

Charles Wuorinen
a portrait

New Music Concerts

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New Music Concerts

Robert Aitken, artistic director

2000 – 2001 season

New Music Concerts presents
Charles Wuorinen – a portrait

Sunday March 4, 2001 • Glenn Gould Studio

Introduction 7:15 • Concert 8:00

Programme:

Lepton * (1998) [8'] **Charles Wuorinen** (b. 1938)
James Avery, piano • Erica Goodman, harp • David Swan, celesta

Piece in Two Parts (1960) [14'] **Stefan Wolpe** (1902–1972)
Robert Aitken, flute • James Avery, piano

Trombone Trio * (1985) [8'] **Charles Wuorinen**
Jerry Johnson, trombone • Trevor Tureski, percussion
James Avery, piano

Intermission

Free and Easy Wanderer (1998) [6'] **Peter Lieberson** (b. 1946)
New Music Concerts Ensemble • James Avery, conductor

The River of Light * (1997) [20'] **Charles Wuorinen**
New Music Concerts Ensemble • Charles Wuorinen, conductor

* *Canadian premiere*

The NMC Ensemble: Robert Aitken, flute/piccolo • Mark Rogers, oboe • Max Christie and David Bourque, clarinets
Eric Hall, bassoon • Chris Gondos, horn • Jim Gardiner, trumpet
Jerry Johnson, trombone • Trevor Tureski, Rick Sacks, Bill Brennan, percussion • David Swan, piano & celesta • Erica Goodman, harp • James Avery, piano • Fujiko Imajishi and Jayne Maddison, violins • Douglas Perry, viola • Paul Widner, violoncello
Tom Hazlitt, contrabass



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Tonight's concert is being recorded
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Charles Wuorinen – a portrait

Sunday March 4, 2001
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Programme notes by Daniel Foley

Composer, conductor, and pianist **Charles Wuorinen** was born in New York City on June 9, 1938. He is a graduate of Columbia University where he completed a B. A. degree in 1961, and an M. A. in 1963. During his graduate studies Wuorinen and his colleagues Harvey Sollberger and Nicolas Roussakis co-founded the Group for Contemporary Music. With a mandate similar to that of our own *New Music Concerts*, they have premiered and commissioned expert performances of hundreds of works over the decades and served as a model for subsequent organizations.

Charles Wuorinen's years of service on behalf of contemporary music organizations include his work with the American Composers Alliance, Composers Recordings Inc., the American Music Center and the editorial board for *Perspectives of New Music*. He won the Pulitzer Prize for music in 1970 and was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1985 upon his receipt of the prestigious MacArthur Foundation Award.

Mr. Wuorinen's appearances as a conductor include orchestral engagements with the Cleveland Orchestra, Chicago Symphony, New York Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the American Composers Orchestra. He has served on the faculties of Columbia, Princeton, and Yale Universities, the University of Iowa, University of California (San Diego), Manhattan School of Music, New England Conservatory, and the State University of New York at Buffalo. He has held the position of Professor of Composition at Rutgers University since 1985.

Wuorinen began composing at age five, even before starting piano lessons (at age 6). C.F. Peters has published more than 200 of his compositions to date. His newest works include *Symphony Seven* commissioned by four American orchestras, a trilogy of orchestral scores for the New York City Ballet, a Piano Quintet for Ursula Oppens, and a Percussion Quartet. He has recently completed work on *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, an opera based on a novel of Salman Rushdie with the poet James Fenton and the director Mark Lamos.

In conversation with Joan Peyser in 1997, Wuorinen described his compositional method as "Schoenbergian to some extent, and also very much indebted to [Milton] Babbitt and [Elliott] Carter... and to some extent—more aesthetically than methodically—to [Stefan] Wolpe." Of special significance for him are the late "tonal-punning twelve-tone pieces" of Igor Stravinsky. Eastern influences—Indian, Japanese, Chinese and Arabic music—have been prominent sources of inspiration. Benoit Mandelbrot's pioneering work in the field of Fractal Geometry has played a crucial role in several of his most recent works.

