

20TH CENTURY CONSORT

MARCH 18, 1989

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

present

The 20th Century Consort

Christopher Kendall, Artistic Director

Elisabeth Adkins, violin

David Hardy, cello

Thomas Jones, percussion

Loren Kitt, clarinet

Lisa Emenheiser Logan, piano

Eileen Mason, harp

Sally McLain, violin

Sara Stern, flute

David Teie, cello

Denise Wilkinson, viola

Guest Artist

David Gordon, tenor

Saturday, March 18, 1989

Lecture-discussion 4:30 p.m.

Concert, 5:30 p.m.

Marion and Gustave Ring Auditorium

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

The 20th Century Consort's 1988-89 performance series is supported in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, a Federal agency.

THE PROGRAM

LECTURE-DISCUSSION

Christopher Kendall, 20th Century Consort
Stephen Albert, composer
Kathryn Alexander, composer
Ronald Perera, composer

CONCERT

The Whole Air Is Tremulous (1984-85)

Ms. Stern

Kathryn Alexander
(b. 1955)

Crossing The Meridian (1982)

July 18, 1846, Crossing the Great Divide
That Sensual Phosphorescence
Meticulous, Past Midnight
Danse Russe
Math

Mr. Gordon
Ms. Stern, Mr. Kitt, Mr. Jones
Ms. Adkins, Ms. Wilkinson, Mr. Hardy
Mr. Kendall

Ronald Perera
(b. 1941)

INTERMISSION

Songs from the Stone Harp (1988)

Winter Evening
Wolves
Wingbeat
Lemmings
Children of Wind and Shadow

Mr. Gordon
Ms. Mason, Mr. Teie, Mr. Jones

Stephen Albert
(b. 1941)

Distant Runes and Incantations (1985)

Ms. Adkins, Ms. McLain, Ms. Wilkinson, Mr. Hardy
Ms. Stern, Mr. Kitt, Ms. Logan, Mr. Jones
Mr. Kendall

Joseph Schwantner
(b. 1943)

The audience is invited to join the artists in the Plaza lobby after the concert for a wine-and-cheese reception, sponsored by the Friends of the 20th Century Consort.

1988-89 Concert Series — 20th Century Consort

November 5 — *Gala Opening Concert*
Guest Ensemble, **Collage New Music** from Boston

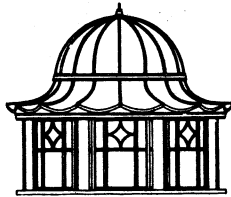
December 3 — *Death and Transfiguration*
20th Century Consort
Music by George Crumb and Olivier Messiaen

February 11 — *Contrasts and Café Music*
20th Century Consort
performs Bartok, Ravel, Schoenfield, Jolivet and Wuorinen

March 18 — *Magic!*
20th Century Consort
Works by Stephen Albert, Allen Schindler, and Joseph Schwantner

April 22 — *Strings in the Earth and Air*
20th Century Consort
Music by Warren Benson, Michael Finckel, and Nicholas Maw;
Arnold Schoenberg's *Transfigured Night*

20th Century Consort
Christopher Kendall, *Artistic Director*
Alyce Rideout, *Manager*



Smithsonian Institution

Robert McC. Adams, *Secretary*
James T. Demetron, *Director*, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden
Janet W. Solinger, *Director*, Resident Associate Program
Marcus L. Overton, *Manager*, RAP Performing Arts

The Resident Associate Program is the continuing education, cultural, and membership arm of the Smithsonian Institution for metropolitan Washington, and relies on the support of its more than 60,000 members to support its activities. The Program brings distinguished performing artists to the Washington area in more than 100 performances annually. Please telephone 357-3030 for membership information.

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

KATHRYN ALEXANDER: The Whole Air Is Tremulous

A native of Waco, Texas, Kathryn Alexander comes from a musical family, where she found it natural to be involved with music from an early age. She eventually completed her bachelor's degree at Baylor University as a flutist, then went to the Cleveland Institute of Music for graduate study. While there she made the acquaintance of composer Donald Erb who, taken with her musicality, encouraged her to compose. So, at the age of twenty-five, she started off on that new track. Erb's intuition was well founded: having barely finished her doctorate in composition at the Eastman School of Music, she won the Prix de Rome, which allows her to spend this year at the American Academy there, composing full time. In addition to Erb, her teachers have included Barbara Kolb and Joseph Schwantner.

