

Nov 10 '91

NEW MUSIC CONCERTS

Artistic Director ROBERT AITKEN

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21st season

new music
C O N C E R T S

Sunday
November 10, 1991
4 p.m.
Premiere Dance Theatre
Harbourfront

The Arditti String Quartet

Conlon Nancarrow String Quartet No. 3

Alvin Lucier Navigations

Philip Glass Mishima

Intermission

Charles Ives String Quartet No. 2

Sunday
November 10, 1991
8 p.m.

Niccolo Castiglioni Romanze

James Dillon String Quartet No. 2

Brian Ferneyhough String Quartet No. 3

Intermission

Iannis Xenakis Tetora

Gavin Bryars String Quartet No. 1

*Presented by New Music Concerts
in association with Harbourfront Corporation.*

The **Arditti String Quartet** enjoys an unmatched, international reputation as interpreters of contemporary and twentieth-century music.

Formed in 1974 by violinist Irvine Arditti while he was a student at the Royal Academy of Music, its original members have subsequently been joined by cellist Rohan de Saram, second violinist David Alberman and violist Garth Knox.

Initially formed to perform a work by the Polish composer Krzysztof Penderecki, the quartet performs a repertoire that reads like a who's who of twentieth-century composers, with many of the works being written specifically for the ensemble: recent performances have included new works by Cage, Carter, Gubaidulina, Messiaen, Penderecki and Xenakis, to mention only a few; a commission for the 1994 Salzburg festival will result in a new work for string quartet by Stockhausen—one of his first works in many years to use conventional instrumentation. In addition to its very extensive repertoire, the quartet also performs between 20 and 30 new pieces a year in concert, and even a greater number of new works, many by younger composers, in workshop situations. The quartet has also been closely involved with the Darmstadt Ferienkurse since 1982.

Future performances will include a four-concert series of the music of Berg, Schönberg and Webern, to be played in London, Paris, Frankfurt, Cologne, Antwerp and Reggio Emilia in Italy. Their recording projects involve one recital disc each year for the Gramovision label in New York, and an extensive collection for Disques Montaigne in Paris.

Gavin Bryars

"The *String Quartet No. 1* ('Between the National and the Bristol') was commissioned by the Vienna Festival at the suggestion of Edek Bartz for the Arditti Quartet to play in 1985. I had never considered writing a string quartet partly because, although a string player myself, as a bassist I was outside the privacy of such an ensemble and could only view its perfection from a distance. My original idea was to write a quartet in which each instrumental part would be a portrait of a composer associated with it as a player—the whole quartet would act as a kind of imaginary seance bring them together. (This scheme had Ysaye as first violin, Vieuxtemps as second violin, Hindemith or Kupkovic as viola and Schönberg as cello.) In the event, there was not enough time to develop this fully and I only allude to Ysaye, as composer and virtuoso, and to his connection with Busoni, his occasional accompanist.

"A great deal of the music is in a high register and uses harmonics, both natural and artificial, extensively. At the end of the piece, knowing the extraordinary virtuosity of the Arditti Quartet, I wrote a coda for which each instrument retunes one pair of strings. The first violin retunes the top two strings to G-sharp and D-sharp (giving G, D, G-sharp, D-sharp). The second violin retunes the bottom two strings to F-sharp and C-sharp (giving F-sharp, C-sharp, A, E). This is done as discreetly as possible and results, effectively, in two violins tuned a semitone apart; and [in similar fashion] with the viola and cello tuned a semitone apart (with the octave difference). From this point on, there are only harmonics. The idea was to have natural harmonics on the 'artificially' tuned strings, and artificial harmonics on the 'naturally' tuned strings. Extended solos in natural harmonics are part of the bassist's solo repertoire, and their inclusion here assimilates the bassist, a little, into the privileged company of the other strings.

"The quartet is dedicated to my sister, Hazel, who died while I was

revising the piece for the London performance and for recording."—G.B.

James Dillon

String Quartet No. 2 "Del Cuarto Elemento" was written at the request of the Greater London Arts Council and Irvine Arditti, and received its premiere in 1988. Superficially, Dillon's approach can seem to resemble Ferneyhough's, but it is distinguished by its own sense of continuity with musical discourse. Its heterogenous styles of play are integrated with an almost baroque continuo line. Dillon's writing could be considered almost traditionalist if it did not use as many quarter-tone intervals. In this piece, the composer was inspired by Bachelard's distinction between dream, symbolised by existence on earth, and the reality of the dream, symbolized by existence in water: the arpeggios, the figurations and the melodic lines are assimilated in the surfaces; the crossing glissandos provide the sense of depth. Dillon creates a hierarchy between these two types of matter: between the ornaments, the figurations, the trills and tremolos, and between the intervals using quarter-tones and glissandos of different natures. A "perpetuum mobile" propels us across these different dream materials.

