

**Smithsonian Resident Associate Program
and
The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden**

present

The 20th Century Consort

Christopher Kendall, Artistic Director and Conductor

Lucy Shelton, soprano

Sara Stern, flute

Loren Kitt, clarinet

David Thomas, clarinet

Rudolph Vrbsky, oboe

Truman Harris, bassoon

Daniel Carter, horn

Thomas Jones, percussion

Dotian Litton, harp

Elisabeth Adkins, violin I

Holly Hamilton, violin II

Nina Falk, viola

David Hardy, cello

Hal Robinson, bass

Lisa Emmenheiser Logan, piano

Saturday, December 5, 1987

Lecture-discussion, 4:30 p.m.

Concert, 5:30 p.m.

Auditorium, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

The 20th Century's Consort's 1987-88 performance series is supported in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, a Federal agency.

THE PROGRAM

LECTURE-DISCUSSION

Edward P. Lawson, Chief, Department of Education, HMSG
Simon Bainbridge, composer
Nicholas Maw, composer
Christopher Kendall, Artistic Director, 20th Century Consort

CONCERT

Era Madrugada (1984)

Simon Holt

(b. 1958)

Ms. Stern, Mr. Thomas, Mr. Carter, Ms. Logan, Ms. Adkins, Mr. Robinson

La Vita Nuova (1979)

Nicholas Maw

(b. 1935)

- I. Sonetto (Sonnet)*
- II. Madrigale (Madrigal)*
- III. Tacciono i boschi (Silent the Forests)*
- IV. Madrigale (Madrigal)*
- V. Il Sogno (The Dream)*

Ms. Shelton, Ms. Stern, Mr. Vrbsky, Mr. Thomas, Mr. Harris, Mr. Carter, Ms. Litton,
Ms. Adkins, Ms. Hamilton, Ms. Falk, Mr. Hardy

INTERMISSION

Ring A Dumb Carillon (1964-65)

Harrison Birtwistle

(b. 1934)

Ms. Shelton, Mr. Kitt, Mr. Jones

Voicing (1982)

Simon Bainbridge

(b. 1952)

Ms. Stern, Mr. Vrbsky, Mr. Thomas, Mr. Harris, Mr. Carter, Ms. Logan, Ms. Adkins,
Ms. Hamilton, Ms. Falk, Mr. Hardy, Mr. Robinson

The audience is invited to join the artists upstairs in the Plaza lobby immediately following the concert for an informal wine-and-cheese reception, made possible through the generosity of the British Council.

1987-88 Concert Series — 20th Century Consort

October 24 — *The British Discover America*
Guest Ensemble, Lontano

December 5 — *The Americans Discover Britain*
The 20th Century Consort

January 30 — *New Music for String Quartet*
Guest Ensemble, The Kronos String Quartet

February 27 — *Tintinnabular Travels*
The 20th Century Consort

April 23 — *Lunar Landing*
The 20th Century Consort

20th Century Consort
Christopher Kendall, *Artistic Director*



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Janet W. Solinger, *Director*, Resident Associate Program

Marcus L. Overton, *Senior Program Coordinator*, RAP Performing Arts

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Please note:

The taking of photographs and the use of recording equipment
are strictly prohibited.

Restrooms are located in the lower lobby adjacent to the escalators.

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

SIMON HOLT: Era Madrugada

Simon Holt's instrumental septet Era madrugada ("It was the Morning") draws its inspiration from the following poem by Federico García Lorca:

Sorpresa

Muerto se quedó en la calle
con un puñal en el pecho.
No lo conocía nadie.
¡Cómo temblaba el farol!
Madre.
¡Como temblaba el farolito
de la calle!
Era madrugada. Nadie
pudo asomarse a sus ojos
abiertos al duro aire.
Que muerto se quedó en la calle
que con un puñal en el pecho
y que no lo conocía nadie.

