Brown New Music presents

SCHITT

Friday, December 10th 2004
Grant Recital Hall

  Butch Rovan, clarinet
  Katherine Bergeron, RCA victrola

Eleven Echoes of Autumn (1966) George Crumb
  Molly Birnbaum, alto flute
  Alex Kotch, clarinet
  Drew Nobile, violin
  Zen Canaday, piano

--- intermission ---

Little London Trio (1985) Peter Schickele
  Drew Nobile, violin
  Arthur Kim, violin
  Adam Pogoff, viola

String Quartet no. 4 (1989) Alfred Schnittke
  iii. Largo
  Drew Nobile, violin
  Arthur Kim, violin
  Adam Pogoff, viola
  Becca Anzalone, ‘cello
Workers Union (1975)
Louis Andriessen

Ronald Beimel, whistling
Gwen Fuertes, Grant Recital Hall / scrap metal
Whit Bernard, Grant Recital Hall / scrap metal
Greg Kuwaye, electric bass
Andrew Delollis, sine wave oscillator with telegraph key

NOTES

Joseph Butch Rovan
Winding Up (1995)

Joseph Butch Rovan is a composer and performer on the faculty of the Department of Music at Brown University, where he co-directs the MacColl Studio for Electronic Music and the Ph.D. program in Computer Music and Multimedia. Prior to joining Brown he directed CEMI, the Center for Experimental Music and Intermedia, at the University of North Texas, and was a “compositeur en recherche” with the Real-Time Systems Team at the Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique (IRCAM) in Paris. Rovan worked at Opcode Systems before leaving for Paris, serving as Product Manager for MAX, OMS and MIDI hardware.

Rovan is the recipient of several awards, including a jury selection and second prize in the 1998 and 2001 Bourges International Electroacoustic Music Competitions, and first prize in the 2002 Berlin Transmediale International Media Arts Festival. Recent performances include the premiere of his “Hopper Confessions” for cello and interactive electronics at the 2003 Festival Synthèse in Bourges, France. Rovan frequently performs his own work, including performances at the 1999 International Computer Music Conference (ICMC) in Beijing, the 2000 SEAMUS conference at UNT, the 2000 ICMC in Berlin and the 2002 New Interfaces for Musical Expression (NIME) conference in Dublin. His interactive scores for dance have been programmed in Munich, Paris, Reims, Monaco, the 2001 SEAMUS conference in Baton Rouge and the 2001 ICMC in Havana. Rovan currently serves as American representative on the board of directors of the International Computer Music Association. His music has been released on the Wergo, EMF and Traumton labels.

Rovan’s research into gestural control and interactivity has been featured in IRCAM’s journal “Resonance,” “Electronic Musician”, the Computer Music Journal, the Japanese magazine “SoundArts” and is featured on the CDROM “Trends in Gestural Control of Music”, published by IRCAM (2000). His research has been presented at the international conference “KANSEI: The Technology of Emotion”, the 1998 ICMC, the 1998 IEEE International Conference on Systems, Man, and Cybernetics, the 1998 SEAMUS conference, and at the Bauhaus summer workshop in Dessau, Germany. His dramatic work “Vis-à-vis, for voice, interactive computer music and interactive video, will be released on DVD by the EMF label.

Winding Up is a memorial to things passing, and about winding up where one did not expect. Winding up the victrola brings a whole world of scratches, pops, and low-fidelity audio to life—timbres that have disappeared with the compact disc, but which can now create a unique kind of listening. Here a Victor Talking Machine Company victrola (circa mid 1920s) spins fragments of a Paul Whiteman record, “Oriental Fox Trot” (Cui's "Orientale"), while the clarinetist pieces together fragments of his disassembled instrument in new ways. Ultimately a point of connection between the two distant worlds is found, a moment of song. But it is a window that closes as quickly as it opens, melody losing itself in the welcoming surface noise of a spinning 78.

