

The Smithsonian Associates Presents

20th CENTURY CONSORT

April 15, 2000

Marion and Gustave Ring Auditorium,
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

The Smithsonian Associates
presents

20th Century Consort

Christopher Kendall, Artistic Director and conductor

Elisabeth Adkins, violin
Glenn Donnellan, violin
Daniel Foster, viola
Holly Hamilton, violin
David Hardy, cello
Pam Hentges, violin
Loren Kitt, clarinet
Lisa Emenheiser Logan, piano
Daniel Matsukawa, bassoon
Robert Oppelt, contrabass
Sara Stern, flute
Nancy Thomas-Weller, viola
Rachel Young, cello
Susan Schilperoort, manager
Curt Wittig, electronics
Marcus Wyche, stage manager



Saturday, April 15, 2000
Pre-Concert Discussion 4:00 p.m.
Concert 5:00 p.m.

Marion and Gustave Ring Auditorium
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

The 20th Century Consort's 1999-2000 performance series is sponsored by The Smithsonian Associates and funded in part by generous contributions from The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, Sigrid Biow, The Aaron Copland Fund for Music, the National Endowment for the Arts and the Friends of the 20th Century Consort.



The Smithsonian Associates

Pre-Concert Discussion

Christopher Kendall, conductor;
Jennifer DeLapp, Scholar

Program "Simple Gifts"

Shaker Loops John Adams

- I. Shaking and Trembling
- II. Hymning Slews
- III. Loops and Verses
- IV. A Final Shaking

Ms. Adkins, Mr. Donnellan, Mr. Foster, Mr. Hardy, Ms. Hentges,
Mr. Kendall, Mr. Oppelt, Ms Young

Four Souvenirs Paul Schoenfield

- I. Samba
- II. Tango
- III. Tin Pan Alley
- IV. Square Dance

Ms. Adkins, Ms. Logan

Intermission

Appalachian Spring Aaron Copland

Ms. Adkins, Mr. Donnellan, Mr. Foster, Ms. Hamilton, Mr. Hardy,
Ms. Hentges, Mr. Kendall, Mr. Kitt, Ms. Logan, Mr. Matsukawa, Mr. Oppelt,
Ms. Stern, Ms. Thomas-Weller, Ms. Young



The audience is invited to join the artists in the Plaza Lobby for an informal post-concert reception, sponsored by the Friends of the 20th Century Consort

Program Notes

by Steven Ledbetter

JOHN ADAMS (b. 1947)

Shaker Loops

A native of Massachusetts, John Adams achieved his “musical awakening into consciousness” in Symphony Hall, sometime in the 1950s, when an elderly female relative gave him a ticket to a concert. “I sat in about the 8th row; Richard Burgin conducted, and the very first orchestral sound I heard was a double string orchestra, that incredible G-minor chord that opens Vaughan Williams’s *Tallis Fantasy*. It was a primal experience!” Adams learned to play the clarinet and went on to study at Harvard, where he studied primarily with Leon Kirchner. “My music was always fairly tonal, but then it was expressionistic in a way that is hard to define.” He was also active as a conductor at Harvard, where he became director of the Bach Society, and played clarinet professionally (he was a member of the orchestra in the American premiere of Schoenberg’s *Moses und Aron*, which Sarah Caldwell conducted at the Boston Opera Company).

Upon receiving his M.A. from Harvard, Adams moved to San Francisco, where he has lived, taught, and composed since 1972. He became involved with the San Francisco Symphony when he worked with Edo de Waart to implement a series of concerts entitled “New and Unusual Music,” beginning in 1980. The series received national attention and became the model for a Composer-in-Residence program operating with a number of American orchestras, in which a composer forms an extended relationship with an ensemble, assisting the music director in choosing new music by other composers for performance and writing new pieces to be given their premieres by the host orchestra.

In the early years, John Adams’s music included works for traditional instruments as well as electronic music. Working in one medium has sometimes helped shape his views of another. Work with electronics allowed him to experience the sound directly—while composing—in its precise, full sonority (a luxury not normally granted to composers for instruments, unless they happen to be writing for a single instrument that they can play themselves).

Electronic music often relies more on timbre and pulse than on, say, melody, as a shaping force. The experience of working with the medium affected what Adams wanted to hear when he was writing for instruments as well—his ear and his imagination were newly sensitized to the power of sonority, of timbre, of instrumental color.