Surprise

The dead man lay in the street
with a knife in his chest.
No one knew who he was. How
the streetlamp trembled!
Madre.
How the little streetlamp trembled!
Between the night and the morning.
No one could lean over his eyes
open on raw air.
How come
this dead man lies in the street, what?
with a knife in his chest, & that no
one should know who he was?

--translated by Paul Blackburn

As in several of Holt's other compositions, the 12-minute Era madrugada paints picturesque musical metaphors of striking visual images; this work's ominous atmosphere, bold colors, angular lines, and eerie timbral effects perfectly reflect the stark imagery in Lorca's poem. Era madrugada is built upon the repetition and organic development of clearly defined musical cells; tremendous tension is created and sustained by the juxtaposition of brief periods of silence and moments of great agitation. Writes Holt about his compositional process: "I never have a mathematical plan when I'm composing, It's very much intuitive. I generate all the material first and see what that tells me...Whatever I'm writing I need to feel that I'm bursting out of the instrumentation, that I've got six instruments too few, so that the music is crammed into the textures...Then there will be conflict inside the music."

Era madrugada is scored for piccolo, clarinet, horn, piano, viola, cello, and bass. It was commissioned by the Royal Institute of British Architects for the Nash Ensemble, who premiered the work on 24 May 1984. Tonight's performance marks the work's American premiere.

-- Mary Lou Humphrey

NICHOLAS MAW: La Vita Nuova

Nicholas Maw's 26-minute song cycle La Vita Nuova resulted from a commission by the BBC for soprano Phyllis Bryn-Julson and the Nash Ensemble. As Maw had never before composed for solo soprano, even though he was known primarily as a vocal composer, he seized this opportunity, in 1978, to write for voice and small instrumental ensemble. (Maw considers this grouping to be the archetypal genre of the 20th century, citing such works as Schoenberg's Pierrot Lunaire, Ravel's Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé, and Boulez's Le marteau sans maître as examples.) Maw had long wished to set Italian poetry, and at first contemplated adapting Dante's La Vita Nuova, the late 13th-century poetic treatise which established a new aesthetic of love and extended the range of expression found in Italian love poetry. But the impracticality of that project led Maw to abandon his plans, and instead he set five poems by Italian Renaissance poets who succeeded Dante:

Sonnet by Cavalcanti (Dante's best friend), Madrigal by Boiardo, Silent the Forests by Tasso, Madrigal by Michelangelo, and The Dream by Gaspara Stampa. All captured Maw's imagination with their beautiful language, positive outlook on love, and suitability for the soprano voice. (As these poems evoke Dante's spirit of love, and the new life of the senses he espoused in his book, Maw retained the title La Vita Nuova for his cycle, even though it does not contain any poetry by Dante.) Maw wished to emphasize contrast in this song cycle, so he was drawn as well to these poems' widely varying topics, imagery, and modes of address. He ordered the texts to highlight their innate contrasts, and set them in a slow-fast-slow-fast-slow sequence. Each movement projects a sharply differing mood, or attitude towards the subject of love: an invocation to the spirit of love (I), a rapturous outburst over the joy of love (II), an evocation of night's sweet stillness for lovers (III), a tormented old man's bitter outcry over love's frustration (IV), and an elderly woman's plea to her husband to leave political life in the city for a simpler life in the country (V). The cycle's lush, highly melodic musical setting is directly based on the texts' language; its late-Romantic, extended tonality is tempered by formal and textural clarity. La Vita Nuova typifies Maw's vocal writing, and is clearly descended from his florid Scenes and Arias for three female voices and orchestra (1962), the work in which he first formulated his musical language.

La Vita Nuova is scored for solo soprano, flute (piccolo), oboe (English horn), clarinet, horn, harp, two violins, viola, and cello. It was premiered by Bryn-Julson and the Nash Ensemble, Mark Elder conducting, at a Promenade Concert at the Round House in London on 2 September 1979.