Alvin Lucier

"I got the idea for *Navigations for Strings* in 1980, while recording ionospheric sounds on a Colorado mountain top. As I listened to the tapes, I noticed the presence of high-pitched tones, which recurred with unnatural regularity. I later learned that these were signals from the Omega Navigational System, used for position fixing and guidance of aircraft and ships throughout the world. I was enchanted by the natural radio emissions from the ionosphere, but irritated by the incessant man-made tones of the Omega network. No amount of filtering or editing could eliminate them.

"Over the years these tones have haunted me. I have often found

myself humming or whistling them as I went about my daily tasks. Over time, I gradually compressed them into a single four-note melodic cell, consisting of two descending whole tones, (B, A, B-flat, A-flat), outlining a minor third. I often thought of using them in a musical work.

"When I was asked to write this quartet, I decided to lay to rest these friendly but persistent musical ghosts. I would make the Omega tones disappear. One way I could do this was by slowly squeezing the third into a single tone. By means of a simple numbering system, I wrote out a long stream of continually changing melodic and instrumental combinations of the original four tones. As the players move through the combinations, they raise and lower the pitches in imperceptibly small increments, some smaller than the human ear can hear. As the size of the interval contracts, the players gradually lower the dynamic level and slow down the tempo, allowing the sounds to lengthen like shadows and recede into the ambience of the room.

"Throughout the work, audible beats are heard at speeds determined by the distances between the pitches. Starting with 14, 13 and 12 beats per second—the number of cycles between the original pitches—the beating gradually slows to zero when unison is reached. At regular intervals, the players can check their tuning by listening for beats between adjacent tones.

"*Navigations for Strings* was commissioned by Ernstalbrecht Stiebler and the Hessischer Rundfunk, and is dedicated to the Arditti String Quartet. It was written in the spring of 1991, in Berlin and Middletown, Connecticut."—A.L.

Philip Glass

Philip Glass was born in 1937 and studied first at the Juilliard School and later in Paris with Nadia Boulanger and Ravi Shankar.

The music of India was a decisive influence and led him to adopt a language of ostinati proceeding through slowly evolving repetitions.

Mishima was originally written for Paul Schrader's film of the same name, and later the orchestral score was reworked by the composer.

Conlon Nancarrow

String Quartet No. 3 was written in 1987, after a meeting between the composer and the Arditti Quartet in London in 1985, when the Arditti played the composer's first quartet; both parties expressed a desire for something new to be written. The result was the second work in this genre that the composer has completed (the original second quartet, begun many years earlier, was never finished).

The third quartet has three movements, each of which is a strict canon with the speed relationship 3:4:5:6.

In the first movement, each instrument begins in turn and ends in turn. An unusual feature of the second movement is that, with the exception of an interruption in the middle of the movement, the music uses only natural harmonics. In this movement, as in the first, each voice ends in turn.

The third movement has the same tempo relationships as the others and ends with a canonic acceleration, maintaining the same tempo relations until the final note, where the four parts eventually come together on the note C.

The Arditti Quartet gave the premiere of this quartet in Cologne in 1988, in a concert for West German Radio, who commissioned the work.

Brian Ferneyhough

"The composer is not always the most suitable person to present a new work to its listeners. Too often the immediate concerns and pressures of the act of composition obscure his view of aspects of his piece which, from the point of view of the listener, may assume major interpretative significance. The remarks on my *Third Quartet* which follow are thus intended not as a general guide to musical meaning, but far more, should be seen as a reflection of some of the most important factors influencing the manner in which the pressures of the compositional act arose from, and were articulated by, my own subjective situation.

"The final form of this quartet is quite different from that which I had planned at the outset. Initially (several years ago) I had sketched out a five-movement structure; in the event, this was finally reduced to a two-movement layout, in which the second movement contains superimposed elements of several other movemental types. The change may be attributed in large part, to questions of musical balance; at the same time, the altered perspective permitted me to regard the piece very much as a record of two very different reactions to a state of extreme inner crisis. Since both movements, very different in regard of contents, are approximately of the same length, I thought of them as polar opposites, reflecting, by their intransigent extremity, the empty spaces in between.

"The first movement moves in an almost frozen, dazed, autistic world of isolated fragments, partial, disconnected repetitions and sudden, unmotivated outbursts. The more than twenty basic textural elements are constantly being mutated, erased and recombined in a fashion which practically eliminates the possibility of establishing a single underlying continuity. At the same time, the overall form reflects closely the self-preoccupied nature of its materials in a dual mirroring strategy: on the one hand, the individual sections are interlocked in a complex pattern of sub-surface

symmetries; on the other, the final third of the movement reflects the patterns and texture types of the first two-thirds by replacing each element with its 'complementary' element from the opposite end of the spectrum.

