describing his experience of the passage of time in prison. After his death, the letter was published in the magazine *Ramparts*. As I read it, I was impressed both by the poetic quality of the text and by its cryptic irony. I read it over and over again. It seemed that I was trying both to capture a sense of the physical presence of the writer, and at the same time to unlock a hidden meaning from the simple but ambiguous language. The act of reading and re-reading finally led me to the idea of a musical treatment. The text is as follows:

I think the combination of age and a greater coming together is responsible for the speed of the passing time. It's six months now, and I can tell you truthfully few periods in my life have passed so quickly. I am in excellent physical and emotional health. There are doubtless subtle surprises ahead, but I feel secure and ready. As lovers will contrast their emotions in times of crisis, so am I dealing with my environment. In the indifferent brutality, the incessant noise, the experimental chemistry of food, the ravings of lost hysterical men, I can act with clarity and meaning. I am deliberate, sometimes even calculating, seldom employing histrionics, except as a test of the reactions of others. I read much, exercise, talk to guards and inmates, feeling for the inevitable direction of my life.

– Note by the composer

THE CALIFORNIA E.A.R. UNIT

Dubbed the "wizards of new music" by the LA Daily News; cited by The New York Times, "The EAR Unit performs with exuberance and razor sharp precision ..."; heralded in Brussels by La Province, "The California EAR Unit, d'excellents musiciens ... un ensemble de tres grand qualite"; and identified by LA Style, "The

exhilaration in their playing, as they plunge with glorious high spirits and dazzling skill into the world's most daunting repertoire... should be reward enough for anybody."

These are just a few of the national and international press accolades garnered by the California EAR Unit in its twenty-two year history. The Los Angeles-based new music ensemble is dedicated to the performance, promotion, and creation of the exciting music of our time. Founded in March 1981, the EAR Unit has brought unparalleled versatility, virtuosity, and dedication to its performances and is recognized today as one of America's finest contemporary chamber ensembles. For its contributions to the field of contemporary American music, the ensemble has recently garnered awards from the LA Weekly (Best Classical Series 1999 and 2003) and the 1999 "Letter of Distinction" from the American Music Center.

Kaleidoscopic. Eclectic. Violins and pianos one minute, harmonicas and amplified plants the next – the audience never knows what to expect. Attending an EAR Unit concert means experiencing a fresh, exuberant approach to music making. Since 1987 the EAR Unit has been Ensemble-in-Residence at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art where they present their own four-concert critically acclaimed series. The EAR Unit's repertoire of over 400 compositions ranges from the most demanding works for the concert hall to collaborations with major artists in other fields to create original multi-media works. The EAR Unit combines a "classic" instrumentation of flute, clarinet, keyboards, percussion, violin and cello to an "anything goes" including voices, panpipes, handcuffs, playing Bach on the cello with a carrot (Cage's *Theater Piece*), theatrics and the latest interactive electronic media.

The Unit has performed at major venues all over the world including Tanglewood, Brussels, Aspen, Kiev, Paris, the Kennedy Center, Cologne, New York, Boston, Minneapolis, San Francisco, Santa Fe, Amsterdam, Reykjavik, and many places in between. The ensemble has been featured in documentaries for the BBC and Japanese television and many of their concerts have been broadcast by American and National Public Radio, WGBH's "Art of the States" Program, WDR (Germany), BRT (Belgium) and DR (Danish Radio), and the International Rostrum of Composers.

The EAR Unit has recorded for Nonesuch, Crystal, New Albion, New World, Tzadik, O.O. Discs, CRI/Emergency Music, and Cambria labels and has the distinction of being one of the first contemporary music groups to be featured on a CD-ROM – Morton Subotnick's *All My Hummingbirds have Alibis* on the Voyager label. New Albion has released a collection of pre-eminent Dutch composer Louis Andriessen's works, featuring *Zilver*, which was also written and commissioned by the Unit in conjunction with the EAR Unit's tour of England for the Contemporary Music Network. Bridge Records has issued Morton Feldman's four-hour long trio for Philip Guston (labeled "Best Classical CD of 1997 by CDNow). Recent recordings include *Go* on the Echograph label and *Settings*, music by Mel Powell on New World.

UPCOMING SYZYGY CONCERT

Friday, April 1, 8:00 p.m., Duncan Recital Hall

Mario Davidovsky, guest composer

celebrating his 70th birthday this season.

All-Davidovsky Program: *Synchronism No. 9* (for violin and electronic tape)(1988); *Synchronism No. 6* (for piano and electronic tape)(1970); and *Duo Capriccioso* (for violin and piano)(2003).



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