-- Mary Lou Humphrey

TEXTS

I. Sonnetto (Cavalcanti)

Per gli occhi fiere un spirito sottile,
Che fa in la mente spirito destare,
Dal qual si muove spirito d'amare,
Ch'ogn'altro spiritello fa gentile.

Sentir non può di lui spirito vile,
Di cotanta virtù spirito appare.
Questo è lo spiritel, che fa tremare
Lo spiritel, che fa la donna umile.

E poi da questo spirito si muove
Un altro dolce spirito soave
Che segue un spiritello di mercede.

Lo quale spiritel spiriti piove,
Ch'ha di ciascuno spirito la chiave
Per forza d'uno spirito, che'l vede.

Sonnet (translated by Ezra Pound)

A breath of thy beauty passes through my eyes
And rouses up an air within my mind
That moves a spirit so to love inclined
It breedeth, in all air, nobilities.

No vile spirit to discern his vertu is able
So great is the might of it,
He is the spryte that putteth a trembling fyt
On spirit that maketh a woman mercyable.

And then from this spirit there moveth about
Another yet so gentle and soft that he
Causeth to follow after him a spirit of pity.

From the which a very rain of spirits poureth out,
And he doth carry upon him the key
To every spirit, so keen is his breath to see.

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II. Madrigale (Boiardo)

Cantati meco, innamorati augelli,
Poi che vosco a cantar Amor me invita;
E voi, bei rivi e snelli,
Per la spiaggia fiorita,
Tenete a le mie rime el tuon suave.
La beltà, che io canto, è sì infinita,
che il cor ardir non have
Pigliar lo incarco solo;
Ch'egli è debole e stanco,
e il peso è grave.
Vaghi augeleti, vui ne gite a volo,
Perchè forse credeti
che il mio cor senta duolo,
E la zogia ch'io sento non sapeti.
Vaghi augeleti, odeti:
Che quanto gira in tondo
Il mare, e quanto spira zascun vento,
Non è piacer nel mondo,
Che aguagliar se potesse
a quel che io sento.

Madrigal (tr. L. R. Lind)

Sing with me, you little amorous birds,
Since Love invites me now to sing with you;
And you, bright brooks, green swards,
Where flowers blossom too,
Keep with my rhymes harmonious rhythm sweet.
Beauty, of whom I sing, is so complete
That my heart does not dare
To carry the burden alone;
For it is weak and worn,
the weight to bear.
Wandering birds, you fly away again,
Perhaps since you believe
My heart is full of pain,
And the joy I feel you cannot now conceive.
Wandering birds, perceive:
As great as are the waters hurled
At sea, however great winds blow,
There is no pleasure in this world
That can compare with that I know.

III. Tacciono i boschi (Tasso)

Tacciono i boschi e i fiumi,
E 'l mar senza onda giace,
Ne le spelonche i venti han tregua e pace,
E ne la notte bruna
Alto silenzio fa la bianca luna:
E noi teniamo ascose
Le dolcezze amorose:
Amor non parli o spiri,
Sien muti i baci e muti i miei sospiri.

Silent the Forests (tr. Edwin Morgan)

Silent the forests, the streams,
Waveless-sheeted the sea,
Winds in their caves unblustering, at peace,
Somber the night, and white
Its moon of deepest and marmoreal quiet:
Let us too lie like secrets
Locked in love and its sweetness--
Love have no breath, no voice,
No sound a kiss, no voice or sound my sighs!

IV. Madrigale (Michelangelo)

Mentre c'al tempo la mia vita fugge,
Amor più mi distrugge,
Nè mi perdona un' ora,
Com' i' credetti già dopo molt' anni.
L'alma, che trema e rugge,
Com' uom c' a torto mora,
Di me si duol, de' suo' eterni danni.
Fra 'l timore e gli inganni
D' amore e morte, allor tal dubbio sento,
Ch' i' cerco in un momento
Del me' di loro, e di poi il peggio piglio;
Si dal mal uso è vinto il buon consiglio.

