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The Pentland Project

Sunday September 18, 2005 • Jane Mallett Theatre

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Sunday September 18, 2005

Jane Mallett Theatre

(St Lawrence Centre)

7:15pm Introduction

8:00pm Concert

New Music Concerts presents

The Pentland Project

featuring The Turning Point Ensemble

Owen Underhill and Jeremy Berkman, co-artistic directors

Programme:

Five preludes for piano (1938) 9' **Barbara Pentland** (1912–2000)

1. Prologue 2. Legend 3. Jest 4. Romance 5. Curtain

Jane Hayes, piano

Eventa (1978) 15'

Pentland

Flute, clarinet, trombone, two percussion, harp, violin, cello

Quintet for Piano and Strings (1983) 22'

Pentland

— Intermission —

Commenta (1981) 10'

Pentland

Heidi Krutzen, solo harp

Disasters of the Sun (1976) 30'

Pentland

Mezzo soprano (Judith Forst), flute, clarinet, horn,
two percussion, piano, violin, viola, cello, prepared tape

Turning Point Ensemble: **Brenda Fedoruk**, flute • **A.K. Coope**, clarinet

Ben Kinsman, horn • **Jeremy Berkman**, trombone • **Heidi Krutzen**, harp

Jane Hayes, piano • **Robin Reid**, **Vern Griffiths**, percussion

Marc Destrubé, **Brent Akins**, violins • **Yariv Aloni**, viola • **Peggy Lee**, cello

Judith Forst, mezzo soprano • **Owen Underhill**, conductor

New Music Concerts

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Thoughts on Barbara Pentland and the 2005 Pentland tour

by Owen Underhill

The September 2005 tour of the music of Vancouver composer Barbara Pentland (1912-2000) is part of a larger Turning Point Ensemble Pentland project which began with a concert in the fall of 2004 and will include a recording of her music to be released on the Centrediscs label in 2006. A reassessment of the music of Barbara Pentland is timely, as she holds a distinctive place in the history of Canadian music. Underperformed in her lifetime with the possible exception of her piano repertoire, her music has fallen even further into obscurity since her death with several of her more significant works waiting decades for second and third performances. Some factors that may have contributed to this lack of attention are her 'isolation' from the more established central Canadian centres (having lived in Vancouver the last 50 years of her life), the performance challenges and the uncompromising character of some of the music, her feisty and spirited personality which sometimes clashed with the music and academic establishments, and the general malaise and disinterest in 'historical' Canadian music that falls in between the worlds of new music and a smattering of pre-1980 'audience friendly' Canadian repertoire that still gets performed,

The tour program the Turning Point Ensemble is presenting should not be considered a retrospective as it concentrates on the late period of her composition between 1976 and 1983. This period of work exhibits a lyrical and intense compositional voice, colourful orchestrations, an intuitive organic sense of development, and a contemporary language that includes special instrumental techniques and aleatory zones (areas of controlled improvisation). Earlier tendencies of her work are still present including programmatic references, a Webern-influenced economy of means, and a lean 'neoclassic' sense of line. Perhaps listening to the music will show that the preconception of her work as unremittingly cool and rigid is incorrect. At any rate, it is only through first-hand experience with a composer's work that a true impression can be formed, and in the case of music now twenty-two to sixty-seven years old, it is interesting to experience the compositions in the light of time that has passed.

I first met Barbara Pentland in 1982 after moving to Vancouver. At the age of seventy, she was overflowing with vitality, and in the midst of a lively and productive decade of composition. The occasion of our meeting was the second performance of *Disasters of the Sun*, which I conducted for the Vancouver New Music Society. Like the premiere in 1977, the performance featured the late Phyllis Mailing as soloist. Although Pentland had a reputation for being a tough taskmaster,



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I found her easy to work with. It is true that she was intensely concerned that all of the details of her score (tempi, dynamics, micro-fluctuations of pitch and timbre) were accurately represented in performance. At the same time, I found her sympathetic and affirming to the interpretative nuances of performance that would bring her music alive.

