

music at convocation hall

SYN-AESTHETICS

Music: Howard Bashaw, Malcolm Forsyth

Choreography: Linda Rubin

Lighting and Projection Design: Lee Livingstone

Lecturer and Guest Host: John Charles
Critic, Edmonton Sun

**Tuesday & Wednesday,
April 16 & 17, 1996**

7:00 pm *Pre-Concert*
Introduction
and Reception

8:00 pm *Concert*

**Timms Centre for the Arts
University of Alberta**

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PROGRAM

Sonata for Trumpet and Piano* Malcolm Forsyth
(b. 1936)

- I Commodo e cantabile
- II Gently and rhythmic
- III Vivace

Fordyce Pier, trumpet
Janet Scott-Hoyt, piano and synthesizer
Lighting and Projection Design: Lee Livingstone

Lines to Fanny Brawne (poem of John Keats) Malcolm Forsyth
In the dying of anything (poem of Brian Patten)

Kathleen Lotz, soprano
Roger Admiral, piano
Lighting and Projection Design: Lee Livingstone

About Chords* (1994) Howard Bashaw
(b. 1957)

Corey Hamm and Scott Godin, pianos
Carl Hare, actor***
Dancers: James Viveiros and Debbi Onufreychuk
Choreography: Linda Rubin
Lighting and Projection Design: Lee Livingstone
Costume Design: David Lovett

Six Poems of Catullus (1992) Howard Bashaw
(subtitles by the composer)

- XIVB Shudder
- LXIX Rufus
- CV Muses
- XXV Thallus
- LXXXV Love & Hate
- LXX Love, Wind & Water

Russell Whitehead, trumpet
Malcolm Forsyth, trombone
Christopher Taylor, bass trombone
Kathleen Lotz, soprano
Mary Fearon, Craig Scott and John Hermans, French horns
Lighting and Projection Design: Lee Livingstone

*World premiere

***With permission of the Canadian Actors' Equity Association

INTERMISSION

Timepieces - 17 miniatures (1993)*

Howard Bashaw

1. Introduction
2. Rantillism I: Mild Admonition
3. Austere Reflection
4. Calculation I: Structural Acceleration & Convergence
5. Uncertain Gathering
6. Rantillism II: Interrogation
7. Remembrance Day Part I
8. Remembrance Day Part II
9. Promenading with Others
10. Random Eclipsing
11. Calculation II: Five Simultaneous Tempi in Canon of Palindromes
12. Distant Wisdom
13. Accelerating Ostinato
14. Calculation III: Five Simultaneous Tempi in Canonic Phasing Texture
15. Rantillism III: Irritating in Simple Form
16. "?"
17. Calculation IV: Eolian Texture - Melody with Eighteen Simultaneous Tempi in Structural Palindrome
(The Voice in the Chimes)

Russell Whitehead, trumpet

Amanda Forsyth, cello

Norman Nelson, violin

Roger Admiral, piano

Dancers: Tamara Bliss, Dion Johnstone,

Jennifer Nikolai, and James Viveiros

Choreography: Linda Rubin

Lighting and Projection Design: Lee Livingstone

Costume Design: Linda Rubin and Tamara Bliss

*Timepieces was commissioned through the Canada Council by the Banff Centre for the Arts

Six Episodes after Keats (1979)

Malcolm Forsyth

Carl Hare, voice
Norman Nelson, violin
Amanda Forsyth, cello
Stéphane Lemelin, piano
David McNally, actor*
Choreography: Linda Rubin
Lighting and Projection Design: Lee Livingstone
Costume Design: David Lovett

Choreography
Lighting and Projection Design
Costume Design

Linda Rubin
Lee Livingstone
David Lovett
Linda Rubin
Tamara Bliss

Production Assistant
Technical Director/Lighting Board Operator
Video Graphics Technician
Sound

Jacqueline Poissant
Grant Johnson
Greg Brown
Garth Hobden

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Program Notes

Sonata for Trumpet and Piano (1994-95)

I *Commodo e cantabile*

II *Gently and rhythmic*

III *Vivace*

This work was commissioned by the trumpeter Fordyce Pier, and funded by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. It was written partly while the composer was living in France in 1994, (immediately after completing another work involving the solo trumpet, *Evangeline*, a cantata for soprano, trumpet and orchestra) and completed early in 1995, back home in Edmonton.

The first movement, *Commodo e cantabile*, evokes a striding, optimistic mood, with one of the composer's favourite rhythmic devices, the hemiola, forming its foundation: when one instrument is in 6/4 meter the other is almost invariably in 3/2.

The second movement, *Gently and rhythmic*, which the pianist can optionally perform on a synthesizer, imitates the sound of African log-drums. The muted trumpet melody is a gentle, African-inspired pentatonic song evincing the typical rhythmic subtleties of that style. The two instruments switch roles back and forth, the piano imitating the marimba upon assuming the melodic role.

