



Other Minds Festival: OM 7, Concert 2 (selections), 5 of 8

Identifier

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Object Type

Digital Audio

Musical Selections

Funebre, lento espressivo [3rd movement of “Sonata No. 1”] (1923) (5:24) / George Antheil

Description

CONCERT II Program Notes March 9 (Selections)

EZRA POUND: FIDDLE MUSIC FIRST SUITE
CAVALCANTI

Born in Hailey, Idaho, in 1885, Ezra Pound earned a degree from Hamilton College in 1905 and briefly taught at Wabash College before traveling to Europe, where he spent most of his formative years. In the early teens of the 20th century, he opened a seminal exchange of work and ideas between British and American writers such as W.B. Yeats, Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams, and especially T.S. Eliot, for whom he helped reconstruct and edit *The Waste Land*. It was at this time in Europe that Pound also became interested in Japanese and Chinese poetry. From this poetry, Pound derived and promoted Imagism, a movement in poetry stressing clarity, precision, an economy of language, and foregoing traditional rhyme and meter. In 1920, Pound began composing; His music pursued the rationale of matching speech rhythms to the musical melodic line in a spare style reminiscent of Provençal folk music mixed with an aesthetic deriving from Antheil and Stravinsky. His repertoire includes two operas, *Le Testament de Villon* and *Cavalcanti*, as well as a body of solo violin music, including *Frottola* (an antique musical form), *Al poco giorno*, and *Fiddle Music First Suite*.

Pound's iconoclastic music can be compared to that of his American contemporary Charles Ives. Both composers subjected melody to sophisticated techniques of juxtaposition and layering, Pound shaping melody with literary contours and Ives with harmonic and contrapuntal textures. Each experimented with a combination of different genres concentrated in a single complex work—Ives incorporating hymns, folk tunes, ballads and minstrelsy, as well as instrumental pieces; Pound drawing from a vocal matrix of plain chant, homophony, troubadour

melodies, bel canto and nineteenth century opera clichés, and from 20th century polyrhythms and cabaret style singing.

GEORGE ANTHEIL: SONATA NO. 1 FOR VIOLIN & PIANO

In 1923, Ezra Pound commissioned from George Antheil two sonatas as a vehicle for Pound's companion, the noted Irish-American violinist Olga Rudge. Inspired by Rudge's wild and intense artistry, Antheil produced both sonatas inside of four months. After completing the first movement of the First Sonata, Antheil returned from a visit to Tunis, determined to get beyond its "Les Noces" sound. To whatever extent Antheil succeeded in this, the modernist devices in the Sonata No. 1 went well beyond Stravinsky's idiom. Antheil's tone clusters, complex irrational meters, additive silence, and distortion of timbre had first appeared in America around 1915 in the music of Henry Cowell and Leo Ornstein, but Antheil had to invent notations for such techniques for which there is still no standardized notation.

- Ron Erickson

JAMES TENNEY: CHORALE DIAPHONIC TOCCATA 3 PAGES IN THE SHAPE OF A PEAR

3 Pages in the Shape of a Pear presents the pianist with three pointillist images of a pear, without notes, musical symbols, or any directions whatsoever. In this way, the music is all and only shape, that is, visual shape, with the various parameters of sound devised by the performer. But in addition to the long and fruitful (pardon the pun) tradition of graphic scores, Tenney is of course working, tongue-in-cheek, with the classical precedent of Erik Satie's *Morceaux en forme de poire* (Pieces in the form of a pear) from 1903. This kind of ironic distance and reference occurring simultaneously reappears closer to home in the *Diaphonic Toccata* (dedicated to Ruth Crawford Seeger) and *Chorale*, compositionally separated by over 20 years and contrasting dramatic gestures—the former a confrontation (or reconciliation?) between the piano's reckless *furioso* and the violin's calming, lingering stream of melody, and the latter where the piano's deep, resonating, dirge-like chords cut into the violin's melody with a surprisingly literal emotionalism—but which share not only a sense of experimentation and harmonic language reminiscent of Henry Cowell, but also a symmetrical, arch-like classical structure.

Shape, balance, reference, distance, equilibrium, symmetry, contrast, form. These are the particulars of a creative approach that reconstructs its own relationship to the traditional values of classicism, one which brings a mathematical conscience to free will, explores the transformation from conception to perception, and celebrates the dialectical tension that results. This is James Tenney's music.

- Art Lange

JAMES TENNEY: DIAPHONIC TRIO FOR VIOLIN & PIANO

For the last 25 years, I have been engaged in an effort to redefine "harmony," and to renew the process of harmonic evolution, which had come to a halt in Western music in about 1910. This effort inevitably involved working with pitch systems other than 12-tone equal temperament, which had been the unchallenged standard in Western music since the Baroque era. In this *Diaphonic Trio* for violin and piano (it is a "trio" because the left and right hand piano parts are always treated as two separate "voices") I have tried to combine with this concern for harmony my fascination with two other essential threads of development in earlier 20th century music. These were chromatic saturation and dissonance—especially as these conditions were exemplified in the work of Arnold Schoenberg, Alban Berg and Anton Webern in Vienna, and Charles Ives, Edgard Varèse, Carl Ruggles,

Charles Seeger and Ruth Crawford Seeger in the United States. The piano is tuned to a non-tempered 12-note scale based on the harmonic series of a low F, and the same set of pitches is used in the violin part as well, notated in the score by numbers above each note indicating its deviation in cents, or hundredths of a tempered semitone, from the corresponding note in equal temperament.

Diaphonic Trio was commissioned by Sabat/Clarke with the assistance of the Ontario Arts Council.

- James Tenney

People

Other Minds Festival (features)

Sabat/Clarke Duo (features)

Antheil, George, 1900-1959 (features)

Sabat, Marc (features)

Clarke, Stephen (Pianist) (features)

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