

New Music Concerts and THE MUSIC GALLERY present

Within/Above/Beyond/Enactments

Sunday December 1, 2002

The Music Gallery at the Church of Saint George the Martyr

Illuminating Introduction with Austin Clarkson at 7⁰⁰ pm:

"The Art of Action: Wolpe and the New York School of Musicians and Painters"

Concert at 8⁰⁰ pm • 32nd season – 261st event

Programme:

Stefan Wolpe (Germany/USA, 1902–1972) **Enactments** ** (1950–53)
for three pianos (32')

David Swan, Stephen Clarke and Marc Couroux, pianists

Robert Aitken, conductor

Daniel Foley, John Sherlock, Linda C. Smith, page turners

Geoffrey Palmer (England, 1951) **Within, above, beyond** ** (2000/2002)
for string quartet (24')

Accordes string quartet: Fujiko Imajishi and Carol Lynn Fujino, violins;
Rose Shaw, viola; David Hetherington, violoncello

— Intermission —

Geoffrey Palmer **Reconciliation** * (2002)
for solo violin (10')

Fujiko Imajishi, violin

Stefan Wolpe **Enactments**
(Reprise)

* World Premiere / ** Canadian première

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New Music Concerts gratefully acknowledges the financial support of:

The Canada Council for the Arts; Toronto Arts Council; The Province of Ontario through the Ontario Arts Council & the Ontario Arts Council Foundation Arts Endowment Fund; The Max Clarkson Foundation; C. A. Delaney Capital Management Ltd.; The Herbert Green Family Foundation; The Fleck Family Foundation; The Koerner Foundation; The Julie-Jiggs Foundation; The McLean Foundation; The SOCAN Foundation; Istvan Anhalt; Peter Anson; Mrs. H.S. Aitken; David & Marcia Beach; John Beckwith; Jack Behrens; Harriet Bunting-Weld; Austin Clarkson; Daniel Cooper; Dorith Cooper; Omar Daniel; Elizabeth Frecaut & Paul Walty; Mary Gardiner; Rachel Gauk; Erica Goodman; Marvin Green; Anne & Lyman Henderson; Fujiko Imajishi; Scott Irvine; Linda & Gordon Johnston; Stefanos Karabekos; Lothar Klein; Michael Koerner; Hope Lee; Alexina Louie & Alex Pauk; James Pitblado; Ray Luedeke; Joe Macerollo; Jan Matejcek; Bruce Mather; Kathleen McMorro; George Montague; Roger D. Moore; Ruth Morawetz; Mary Morrison; Keith Ngan; David A. Nichol; David Olds & Sharon Lovett; Grace & Donovan Olds; Harvey Olnick; Douglas Perry; Sue Davidson Polanyi; Lisa Rapoport & Christopher Pommer; Patricia Rideout; Linda Catlin Smith & Rick Sacks; Jeffrey Smyth; Ann Southam; John Stanley; Douglas Stewart & Kathleen Woodard; Ruth Vellis; Patricia Wardrop; John Weinzwieg.

New Music Concerts gratefully acknowledges the support of The Stefan Wolpe Society, Inc. and Y.C. Chau & Sons Piano Inc. for providing the Mason & Hamlin grand piano

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Geoffrey Palmer, born in Dorset, England, in 1951, is a teacher and composer. He began his composing career in the 1970s as a graduate of the Huddersfield school, but then paused to devote time to his family and to teaching. In the 1990s, new compositions began to appear and these were well received. He won prizes from *Classic CD Magazine* (1997), *Music Haven* (1998) and the *English Poetry and Song Society* (1999), and he was awarded a doctorate in musical composition by the University of Bristol.

Broadcasts have included live BBC relays of both the second and third string quartets from the Cheltenham Festival in July 1999 and July 2000 respectively, and excerpts from his *Hadassah Variations* were broadcast on both BBC radio and television in May 2002. His music has been performed in some of the major London venues, and as far away as Finland, Poland and Japan. His connections with Canada began with a composer visit to the University of Toronto in 1999. He currently composes in his home on the North Sea coast, and has recently been appointed Composer in Education with the Tees Valley Music Service.