During the 1970s Adams became interested in the kind of music described by the term “minimalist,” based in overlapping repeated patterns and steady pulses. Many composers have worked with minimalist ideas in recent years, coming at them from different directions, whether by way of Indian classical music (like Philip Glass) or through the influence of an inveterate experimenter such as John Cage, or African drumming (Steve Reich). Adams encountered minimalist ideas in a performance that he conducted at the San Francisco Conservatory, sometime in the mid-1970s, of a work by Steve Reich. “I saw some possibilities in that, in developing on this extremely simple music, building much more complex structures, a much richer harmonic palette. The ‘minimalist’ qualities that I began to use were the insistent pulse and the repetitive nature of the building up of structures. My first piece that qualifies as minimalist was *Phrygian Gates*, a large work for solo piano—that was a rather strict, severe composition, a lot of pre-compositional decisions were made; things have loosened up more recently.” One might ask whether his years in California led him to find solutions in Asian music, as so many Californians did, but he insisted that this was not the case. “Despite the fact that I’ve lived in California all these years, I am still terribly European-oriented, my cultural sympathies still lie with German music.”

Adams rather quickly distinguished himself from the other composers known for the “minimalist” approach—particularly Terry Riley, Philip Glass, and Steve Reich—by finding fruitful connections between “minimalism” and older, “maximal,” techniques, which continued in many later works.

His music features more rapid changes of activity than was the case in the sometimes hypnotic, seemingly endless, repetitions of older minimalist music. *Harmonium for chorus and orchestra* (1981) and *Grand Pianola Music* (1982) moved farther away from the purest minimalism, with considerable dramatic contrast and a pronounced sense of motion and sectional articulation. Adams has become best known for his two operas, *Nixon in China* and *The*

Death of Klinghoffer, both to librettos by Alice Goodman based on recent actual events and memorably staged by Peter Sellars, both of which enjoyed singular success.

Adams seems to like alternating works of carefully controlled emotion, building over long arches to a substantial climax, as in his moving work for baritone and orchestra, *The Wound-Dresser*, which sets Walt Whitman's description of caring for the dead and dying young men in the Washington field hospitals during the Civil War—a text that cannot help evoking the more recent scourge of AIDS, which saw a generation dying pointlessly. Yet this quiet, profound score came soon after a wildly devil-may-care orchestral work called *Fearful Symmetries* (the two pieces were released on the same recording, as if to point up their striking opposition in mood. His more recent works have included the quirky and vivacious *Gnarly Buttons*, for clarinet and chamber orchestra, and the lyrical and expressive *Violin Concerto*, which has received a number of major awards.

Today, John Adams is one of our best-known American composers. When he composed *Shaker Loops*, he was just beginning the work that was to propel him to the forefront of American composition. At that time he had the good fortune to be able to work almost the way a composer of electronic music does—hearing a reading of the piece in draft, recording it, listening to it, refining it, and hearing it again in successively closer approximations of his vision. This happened through his directorship of the New Music Ensemble at the San Francisco Conservatory, which gave him an ensemble that could, when desired, function as a workshop for the composer.

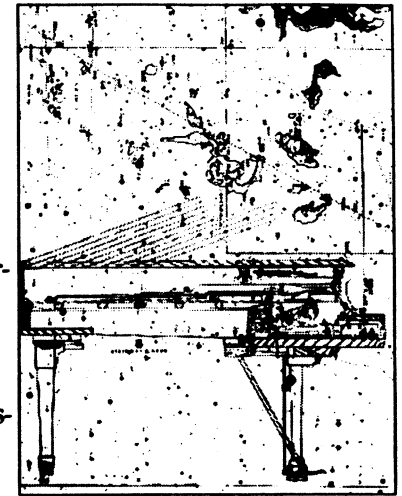
In the fall of 1977 Adams was experimenting with a trio of violins playing certain tremolo patterns. This material grew into a work, *Wavemaker*, performed the following February, then further reworked for amplified string quartet. The second version was played by the Kronos Quartet at the Cabrillo Festival in August 1978, but the composer withdrew it for further refinement after a single performance. Through the autumn of 1978, he worked with a group of Conservatory string players, rehearsing, testing, and rewriting the piece until it assumed its present shape.