I programmed and conducted a number of other performances of Pentland's music in the years I was working with Vancouver New Music. A highlight was an all-Pentland concert which we produced in 1987 as a 75th birthday tribute. The day of the concert was proclaimed Barbara Pentland day in the City of Vancouver by the then-Mayor, the current premier of British Columbia, Gordon Campbell. Barbara and her husband were picked up in a white Rolls-Royce limousine and escorted to the Vancouver Playhouse Theatre. The concert included two premieres and featured a number of the performers who had championed her music including the pianist Robert Rogers, the Purcell String Quartet, soprano Margarita Noye, and the Toronto harpist Erica Goodman. The last time I remember Barbara coming to attend one of her performances was a Canadian Music Centre 35th Anniversary concert Vancouver New Music organized in 1994. There were twenty British Columbia composers represented, and Pentland seemed to enjoy the sense of occasion and participated in the group pictures after the concert. Unfortunately, she was already suffering from Alzheimer's and was to spend the last five years of her life away from the public eye as her condition worsened and her memory failed.

I have encountered several individuals over the years that found Barbara Pentland to be a prickly and difficult person. These have ranged from past students to those in various positions who felt her wrath over musical matters. Others like Robert Rogers who studied with her in the fifties at UBC found her to be "a wonderful and demanding teacher." Certainly, Barbara was a fighter for those things which she believed in, and in my years at Vancouver New Music, I received more than one angry letter from her over such issues as the high volume at an electroacoustic music concert. I responded to her passionate letters as best I could, but like her close friends, I did experience her warmth and personable side as well. A number of times I went to Pentland's modern Point Grey home to discuss upcoming performances. Visiting her there was to enter a much more relaxed and hospitable world than one might expect given her fierce reputation. I was surprised, the first time I went, to see her vintage Morris Minor automobile parked in the driveway. Upon entering the home, her fascinating husband, the industrial psychologist John (Hally) Huberman, would regale you with all manner of stories such as growing up with the Hungarian composer Ernő Dohnányi as his stepfather. Then Barbara would usher you into her composer's studio complete with grand piano, her original scores and recordings of her performances. Barbara was a fine pianist and

she often had Bach keyboard music open on the piano. She always seemed appreciative of those who took interest in her music, and would answer honestly and informatively all questions about her music. With the 'business' part out of the way, Barbara and John would invite you into the back yard to sit and watch the stellar jays who they fed regularly. They were both avid gardeners and loved to show you the plants and flowers.

As the generation of pioneering Canadian composers of the post-war years passes, it is critical that we keep their music and contributions alive. The Turning Point Ensemble hopes that the 2005 tour will generate a renewed interest in Barbara Pentland's music.

Owen Underhill
Co-Artistic Director, Turning Point Ensemble

Barbara Pentland — Biography

Barbara Pentland (1912-2000) was born in Winnipeg. Her single-minded vision and strength of character surfaced early. Frail in health, she developed an early interest in piano and composition. She pursued her passion of becoming a composer against her parents' wishes until finally they relented, and she began formal composition studies in Paris in 1929. Returning to Winnipeg in 1930, Pentland spent the next six years primarily active as a pianist. Wishing to further develop her composition skills, Pentland won a fellowship to study composition at the Juilliard Graduate School, where she studied from 1936 to 1939. In New York, she studied with Bernard Wagenaar and experienced the music of Bartok, Stravinsky and Hindemith first-hand. Later in the summers of 1941 and 1942, she studied with Aaron Copland at the Berkshire Music Center. From 1939 to 1942, Pentland was active in many aspects of Winnipeg cultural life, composing radio plays for CBC, music for ballet, orchestra and choir, and several works for solo piano.

Wishing to be at the centre of the Canadian compositional scene, Pentland moved to Toronto in 1942 where she established herself as a composer on the more radical end of the spectrum. During her Toronto period, which lasted until 1949, she taught composition and theory at the Toronto Conservatory and premieres of her music were a regular component of the lively contemporary music milieu in the heady years following war's end. Her compositions also received some exposure in Winnipeg, the United States and Europe.

In 1949, Pentland relocated once again, this time all the way across country to Vancouver where she accepted a position at the newly formed Department of Music at the University of British Columbia. She was to remain in Vancouver for the remainder of her life. Her teaching at the University of British Columbia came to an end in 1963 when she resigned over a dispute regarding grading. Pentland maintained a productive and evolving compositional career well in her eighth decade, with many of her works being commissioned and performed by leading Canadian new music groups, chamber ensembles and soloists.