Finally, in the *Vivace* we hear an opening trumpet melody of a positive and articulate style contrasted with a second theme of softer, more singing character. More conventional in form, the two themes are developed in tandem before returning for a bright and optimistic conclusion.

Lines to Fanny Brawne for high voice and piano (1991)

(Text: John Keats, 1819-1820)

The composer's fascination with the poetry of Keats began whilst he was still in high school, when he was required to recite passages from the *Ode to a Nightingale*. It was this famous romantic work which later inspired him in the composition of his piano trio, *Six Episodes after Keats*, in 1979)

In the collected edition of Keats's poems there appears a short, untitled piece under the name, *Lines supposed to have been written to Fanny Brawne (1819-1820)*. Miss Brawne was the object of Keats's devotion for much of his tragically short life, and this poem is a passionate plea for her understanding of this devotion. This song was written as the imposed work for the final round of the Canadian Music Competition in Montreal in 1991.

Lines to Fanny Brawne (continued)

This living hand, now warm and capable
Of earnest grasping, would, if it were cold
And in the icy silence of the tomb,
So haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights
That thou would[st] wish thine own heart dry of blood
So in my veins red life might stream again,
And thou be conscience-calm'd--see here it is--
I hold it towards you.

In the dying of anything

(poem by Brian Patten)

Brian Patten (b. 1946), was one of a group of three (the others being Adrian Henri and Roger McGeough) who became known as The Liverpool poets, committed to reviving poetry as a public, performed art. They flourished particularly during the 1960s in Liverpool, strongly influenced by the pop music and culture for which the city was then known. *The Mersey Sound* (1967), in the Penguin Modern Poets series, is an anthology of their work.

Speaking only that our words might bend grasses,
make paths that are both simple and possible,
we talk together and failing with words we touch.
There is nothing simpler nor more human than this.
Once ignorant of any feeling's end
we dreamt in proportion to galaxies,
measuring each other against rainbows, love burst,
fell softly soaking us.

But we lie quieter now,
older,
arms pressed out against darkness.

In the dying of anything there walks a creature looking for its
song;
huge, it bends down planets that it might ask them
the ways back to life again.

No longer one steady and running stream
we are glad to lie here,
catching what life and light we can.
There is nothing simpler, nothing more human than this.

About Chords

About Chords might seem a peculiar title for a piece whose choreography represents not abstract patterns but rather three historical characters: the early nineteenth century piano pedagogue Friedrich Wieck; his daughter Clara, one of the greatest pianists of the century; and Clara's suitor and eventual husband (over her father's strenuous objections), the composer Robert Schumann. The title stems from composer Howard Bashaw's encounter with elder Wieck's essays; its aptness became clear as another odd group of three--composer, choreographer, and musicologist--discussed the piece and the characters, trying to approach a familiar and all too easily clichéd triangle. What came to dominate our attention were the personae that emerged from the interactions of the three figures. Friedrich Wieck, seen only through his own public statements on teaching and music, and through the child he viewed as his supreme artistic creation, controlling her childhood to the point of writing a diary for her in her own voice, fades as that creation departs from the path he had marked out. Robert Schumann, devotee of Romantic literature and follower of its script of unscripted self-realization, takes as his artistic and personal task the projection of his inmost self as public persona, in a life that alternates manic bursts of creative activity with suicidal depression, until his early death in an asylum. Finally, Clara, whose career as a touring piano virtuoso and teacher spanned most of the century, strives, it seems, to have no persona but that of the medium through whom passes music, her supreme value--that which she herself composed but far more prominently that of the Great Masters (especially her late husband), whose cause she championed throughout that career.

In the end, the belief that life was essentially "about chords", that Great Music itself represents a supreme value, was the one thing that united all three. This aesthetic viewpoint was novel and far from universally accepted in the 1830s, when the three first met, but each was dedicated to it; ultimately Clara Wieck Schumann, however, most thoroughly embodied it. By making her life so effectively "about chords", she became powerfully ambivalent figure. Subordinating her own voice to that of the Great Masters of music, she lived out--despite her rebellion--the goals for which her father had shaped her. And yet, through that process of disappearing into a male-dominated musical canon, she has also emerged in her own right as a woman unmistakably visible in a musical culture that effectively kept most women safely out of public sight--and sound.

notes by David Gramit

Six Poems of Catullus

A definite challenge; to compose for soprano, trumpet, tenor trombone, bass trombone and three horns. When I was first approached about writing for this unusual ensemble, I was stumped - where to begin? I eventually managed to start by establishing two separate areas of concerns: balance and text. In the first area I had two main problems to address: how to balance one soprano with a brass sextet, and how to balance the brass instruments within the sextet itself (one could not, for example, simply adopt writing styles customary for a standard brass quintet). As for the second area - well, ask yourself: what manner of text would be best suited for this ensemble?