Shaker Loops is a “modular” composition for seven solo strings or seven-part string orchestra. The term “modular” implies that the piece is built up out of repeated sections that run simultaneously in

the different parts (though rarely repeating themselves at the same time). Each instrumental line consists of patterns that recur over and over, gradually changing in one part or another, so that the listener hears a constant pulsing activity with a very gradual change of harmony and sonority on the large scale.

The score is divided into four sections which run directly from one to the other. These sections are quite distinct, each being characterized by a particular style of string playing, yet the boundaries between sections seem to be made purposely misty, so that we find ourselves moving gradually from, say, “Shaking & Trembling” to “Hymning Slews.” It is worth noting here that the title, *Shaker Loops*, and the references in the section headings to “hymning” and to “verses” do not imply anything like a direct borrowing from the music of the people called Shakers, members of the Millennial Church, who were well established in certain areas of New England a century ago (including regions where John Adams grew up), but who are now virtually extinct. The services of the Shakers were filled with music and dance in which, they felt, they were seized by a divine power and carried to a level of rapture. The musical “shaking” of the measured tremolo throughout much of John Adams's score may capture some of the fine frenzy of the Shakers (at a climactic moment, he calls upon the performers to “Shake!”), but does not make use of any of their hymn tunes as the title might lead us to expect (and as Aaron Copland did in *Appalachian Spring* over fifty years ago). The pun arises rather from the frequent use of the measured tremolo, a musical “shake,” as a fundamental rhythmic pattern in the score. The word “Loops” in the title refers to the repeated musical ideas by analogy with “tape loops” that are often used in the creation of electronic music, a segment of sound material on tape that is repeated over and over again. Here, of course, the “loops” are played “live” by the performers.

The composer's own description of *Shaker Loops* describes the course of the work very clearly:



The four sections, although they meld together evenly, are really quite distinct, each being characterized by a particular style of string playing. The outside movements are devoted to “shaking,” the fast, tightly rhythmicized motion of the bow across the strings. The “slews” of Part II are slow, languid *glissandi* heard floating within an almost motionless pool of stationary sound (played *senza vibrato*). Part III is essentially melodic, with the celli playing long, lyrical lines (which are nevertheless loops themselves) against a background of muted violins, an activity which gradually takes on speed and mass until it culminates in the wild push-pull section that is the emotional high-point of the piece. The floating harmonics, a kind of disembodied ghost of the push-pull figures in Part III, signal the start of Part IV, a final dance of the bows across the strings which concludes with the four upper voices lightly rocking away on the natural overtones of their strings while the celli and bass provide a quiet pedal point beneath.

PAUL SCHOENFIELD

Four Souvenirs, for violin and piano

Paul Schoenfield was born in Detroit on January 24, 1947. He is one of an increasing number of composers whose music is inspired by the whole world of musical experience—popular styles both American and foreign, vernacular and folk traditions, and the “normal” historical traditions of cultivated music-making, often treated with sly twists. He frequently mixes in a single piece ideas that grew up in entirely different worlds, making them talk to each other, so to speak, and delighting in the surprises their interaction evokes. For example, themes from Wagner’s *Tannhäuser* turn up in his evocation of country fiddle music, the *Three Country Fiddle Pieces for violin and piano*, one of his first works to be recorded. Similarly in *Carolina Morning* we find elements of the 1922 song *Carolina in the Morning*, which Gus Kahn [words] and Walter Donaldson [music] wrote for a revue called *The Passing Show of 1922*.

Schoenfield is a pianist and composer who, he says, “ran away at 16” from his native town. He studied at Carnegie-Mellon Institute, where he became assistant to Nikolai Lopatnikoff; later he studied with Robert Muczynski at the University of Arizona. After living in Minnesota for about six years, he moved to Ohio, where he spent several years on the faculty of the University of Akron before moving to Israel. He recently returned to Ohio.

Schoenfield’s shorter chamber works with characteristic titles—*Three Country Fiddle Tunes; Vaudeville; Cafe Music; and Elegy, Rag, and Boogie*—and longer pieces such as the piano concerto often refer to popular styles of entertainment music, often reflecting his own Orthodox Jewish tradition, even though Schoenfield transmutes them clearly into concert works—serious compositions with a sense of humor.

Regarding his *Four Souvenirs for violin and orchestra*, the composer writes:

Four Souvenirs was commissioned by the Soviet emigré Lev Polyakin. Although a classical violinist by training, Lev has had a proclivity for jazz since coming to this country. In addition to being a member of the Cleveland Orchestra, he frequently performs at Cleveland’s jazz clubs.