Within, above, beyond (2000/2002)

Programme note by Geoffrey Palmer

This quartet was conceived in an almost identifiable second whilst I was reading an account by one of the 'orchestra girls' at Auschwitz-Birkenau of life at the death camp there: she describes how she was orchestrating music for them all to play – for the Nazis to relax to after their day's 'work', or for the internees to march to; as she worked, her head filled with the sound of the music on the manuscript paper in front of her... until she lifted her eyes to the crematorium chimneys, when her head filled with an entirely different sound. I became taken with this idea of extremely contrasting sound worlds, and the ease with which we can slip between them – a parallel, perhaps, to the ease with which we as a species seem to slip between barbarism and civilization.

So these two sound worlds became the within and the above of the title – contrasting the sweetness of, say, Puccini (quoted extensively in my quartet) with the bitterness of cruelty and murder; the beyond came a little later as I found out more about the support and generosity that the orchestra girls had towards and for each other – the same humanity in defiance of dehumanizing influences which is so magical and so vital for our future.

I worried a long time about trying to portray something so ugly as the external life of a death camp – there is enough ugly sound in the world. Then one night I switched on the car radio as I was driving home and heard the crowd scenes from Bach's *St John Passion*, and I knew it could be done – to create systematic and inflexible music which sets off all the more the pathos of what comes after. The sweetness comes in the form of snippets of *Madama Butterfly* – itself a disturbing story. The third element, looking beyond, is also the most forward looking, using microtonal harmonies: one of the violinists uses a violin tuned down a quartet-tone for some of this music, particularly in the final pages of the score where, like the incoming tide smoothing the sand, some of the hurt is maybe washed away.

The composing of the piece, over about a year, took me on some unexpected journeys, both inner and outer. I visited Auschwitz-Birkenau in midwinter – in snow, fog and extreme cold. I also visited Anita Lasker Wallfisch – a survivor of the camp orchestra – at her London home, and she too gave me further insights into the whole extraordinary story. I am delighted and privileged that Anita accepted the dedication of this work, which was first performed at the 2000 Cheltenham Festival by the Sorrel String Quartet.

Geoffrey Palmer

Reconciliation (2002) for solo violin

Commissioned by New Music Concerts

“Destroy, kill, and cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women”

— *Decree of Haman, Susa, 4th Century BC*

“Let Haman's ten sons be hanged upon the gallows”

— *Queen Esther, Susa, 4th Century BC*

“Every Jew that we can lay our hands on is to be destroyed now, without exception”

— *Himmler, Auschwitz, 1941*

“Every member of that suicide bomber's family must be killed”

— *Israeli at scene of bus bombing, 5th June 2002*

And so the pattern of hatred and violence goes on. This piece, written in the summer of this year, explores the notion of reconciliation at a musical level. It takes a handful of musical ideas, all related but stylistically perhaps incompatible, and tries to work them into a unified whole. It is, I suppose, a kind of a prayer that something similar can happen “out there”.

— *Geoffrey Palmer, September 2002*

Stefan Wolpe (1902–1972)

Enactments for Three Pianos (1950–1953)

Programme note by Austin Clarkson



Stefan Wolpe was formed as much by modern developments in the visual arts as in music. He was not yet 18 when he spent the summer at the Bauhaus in Weimar. Walter Gropius had founded the revolutionary school for arts and crafts the previous year and invited the most brilliant artists to teach there. For Wolpe the Bauhaus was “the place in which modern art was being taught, experimented on, and we all traveled there like pilgrims to Jerusalem or Mecca.” Wolpe attended lectures and took part in the preliminary course taught by Johannes Itten, Vassily Kandinsky, and Paul Klee. Many of the Bauhaus masters were researching correspondences among the arts, and music and theatre had an important part in the Bauhaus program. The effects of the Bauhaus are everywhere apparent in Wolpe's compositions, theoretical writings, social ideals, life-long associations with painters, and interest in vernacular musics. He learned how to research the materials of his art in order to find a balance between logical construction and imaginative expression. He applied the nonauthoritarian attitude and the respect for the individual's creative process of the Bauhaus masters in teaching his own students. Wolpe said that he “learned mostly from the painters” while from musicians he “learned only to liberate myself from my teachers.”