From here, my first step would be to divide the brass into two distinct timbral groups: the trumpet and trombones (the cylindrical bores), and the three horns (the conical bores). This symmetrical division allowed the bright and assertive qualities associated with the first group to be contrasted with the relatively mellow - or even mysterious - qualities of the second group. These two groups could then be regarded as 'forces' to be either opposed or combined in the compositional process. My next step was to consider ways of balancing the soprano with the sextet. For this, I first decided on a spatial setting in which the brass would be positioned symmetrically around the perimeter of the concert hall with the soprano standing somewhere in the center. I subsequently decided to amplify both the soprano and the brass to allow for not only refined and 'live' control of the overall balance, but also the inclusion of certain special effects such as cathedral-like reverberation.

Having arrived at these strategies for dealing with issues of balance, I then went about the nettlesome business of finding an appropriate text. The creation of two contrasting timbral 'forces', combined with the somewhat surrealistic - if not theatrical - effect of the staging and amplification provided the context I needed to take an inspired approach. At this point I decided to set text that was in Latin - the sound of this language was somehow suitable. It was then that the poems of Catullus (c.84-54 B.C.) came to mind.

The six Catullus poems I eventually chose are clearly related in that they each contain a certain tension arising from opposing forces or conflicting emotions of some kind. In XIV B (Introduction and 'Shudder') curiosity is tempered by caution - advance or retreat? In LXIX ('Rufus'), desirable physical qualities are juxtaposed with undesirable physical qualities. In CV ('Muses'), a sense of struggle and frustration arises when desire or aspiration is countered with hostile rejection. In XXV ('Thallus'), a transition in character from soft - if not friendly - sarcasm to hard and menacing aggression quickly unfolds. In LXXXV the age-old dilemma of love and hate returns. Finally, in LXX (love, Wind and

Six Poems of Catullus (continued)

Water) a mature yet whimsical poignancy is reflected in the distinction made between the way things seem and the way things really are in matters of love.

Just as the sextet could be divided into two symmetrical contrasting group, so too could the six poems just described: three poems are 'light' in character ('Rufus', 'Thallus', and 'Love, Wind and Water'), and three poems are relatively 'dark' in character ('Shudder', 'Muses' and 'Love and Hate'). The order in which the poems unfold in the musical setting creates a kind of cycle wherein the three 'light' poems alternate with the three 'dark' poems. The perimeter staging of the brass reflects this cycle in the parallel alternation of cylindrical bores with conical bores.

As for an overall sense of journey, both the design and effect of the cycle is, I suppose, faintly séance-like in nature; if the musical setting of the first poem suggests a reaching back to find and bring forth the somewhat reluctant spirit of Catullus, the setting of the last poem contains the concluding counter-suggestions of departure and farewell.

notes by Howard Bashaw

Timepieces

Two categories of time are represented in *Timepieces*: time in the programmatic sense (pieces that suggest memories or impressions of events); and time in a purely structural sense (pieces whose basic function is to articulate a distinct organization of musical time). While each of these 17 miniatures is a complete and concise musical statement, they are performed *attacca* where each movement is, to a certain extent, a preparation for the next.

The choreography for "Timepieces" is a direct reflection of both the structure and meaning of the music itself. Each of the four dancers is associated with one particular instrument throughout. The succession of scenes in the choreography is non-linear in the sense that no one scene is directly related to the next.

notes by Howard Bashaw

Six Episodes After Keats

for violin, cello and piano (1979-81)

The composer spent a year living in Hampstead, London, in 1979-80, and soon happened upon Keats House, now a museum, on the fringes of Hampstead Heath. Childhood recollections of Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale", memorised and recited, flooded back as he steeped himself in the atmosphere of the house and its memorabilia.

Walking for hour upon hour, as Keats had done, on the heath nearby, a deep sense of personal crisis found the Keats Ode becoming closely associated with the piano trio Forsyth was then writing. No mere superficiality, the titles of the six episodes were profoundly linked with the famous poem and even served to direct the composition after a certain stage, to some extent.

In a general sense the three instruments began to emerge naturally as three actors in a drama, or three points of view in a spiritual journey. the violin seems to personify the free and elevated spirit of the nightingale, achieving a state of ecstatic bliss in the fifth Episode; the cello emulates the poet's struggles in this temporal realm, and the piano acts for the most part as an objective observer, a prime instigator only in the third section.

The quotations which head the Six Episodes are:

1. A drowsy numbness pains my sense.
2. I cannot see what flowers are at my feet.
3. ...Lethewards had sunk.
4. No hungry generations tread thee down.
5. Immortal Bird.
6. Fled is that music.

There is a break between numbers 1 & 2, and between 3 & 4, and the work lasts about twenty-five minutes.

This collaboration between the Departments of Music and Drama was made possible by a grant from the Faculty of Arts Support for the Advancement of Scholarship Fund.

Tonight's concert is being recorded by CBC for future broadcast on *Two News Hours*, heard Sundays at 10:00 pm on CBC Stereo 90.9 FM

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