"The second and final movement explodes into an iridescent flood of irate images, almost cadence-like in its constantly changing instrumental combinations and wildly fluctuating superpositions of texture and tempo. The complexity of this movement resides largely in the fact that a number of movements have been, in effect, compacted together, each of them having been 'damaged' in greater or lesser degree by the impact. Whilst the attentive listener may well discover residual features of a rondo structure, this should be understood less as a consciously imposed dictate than as a reflection of the fact that at least three distinct processual strata are running concurrently, albeit surfacing into the domain of the audible only at certain precalculated moments."—B.H.

The *Third Quartet* is dedicated to the members of the Arditti Quartet, and was commissioned with funds provided by the Arts Council of Great Britain. The world premiere, given by the Arditti String Quartet, took place in 1987 at the Maison de Radio in Paris, as part of a complete cycle of Ferneyhough's string quartets.

Charles Ives

An irascible American whose place in musical history was never fully explored until the centenary celebration in 1974 of his birth, Ives took a dim—if not to say positively sour—view of conventional "pretty" music almost from the beginning of his career. He was still a student at Yale when he began juxtaposing musical elements that did not, properly speaking, belong together. Multiple layers of almost everything delighted him: layers of colliding rhythms, of unrelated harmonies, of distinct and unassociated rhythms, of unrelated harmonies, of distinct and unassociated

tunes—all suggested to him the richness and unpredictability of life. He wrote his music as he and he alone heard it, sacrificing (as he well knew) the opportunities for performance that a more amenable attitude might have won. By the time he was 30, he had almost nonchalantly included in his lexicon of compositional means many elements that later avant-garde composers explored more systematically: whole-tone scales, tone clusters, quarter-ones, some chance elements, atonality and even a 12-tone row or two. "Beauty in music," he wrote, "is too often confused with something that lets the ears lie back in an easy chair ... Some of these pieces were in part made to strengthen the ear muscles, the mind muscles, and perhaps the Soul muscles too."

In 1907, when Ives began the *Second Quartet*, he was living in New York, was soon to be married and was already deep into the business of selling life insurance, which was to make his fortune and was to account for the extraordinary dichotomy of his life as a businessman-composer. It is entirely characteristic that he wrote this quartet partly as a gesture of irritation and defiance toward one of his favorite scapegoats, the Kniesel Quartet. His journal tells the story: "It used to come over me—especially after coming from some of those nice Kniesel Quartet concerts—that music had been, and still was, too much of an emasculated art. Too much of what was easy and usual to play and to hear was called beautiful, etc.—the same old even-vibration. Sybaritic apron-strings, keeping music too much tied to the old ladies. The string quartet music got more and more weak, trite and effeminate. After one of the Kniesel Quartet concerts in the old Mendelssohn Hall, I started a string quartet score, half mad, half in fun, and half to try out, practice, and have some fun with making those men fiddlers get up and do something like men... It is one of the best things I have, but the old ladies (male and female) don't like it anywhere at all."

Although the journal seems to condense the time-span in which the quartet was composed, in actuality it was not complete until 1913

(the end of the second movement was dated January 1, 1911). As it was Ives' practice to write music in the evenings and on weekends, his progress was sporadic and patchy at best, and he often worked on several compositions at the same time. His manuscripts present notorious difficulties to the performer, and the *Second String Quartet* is no exception.

Iannis Xenakis

In *Tetora*, the composer has developed an almost dualistic method of composition. At the opening of the work, a simple melodic 'mode' is confronted with a more aggressive, denser rhythmic 'mode.' In time, both modes melt into each other but then collide with each other again. In contrast to Xenakis' earlier compositions, *Tetora* is relatively simple in its rhythmic structure and its melodic fabric and directly accessible to the ear. However, the work (not least because of its occasionally extreme tempi) is infused with the same spirit as the 'aggressive' works of the '60s. The work was commissioned in 1990 by the Caisse des Depots Consignation and WDR, Köln, and was first performed on April 27, 1991 by its dedicatees, the Arditti String Quartet.

Niccolo Castiglioni

Romanze was written in the spring of 1990, and has as its characteristic a concern with the expressivity of the strings within the context of a retrospective exploration of the beginnings of contemporary atonality (Schönberg above all, who in Castiglioni's opinion does not always receive the respect he deserves from the avant-garde).

Excellent team work is essential in the successful realization of New Music Concert's high artistic goals. Now into our twenty-first season, we are blessed with an abundance of musical resource in Toronto. On behalf of our entire organization and all of our subscribers, I want to personally thank the many

superb musical artists listed below who participated last year in our twentieth successful season.

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