Specifically, he asked for some short pieces that could be played at “Night Town,” a local jazz spot that specializes in bringing old jazz styles to the fore. Thus these pieces are in fact actual souvenirs, music that one could hear during the great radio days of the 1920s.

AARON COPLAND (1900-1990)

Appalachian Spring, Ballet for Martha

American composers’ urge to write in a nationalistic, “American” style ran deeply before Aaron Copland created one way of doing so in the 1920s. His desire to become recognizably “American” led at first to an encounter with jazz elements (though never with actual jazz composition) in the *Organ Symphony, Music for the Theater*, and the *Piano Concerto*. Though these works marked Copland as a man to watch and hinted at the course of things to come, they were regarded by many as “difficult” scores. And his style became still more complex at the beginning of the 1930s with the *Symphonic Ode*, the *Short Symphony*, and the granitic *Piano Variations*.

But the social changes of the 1930s brought a general interest among the leftist artists and thinkers with whom Copland was friendly in attracting a wider audience than ever before, in addressing the common man and expressing his hopes, dreams, and desires by artistic means. Copland was one of a generation of composers who shared this desire; he accomplished the change of viewpoint with notable success, simplifying his style for greater

accessibility, but never ceasing to be utterly individual in sound or approach. The simplicity heightened certain elements that had not been apparent in his music earlier—most notably an extraordinary tenderness that never becomes sentimental. At the same time, Copland's music retained its energy and verve, its sense of space and color in laying out orchestral lines; thus his music is instantly recognizable as proceeding from the same musical imagination, no matter what its style.

Copland had already written two popular ballets based on western themes—a striking achievement in imagination for a composer city-born and city-bred. Both *Billy the Kid*, composed for Eugene Loring, and *Rodeo*, composed for Agnes de Mille, had been notable successes, so it could have been no surprise when Martha Graham asked him to compose a ballet for her. Graham presented him with a scenario to which he invented his music, scoring it for thirteen instruments because that was all that could be accommodated in the Coolidge Auditorium at the Library of Congress, where the premiere was to take place.

Copland had no title in mind as he composed; Graham suggested *Appalachian Spring*, which was a phrase she had liked from a poem by Hart Crane. The scenario is a simple one, touching on primal issues of marriage and survival, on the eternal regeneration suggested by spring. It is set in the Pennsylvania hills early in the nineteenth century.

The bride-to-be and the young farmer-husband enact the emotions, joyful and apprehensive, their new domestic partnership invites. An older neighbor suggests now and then the rocky confidence of experience. A revivalist and his followers remind the new householders of the strange and terrible aspects of human fate. At the end the couple are left quiet and strong in their new house.

Shortly after the premiere, Copland prepared a version for full orchestra that contains the substance of the ballet, omitting a few passages that Copland felt were of interest only when accompanying the danced story. For many years that was the only way one could hear the music of *Appalachian Spring*, except in the performances of the Graham company. But in the last decade or two, many performances have chosen to feature the original scoring for thirteen instruments, though still using the shortened form of the orchestral version. This evening's performance will include the entire ballet score as Copland wrote it for Martha Graham. The

score has no feeling of restraint from its necessary limitation to thirteen instruments. Even when writing for full orchestra, Copland has always tended to produce a lean sound, lithe and athletic; the use of the smaller ensemble simply highlights that tendency in his work.

All of Copland's three major ballet scores make use of old folk melodies, but *Appalachian Spring* uses the least; the only tune to pre-date the composition is the Shaker hymn "Simple Gifts," which serves as the basis of a series of variations near the end of the ballet. But the tune also plays a background role in unifying the entire score; from the introduction onward, we frequently hear a three-note motive that is easily recognizable as the first five notes of "Simple Gifts" in outline form. From this motive comes the entire triadic "sound" of the ballet. It employs a harmonic style often referred to "white-note harmony" because its elements can be found by playing on all the white notes of the piano keyboard; this diatonic sound, even when employed in chords dissonant by traditional harmonic standards, seems fresh and clean compared to the endless, sometimes overheated, chromaticism of late romantic music. When used here, to evoke a new world, an open frontier being settled by hardy individuals, Copland makes it by turns strong, assertive, even acerbic, or delicate and tender. Through all its changing moods, Copland's score calls up a sense of the optimism and courage, the vigor and energy, and the deep wellspring of faith and hope that we like to regard as characteristic of the American experience.

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