

New Music Concerts Newsletter • Volume XVIII No. 3

Dear Friends,

I'd like to thank all of you who responded to our invitation to "start the season right" with a charitable donation or sent us a year-end cheque (or made an on-line gift) to ensure a 2008 tax receipt would be forthcoming. Thank-you letters and charitable receipts were all mailed out a couple of weeks ago, so if you have not yet received yours please let me know and I will look into it. (And a special thank-you to my mother and father who once again have been quick off the mark and made the first donation of 2009!)


I hope the New Year finds you rested and relaxed from the holiday season and I wish you peace and plenty in the year ahead (current events and economic forecasts notwithstanding). After quite a busy fall, with three concerts and our CD launch all falling within a six week period, I was pleased to take a break and catch my breath over Christmas. But it seems that it's dangerous to get too relaxed because here we are back in the thick of it again, with a number of grant applications looming just over the horizon and a concert in just 10 days.

As you may know, Bob Aitken spent a week in Lodz, Poland in November where he was one of the adjudicators of the prestigious 7th International Tansman Musical Competition, organized by the Alexander Tansman Association for the Promotion of Culture. I'm not sure yet what will develop from the networking Bob did while he was there (although I'm pretty sure we'll be seeing Polish composer Zygmunt Krauze here in the not-to-distant future), but I do know how fruitful these trips can be and a previous episode of "jury duty" in Poland led to the concert we will hear on January 17 at the Music Gallery. Bob says "I heard Canadian pianist **Winston Choi** for the very first time in Krakow as a judge for the Penderecki Chamber Music Contest where he won first prize. Later he sent me his outstanding recording of the piano works of Elliott Carter and finally I had the satisfaction of performing with him at The Festival of the Sound. His wife **Minghuan Xu** is no less talented and together they form a regular tour de force."

Winston will perform *Affulgat sol omnibus animalibus*, a solo piano piece composed for him by Toronto's **Brian Current**, Minghuan is featured in **Bright Sheng's** *The Stream Flows* for solo violin and together they will pay tribute to **Elliott Carter's** centenary with his Duo for violin and piano. The concert also includes the Canadian premiere of works written especially for Duo Diorama: *Three Translations* by **John Austin**, *Re: (No Subject)* by **Marcos Balter** and a Concerto for violin, piano and computer by **John Melby**.

Three of the composers will be with us for the concert so be sure to come early for the **Illuminating Introduction at 7:15**. As always there will be a post-concert reception so please stay to meet the artists and raise a glass to the New Year with us:

Sincerely,



David Olds
General Manager

Saturday January 17, 2009

Duo Diorama

Minghuan Xu, violin • **Winston Choi**, piano
8 pm at The Music Gallery • Introduction 7:15
197 John Street • Reservations 416 961 9594

John Austin (USA, b.1934)
Three Translations * (2008)

♣ **Brian Current** (Canada, b.1972)
Affulgat sol omnibus animalibus (2007)

Elliott Carter (USA, b.1908)
Duo (1974)

Bright Sheng (China/USA, b.1955)
The Stream Flows (1990)

Marcos Balter (Brazil/USA, b.1974)
Re: (No Subject) * (2004)

John Melby (USA, b.1941)
Concerto for violin, piano and computer * (2008)
* Canadian premieres

Duo Diorama comprises Chinese violinist **Minghuan Xu** and Canadian pianist **Winston Choi**. They are compelling and versatile artists who perform in an eclectic mix of musical styles, ranging from standard works to the avant-garde. It is a partnership with a startlingly fresh and powerful approach to music for violin and piano. The duo's name "diorama" defines its artistic ideals. In visual arts, a diorama is a scene or story reproduced on cloth transparencies with various lights shining through to produce changes in effect. In the case of **Duo Diorama**, the musicians' performances create an illusion of colour and three-dimensionality, transporting the listener to another time and place.

Having performed extensively throughout North America, South America and Europe, Duo Diorama has gained a loyal following wherever they travel to. The duo's recent appearances at the Colours of Music Festival, the Mammoth Lakes Music Festival and the Triada Music Festival were met with critical and audience acclaim. Their South American tour in 2006 included performances at the Festival Musica Nova in Brazil and Festival

Encuentros. As the inaugural recipients of the Banff Centre's Rolston Fellowship in Music, they have recently toured throughout Canada, having performed in recital series from coast to coast. In 2006 they gave their successful New York debut at Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, as winners of Artists International Presentations' "Special Chamber Music Award." A feature broadcast on the debut was covered by Voice of America, a weekly television program viewed by millions of people in Asia.

