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Music

WILLIAM BOLCOM

A MUSICAL HOMECOMING

University
of
Washington

THE 1993-94 HANS AND THELMA
LEHMANN DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR

8:00 PM
May 5, 1994
Meany Theater

Bolcom composed LILITH in 1984 under a commission from three saxophone-piano duos funded through the National Endowment for the Arts. The work is dedicated to Laura Hunter and Brian Connelly.

Each of the work's five movements, "The Female Demon", "Succuba", "Will-o'-the-Wisp," "Child Stealer," "The Night Dance," is identified with one aspect of the legendary figure named in the title of the work. Bolcom provides quotations from Biblical dictionaries on the first pages of his score which describe Lilith as 'a female demon. She is identified in a Canaanite charm of the eighth century B.C., and likewise in post-Biblical Jewish literature, with the child-stealing witch of worldwide folklore. In Mesopotamian texts she appears primarily as the succuba, who tempts men in sexual dreams. She is depicted by Isaiah as haunting desolate places in company with such unclean birds as the kite, pelican, and owl, and with such ghoulish beasts as wildcats and jackals: "Wild cats will meet hyenas there, the satyrs will call to each other, there too will Lilith take cover, seeking rest."'

In keeping with the demonic qualities of the subject, Bolcom creates an intensely frightening piece of music. The composer's many expression marks only suggest the unconstrained qualities of the piece. The opening movement is marked "Wild and raunchy, free." In the second movement the saxophonist is instructed to play "like a wild animal's soft growl." By way of contrast, the third movement is an ethereal *molto perpetuo*. The growling tones of the saxophone are intensified in the fourth movement by aiming the instrument into the resonant sound chamber of the piano. The final movement, ostensibly a sensual dance, frequently veers toward the uncontrolled. Bolcom's instruction to the performers summarizes the impact of the work: "ominous."

The PIANO QUARTET (1976) was written on commission for the Lincoln Center Chamber Society and in honor of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Serge Koussevitzky. The Intermezzo provides the axis of the quartet, on which the entire form rests in active balance. Set against the relative atonality of much of the rest of the quartet, the Intermezzo is a simple waltz in e-flat, perhaps a little nostalgic, but certainly the first purely human note since the first movement Barcarolle.

Both my major commissions for the 1976 bicentennial observance took for their themes what I think of as a tragic flaw in the American psyche that seems to lead inexorably toward violence. The impulse that leads the Piano Quartet to a (to me) terrifying conclusion is internal and psychological. I plead guilty here to writing program music. I am passionately concerned with, even frightened by, the American psyche and I deeply believe that, as we enter what may be the most perilous passage in our history, we need to understand ourselves better—otherwise, certain disaster will follow. [Program note by William Bolcom]

What is a cabaret song? Is it the long letter to the *Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands* sung by sad Dylan on his commercial for psychedelics, *Tambourine Man*, or the John Wesley Harding dirge? Unh unh, them's western ballads sung in saloons of the Pecos, not in cabarets, though Jacques Levy's lyrics to Dylan's hymn *Durango* saunter easily into the cabaret spot.

Cabaret stuff cannot be electrified to an audience of teary old timers at the Palace or the kids at the Palladium nor yet to Felt Forum throngs. Maybe in a small concert hall but not really; that's more an experience brought about by the heartbreaking wear and tear of cabaret life on its ill-paid performers who need the occasional lucrative airing.

DAT / CAS
12,379 / 12,380

PROGRAM

- DAT
102 LILITH (1984).....(17'25)..... Michael Brockman, saxophone
Lisa Bergman, piano
- 104 from PIANO QUARTET (1976).....(10'05)..... Kui He, violin
III. Intermezzo Jeff Yang, viola
IV. Finale Leslie Hirt, cello
Krista-Dawn Jenner, piano
- 106 from CABARET SONGS (1977-85).....(8'00)..... Julian Patrick, baritone
Over the Piano Lisa Bergman, piano
Fur (Murray the Furrier)
Waitin' (2'39)
- 107 LIME JELLO MARSHMALLOW COTTAGE CHEESE SURPRISE (1973)
-
- INTERMISSION CASS SIDE A
- SIDE B
- 109 DUET FOR QUINTET (1971).....(13'51)..... FEAR NO MUSIC
Pamela Ryker, flute
Dunja McKennéy, clarinet
Andrew Ehrlich, violin
Virginia Dziekonski, cello
Jeffrey Payne, piano
- 1011 AUBADE (1982).....(5'58)..... Alex Klein, oboe
Yuka Sasake, piano
- 1013 FIVEFOLD FIVE (1987).....(10'35)..... SONI VENTORUM
Felix Skowronek, flute
William McColl, clarinet
Alex Klein, oboe
David Kappy, horn
Arthur Grossman, bassoon
and
Craig Sheppard, piano

WILLIAM BOLCOM, born in Seattle in 1938, joined the University of Michigan School of Music faculty in 1973 and has served as professor of composition since 1983. At age eleven he entered the University of Washington to study composition privately with John Verrall. Later he studied extensively with Darius Milhaud, both in California and Paris. Among many honors, he has received two Guggenheim fellowships, a Koussevitzky Foundation grant, and an award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In 1988, he received the Pulitzer Prize in music for his "Twelve New Etudes" for piano, and he was commissioned to compose a song cycle to texts by American women, performed by mezzo-soprano Marilyn Horne during Carnegie Hall's 1990-91 centennial season. As a solo pianist and concert artist with his wife, soprano Joan Morris, Bolcom has recorded and performed widely. His music, from ragtime to the theater and from chamber music to symphonic works, has gained worldwide prominence.

