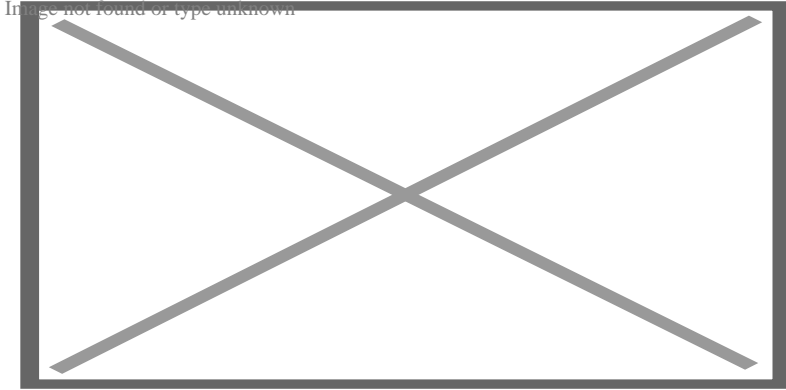


Other Minds Festival: OM 21: Panel Discussion & Concert 1, 4 of 13



Identifier

OMF.2016.03.04.c1.D

Description

Other Minds' 21st Festival of New Music took place at San Francisco's SFJAZZ Center over the course of two evenings and one afternoon during March 4-6, 2016. The three concerts featured works of ten American and international composers; Lasse Thoresen (NO), Cecilie Ore (NO), Oliver Lake (US), Larry Polansky (US), John Oswald (CA), Nicole Lizée (CA), Phil Kline (US), Michael Gordon (US), and two OM alumni, Gavin Bryars (UK), and Meredith Monk (US).

The human voice and speech played a large role in the first concert, in which half was entirely dedicated to vocal works by Lasse Thoresen, Cecile Ore, and Gavin Bryars, performed by Nordic Voices. The second half of the concert demonstrated many musical elements of pre-recorded speech in the string quartets of Phil Kline and Michael Gordon, performed by Flux Quartet.

Concert 1: Friday, March 4, 2016

Lasse Thoresen: Solbøn (2012)

Solbøn is composed over an ancient, formulaic Norwegian folk-tune, probably used as a lullaby that I transcribed - with all its tiny microtonal nuances and ornaments - from a recorded performance by Berit Opheim. She, in turn learnt it from Agnes Buen Arnås. The text of the piece gave me the idea of letting the tiny melody of only five notes, and lasting only 25 seconds, become the basis of a composition 10 minutes long. The text is a prayer for light and warmth to envelop everything we love. The work describes a process towards light translated into sound. And the inner light burst forth from inside the vocal sounds when the overtones that reside in every singer's voice, emerge.

Himmelske Fader (2012)

The tune that forms the theme of this piece I have transcribed from a recording of Ragnar Vigdal, a traditional Norwegian folk singer who has found his own personal way of performing pietistic hymn texts, with all the

fervor and pietistic humility that characterizes this spiritual tradition. The tonality of his vibrantly ornamented melodies seems to come straight from the Middle East. The third step in the melodies is neutral: Halfway between major and minor. If one uses them in a triad, they sound rather out of tune. The leading tone is also neutral. Other notes as well often deviate slightly from the tempered scale. I found a way nevertheless of developing harmonies and modulations that I thought could not be the original tonality. Sometimes the music may sound medieval, sometimes oriental. The piece begins with breathing to calm the body and soul for meditation and prayer.

This piece was commissioned by the folk music festival of Voss, a city situated in the mountains of Western Norway. These pieces were written for Nordic Voices, the spearhead ensemble of the Convergence Project, a project that aims at enriching the classical voice with singing techniques from ethnic music. They are two out of four that I have collected in my opus. 42. I won the Nordic Music Prize for this opus in 2010.

Cecilie Ore: Dead Pope on Trial! (2015) [*World Premiere]

Dead Pope On Trial! is a story about how religious beliefs when guided by superstition and hunger for power can lead to incredibly ridiculous and outrageous actions. In the year 887, when Pope Formosus, a former head of the Catholic Church, was resting peacefully in his grave, he was brutally disturbed and his corpse was dug up. His successor, Pope Stephen VII, accused him of having attained his papal status illegally. The corpse of Formosus was dressed in full papal vestments, put on a throne and accused of fraud. The judges found him guilty and punished him by cutting off his three blessing fingers, dressed the corpse in rags and threw him into a common grave.

...but he did not rest for long...

Formosus was dug up again, dragged through the streets and thrown into the Tiber River, all in order to extinguish any traces of his soul and body. But his body was found, his papal status once more restored and he was buried according to correct rites and rituals. But his peace did not last. Once more he was dug up, put on trial again and found guilty. Three more fingers were cut off and once more he was sunk in the river with heavy chains attached, only to be washed up on shore entangled in a fisherman's net and this time buried in a secret grave by his followers. But even that did not spare him a couple of more rounds. All in all poor Formosus was buried and dug up a total of six times, every time his body was more mutilated and finally also beheaded. But in spite of his tribulations, he was a persistent corpse and could finally find his peace fully restored as a pope in his own right and lies today buried next to his eminent colleagues in St Peter's Church in Rome.

...but can we be certain we have heard the last of Pope Formosus?

Text: Cecilie Ore & Bibbi Moslet; Music: Cecilie Ore

[* Commissioned by Nordic Voices and Other Minds with generous support from Tekstforfatterfondet Det Norske Komponistfond and Music Norway]

Gavin Bryars: Book of Madrigals (2002/2015)

Like many Englishmen I had sung madrigals for pleasure - usually late at night with friends, after several glasses of wine. While these madrigals have their charm, and many are extremely beautiful, I found through embarking on an extended exploration of the madrigal as a creative venture that the richest source lays in the Italian Renaissance.