The output of Barbara Pentland represents a fascinating journey that is at the same time idiosyncratic and responsive to the leading compositional trends of the mid to late twentieth century. From her early tonal programmatic compositions, the influence of Hindemith, Stravinsky and Copland pushed her to a lean, more horizontal neoclassicism in her work of the late thirties and forties. Her interaction with the Schoenberg pupil Dika Newlin at the MacDowell Colony in 1947 and 1948 caused her to write her first serial (twelve-tone) work in 1948, the *Octet for Winds*. In 1955, Pentland attended the Darmstadt International summer school, a hotbed for the new avant-garde directions of contemporary music. There, she discovered the music of Anton Webern. This was the most important influence on Pentland in mid-career. She herself jokingly divided her work into P.D. (pre-Darmstadt) and P.D. (post Darmstadt). Pentland was never dogmatic in her use of serialism. As she herself said: "I rarely used it (twelve-tone serial technique) very strictly because I'm fairly intuitive in composing and I couldn't put a straitjacket on things that wanted to emerge on their own so to speak. I allowed it a free rein, I used it as a kind of governing principle, and I have very rarely written works that could be called in any way in strict serial technique." From the *Symphony in Ten Parts* (1957), which most clearly demonstrates the Webern influence, she continued to evolve a more rugged individual language.

Uncompromising directness, lucid clarity, and intensified expression are some characteristics we find in Pentland's late music. Several of the works written from 1970 forward also show her concerns and anxieties regarding the violence and haphazard carelessness of the contemporary world. Subject matter addressed in this work includes the Vietnam War (*News*), feminism (*Disasters of the Sun*) and the destruction of the environment (*Tellus*). Recent interest in the music of Barbara Pentland has included the 2003 production of a Centrediscs three CD recording as part of the Canadian composer Portrait series. Included on this CD is the Pentland documentary produced and prepared by CBC's Eitan Cornfield. It is an informative and interesting source for those who wish to learn more about Pentland and her music.

Five Preludes for Piano (1938)

The *Five Preludes* were written while Pentland was studying with Bernard Wagenaar at the Juilliard Graduate School. Lively incidental piano pieces in the 19th century tradition, they show Pentland beginning to assimilate dissonance, and Hindemith-like angular rhythms into her previous Franck-influenced style.

— Owen Underbill

Eventa (1978)

Eventa was commissioned by New Music Concerts, Toronto. The score is headed with a quotation from Cicero: "Causae eventorum magis me movent quam ipsa eventa" ("The cause of events always interest me more than the events themselves.") During the period of composition, the last half of 1978, various events caused by man's inhumanity to man – and other creatures – made some dramatic impact on the work, leavened now and then by humour, escape from grim reality. It might also be entitled: "A day in the life of the world." The instruments cause their own events by their participation as individuals and groups.

The three categories of instruments each contain one member who is less closely related and so behaves accordingly: the trombone among the winds, the marimba in the percussion and the harp with the strings. Formally, it is one movement in two main parts, with three general tempi, increasing speed to the centre, then reversing the pace to the end. There are four aleatory zones with certain freedoms, but the tonal direction is always controlled.

— Barbara Pentland

Quintet for Piano and Strings (1983)

The *Quintet* was commissioned for the Purcell String Quartet and completed early in 1983. The four sections are played without a break. The first part opens slowly as it introduces the thematic ideas and then changes tempo as it unfolds. Its close leads into a scherzo-like movement. The third part is slow, with its theme presented first in harmonics on all the instruments. The final section sums up various facets of the previous parts and fades out with a quiet dissolution of elements. In parts 1, 2 and 4, three aleatory zones occur, where the performers have certain freedoms with given material. There is no confrontation between piano and strings with one or the other dominating, but co-operation, each instrument contributing to the fabric as an individual.

— Barbara Pentland

Commenta (1981)

Commenta was written towards the end of 1980 into '81, my first work for solo harp. It was inspired by the fine playing of Erica Goodman in two previous ensemble works featuring harp, with technical help from Donna Hossack (in Vancouver), former harpist with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Structurally the piece can be divided into three main sections, evolving from the bard-like opening and proceeding through contrasting aspects of the theme to a climax. In the second section a rather giocoso fugal elaboration is interrupted by more sober episodes, which lead to a suggestion of tolling bells fading in the distance. The final section recalls some earlier commentary and reaches an aleatory zone where the player has certain freedoms with given tones. A variant of the opening brings the work to a close.