While in residence at the University of Georgia at Athens last winter Mr. Wuorinen was asked if his extensive use of pre-compositional methods had branded him as "the last great serialist," to which he replied,

Serialism is a term that I think is better ignored. What does that mean? I am a composer that has come out of the music of the last 100 years with Stravinsky in the background and Elliot Carter in the foreground as my influences. I don't think that you make art by a strict set of guiding principles. The matrix (the system used in serialism) is certainly in the background, but I defy anyone to find it. I have processes that I developed over the years and that serve me well, but they cannot be summed up in two words – like strict serialist.

Charles Wuorinen

Trombone Trio (1985)

Wuorinen's *Trombone Trio* – for Trombone, Mallet Instruments (Marimba and Vibraphone) and Piano – was written between June 1 and July 22, 1985. It was commissioned by the trombonist Ronald Borrer, to whom it is dedicated, for performance with the New York new music ensemble, Parnassus. Cast in the form of a single movement, the work is 8 minutes long. Certain time lengths in the piece are reflective of the proportion known as the Golden Section.

(The *Golden Section*, a means of dividing a segment of space by the formula $a/b = (a + b)/a = \text{phi}$ (0.618), was first observed by Pythagoras and is a hallmark of Renaissance art and architecture. Its contemporary use in the music of Bartók was first documented by Ernő Lendvai. These proportions have also been detected in the music of Debussy, though neither composer left any conclusive evidence of a comprehensive use of these procedures.)

Charles Wuorinen

Lepton (1998)

Lepton (1998) for celesta, harp and piano is dedicated to James Avery, who commissioned the work with the assistance of the Ministerium für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Kunst Baden-Württemberg for the Freiburg-based Ensemble SurPlus. Apart from being the name of one of Mr. Wuorinen's cats, the title of the work refers to a group of electrically charged subatomic particles that include the electron, muon and tau. There are three types of charged lepton and three types of neutral lepton, together with six related anti-Leptons. An analogy may be formed between these twelve entities and the pair of complementary hexachords which, through the process of inversion, form the twelve intervals of the chromatic scale.

Charles Wuorinen

The River of Light (1996)

In 1987, Wuorinen was invited by the dancer and choreographer Jean Pierre Bonnefoux to compose a work for the New York City Ballet. The result was the cello concerto, *FIVE*, written for the redoubtable Fred Sherry, a longtime friend and stalwart champion of new music. The score attracted the attention of Peter Martins, the Ballet's director, who immediately commissioned a second ballet, *Delight of the Muses* (1991), and ultimately a series of three ballets to be performed over the course of a single evening. This latest request inspired Wuorinen's Dante Trilogy, consisting of *The Mission of Virgil* (1994), *The Great Procession* (1995), and *The River of Light*, (1996), based on episodes from the *Divine Comedy*.

Mr. Wuorinen has described *The River of Light* as containing "a network of references and allusions to the *Divine Comedy* of Dante, in the present case, the *Paradiso*. I describe the relation of the score to its poetic stimulus the way I have because the music is in no sense narrative, indeed hardly even referential at all. Rather, the exterior structure of the piece is reflective of aspects of Dante's cosmology, and on a more mundane level of his versification technique. And of course it is suffused with my response to the extraordinary beauties of the poem itself, and what it means to convey."

Pianist and conductor **James Avery** is a native of Hutchinson, Kansas. He holds degrees in piano and conducting from the University of Kansas and Indiana University and is a winner of the International Gaudeamus Competition for Interpreters of Contemporary Music. Since 1980 he has served as Professor of Piano at the Hochschule für Musik in Freiburg, Germany and was visiting professor at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, N.Y. from 1986–88. He is a founding member and artistic director of Ensemble SurPlus.

Stefan Wolpe was born in Berlin on August 25, 1902 and died in New York City on April 4, 1972. He began the study of music at the age of 15, attending the Berlin Conservatory and the Hochschule für Musik as well as receiving private instruction from Ferruccio Busoni. While still a student he became involved with the Berlin dada movement and the socialist Novembergruppe. He often travelled to Weimar in these years to attend lectures at the Bauhaus school of design.

By the time Hitler rose to power in 1933 Wolpe had distinguished himself by conducting at socialist demonstrations and rallies, for which he composed a number of proletarian songs and choruses as well as cantatas, chamber operas and an oratorio. Wolpe fled Berlin in March of that year, eventually making his way to Jerusalem the following year after a sojourn in Vienna to study privately with Anton Webern.