Joseph Butch Rovan

George Crumb (b. 1929)
Eleven Echoes of Autumn (1966)
George Crumb was born in Charleston, West Virginia, in 1929. He received his doctorate in music from the University of Michigan. Crumb's music often juxtaposes contrasting musical styles. The references range from the western art-music tradition, to hymns and folk music, to non-Western musics. Many of Crumb's works include programmatic, symbolic, mystical and theatrical elements, which are often reflected in his beautiful and meticulously notated scores. Crumb retired from his teaching position at the University of Pennsylvania after more than 30 years of service. Awarded honorary doctorates by numerous universities and the recipient of dozens of awards and prizes, Crumb makes his home in Pennsylvania, in the same house where he and his wife of more than 50 years raised their three children. A few years after writing Eleven Echoes of Autumn, in 1968, Crumb won the Pulitzer Prize for his Echoes of Time and the River the weekend after being fired from his teaching position at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Crumb is still writing music and leading performances today.

Eleven Echoes of Autumn was composed during the spring of 1966 for the Aeolian Chamber Players (on commission from Bowdoin College). The eleven pieces constituting the work are performed without interruption:

Eco 1. Fantastico
Eco 2. Languidamente, quasi lontano (“hauntingly”)
Eco 3. Prestissimo
Eco 4. Con bravura
Eco 5. Cadenza I (for Alto Flute)
Eco 6. Cadenza II (for Violin)
Eco 7. Cadenza III (for Clarinet)
Eco 8. Feroce, violento (“hauntingly”)
Eco 9. Serenamente, quasi lontano
Eco 10. Senza misura (“gently undulating”) 
Eco 11. Adagio (“like a prayer”)

Each of the echi exploits certain timbral possibilities of the instruments. For example, eco 1 (for piano alone) is based entirely on the 5th partial harmonic, and eco 2 on violin harmonics in combination with 7th partial harmonics produced on the piano (by drawing a piece of hard rubber along the strings). A delicate aura of sympathetic vibrations emerges in echi 3 and 4, produced in the latter case by alto flute and clarinet playing into the piano strings. At the conclusion of the work the violinist achieves a mournful, fragile timbre by playing with the bow hair completely slack.

The most important generative element of Eleven Echoes is the “bell motif” – a quintuplet figure based on the whole-tone interval – which is heard at the beginning of the work. This diatonic figure appears in a variety of rhythmic guises, and frequently in a highly chromatic context.

Each of the eleven pieces has its own expressive character, at times overlaid by quasi-obbligato music of contrasting character, e.g, the “wind music” of the alto flute and clarinet in eco 2 or the “distant mandolin music” of the violin in eco 3. The larger expressive curve of the work is arch-like: a gradual growth of intensity to a climactic point (eco 8) followed by a gradual collapse.

Although Eleven Echoes has certain programmatic implications for the composer, it is enough for the listener to infer the significance of the motto-quote from Federico Garcia Lorca: “...y los arcos rotos donde sufre el tiempo” (“...and the broken arches where time suffers”). These words are softly intoned as a preface to each of the three cadenzas (echi 5-7) and the image “broken arches” is represented visually in the notation of the music which underlies the cadenzas.

George Crumb

Notes written for the CRI recording of
Eleven Echoes of Autumn, 1965 (recorded Performance by the Aeolian Chamber Players, CRI 233)

Alfred Schnittke (1934-1998)
String Quartet No. 4 (1989), Mvmt. III, Lento
Alfred Schnittke was born to Russian-German parents, and received his musical education in Austria and Moscow. He has gained great musical acclaim, particularly in Russia, Europe, and the United States, and boasts a truly impressive output of work. This includes 60 film scores, 9 symphonies, 6 concerti grossi, 4 violin concertos, 2 cello concertos, a piano concerto, 4 string quartets, and many other chamber works, ballet scores, choral and vocal works. Schnittke has written in a wide range of genres and styles. He is often considered Shostakovich's successor because of similarities in the use of irony in composition, and a complicated relationship with the Soviet government. Both are buried in Moscow's Novodevich Necropolis.