Having already commissioned and premiered over 20 works in the last few years, Duo Diorama is a leading proponent of music of living composers. They are committed to music from today's culture and take a very personal approach to the presentation of these works — both those by the established modern masters and today's emerging young composers. Composers they have commissioned include Marcos Balter, George Flynn, Derek Hurst, Gregory Hutter, Felipe Lara, Jacques Lenot, Andrew List, M. William Karlins, John Melby, Michael Pisaro, Stephen Syverud, Kurt Westerberg, Daniel Weymouth, Amy Williams, Amnon Wolman, Jay Alan Yim, and Mischa Zupko. Their many projects include performing multi-disciplinary works involving electronic media. By juxtaposing their performances with colorful commentary, Duo Diorama's unique performances emphasize the relevance and vivacity of classical music.

MingHuan Xu performs extensively in recital and with orchestra in China and North America. She is also a highly sought after chamber musician, having collaborated with the St. Petersburg Quartet, Colin Carr, Eugene Drucker, Ilya Kaler, and Ani Kavafian. She delights audiences wherever she performs with her passion, sensitivity and charisma. Xu was a winner of the Beijing Young Artists Competition and gave her New York debut at age 18 as soloist with the New York Youth Symphony Orchestra. Currently Assistant Professor of Violin at Grand Valley State University, she plays on a 1758 Nicolas Gagliano violin. **Winston Choi** was Laureate of the 2003 Honens International Piano Competition (Canada) and winner of France's 2002 Concours International de Piano 20e siècle d'Orléans. He regularly performs in recital and with orchestra throughout North America and Europe. Already a prolific recording artist, he can be heard on the Arktos, Crystal, l'Empreinte Digitale, Intrada and QuadroFrame labels. Formerly on the faculties of the Oberlin Conservatory and Bowling Green University, he is Assistant Professor and Head of Piano at the Chicago College of Performing Arts at Roosevelt University.

John Austin (USA, b. 1934)

John Austin's music has been performed widely in Chicago and elsewhere, including the Tanglewood, Aspen and Door County music festivals. Austin was a founding member of the Chicago Society of Composers and has received grants and fellowships from the McDowell Colony, the Illinois Arts Council, the American Music Center, the Composers Conference in Johnson, Vermont, and the Harris Foundation. Austin studied composition independently with

Roy Harris during his college years (Harvard, 1956). After a brief stint in the U.S. Army Artillery, he worked in a bank, earned a law degree (Harvard, 1960), and served in the U.S. Justice Department and once again in the Army. Austin later taught music and studied composition in Vienna (1961-62); with Robert Lombardo at Roosevelt University (M.M. 1973); and with Ralph Shapey at the University of Chicago (Ph.D., 1981). From 1981 to June 1999, Austin supported his composition practicing law. He now devotes his time to music except for occasional legal consulting.

Three Translations (2008)

Unfettered by English's grammatical specifics of person, number, and tense, Chinese poems—here of a mere twenty ideograms—resonate with a rich web of possibilities that require the reader's participation. This is an art of innumerable possibilities virtually all suggested by unadorned observations of the external world—an art that knows that every choice denies another, every interpretation excludes another. These musical "translations" embody a subjective response to the poems rather than an attempt to portray their elements. The word-for-word translations of the three poems are courtesy of Professor Wai-Lim Yip and appear in *Chinese Poetry: An Anthology of Major Modes and Genres*, which he edited and translated. The book begins with instructive examples of the difficulty of translating classical Chinese poems into English.

— John Austin

Brian Current (Canada, b. 1972)

A 2005 Guggenheim Fellow and recipient of the 2003 Barlow Prize, Brian Current has established himself as one of the leading composers of his generation in North America. His music, lauded and performed internationally as well as broadcast in over 35 countries, has been widely acclaimed for its energy, wit and daring bravado. Recent performances of his music have been presented by the Indianapolis Symphony, the New York City Opera Vox festival, the Esprit Orchestra, the Oakland Symphony, the Vancouver Symphony, the Warsaw National Philharmonic and the American Composers Orchestra at Carnegie Hall. Recently Brian Current's new disc *This Isn't Silence: Works for Symphony Orchestra*, was nominated for a Juno Award, and featured Current conducting in a first-ever CBC broadcast of Classical Juno nominees. Brian Current lives in Toronto where he conducts the New Music Ensemble of the Royal Conservatory.