Madrigal (tr. Creighton Gilbert)

While life is running out in me through time
Love still is doing harm,
And will not leave me an hour
As I after so many years had thought.
My soul shakes and screams
Like a man falsely murdered,
Complaining to me of the eternal cheat.
Between fear and deceit
I feel such doubts then over love and death
That I seek in one breath
The better of them, and then take the worse,
Good counsel thus beaten by evil use.

V. Il Sogno (Gaspara Stampa)

The Dream (tr. Richard Aldington)

Deh lasciate, signor, le maggio cure
D'ir procacciando in questa età fiorita,
Con fatiche e periglio della vita,
Alti pregi, alti onori, alte venture;
E in questi colli, in queste alme e sicure
Valli e campagne, dove Amor n'invita,
Viviamo insieme vita alma e gradita,
Fin che il sol de'nostri occhi
al fin s'oscure;

Perchè tante fatiche e tanti stenti
Fan la vita più dura, e tanti onori
Restan per morte poi subito spenti.
Qui coglieremo a tempo e rose e fiori,
Ed erbe e frutti, e con dolci concenti
Canterem con gli uccelli i nostri amori.

Ah, leave, my lord, in this flowering age
those weighty cares whereby you labor hard
with travail and with danger to your life
for high rewards, high honors, high emprise.
Amid these hills, these safe and lovely vales
and plains where Love invites, let us together
spend a life divine and happy till to our eyes
at last the sun grows dark.

So many labors and so many toils make life
a hard thing; and all these honors in a
trice by death return to naught.
Here let us pluck the rose and flowers and
leaves and fruit while time is ours, and
with soft music let us sing our loves
unto the birds.

--from 'Lyric Poetry of the Italian Renaissance'
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HARRISON BIRTWISTLE: Ring a Dumb Carillon

Ring a Dumb Carillon was composed in the winter of 1964-65, and was premiered at a British Arts Council concert presented at the Institute for Contemporary Art, London, on 19 March 1965. The work was subsequently recorded for Earle Brown's Mainstream label (USA) in 1968, and was published, with slight revisions, the following year by Universal Edition. The work is scored for soprano (doubling on suspended cymbals), B-flat clarinet, and percussion (one performer playing suspended cymbals, timbales, wood blocks, temple blocks, cow bells, maraca, claves, and bongos.) The work lasts 16 minutes, and uses Christopher Logue's poem "On a Matter of Prophecy" (from the collection Wand and Quadrant), deriving its title from a line in the poem. "The work is not so much a 'setting' of the poem as an embodiment of certain images in it. The line, 'one slow turn of the world,' for instance, clearly relates to the composer's interest in the kind of cyclic form where the same departure point branches off in a different direction each time...The redefinition of the soloist's function in a vocal part has long fascinated Birtwistle. The present work examines the problem from the point of view of a voice pitted against an obbligato instrument which is defined as musically equal to it. In one sense, the clarinet part is the cantus firmus of the piece, but inevitably, the presence of the words brings the vocal part into focus in its own light. To decide which of the two parts is superior is to miss the point: the work depends on the tension between soprano and clarinet and on their different but equal vividness." (From the composer's note to the recording.)

As Michael Hall points out in his monograph (1984), the first performances of Ring a Dumb Carillon and Tragoedia, an instrumental work, in 1965 burst upon the British music scene as if out of nowhere. Critics who had been merely respectful towards Birtwistle's music since Refrains and Chorusus (premiered in 1959) now praised the fully developed and highly original voice of a young master. Born in the stark industrial town of Accrington, Lancashire, Birtwistle grew up playing the clarinet in the local band and composing in a "sub-Vaughan Williams" manner. His matriculation at the Royal Manchester School for Music in 1952 brought him into contact with other young composers (notably Alexander Goehr and Peter Maxwell Davies) who were seeking a way out of English musical parochialism.