— Barbara Pentland

Disasters of the Sun (1976)

The periodic collaborations with Dorothy Livesay (1909-1996) inspired some of Barbara Pentland's strongest work. Pentland and Livesay were both trailblazers with a radical artistic temperament. Born in Winnipeg only three years apart, they would separately find their way to the non-conformist west coast. The two first met on a ship around 1930, returning from France where both young women had been studying. It wasn't until some twenty years later that they met again in Vancouver, eventually deciding to collaborate on a chamber opera. *The Lake*, completed in 1952, was based on an incident in the life of 19th century Okanagan pioneer Susan Allison. It would be another twenty years before they were to work together again. Livesay had heard a premiere of Pentland's *Mutations* for cello and piano, and sent Pentland a copy of a cycle of her poems called *Disasters of the Sun*. Pentland was struck by the dramatic portrayal of a lifetime of conflict between sun and moon, male and female. She decided to set the work to music, and the Vancouver New Music Society commission was premiered in 1976 with Phyllis Mailing as vocal soloist.

Disasters of the Sun is written for solo mezzo-soprano and an ensemble of nine players. The incisive language of the poetry is sharply etched in the musical setting. By turns angular and harsh, tender and sinuous, or precise and rhythmic, the music captures the various life stages and scenes of conflict presented in the text. The singer, functioning almost like a storyteller, drives the action forward with drama and intensity. The ensemble writing is extraordinarily detailed and colourful, bringing to life Livesay's rich imagery. The seven poems in the cycle are separated by instrumental interludes. In a number of sections of the piece, Pentland writes what she calls aleatory zones, where the musicians improvise within controlled structures. In addition, there is limited use of a recording of the soloist which, serving as a kind of recall, is layered over the live performance.

— Owen Underhill

Disasters of the Sun (Dorothy Livesay)

1.

O you old
gold garnered
incredible sun
sink through my skin
into the barren bone

if I'm real
I'm totem carved
with your splayed
scalpel

if I'm a person
the gods roar
in horrible surprised
masculinity

but if I'm a woman
paint me
with the beast's stripes
assure me I am human

2.

The World is round
it is an arm
a round us
my fingers touching Africa
your hand
tilting Siberian trees
our thoughts
still as the tundra stones
awaiting footprints

bright between our bones
shines the invisible sun

3.

Though I was certain
we recognized each other
I could not speak:
the flashing fire
between us
fanned no words

In the airport circle where
the baggage tumbled
all my jumbled life
fumbled
to find the one sweet piece
recognizable, red
the clothing stuffed and duffed
labelled mine
and over across the circle saw
your dark hair, piercing eyes
lean profile, pipe in mouth.

Incredibly, you move
You seem to dance
and suddenly
you stand beside me, calm
without surprise:

I cannot tell
what country you are from
we recognize each other
and are dumb

your hand your hand
tense on your pipe
your look a soft bomb
behind my eyes.

4.

My hands that used to be leaves
tender and sweet and soothing
have become roots
gnarled in soil

my hands
tender as green leaves
blowing on your skin
pulling you up
into joyous air
are knotted bones
whitening in the sun.

5.

During the last heat wave
a sunflower
that had stood up straight
outstaring the June
sun
wilted collapsed
under the pitiless July
sky

now in burning August
I close out the city
trembling under heat
the green trees visibly
paling –
I close and curtain off myself
into four walls
breezed by a fan

but the fan
fumes!
and suddenly it
BREAKS OFF from the wall
whirls across the room
to rip my forefinger.

I tell you
we live in
constant
danger
under the sun bleeding
I tell you.

6.

Keep out
keep out of the way of
this most killing
northern sun
grower destroyer

Sun, you are no goodfather
but tyrannical king:
I have lived sixty years
under your fiery blades
all I want now
is to grope for those blunt
moon scissors

7.

When the black sun's
gone down
connect me underground:
root tentacles
subterranean water

no more lovely man can be
than he with moon-wand
who witches water.

Turning Point Ensemble

The Turning Point Ensemble (TPE) was formed by its musician members in 2002 with the goal of presenting rarely heard concert music for a large-sized chamber ensemble. With a mission to broaden the appreciation and understanding of music composed during the past hundred years, the Turning Point Ensemble has quickly earned a stellar reputation for outstanding programming and musicianship. The ensemble's debut concert on Vancouver's Music in the Morning series, as well as their 2004 performance during CBC's Dutch Music Week were broadcast nationally on CBC Radio Two and Radio Canada. The Turning Point Ensemble received international acclaim for their efforts in performing Hanns Eisler's *Vierzehn Arten den Regen zu beschreiben* (Fourteen Ways to Describe Rain) in synchronization with Joris Ivens' 1929 film *Regen* (Rain). Due to recent scholarship, TPE's March 2004 Vancouver performance was the first ever successful synchronization of the music and the film in live performance. Working closely with contemporary Canadian and International composers, TPE has premiered compositions by Rudolf Komorous, Owen Underhill, and Gordon Chin, and are currently working with Vancouver based composers Bradshaw Pack, Jocelyn Morlock, and John Korsrud in developing several new works. The ensemble will be in residence for the second consecutive year in the Sonic Boom Festival, working with emerging British Columbia composers and premiering their work as part of Vancouver Pro Musica's annual festival of new composition. The Turning Point Ensemble's debut CD on the Artifact label, *Strange Sphere* (the music of Rudolf Komorous) includes the title composition, written for the Turning Point Ensemble under the direction of Owen Underhill, as well as *The Seven Sides of Maxine's Silver Die* performed by Eve Egoyan and the New Music Concerts Ensemble under the direction of Robert Aitken. TPE's second recording project is an all-Barbara Pentland disc with special guest Judith Forst, currently in preparation for release in 2006.