Piano Piece No. 1 (2007)

Subtitled "Affulgat sol omnibus animalibus dei", the piece was commissioned by Prairie Debut with assistance from the Canada Council for the Arts. The work is dedicated to Winston Choi, who premiered the piece on a Canadian tour. The Latin text means "let the sun shine down upon all of God's creatures", a phrase I kept in mind throughout improvising sessions at the piano. I was interested in finding music that was very active yet also very calm.

— Brian Current

Elliott Carter (USA, b.1908)

Born in New York City on 11 December 1908, Elliott Carter began to be seriously interested in music in high school and was encouraged at that time by Charles Ives. He attended Harvard University where he studied with Walter Piston, and later went to Paris where for three years he studied with Nadia Boulanger. He then returned to New York to devote his time to composing and teaching. With the explorations of tempo relationships and texture that characterize his music, Carter is recognized as one of the prime innovators of 20th-century music. In 1960, Carter was awarded his first Pulitzer Prize for his visionary contributions to the string quartet tradition. Stravinsky considered the orchestral works that soon followed, *Double Concerto* for harpsichord, piano and two chamber orchestras (1961) and *Piano Concerto* (1967), to be "masterpieces". Elliott Carter has been the recipient of the highest honors a composer can receive: the Gold Medal for Music awarded by the National Institute of Arts and Letters, the National Medal of Arts, membership in the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and honorary degrees from many universities. Hailed by Aaron Copland as "one of America's most distinguished creative artists in any field," Carter has received two Pulitzer Prizes and commissions from many prestigious organizations.

Duo for violin and piano (1974)

The *Duo for Violin and Piano* derives its character and expression from the contrast between its two very dissimilar instruments — the bow-stroked violin and the key-struck piano. The mercurial violin music, at times intense and dramatic, at others light and fanciful, constantly changes its pace and tone of expression; the piano plays long stretches of music of consistent character and is much more regular both in rhythm and in style. The piano makes extensive use of the pedal to mask one sonority with another and then gradually to uncover the second- as in the very first measures. In fact, the long opening section for the piano forms a quiet, almost icy background to the varied and dramatic violin, which seems to fight passionately against the piano. After this beginning, the music is joined seamlessly until the end.

In the course of the work, the violin focuses on one aspect of its part after another — and often on two or more aspects at a time — playing in a rubato, rhythmically irregular style, while the piano constantly plays regular beats, sometimes fast, sometimes slow. Toward the end, while the violin is involved in a very fast impassioned music, the piano becomes more and more detached, playing a series of regular rhythmic patterns, each successively slower than the previous one. As the piano reaches a point of extreme slowness, the violin is heard increasingly alone, isolating for a few measures at a time the various elements of its part, with the quiet and more lyrical aspects given more prominence than previously.

The general form is quite different from that of the music I wrote up to 1950. While this earlier music was based on themes and their development, here the musical ideas are not themes or melodies but rather groupings of sound materials out of which textures, linear patterns, and figurations are invented. Each type of music has its own identifying sound and expression, usually combining instrumental color with some "behavioral" pattern that relies on speed, rhythm, and musical intervals. There is no repetition, but a constant invention of new things—some closely related to each other, others, remotely. There is a stratification of sound so that much of the time the listener can hear two different kinds of music, not always of equal prominence occurring simultaneously. This kind of form and texture could be said to reflect the experience we often have of seeing something in different frames of reference at the same time.

— Elliott Carter

Bright Sheng (China/USA, b.1955)

Bright Sheng's musical studies began in China at the age of four when his mother taught him piano. After the Cultural Revolution, he moved to New York in 1982 where his teachers included Leonard Bernstein, George Perle, Hugo Weisgall and Jack Beeson. A strong Eastern influence is evident in his music, which often uses traditional tales, folk songs and instruments from China, as well as gestures borrowed from Chinese opera; however it is incorporated into a highly original and assured framework based on a Western tradition. He is much in demand as a composer, pianist, conductor and artistic director for major organizations throughout America and Europe.

The Stream Flows (1990)

This work [was] commissioned by the Foundation for Chinese Performing Arts, for Nai-Yuan Hu, who gave the premiere performance on October 20, 1990 at the Jordan Hall of the New England Conservatory in Boston, Massachusetts. This work is dedicated to my teacher Hugo Weisgall.