Birtwistle was profoundly inspired by contact with the Continental avant-garde of the 1950s, especially Messiaen (Turangalîla Symphony), Boulez (Le marteau sans maître), and Stockhausen (Zeitmasse). It was Stravinsky's Agon (1957), however, which led Birtwistle to see the need "to invent an archaic world," to imply, as Hall puts it, a "circular process" where "at any stage a composer can initiate the historic process," suggesting "perpetual recurrence."

So, as Stravinsky molds serialism into a reinvention of the French Baroque dance in Agon, Birtwistle fuses diverse influences from the music of the 1950s, as well as earlier styles, into the stark world of Ring a Dumb Carillon. In the poem (published in 1953), there are juxtapositions of recurring diverse images, ranging from the moon goddess through the world of ancient Greece, from the cromlech (a dolmen, or circle of stone monoliths) to the grim by-products of the Industrial Revolution; buttercups seem a metaphor for timelessness, or continuity. The poem thus inhabits a world of extreme archetypes, a source Birtwistle would later exploit in such seemingly incompatible stage works as Punch and Judy (1966-67) and The Mask of Orpheus (1973-83).

The sharp juxtapositions of the poem are expressed musically in an economical, almost restrained manner. The voice and clarinet parts together form a kind of monody, although never literally in unison. Birtwistle utilizes heterophony (where one part elaborates upon the other in a decorative manner) and a distorted kind of organum, where the two parts move in rhythmic unison, but where the traditionally parallel motion is distorted or replaced by contrary motion. At other times one part holds or reiterates a single pitch, acting as a catalyst for the other part's rhapsodic outbursts. This manner of pitch centering is mirrored in the melodic lines themselves; although their pointillistic, atonal character and free use of register inhabit the post-Webern world of 1950s European music, the presence of pitch and motivic repetition echoes Stravinsky's harmonic and melodic procedures. Only once does pure monophony appear, in a soprano solo ("The woman god stir...."); this moment serves as the mid-point of a non-literal symmetrical arch that determines on a large scale the overall structure of the work.

While heightened monody had been an aspect of Birtwistle's music since his earliest works, the element of rhythm was still undergoing considerable transformation during the composition of Ring a Dumb Carillon. The work of Messiaen had introduced Birtwistle to the concept of additive rhythm, where the placement of the downbeat metric accent could be delayed or hurried by the subtraction or addition of beats to the measure. In Messiaen this makes for a sense of irregular strong downbeats, while Stravinsky tends to syncopate his already highly irregular meters. Birtwistle takes a different approach, attempting, as Hall puts it, to place subjective time into the context of objective time; that is, to reconcile the perception of time as perceived through memory, with that of time as ticks on a clock, or pulse. The percussion part often consists of timbrally distinct groups of pulses that are distorted either through additive rhythms or through very gradual changes of tempo. The effect is that of broken or warped time, the percussion inconsistent in its coincidences with the soprano and clarinet. Even the more active percussion sections, with their greater variety of timbral mixture, seem accompanimental in nature, although passages of rhythmic unison with one or the other part occur; these create a heterophonic effect, now with percussion as catalyst. Although rhythmic palindromes occur with great frequency, Ring a Dumb Carillon does not appear to utilize the medieval compositional procedure of isorhythm, where pitch-and-rhythmic cycles are produced by the superimposition of differing numbers of distinct elements; Birtwistle would come to use this technique to further a sense of activity within a static texture. In tonight's work, he relies on non-literal repetitions of gestures in all three parts to achieve this end.

Birtwistle's already considerable ear for timbral subtleties and the juxtaposition of extremes of dynamic range help to reinforce the unusual synthesis of the stark and mysterious which so caught the imagination of the musical press when Ring a Dumb Carillon was introduced. The passion of this sound world is post-expressionist and unsentimental in quality, yet it is undeniably there, in a ritualistic, almost elemental form. This then is the achievement of this work, as well as the nature of the well from which the subsequent work of Birtwistle has sprung.