It is in Germany that the rhinestone mantle of cabaret is worn most comfortably. Out of the Viennese café tradition that gave birth to Schubert's pop tunes, lieder in English, came the line from Oscar Straus to Brecht-Weill. Along the way, around the turn of our century, Schoenberg took time out from copying operetta scores to write a few dozen items called *Brettli-Lieder*—cabaret songs. (If you're lucky enough to find the record of Marni Nixon singing these you may be surprised.)

The most daring moment in the history of cabaret occurred in Zurich in February 1916. On that day Dada was born; in the chintzy sleazy inartistic unintellectual atmosphere of the Cabaret Voltaire, the movement that was to transform modern art and lay the groundwork for post-modernism was announced by a reading by Tristan Tzara, followed by "performance art" by Arp and Kandinsky, lyrics by Wedekind, Morgenstern, Apollinaire, Marinetti, Cendrars. Designs by Modigliani, Picasso. Simultaneous reading of three poems "showing the struggle of the vox humana with...a universe of destruction whose noise is inescapable." (Hugo Ball's Diary).

An intellectually starved America, coming out of its long Puritanical fast, welcomed the new imports. Cabaret quality writing moved off the floor and onto the stage, where the '20s saw Rice's *Adding Machine* and Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal*, a kind of living newspaper that happened to star Clark Gable; in the '30s Rome's *Pins and Needles*, Blitzstein's *The Cradle Will Rock*, Weill's *Johnny Johnson* all had the episodic, collagistic approach characteristic of cabaret. Even *Our Town* has the spare, loose quality of revue, with the cohesiveness of real theme that makes it cabaret-like in form.

In England Auden had begun his campaign against the uncouth refinement of political rhetoric:

*Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone...
Let airplanes circle mourning overhead
Scribbling on the sky the message HE IS DEAD.
Put crepe bows round the necks of the public doves,
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.*

Clear and simple, but demanding that imagistic attention characteristic of the cabaret experience. Auden also wrote such wry songs (to Britten's delicious music) as *Tell Me the Truth About Love*:

*It is prickly to touch as a hedge is
Or soft as eiderdown fluff,
Is it sharp or smooth at the edges.
O tell me the truth about love.*

[Abridged from notes by Arnold Weinstein]

LIME JELLO MARSHMALLOW COTTAGE CHEESE SURPRISE has become the trademark of every Bolcom-Morris concert. Inspired by a lunch in Joan Morris' hometown of Portland, Oregon, the restaurant was populated with ladies conversing and munching on chicken croquettes and canned pear salad with mayonnaise dressing. I was suddenly transposed in memory to all those musical soirees I played as a boy. The entire indigestible thing came in a flash, a paean to the special branch of American cuisine we all know viscerally. Voila! this gastric tune!
[Notes by William Bolcom]

Subtitled "A Farce for Fun," **DUETS FOR QUINTET** is a theater piece, but the "theater" resides almost totally in the music. All must be performed with a Buster Keaton-esque restraint, allowing the Keaton-esque wildness to come through

as strongly as possible. Each instrument has a musical role and a very definite personality; for the player the object is to find a profile from studying one's own part and listening to the part one is in dialogue with. Duet-texture is the controlling idea; I've tried the same restraint in not telling actors how to speak their lines in the absence of tempo and expression markings for the most part. To get the flow players must stay engaged even when not playing.

In the middle there is a "games" measure: capture F#, and one wins by cleverness but also ruses. (The flute is at a disadvantage here as the F# in question is in a weak tessitura.) Much of this piece was inspired by my work with Paul Sills' improvisational techniques; he was the founder of the original Second City, of which SCTV was a pale imitation.

AUBADE, written for Heinz Holliger and Dennis Russel Davies, was inspired by a reading of Jonathan Schell's *The Fate of the Earth*, with its alarming projection of nuclear holocaust. It is a quiet, elegiac piece, subtitled "For the Continuation of Life." Holliger and Davies premiered the work in Helsinki in September 1982, and it has been performed since then by them, Harry Sargous, and others.

FIVEFOLDFIVE was written in the Spring of 1987 and received its première at the Saratoga Performing Arts Center in August of that year by the Philadelphia Woodwind Quintet and Dennis Russel Davies. Of the peculiar title, the composer confesses, "I have no idea why I chose that as the title. It really was one of those things that came to me in a dream; you get bigger, you get smaller, you change shape, and suddenly you're you again. But it may turn out to be a nightmare in spots." Composed in one continuous movement, the work begins with slow clusters of sound in the piano, echoed by the winds. A unison phrase leads to a more lively section with alternating tempos in a fantasia style. Good humor abounds as a fast-paced boogie-woogie leads to a contemplative coda.

UPCOMING 1993-94 CONCERTS:

To request disability accommodations, contact the Office of the ADA Coordinator at least ten days in advance of the event. 543-6450 (voice); 543-6452 (TDD); 685-3885 (FAX); access@u.washington.edu (E-mail).

~~May 6, Jazz Studies Concert Series. 8 PM, Brechemin Auditorium. Cancelled.~~

May 8, An Afternoon of Gospel Preludes for Organ by William Bolcom, composer. Featuring Pat Wright and the Total Experience Gospel Choir. 4:30 PM, University Methodist Temple.

May 11, William Bolcom's Piano Etudes. 5 PM, Brechemin Auditorium.

May 12, Keyboard Debut Series. 8 PM, Brechemin Auditorium.

May 13, Contemporary Group. 8 PM, ~~Meany Theater~~ Brechemin Auditorium, featuring a William Bolcom work. Call 685-8384.

May 13 and 14, Littlefield Organ Series: Paul Klemme, *organ* and Jerry Webster, *trumpet*. May 13 at 12:30 PM and May 14 at 8:00 PM, Walker-Ames Room, Kane Hall.