As a Jew, Communist sympathizer and avant-garde composer Wolpe was exiled from Germany in 1933. He lived in Jerusalem for four years and then immigrated to the United States, where he became an American

citizen. In New York City during the early 1950s he often attended meetings of the Artists' Club on Eighth Street. There he became close friends with Willem and Elaine de Kooning, Franz Kline, Mark Rothko, and Jack Tworikov. These painters taught from time to time at Black Mountain College, the progressive liberal arts college where Wolpe was music director from 1952-1956. It was in the mountains of North Carolina that Wolpe finished *Enactments for Three Pianos*. *Enactments* for Wolpe was a breakthrough into a new concept of music akin to the abstract expressionist canvases of his friends. It was not until Wolpe had nearly finished the work that he settled on the title *Enactments*, thus linking it to the world of the painters. A few months earlier the art critic Harold Rosenberg published his celebrated essay on the American action painters: "What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event. The act-painting is of the same metaphysical substance as the artist's existence. The new painting has broken down every distinction between art and life."

Like the huge canvases of the painters, each movement of *Enactments* presents (not represents) a particular action over a wide expanse of sound. The painters wanted their canvases to enfold the viewer in an environment that allows for intimacy, reflection, and the evoking of meditative states. Similarly, each movement of the *Enactments* surrounds the listener in the unfolding of a continuous action. *Enactments* for Wolpe meant "acting out, being in an act of, being the act itself."

The first movement, "Chant" is an exuberant, lyrical action. Wolpe described it with these images: "Stones sing, flower, throats, the chlorophyl, the dead leaves, the traces, the history of chemical reaction, the pulse of cells of what is in the making and in the changing phase." The second movement, "In a State of Flight," is an action of scattering interruptions and intersections. Flight may be soaring freedom or fearful panic and dread. The core sound of the third movement, "Held In," is a chord at the center of the pitch field. The sound blooms profusely, radiantly — summertime. The fourth movement, "Inception," is an action of emergence. Muffled, tremulous stirring — springtime. The last movement, "Fugal Motions," is an interplay of scattering and gathering actions. The subject, derived from the first movement, has a celebratory feel. Each piano has a distinct character, as though three masterful, free jazz improvisers are jamming together.

Wolpe dedicated the work to three pianists who were members of his extended family — Irma Wolpe, his second wife, and her two students Jacob Maxin and David Tudor. As it turned out three movements (1, 3, 5) were first performed by Toshi Ichyanagi, Russell Sherman, and David Tudor at Carl Fischer Hall, New York, in 1959 on a program that Wolpe shared with his student Ralph Shapey. In 1960 the Kontarsky brothers — Aloys, Alfonse, and Bernhard — performed the same three movements at Darmstadt. The work was at last given complete ten years after it was composed, in April of 1963, by Robert Miller, Lawrence Smith, and David Tudor. In 1973 Philip Corner, Joel Sachs, and Cheryl Seltzer gave *Enactments* on a concert in memory of Wolpe, and in 1982 Anne Chamberlain, Joel Sachs, and Cheryl Seltzer recorded the work for Nonesuch Records. *Enactments* has yet to appear on compact disc. A new edition of *Enactments*, engraved by David Nichol, was prepared in time for performances by groups in Germany, the United States, and Canada for the centenary celebrations.



Austin Clarkson taught at the University of Saskatchewan and Columbia and Yale Universities prior to his appointment to York University, where he is Professor Emeritus. While completing the Ph.D. in musicology at Columbia, he studied privately with Stefan Wolpe. After the composer's death in 1972 he played a major role in archiving the composer's papers, which had suffered severe damage in a fire. The papers are now held by the Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel. Prof. Clarkson helped to found the Stefan Wolpe Society and is general editor of the composer's music and writings. His essays on the music of Wolpe have appeared in many books and journals, and he has edited a volume of essays on Wolpe by various authors (Pendragon, in press). Other publications include a book co-authored with the pianist and educator Reginald Godden, the catalogue of the music of Mordecai Sandberg (Musica Judaica), and essays on John Cage and the transpersonal (Chicago) and the theoretical writings of Istvan Anhalt (McGill-Queen's). Prof. Clarkson's research and teaching on the creative imagination led to formation of the Milkweed Collective, a community of artists and writers, and to the forthcoming book, The Intelligence of the Imagination: Personal Stories of the Creative Process.

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