While resident in Palestine Wolpe refined his approach to the serial method he had learned from Webern. In works such as his 1936 compositions, *Duo in Hexachord* and *Four Studies on Basic Rows* he demonstrated an alternative to Schoenberg's strictly atonal hierarchy of "twelve notes related only to one another" by lingering over, favouring and savouring the quality of certain intervals and allowing their special characteristics to determine the architecture of his works. For Wolpe the serial procedure was as valid for a collection of seven diatonic or eight octotonic notes as it was for the dodecaphonic twelve.

In 1938 Wolpe joined the exodus of European composers who moved to America. For the next three decades he taught at colleges in Pennsylvania, North Carolina and New Jersey in addition to teaching privately from his home in New York City where his influence was felt by a generation of American composers that included Morton Feldman, David Tudor, Ralph Shapey and Charles Wuorinen.

Stefan Wolpe

Piece in Two Parts (1960)

Wolpe once likened the effect of his *Piece in Two Parts* (1960) as evoking "birds flying through fire." He also observed that "the two instruments create a canvas of autonomous sound that is filled, emptied, raced across, moved over, fragmentized, and reconstructed with amazing rapidity. The sound exists in the maximal states of being that I could conceive of, and the rate of speed of conversion from one state of being to the least expected next is the central issue. The virtuosity is not merely one of instrumental agility, but more so a virtuosity of rapid transformation."

Peter Lieberman was born in New York City in 1946 and now lives in Santa Fe after spending a decade in Halifax, Nova Scotia. He is the son of the late Goddard Lieberman, former president of Columbia Records, and the ballerina Vera Zorina. Lieberman's principal teachers in composition were Milton Babbitt, Charles Wuorinen, Donald Martino, and Martin Boykan. After completing musical studies at Columbia University, he left New York City in 1976 for Boulder, Colorado to continue his studies with Chogyam Trungpa, a Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhist master he met in 1974. Lieberman then moved to Boston to direct Shambhala Training, a meditation and cultural program. During this period he also attended Brandeis University and received his Ph.D. degree. From 1984 to 1988 he taught at Harvard University, then became international director of Shambhala Training in Halifax. Since 1994 he has devoted his time exclusively to composition. Lieberman's Toronto performances include Steven Dann's premiere of his Viola Concerto in 1993 and last season's performance of *The Six Realms*, a cello concerto for Yo-Yo Ma and the Toronto Symphony. This season Peter Serkin and the TSO performed his piano concerto, *The Red Garuda*.

Peter Lieberson

Free and Easy Wanderer (1998)

The title *Free and Easy Wanderer* was suggested by a friend and is, according to the composer, "a loose translation of a Chinese herbal mixture I was taking at the time. I thought, 'why not?' and in fact began composing in the spirit of these words. It is a short piece and I based it on the simplest of ideas: an opening chord in the piano and bells which provided the intervallic and harmonic stuff of the piece, and a motif in the clarinet which generated rhythmic impetus. Phrases and sections of the music arise and dissolve with transformations of the chord and the motif. 'Free' and 'Easy' suggested to me the qualities of water: water will flow in the most casual, sparkling way in a brook, or it can swiftly rage forward in rapids, quickly coming to rest again in the next section of the river. Water 'wanders' as a river winds through the countryside, yet it carves its way through the landscape in a definite pattern." *Free and Easy Wanderer* is dedicated to Oliver Knussen.

Our 30th anniversary continues!

presented in association with Two New Hours on CBC Radio Two

Isabelle Panneton – a portrait

music by Panneton, Gilles Tremblay & Marc Hyland
Glenn Gould Studio • Saturday April 28, 2001

Composer Forum with Isabelle Panneton

Friday April 27, 2001 @ 10:00 am (free admission)
Room M308 • Royal Conservatory of Music • 273 Bloor St. W.

Music Speaks with Robert Aitken

Sunday April 29, 2001 @ 2:00 pm (free with admission)
Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art • 111 Queen's Park

Co-presented by Two New Hours on CBC Radio Two

All Canadian, eh?

music by Rose Bolton, Yannick Plamondon, Rudolph Komorous, Brian Cherney and Chris Paul Harman
Glenn Gould Studio • Saturday May 25, 2001

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