The first part of "The Stream Flows" is based on a famous Chinese folk song from the southern part of China. The freshness and the richness of the tune deeply touched me when I first heard it. Since then I have used it as basic material in several of my works. Here I hope that the resemblance of the timbre and the tone quality of a female folk singer is evoked by the solo violin. The second part is a fast country dance based on a three-note motive.

—Bright Sheng

Marcos Balter (Brazil/USA, b.1974)

The music of composer Marcos Balter (b.1974, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) has been regarded by critics as "colorful, inventive, (...) with vibrant sonics" [New Music Connoisseur] and "vigorous" [New York Times], and has been championed by many of today's most prestigious and adventurous new music ensembles,

performers, and organizations in the United States and abroad. His main composition teachers were Augusta Read Thomas, Amy Williams, and Jay Alan Yim. He has also taken lessons in festivals and master classes in Europe and North America with Louis Andriessen, George Benjamin, Pierre Boulez, Oliver Knussen, Christian Lauba, Tristan Murail, Bernard Rands, Wolfgang Rihm, and Kaija Saariaho, among others. He currently lives in Chicago, dividing his time between that city and Pittsburgh where he is a Visiting Professor of Music Composition at the University of Pittsburgh. For more information and audio samples, please visit the composer's official website at www.marcosbalter.com.

RE: (No Subject) (2004)

RE: (no subject) was written in 2004 for Minghuan Xu and Winston Choi, who also gave its premiere in the same year in Chicago, Illinois. As implied by its title, the work is based both on the idea of absence (or at least temporary suspension) of a true subject as well as the subjectivity behind "subject" as a concept. Moreover, the title also implies the notion that all elements within a structure can only be understood in reference ("RE:") to each other, and referential points can therefore be created or obliterated according to the value given to an element and also according to what combinations of elements are at play at any given moment. The work is divided into four movements, each centered at around one of the violin's open strings. Programmatically speaking, by alluding to the strings of the violin, the work evokes this instrument's physical body, which will be the main source of deconstructive tactics through the unfolding of the musical material.

— Marcos Balter

John Melby (USA, b.1941)

John Melby attended the Curtis Institute of Music, the University of Pennsylvania, and Princeton University, studying composition with Vincent Persichetti, Henry Weinberg, George Crumb, Peter Westergaard, J.K. Randall, and Milton Babbitt. He taught from 1971 until 1973 at West Chester State College (now West Chester University) in Pennsylvania. In 1973 he was appointed to the Composition/Theory faculty in the School of Music of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he was Professor of Music until his retirement in August of 1997 and where he now holds the title of Professor Emeritus. John Melby currently lives with his family in Salem, Massachusetts. He is best known for his music written for computer-synthesized sound, either in combination with live performers or for computer alone, though he has also written a series of large orchestral works. Melby's compositions have won numerous awards and have been widely performed both in the United States and abroad. He was the recipient of an NEA Fellowship in 1977, a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1983, an award from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters in 1984, and an associateship in the University of Illinois Center for Advanced

Study in 1989-90. His awards include several at the International Electroacoustic Music Awards (Bourges, France), where he received First Prize in 1979 for his "Chor der Steine" for computer-synthesized tape.

Concerto for violin, piano and computer (2008)

The Concerto for Violin, Piano, and Computer was composed in 2008 for Duo Diorama. The work is one in a series of (at the time of this writing) seventeen concerti for instruments and computer that I have written and which includes works for the piano as well as for most of the standard orchestral string and woodwind instruments. The composition, which includes a cadenza for the two soloists, is in one extended movement which amalgamates the characteristics of the typical three-movement nineteenth-century concerto first-movement form and which reflects on a larger scale the formal structure of the three-movement concerto. In these concerti, the orchestra is replaced by a computer "orchestra" (though this should not in any sense of the word be construed as implying that an attempt has been made to "imitate" the sounds of traditional orchestral instruments). In this work, I have attempted to exploit to the fullest the extraordinary virtuosity and profound musicality of MingHuan Xu and Winston Choi. The computer-synthesized music was realized in my Macintosh-based computer studio using the MacCsound program for digital sound synthesis and C and FORTRAN data-manipulation routines of my own. The Concerto is dedicated to Minghuan Xu and Winston Choi. The work received its first performance in Cambridge, Massachusetts in October of 2008. Tonight's performance is the Canadian première.

—John Melby



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