Much of Alexander's work involves electronically-generated sounds. In the case of The Whole Air Is Tremulous, the tape part enlarges and expands the capabilities of the solo flute so that, together, tape and human player become a "super-flute." When the work received its first performance at Tanglewood on 15 August 1985, the composer wrote the following commentary:

Many works for instrument and electronic tape pit a live performer against a collage of synthetic sounds. The Whole Air Is Tremulous, however, uses only acoustic sounds from the piccolo, C flute, alto flute, and bass flute. The contemporary flute techniques employed by both the live performer and the tape include: glissandi, quarter-tones, trills, glissandi trills, key clicks, jet whistles, flutter tonguing, harmonics, and whistle tones. The taped sounds are then manipulated and processed using both traditional and contemporary musique concrète techniques, resulting in an extension of the flute itself. The intent is purely musical: the live performer and the tape unite to create a greater whole. Although the piece is not programmatic, the following poem, inspired by a passage from Virginia Woolf's novel Jacob's Room, reflects the nature of the work:

And the whole air is tremulous
stretching, bending; twisting, turning
restless
unable to still
gliding, slipping, sliding
escape?
shaking, trembling, vibrating
sparkling and glinting
--water dances
cerebral plates juxtapose
grating, grinding; pressing, tensing
a spirit roams, creates, divides
and a fine wind roars--
then blow...
sunlight scintillates on leaves
shwining and glowing
--irridescence

RONALD PERERA: Crossing the Meridian

A full professor at Smith College, where he has taught since 1971, Ronald Perera's extensive work in the fields of electronic and computer music led to the completion of a major text with Jon Appleton, Development and Practice of Electronic Music (1975). Given this interest and experience, it is not surprising that many of his works make use of tape, often in conjunction with live performers.

Crossing the Meridian, however, is composed entirely for acoustic instruments without the use of tape, computers, or other electronic devices. It was created for Boston Musica Viva, which gave the first performance under the direction of Richard Pittman in 1982. The composer provided the following note for the premiere:

Celestial navigators check their latitude by timing the exact moment the sun crosses their meridian. At this transit, the sun seems to hang at its zenith, neither rising nor descending. So, also, can our lives seem to hang still in moment of passage.

Crossing the Meridian is about those moments when time can seem almost frozen to us, about those eternal-seeming moments when we perceive ourselves in the middle of experience: in "July 18, 1846, crossing the Great Divide," a pioneer woman at the symbolic midpoint of her journey westward; in "That Sensual Phosphorescence" the persistence of desire; in "Meticulous, Past Midnight," a premonition of lovers parting; in "Danse Russe" a moment of reflection before a mirror; in "Math" the ecstasy of a breakthrough in a creative act.

This cycle is the latest in a series of pieces of mine which turns away from the styles and techniques prevalent in the new music of the early '60s and early '70s. The music is predominantly tonal, even triadic, the meter is usually clearly felt, and the textures tend toward the transparent and spare. Earlier pieces of mine which share these characteristics include Chanteys for orchestra, The White Whale for baritone and orchestra, and three song cycles written between 1969 and 1978.

In this work I have also explored the use of very small note collections, especially on the first and last songs. The first song is a continuous variation on the pitch succession C-G-B flat-F-E. The last song uses only the pitches generated by the overtone series of C up the twelfth harmonic--C-G-B flat-D-E-F sharp--only two notes different from the note collection in the "theme" of the first song. The music works itself put in quite opposite ways in these two songs, however, the first being tentative and searching in character, the last continuous and ecstatic. The central song, which sets an especially intense poem by Hart Crane, is the most chromatic of the group. A viola solo sets in motion a series of commentaries by the tenor and the piano quartet which rise to a passionate outcry and then die away.

Flanking the central song are two short songs featuring unusual instrumental duos which have the character of scherzos.

STEPHEN ALBERT: Songs from THE STONE HARP

Native New Yorker Stephen Albert worked patiently for a number of years outside what was regarded as the mainstream of contemporary musical development. In recent years, however, there has been a remarkable change in the musical environment as many composers have found new ways to use the traditional elements of tonality, which had been banned from "official" music centers for years, and as they have also rediscovered that in all periods, some of the most powerful music was also the most direct.

Following teenage composition studies with Elie Siegmeister and Darius Milhaud, Albert continued at the Eastman School with Bernard Rogers, and later studied in Philadelphia with Joseph Castaldo and George Rochberg. In recent years, he has declined academic positions, sensing there a tendency to limit creativity to certain officially sanctioned techniques and approaches. The development of what has been referred to as "the New Romanticism" began to draw attention to Albert's work, a recognition capped by the award of the 1985 Pulitzer Prize in music to the composer for his symphony RiverRun.

For many years, Albert's works for voice and instrumental ensemble were settings of texts by James Joyce. Songs from The Stone Harp represents a new poetic direction, the first non-Joyce texts that Albert has set in over a decade. The poems come from a book by John Haines, a homesteader in the Alaskan wilderness, who has lived for years in that harsh, beautiful land with none of what we regard as the necessary amenities--indoor plumbing, electricity, or telephone. His poems about the northern Arctic landscape and life allow concrete observations to turn into metaphorical ruminations. Written in the 1970s, these poems are simultaneously bound up with both the real Arctic and with our

imagination of the Arctic.

Originally composed in 1988 on a commission from New York percussionist Jonathon Haas, the songs were at that time scored for tenor, timpani/vibraphone, and harp, with the timpani used as a melody instrument against the voice, the harp serving as intermediary. When the piece was finished, Albert decided that it did not yet give him the sound he wanted, so he recast it with the addition of a cello, in its present form, which is receiving its first performance here. (Still intrigued with the possibilities of sound, Albert has since prepared a soprano version of the cycle in which the melody, sounding an octave higher, is joined by two violas, two cellos, hard and timpani/vibraphone.) These enlargements of the cycle have allowed the composer to be more expansive and sensuous--as he puts it, to "do things I denied myself in the first version." In all versions, the melodic line remains the same, but the score is progressively enriched, instrumentally and harmonically.