Schnittke's fourth and final string quartet is suspended between two opposing ideas. This suspended nature does not lend itself to any specific emotion, but instead creates a landscape. Alienation and contemplation are unfolded through subdued climaxes and struggles between parts. In the third movement, a dichotomy, or struggle, is played out between individuated and unified voices. The opening motive provides a fine demonstration: each voice pleads to the others in a staggered, foreboding texture. The movement develops into sections characterized either by a fragmented or unified treatment of the theme. The end meets in between these two opposing ideas, with the first violin and cello playing in unison over a rhythmically and texturally antagonistic accompaniment.

Adam Pogoff

Peter Schickele (b. 1935)
Little London Trio (1985), Mvmts. I, III

"My idea of relaxation after writing a big piece is to write a little piece, preferably one without a deadline." These are the words of Peter Schickele, a.k.a. P.D.Q. Bach, in regards to his short, creative work, Little London Trio. He is one of this country's leading composers, theorists, musical humorists, and radio personalities (for years, heard on NPR's 'Schickele Mix'). The idea for writing a string trio with unconventional scoring came from Dvorak's Terezetto, also written for two violins and viola. Schickele saw a poster advertising Dvorak's piece while on a bus, on his way to the copyist to deliver the just completed manuscript of Ceremony, the big piece that came before this little one. The work's title only refers to where the composition took place, not any 'Englishness' in the music itself. The first movement is a sort of off-kilter waltz, with frequently changing meter and a steady rhythm. The third movement is very flamboyant, with rhythmically driving sixteenth notes from beginning to end. Little London Trio is a free-spirited piece, laced with some memorable and contagious musical ideas.

Adam Pogoff

Louis Andriessen (b. 1939)
Workers Union (1975)

Louis Andriessen, one of Europe’s preeminent living composers, was born in Utrecht in 1939 into a family of composers. He studied with his father, Hendrik Andriessen, and Kess van Barren at the Royal Conservatory at the Hague, and between 1962 and 1964 with Luciano Berio in Milan and Berlin. Since then he has emerged as a central figure in the international new music scene, developing a unique, pluralistic style that often blends ideas from European free jazz with the lingering influence of the Modernist avant-garde. Perhaps in hopes of avoiding the fate of so many contemporary composers who have been unjustly characterized in terms of "influences," Andriessen tends to cite his own inspiration quite specifically: he claims late Ives to be the source of the fragmented harmonic structures of Anachronie I, while the art of Piet Mondrian is the acknowledged source of the sparse, coloristic, seemingly incomplete vision of De Stijl.

Workers Union, along with the landmark work Die Staat, (both composed 1975-76), betrays Andriessen's seminal artistic influence: his political activism. The piece presents a
distinctly neo-Marxist vision: “any number of loud instruments” pound incessantly in fixed, repetitive yet unpredictable rhythmic structures within loosely defined pitch ranges. The work is starkly industrial and yet humanistic, as unpredictable tone colors emphasize the role of the individual in the actualization of the “immanent” idea of the piece. Above all, the piece, “like the political work,” is a struggle: the performers suffer the physical and psychological consequences of their uncompromising drive towards sonic unity, sweating through fifteen minutes of unrelenting sixteenth note patterns in constantly changing meters. At first, this piece can seem mind-numbingly antagonistic, but stick with it - before long, you might find yourself identifying with the performers’ struggle, or at least pleasantly zoning out. If your mind really does start to go numb, it might help to imagine the piece’s impromptu premiere, arranged in classic Andriessen fashion in late 1975: an ensemble of twelve performers blocked an Amsterdam city street, banging on various construction materials and landing the composer in jail for the night. Way to get outside the concert hall.

Further Listening:

Reading:

Whit Bernard

Please heart (verb), mingle, discuss, share pictures, exchange phone numbers, and enjoy refreshments at the front of the hall during intermission and after the concert.

. . .

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