Owen Underhill, conductor and Co-Artistic Director

Owen Underhill lives in Vancouver where he is active as a composer and conductor, and faculty member in the School for the Contemporary Arts at Simon Fraser University. Underhill has made conducting appearances with the Turning Point Ensemble, CBC Radio Orchestra, Manitoba Chamber Orchestra, the Victoria Symphony, the Vancouver Symphony, the National Arts Centre Orchestra, and the Vancouver New Music Ensemble. His discography includes recordings with the CBC Radio Orchestra, Turning Point Ensemble and Vancouver New Music Ensemble. Among his most recent compositions are *Canzone di Petra* (2004) for flute and harp commissioned by Heidi Krutzen & Lorna McGhee, and *Laments and Dances* (2003) commissioned by ARRAYMUSIC of Toronto. Underhill served as Artistic Director of Vancouver New Music from 1987 to 2000. He is currently, with Jeremy Berkman, Co-Artistic Director of the Turning Point Ensemble. His music exists on a number of compact disc recordings including *Celestial Machine: Music of Owen Underhill*.

Judith Forst, O.B.C, O.C. mezzo-soprano

Canadian mezzo-soprano Judith Forst has sung with most major opera companies throughout North America, including 30 roles in 17 seasons with New York's Metropolitan Opera. Recent European engagements have included performances in the Czech Republic and the Netherlands. Her upcoming engagements include performances with the Pittsburgh, Dallas, San Diego, Santa Fe, and Metropolitan Opera companies. Ms. Forst has not only performed the standard repertoire in many of finest opera houses in the world, but continues to be involved in the creation of new works. She mentors and supports young singers and composers, and devotes countless hours to projects here in Canada. Ms. Forst was the first performing artist alumna to receive an honorary Doctorate of Letters from U.B.C., and has also received an honorary Doctorate of Music from the University of Victoria. In 1992, Ms Forst was inducted into the Order of Canada, and in 2001 into the Order of British Columbia.

Jane Hayes, piano

Equally at home as a soloist, accompanist, and chamber musician, Jane Hayes' affinity for collaborating with other musicians has given her a repertoire covering all instruments from strings through low brass and an extensive vocal repertoire. Her studies took her across Canada, the United States, and Europe. Ms. Hayes moved to BC in 1993 to assume a full-time position at Kwantlen University College in Langley, and she has maintained a busy career as a performer, adjudicator, and clinician since then. She can be heard frequently on CBC radio and has recordings available on the Fanfare, EMI, CBC-Musica Viva, and CBC SM5000 labels among others. Ms. Hayes is a founding member of the Turning Point Ensemble.

Heidi Krutzen, harp

Principal Harpist of the Vancouver Opera Orchestra, Heidi Krutzen is in demand as a soloist and chamber musician in the USA and Canada. Frequently featured at festivals such as Seattle Chamber Music Festival, Vancouver Chamber Music Festival, Strings in the Mountains, Colorado and Festival Vancouver, Heidi performed this summer at the Bach Dynamite and Dancing Festival in Wisconsin, and the Bellingham Festival in Washington. In addition, she was a faculty member for this summer's National Youth Orchestra training program. Together with flutist Lorna McGhee, the Krutzen/McGhee duo has toured throughout North America, with performances recorded by both the CBC and National Public Radio. Their first duo CD *Tabeke – 20th Century Masterpieces for flute and harp* was released this past year on the Skylark label. Heidi spent part of this past spring in South Africa, building houses for two Zulu families with Habitat for Humanity, and helping with music studies at the African Children's Choir Music for Life Centre. Ms. Krutzen is a founding member of the Turning Point Ensemble.

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