JOSEPH SCHWANTNER: Distant Runes and Incantations

A member of the faculty at the Eastman School of Music, Chicago native Joseph Schwantner studied music at the Chicago Conservatory and at Northwestern University, where he earned his doctorate in 1968; his teachers included Alan Stout and Anthony Donato. In 1970, he began an association with the Boston Musica Viva for which he has composed many works, Distant Runes and Incantations being the most recent. A 1979 Pulitzer Prize winner himself, he also received first prize in the Kennedy Center's Friedheim Competition in 1981 for Music of Amber.

Distant Runes and Incantations is scored for six players: flute and clarinet, violin and cello, and piano and percussion. Schwantner is a colorist of dramatic bent. After abandoning the strict serial style of a few early works, he began composing in a freer style, with highly inventive instrumental effects and lyrical gestures, often deployed in dreamlike images.

At the time of its premiere, Schwantner noted that the title was drawn from a poem he had written that provides a suggestive background for the music, not conceived in any sense as an "illustration," but simply as a source of suggestive images. He still prefers to let these images stand in place of a more formal description of the music. The beginning of the poem follows:

Give heed...
 Lord of the dark winds
Give heed...
 Solitary sentinel of the black moors,
Forever vigiland...
 Cloaked guardian of the ancient citadel,
Forever endure...
 You who so long remained watchful, ever steadfast,
 ...how endless the time, dutiful servant.

The composer noted: "The piano seems to play the role of the mysterious and mythical person, 'Lord of the dark winds.'"

-- Notes by STEPHEN LEDBETTER --

* * *

Texts for
Crossing the Meridian
and
Songs from THE STONE HARP
are on the following pages.

Your help in sustaining the mood of these works by turning pages as quietly as possible -- and only at the conclusion of each piece -- is deeply appreciated.

Songs from THE STONE HARP

Poems by JOHN HAINES

1. WINTER EVENING

A Road deep'ning in the north, string with steel, resonant
in the winter evening as though the earth were a harp
soon to be struck as if a spade rang in a rock chamber in the night.

Glittering with mica a figure like a tree turning to stone standing on
its charred roots and tried to sing, and the only poet is the wind,
a drifter who walked in from the coast with empty pockets.

He stands on the road at evening making a sound like a
stone harp strummed by a hand full of leaves.

2. WOLVES

Last night I heard wolves howling, their voices coming from afar
over the wind-polished ice, so much brave solitude in that sound.

Their voices, their voices rang through the frozen water of my human sleep,
their voices rang through the frozen water of my human sleep.

Blown by the night wind with the moon for an icy sail,
with the moon for an icy sail.

3. WINGBEAT

Flocks of evening swallows wheel overhead.

That vast wheel turning, that vast wheel turning in the sky,
turning and turning, that vast wheel turning in the sky,
turning, that vast wheel turning on the axle of the sun,
the wild cries, the passionate wingbeat as the creaking helm
of the summer comes around;

that vast wheel turning, that vast wheel turning in the sky on the axle of the sun,
and the lumbering ship plunges on.

All around us in the twilight a floating bell, your evening is here.

4. THE LEMMINGS

No one is pleased with himself or with others,
no one squeaks gently or touches a friendly nose,
in this darkness beneath a calm whiteness
there are growls and scuffles,
the close smell of a neighbor makes them all dream
of a brown river swelling toward the sea;
In each small breast, in each small breast,
the hated colony disintegrates,
the hated colony disintegrates, the hated colony disintegrates.

5. CHILDREN OF WIND AND SHADOW

We pressed our faces against the freezing glass,
saw the red soil mixed with snow and a strand of barbed wire;
A line of boxcars stood open at the siding,
their doorway briefly afire in the sunset.
The children of wind and shadow,
gone off with their rags and hunger to the blue edge of night.
Our train began to move, bearing north,
sounding its hoarse whistle in the starry gloom of the canyon.

Crossing the Meridian

1. JULY 18, 1846, CROSSING THE GREAT DIVIDE

An end or a beginning:
is this the place where being separates
from itself the precise moment
the space between pulse and pulse

At one instant we are moving towards
transporting the furniture of our lives
bringing the particularities of one existence
to an imagined point where we are taken in
formalized justified like an embrace
without an end

but no love is so final merely
having traced ourselves back to our
Atlantic beginnings
we change from source to source
leap to a new love plunging westward
where once we looked backward all the way

now hesitant among the mountains
we pass across the invisible boundary
that divides self from self
and move forward heartlong towards the other sea
a twin
a mirror of ourselves

2. THAT SENSUAL PHOSPHORESCENCE

That 'sensual phosphorescence
my youth delighted in'
now lies almost behind me
like a land of dreams
wherein an angel
of hot sleep
dances like a diva
in strange veils
thru which desire
looks and cries

And still she dances
dances still
and still she comes
at me
with breathing breasts
and secret lips
and (ah)
bright eyes

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