Text:

Ring A Dumb Carillon

"On a Matter of Prophecy"

He sleeps as sound as any tide cast stone;
and thinks the cromlech
Deep in buttercups like infant Plato jettis-oned in
Syracuse by chance, or careless women gods
Nudged by the wind the whet stone nods
To the buttercups nod to the dreamful
Deep as an oracle asleep beside his core of serpents
or his woman's will
One slow turn of the world.
The cromlech whirled once nodding and the buttercups
Ring A dumb carillon of gold in his ear
Chiming against the twist of the world
A wind-honed prophecy, wake him half up to see the moon's
white flotsam
He one turn out of this dull measure Heaves, crushing
a thousand dewpots with his head, and sleeps again;
like Plato on the beach at Syracuse, a radium in lead
The woman god stir and the python core Shard their diamonds
in his brain scooped out by the bright dream knife.
A wind heaves invisible chimneys and the buttercups flog their
gold on the cromlech's flank.
One slow turn of the world and the moon flotsam as Plato in
tyrants yard, is watched by this blind and moves cantharides
his brain.
Woman and dreams have sung, but, and before, and have
smelted
this endymion into an image of slag buttercup ruled, bound,
in fore talking and the time of night marooned in the yet his
mind
levers his tongue.
The cromlech pivots dumb as any stone.
His tongue crank shafted to the buttercups makes one slow
turn
ringing them back to gathering the honey tongued contraption
seer went home to Athens his philosophy and his back in rags.
Dame gods grow thin with python spittled,
tack, nag in his mind blank gantrys railed with words to make
them safe
and Match the cromlech's shadow as it maims the sun.
And the unanswered buttercups are shrivelled back to seed
Inside his sleeping hand cold as stone.

-- Christopher Logue

SIMON BAINBRIDGE: Voicing

Voicing was commissioned by the Nash Ensemble, which gave the first performance of the work in 1982, as well as the American premiere the following May. The work calls for 11 players comprising a woodwind quintet, a string quintet, and a piano (prepared with rubber mutes.) The beginning shows Bainbridge's familiarity with the minimalism of Philip Glass and Steve Reich, with its constantly repeated rhythms that set up a fast pulse, on which the composer builds up layers of sound. But he finds a way to continue without simply aping his models. For several minutes the ensemble follows the piano's lead in playing repeated notes that overlap from voice to voice, providing coruscating colors and changing harmonies. But when the pianist stops to remove the rubber mutes in the strings, the other instruments begin to go their own way: the pulse is still present, but pizzicatos in the strings and sforzandos in the woodwinds shift the ear's sense of the meter.

The piano's re-entry with a pattern that is 13 eighth-notes long against a measure of 12 eighth-notes contributes to the shift. At first, the shifted rhythm does not much disrupt the momentum of the background pulse, but eventually the different groups diverge in subdividing the measure; the rhythmic impulse seems to be slowing down like a train coming into the station. Just before it stops, a new infusion of energy sets the motor running faster; the texture begins to break up into tiny fragments flashing back and forth, playing against the listener's memory of the regularity that once was. The ensemble stops on a unison and takes off again, this time playing a free-wheeling, vertiginous unison melody with the various instruments entering and dropping out kaleidoscopically. Eventually, this play of lines manages to achieve a solid gathering point to end. Here and there Voicing suggests Glass, Stravinsky, even a trace of Britten, but it remains a remarkable achievement by Bainbridge.

Following studies with John Lambert at the Royal College of Music, Simon Bainbridge spent two fruitful summers working with Gunther Schuller at Tanglewood, which gave him a lasting interest in American music. Also active as a conductor (especially of contemporary repertoire), Mr. Bainbridge in 1983 was appointed composer-in-residence for Southern Arts (England).

