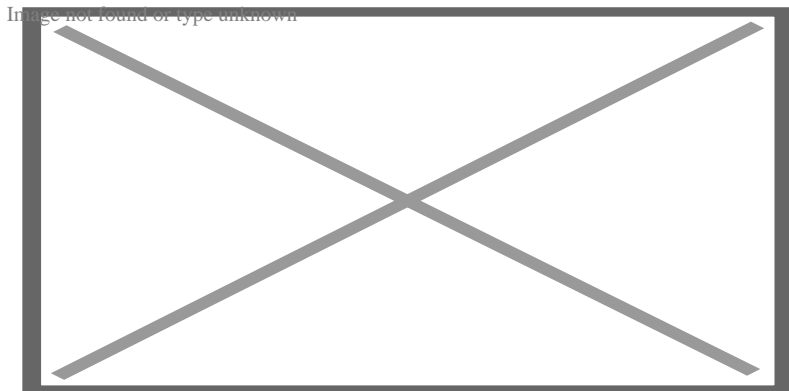


Other Minds Presents: The Heaven Ladder and Other Works for Piano by Terry Riley, 3 of 14



Identifier

OMP.2018.12.05.c1.C

Description

Other Minds' 25th season started off with a special piano concert honoring the work and vision of American composer Terry Riley. Riley, alongside award winning pianist Gloria Cheng, deliver a number of Riley's solo keyboard works before closing the concert with a collaborative 4 hands performance of Cheng Tiger Growl Roar, recently composed in 2018.

This concert was held at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Forum in San Francisco, CA on Wednesday, December 5, 2018.

Two Pieces for Piano (1958/1959) No. 1 No. 2

The Two Pieces for Piano were begun while I was working at United Airlines, writing music on my off time. Also I had just gotten married and we had a daughter on the way. I had begun to play lots of Schoenberg and some intricate Schoenberg-like pieces by composer Loren Rush. I had begun to transition from my Neoclassical period under the spell of Francis Poulenc and Darius Milhaud. The discovery of Schoenberg excited me both as a piano player and composer. I absorbed the rhythmic, textural and melodic angularity of the style without the desire to apply twelve-tone technique to my writing. They were written at the piano a phrase at a time, which I played over and over, modifying the rhythms and pitches until it felt and sounded "right."

The Walrus in Memoriam (1991, rev. 1993)

The Walrus in Memoriam was commissioned by EMI Records for a series of recordings made by Aki Takahashi of piano works composed by various artists based on tunes written by the Beatles. This work deals somewhat freely with sections from I Am the Walrus, stating its main themes in a kind of ragtime setting interspersed and ending with more spacious dreamlike episodes intended to be the memorial for John Lennon.

The Heaven Ladder, Book 7 (1994)

These five pieces were written in 1994 and are the first entirely-written-out piano works since my Two Pieces

for Piano (1958/1959). This may seem a bit strange since my instrument is the piano, but the other works I have composed over the years, and have performed in solo piano concerts, have no scores and involve a great deal of improvisation. I originally intended to write a large single movement work, but as I began exploring what was inside my present musical universe, these five pieces popped out. My concerns here were to do things that could be best expressed with the equal tempered tuning of the piano. I was unconcerned with style but very concerned with content and the desire to make these pieces bathe fully in the kind of sensuality each one is characterized by.

I surprised myself by writing “Ragtempus Fugatis,” for when I began, I had no intention of carrying the fugal aspects of the piece so far, but it seemed to want to write itself that way, using all the traditional fugal tools, such as retrograde, inversion, strettos and so forth. To thicken the plot there are some original ragtime episodes to interact with the subject and propelling minimalist interludes. This work is dedicated to my old friend and Ragtime mentor, Wally Rose.

It is no secret that I am wild about the music of Spain and Latin America and since I heard my first fandango I’ve been wanting to write one. Here I am attempting to alternate and fuse the controlled sensuality of the romantic fandango with a somewhat melancholic chorale.

“Venus in ‘94” is a waltz-scherzo with a somewhat edgy quality to its romanticism. Its beauty comes with a price-tag of a quite hazardous course, requiring the pianist to execute wide but delicate leaps through its intricate voicings and rhythms. A tip of the hat to early Schoenberg, Chopin, and Brazil.

During the writing of The Heaven Ladder my daughter Colleen, presented my wife, Ann, and I with twin grandchildren, Misha and Simone. The inspiration for the opening and closing movements, “Misha’s Bear Dance,” at 90 measures is about the closest thing I have written to a miniature and is marked by high energy and shifting poly-meters. “Simone’s Lullaby,” whose three themes are first introduced in the “Fandango” are set here in an entirely different character. They combine and recombine in a set of variations over its 64 measures. It is marked pianissimo throughout and can be repeated ad libitum.

Misha’s Bear Dance

Venus in ‘94

Ragtempus Fugatis

Fandango on the Heaven Ladder

Simone’s Lullaby

Gloria Cheng, piano

INTERMISSION

The Bull (not in program)

Simply M... (2007)

Simply M... was written in memory of Dr. Margaret Lyon who was the chairman of the Mills College (Oakland, California) music department for 45 years. A remarkable woman and close friend. She brought, among others, Darius Milhaud, Luciano Berio, and myself to the college to teach composition. Simply M... is comprised of a ballad in A flat Major which moves through the keys of A flat minor and B flat minor before settling into long sections based on a left hand E flat ostinatos in 11 beats and 18 beats.

Requiem for Wally (1997)

Requiem for Wally (1997) was written in memory of my ragtime piano mentor, Wally Rose, one of the great masters of the ragtime style. This work combines elements of Ragtime with sections built on the Raga Nat

Bhairav. Much of the ragtime pattern in Requiem is in 7/4 instead of the tradition 4/4 meter. Requiem for Wally is also in multiple sections played without pause and sometimes recycled in variation technique. In similar fashion to I Like Your Eyes, Liberty (2003-2004, in collaboration with the poet Michael McClure), the irregularly arpeggiated patterns of the Nath Bhairav section when harmonized as they are here, are somewhat reminiscent of the harmonic flavor of late Beethoven but heard in a unusual context.

Terry Riley, piano

Cheng Tiger Growl Roar (2018)

Cheng Tiger Growl Roar (2018).

Since Gloria Cheng and I are both playing solo piano on this concert we thought it would be fun to have some new music we could play together. I came up with this suite of four pieces each bearing titles derived from the initials of our names. The energies of the music both do and don't have relationship to the titles but the titles are what jump started the process.

Growl
Cheng
Tiger
Roar

Gloria Cheng and Terry Riley, piano four hands

[Notes by Terry Riley, taken from the printed program.]

Musical Selections

Misha's Bear Dance [From The Heaven Ladder, Book 7] (1994) (02:26) / Terry Riley

Artists

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (features)
Riley, Terry, 1935- (features)
Cheng, Gloria (features)