It was in 1998 that I embarked on a project to write a series of madrigals for the Hilliard Ensemble, eventually deciding to collect them in 'books' in the manner of Italian madrigalists, such as Monteverdi or Gesualdo. Indeed, having written many works for the Hilliard Ensemble I sought, in writing these new madrigals, to work within the spirit and aesthetic of those from the Italian Renaissance. Coincidentally, for reasons of urgent delivery, the first four settings were written on Mondays. So I decided to write the remaining nine on successive Mondays in the summer of 2000 in our home in Victoria BC, sometimes writing two, and once three, in a day. Having done this, it seemed to commit me to writing at least seven books, each one to be written on a different

day of the week.

The Second Book (Tuesdays) is for six voices - originally the Scandinavian Trio Mediaeval (3 sopranos) and three tenors (John Potter plus two from the Hilliard Ensemble then in transition as John was leaving). It was John who pointed me towards Petrarch, and especially the very fine edition by the late Robert Durling. These madrigals set Petrarch in the original 14th century Italian, those sonnets known as the Rime Sparse ("scattered verses"), many of which have Laura as their implied subject. In setting these I have been staggered by the richness of Petrarch's invention, both in the range and choice of imagery and in the extraordinarily subtle poetic devices and techniques that he employs. I chose to write 16 madrigals for this book, using 18 poems (2 madrigals set two consecutive poems). In addition I added an extra one written as a radiophonic piece for CBC's celebration of Marconi ("Marconi's Madrigal"). I speculated that, in December 1901, the "S" that was transmitted from Poldhu in Cornwall to St. Johns in Newfoundland was, in reality, the first letter of a Petrarch sonnet....

The Fourth Book sets longer poems, the 39-line sestina instead of the 14-line sonnet. The first two of these are for eight voices and the third one is the new one, for six voices, to be given its premiere at Other Minds 21.

Book Two, no. 8: I'vidi in terra

Book Two, no. 4: Poi che voi

Book Two, no. 10: Una candida serve

Book Two, no. 14: Morte á spent

Book Four, no. 3: Chi é formato di menar sua vita*

[*World Premiere - dedicated to Benjamin Vresh Amirkhanian for his 100th Birthday]

Nordic Voices

Intermission

Phil Kline: Last Words (2015) [World Premiere]

When Felix Fan and I began to talk about a new piece for Flux, he had the idea of something with a spoken text, but we couldn't decide whose text it might be. Then a few months later I had a hunch about William Burroughs and we had a deal. Almost as soon as I began research, it seemed clear that I would use Burroughs' actual voice, that familiar, authoritative croak which seems a mix of cranky uncle and bad cop. Fortunately, the voice can be found all over cyberspace, in readings, interviews, recording projects, film and even television appearances. He clearly liked to use it as an instrument.

I originally sought out texts that were related to drug use, like the early novel Junky, but I was soon drawn to material from the later Nova Express, which expands the drug addict concept to a vast kind of sci-fi social commentary on human and machine life, where viral "Nova criminals," representing society and government, invade the body and produce language. It is a mind-bending battle on many fronts.

The passages I chose derive from an incantation of Hassan Sabbah, the "old man of the mountain." There actually was such a person, a Nizari missionary of the 11th century, who converted a community in the Alborz mountains of northern Persia. After seizing the fortress of nearby Alamut, he led an insurrection against the Seljuk Turks and founded a group of fedayeen, known as the Hashshashin, from whom we get the name assassin. Burroughs was fascinated with Hassan, and appropriated his identity to issue his stern warnings to the "boards, governments, syndicates, and nations of the world."

The Nova material embodies both the cutup and foldup techniques. There are also different variants of the same pieces found in various media. I have chosen, chopped and shuffled, as well as whittled down to the point where only a fraction remains. None of those techniques, however, seem to lessen the impact of the voice.

Michael Gordon: The Sad Park (2006)

Part 1: Two evil planes broke in little pieces and fire came.

Part 2: There was a big boom and then there was teeny fiery coming out.

Part 3: I just heard that on the news that the buildings are crashing down.

Part 4: And all the persons that were in the airplane died.

The recordings used in this piece are of children, ages 3 and 4, and were made by Loyan Beausoleil, a pre-kindergarten teacher at University Plaza Nursery School in Lower Manhattan, between September 2001 and January 2002. (My son Lev was in Ms. Beausoleil's class during this period.) Her ongoing work with these children is chronicled at <http://www.youngestwitnesses.com>

When I heard these recordings I was struck by the raw tunefulness of the children's speech. These specific segments were chosen for their musicality as well as for their content. I worked with sound designer Luke DuBois on the post-production of these tapes. In Parts 1 and 3, the sound clips are gradually slowed down to reveal the hidden acoustical properties of the speech. Parts 2 and 4 use an electronic music technique called granular synthesis, in which tiny "grains" of sound from the original source are captured and compacted together.

Flux Quartet

Musical Selections

Himmelske Fader (2012) (12:22) / Lasse Thoresen

Artists

Other Minds Festival (features)

Nordic Voices (features)

Thoresen, Lasse, 1949- (features)

Braaten, Tone Elisabeth (features)

Hanken, Ingrid (features)

Rydh, Ebbe (features)

Amundrød, Per Kristian (features)

Havrøy, Frank (features)

Asser, Told Magne (features)