

Noted English composer Sir Harrison Birtwistle returns to New Music Concerts on Sunday, April 5, at 8 p.m. at the DuMaurier Theatre at Harbourfront for the first time since 1980, on the crest of the triumphant Covent Garden première of his opera *Gawain*. The program will feature the North American premières of Birtwistle's *Songs By Myself* and *Four Poems by Jaan Kaplinksi*. Also included in the program is the world première of Vancouver composer Keith Hamel's *Paraphrases*.

**sir  
harrison  
birtwistle  
sunday  
april 5,  
1992  
8 p.m.  
dumaurier  
theatre  
harbourfront**

**973-4000**

Sir Harrison Birtwistle was born in Accrington, Lancashire in 1934. He studied at the Royal Manchester College of Music and the Royal Academy of Music, London. His works have been featured at major musical centres throughout the world, notably in Berlin, Vienna, Paris, London, New York and Tokyo.

His opera *Punch and Judy* (1966) has been hailed as one of the most important of the century after a performance by the London Sinfonietta conducted by David Atherton and also recorded by Decca. The work received a highly successful revival by Opera Factory London. For his second opera *The Mask of Orpheus*, a major project which was performed at the English National Opera in 1986, he received the Grawemeyer Award from the University of Louisville, Kentucky and the Evening Standard Opera Award. His most recent opera, *Gawain*, was commissioned by the Royal Opera House and first performed there in May 1991. He is currently writing a piano concerto

**new music**

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**C O N C E R T S**

commissioned by the Philharmonia Orchestra which they will perform in Paris and London with Mitsuko Uchida and Pierre Boulez in 1993.

### *Songs by Myself*

This group of settings (for soprano and flute, violin, viola, cello, double bass, piano and vibraphone) is simply what its title suggests: songs set to poems written by Birtwistle. "Words for music are hard to come by," writes the composer. "These were dredged from the silt of my subconscious during spates of holiday melancholy on the island of Symi in the southern Dodecanese in the spring of 1983."

### *Four Poems by Jaan Kaplinski*

"Texts for setting to music are hard to come by," writes the composer. "I came across these poems of Kaplinski while browsing the Harrods book department, and my interest was triggered by this statement by the poet: 'To occupy oneself with biology and nature in practice as well as in theory is a vast and noble undertaking. This begins with the observation of nature: photographing birds, feeding animals, describing plants; and ends with a universal science of nature which transforms the world into what I have previously called Utopia, and what formerly was called the realm of peace, the Golden Age.'"

### *Ritual Fragment* (1990)

"Ritual Fragment continues a line of development set up in three of my

other pieces written for the London Sinfonietta (*Carmen Arcadiae Mechanicae Perpetuum*, *Silbury Air* and *Secret Theatre*). It uses the melodic element of *Secret Theatre* to make more explicit the idea of instrumental role-playing, each instrument having its own music, and it is the opposite to the first piece (*Carmen Arcadiae*) which is vertical in concept and almost without any melodic context."—h.b.

*Ritual Fragment* is dedicated to the memory of Michael Vyner and was first performed at the Concert for Michael Vyner at the Royal Opera House, on 6 May 1990.

### *Secret Theatre*

With this new substantial piece for fourteen instruments Birtwistle completes a trilogy of scores all commissioned by the London Sinfonietta, which began with *Silbury Air* (1977) and continued with *Carmen Arcadiae Mechanicae Perpetuum* (1978). *Secret Theatre* has familial relationships with both these pieces, but in several aspects it also relates back to *Verses for Ensembles* (1969) and even to *Tragædia* (1965).

*Tragædia* was the score in which Birtwistle first employed the forms of Greek drama to lend an internal rigour and tension to an abstract musical form.



Greek drama itself had its origins in religious ritual, and ritual in its broadest sense has informed many of his major works, from the schematised violence of *Punch and Judy* through the instrumental theatricality of *Verses* to the two operas, *The Mask of Orpheus* and *Yan Tan Tethera*. But in *Secret Theatre* the ritual is implicit rather than explicit; the audience is admitted to a rite for which it knows no justification; the instrumental protagonists operate according to hidden rules. Though the music remains entirely self-contained and may be fully appreciated as an abstract musical argument, the mystery of its origins provides an added fascination, gives it "magic." The title comes from a poem by Robert Graves of the same name, in which the poet promises "an unforeseen and fiery entertainment."

To act out this suppressed scenario Birtwistles divides the chamber orchestra into two groups, designated Cantus and Continuum. The Cantus instrumentalists play from solo positions at the front of the ensemble; flute, oboe and clarinet are more or less constant members of this group, though at certain moments they are absorbed (musically and physically) back into the Continuum. Conversely the Cantus is sometimes augmented by the trumpet, horn, or two violins. The music of the Cantus is essentially linear, and its instruments play throughout in unison, whether it be "direct" unison, rhythmic unison, or heterophonic unison, when the melodic line unravels into distinct strands. By contrast the material for the Continuum is conceived vertically; the music is built out of an array of ostinatos, interlocked and superimposed.

In a very obvious sense the music of *Secret Theatre* is a vast exploitation of the time-honoured principle of melody and accompaniment, with the endless song of the Cantus underpinned by the incessant clockworks of the Continuum. But the word "accompaniment" implies a subsidiary role, and this is very much the role-playing of equals. The Continuum frequently becomes highly complex and threatens to overwhelm the melody instruments; elsewhere, as if to emphasise their importance and independence, soloists emerge from the ranks of the Continuum with their own extravagant displays, oblivious to the song of the Cantus.

Here then is both a continuation and an elaboration of the musical worlds of *Silbury Air* and *Carmen Arcadiae*, one which takes them into an unprecedentedly complex world. The juxtaposed mechanisms of *Carmen* are multiplied into the Continuum, while the disjunct solos which constantly threaten to disrupt the even flow of *Silbury Air* are extended into something far more sustained and self-contained.—  
Andrew Clements

**Keith Hamel** was born in Morden, Manitoba in 1956, and studied at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto, at Queen's University in Kingston, Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He holds a doctorate in composition from Harvard University.

Hamel has written both acoustic and electroacoustic music and has been awarded many prizes in both media. He has been commissioned by Boulez's Ensemble Intercontemporain, Vancouver New Music, Elektra Women's choir and many others. His music has been performed and broadcast in Canada, the U.S. and Europe.

Hamel is also well known as a developer of computer software for music, and is a member of the Canadian Electroacoustic Community. He is currently professor of composition and director of the electroacoustic music studio at the University of British Columbia.

"*Paraphrases* was written in commemoration of the 200th anniversary of Mozart's death. Although my normal compositional method is Beethovenian (I painstakingly rework my music and frown a lot), I decided that, as a tribute to Mozart, I would conceive of the piece as a whole and simply write it out—the Mozartean approach). *Paraphrases* was composed and notated in one weekend. I chose to write for an ensemble of instruments that would have been familiar to Mozart, and composed the piece in a minimalist style. The harmonic material is derived from a pair of Mozart phrases (yes, the pun was intentional—I think Mozart would have liked it—the pun that is)." —k.h.