

DAT 13,512
CD 13,513-13-514

PROGRAM

CD 13,513

1 **THREE SONGS** for Contralto, Oboe, Percussion and Piano; version with
orchestral ostinato (1930-32).....(10:02).... Ruth Crawford Seeger (1901-1953)

- I. *Rat Riddles*
- II. *Prayers of Steel*
- III. *In Tall Grass*

Voice: Katheryn Weld
Oboe: Sarah Bahauddin
Percussion: Miho Takekawa
Piano: Ming Tsu
Clarinet (and Bass clarinet): Mark Oesterle
Bassoon: Jake Kauffmann
Contrabassoon: Chang Ho Lee
Horn: Hsing-Hua Ho
Trumpet: Eric Borling
Trombone: Steve Nickels
Violins: Eric Rynes, Jennifer Han, Mary Theodore, Jeremiah Hong
Violas: Jeanne Drum, Kerrick Sasaki
Cellos: Jacob Humphrey, Kyle Campbell
Contrabasses: Chris Brunhaver, Josh Hollingsworth
Conductor: Tim Salzman

2 **THREE CANONS** for Woodwinds, Op. 9 (1930).....(10:23)..... Wallingford Riegger
Three-part Canon with Bassoon Obligato (1885-1960)
Canon in the Unison for Flute and Clarinet
Double Canon: Oboe and Clarinet (augmented fourth), Piccolo and Bassoon
(third octave)

Members of the Soni Ventorum Quintet
Felix Skowronek, *flute*, Rebecca Henderson, *oboe*,
William McColl, *clarinet*, Arthur Grosman, *bassoon*

3 **SONATA** for Violoncello and Piano (1948).....(22:17)..... Elliott Carter (b. 1908)
Moderato
Vivace, molto leggiero
Adagio
Allegro

Cello: Rajan Krishnaswami
Piano: David Kopp

INTERMISSION

- [1] *AEOLIAN HARP* (1923) (3:20) Henry Cowell (1897-1965)
 [2] *FABRIC* (1917)..... (1:20) Cowell
Piano: James Myers

- [3] *DIAPHONIC SUITE NO. 1* (1930)..... (5:13)..... Ruth Crawford Seeger (1901-1953)
Flute: Lucas Robatto

- [4] *FIRST CONSTRUCTION* (in metal), for percussion sextet
 with assistant (1939) (9:55) John Cage (1912-1992)
*Percussion: Greg Campbell, Matt Drumm, Christian Krehbiel, Conney Lin,
 Anne Richards, Miho Takekawa, Emmy Ulmer*
Conductor: Linda Moorhouse

- [5] *ANGELS*, for 6 brass instruments (1921)..... (2:50)..... Carl Ruggles (1876-1971)
Trumpets: Erick Borling, Jonathan Eck, Carl Seeley, Janet Young
Trombones: Emily Asher, Steven Nickels
Conductor: Linda Moorhouse

- [6] "From the Salvation Army"
STRING QUARTET NO. 1 (1896) (22:18) Charles Ives (1874-1954)
I. Andante con moto
II. Allegro - Allegro con spirito - Quasi Andante
III. Adagio cantabile - Allegretto - Andante con moto - Adagio cantabile
IV. Allegro marziale - Poco andante con moto - Allegro marziale
Violins: Eric Rynes, David Lawson
Viola: Jeanne Drum
Cello: Richard Evans

movement is also based on hymns. The quartet thus has the spirit and shape of a Protestant service.

The opening movement is a stately fugue based on *Missionary Hymn* ("From Greenland's icy mountains"). The hymn's first phrase serves as the subject, joined at the second set of entrances by a countersubject drawn from *Coronation* ("All hail the power of Jesus' name"). At the climax, the contrasting third phrase of *Missionary Hymn* enters over a pedal point, and the movement ends with a chorale-like setting of the hymn's final phrase, a variant of the first.

Then remaining movements are all in modified ternary form. In the cheerful Allegro, the principal theme is derived from *Beulah Land* and that of the contrasting middle section from *Shining Shore*, two hymns that look forward to the afterlife. Both tunes are so completely reworked that only fragments of each may be recognized, but they lend the themes a strong American flavor and hymnlike character. The meditative third movement theme is based on *Nettleton* ("Come, Thou Fount of ev'ry blessing"), and here the middle section draws motives from all three hymns. The spirited opening theme of the finale blends figures from *Coronation* and *Webb* ("Stand up, stand up for Jesus"). The middle section is adapted from that of the second movement, and the coda combines a complete statement of *Webb* in the cello with the middle-section theme in the first violin. The recurrence in later movements of material from earlier movements unifies the work, and the appearance of a complete hymn at the end after fragments and paraphrases provides a satisfying conclusion." (J. Peter Burkholder)

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CONTEMPORARY GROUP

Joël-François Durand, *director*

presents

THE ULTRA- MODERNS

AMERICAN EXPERIMENTAL
MUSIC IN THE 1920s AND
1930s IN NEW YORK

8:00 PM
June 3, 1999
Meany Theater

"The period between the end of World War I and the beginning of the Great Depression was one of unprecedented ferment and experimentation in American music, marked by an upsurge of groups dedicated to performing modern music. By the late 1920s, the new music scene was divided roughly into two competing circles. The first was centered around the League of Composers, and included composers oriented toward Europe and European models, such as Copland, Piston, Sessions, and Thomson. The second was centered around the Pan American Association of Composers, and included 'American who have developed indigenous materials or are specially interested in expressing some phase of the American spirit in their works,' and 'Foreign-born composers who have made America their home, and who have developed indigenous tendencies in their works.'" (C. Seeger). This latter group, which included, among others, Ives, Varèse, Cowell, Ruggles, Rudhyar, Seeger, and Crawford Seeger, adopted the designation 'ultra-modern' to describe their idiom which, of course, varied from composer to composer."

(Joseph N. Straus *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger*).

In this search to develop a purely American music, the first great "ultra-modern-before-his-time" was of course Charles Ives. For most of his life Ives sought to wipe off the European dust from American music. He attempted to create an American aesthetic unencumbered with clichés from overseas and to define compositional techniques that could best express this new position. Already in his early String Quartet No. 1, Ives resorted to some typical American musical traditions in the form of church hymns. A few years later, he started to incorporate other types of non traditional musical elements such as band tunes which, in his most provocative works, are sometimes superimposed on top of each other. This idea of superimposition of various musical elements was soon going to become somewhat of a trademark in the music of American composers such as Ruth Crawford Seeger, Henry Cowell, John Cage, Elliott Carter and other composers of the same lineage. Charles Seeger transformed it into a radically new musical concept: *heterophony*. Heterophony brings the concept of polyphony a step further, by giving the individual lines such independent individuality that they share little in common with each other. Tonight, this will best be heard in Crawford Seeger's *Three Songs*, in which the voice, oboe, and piano seem often to just co-exist with little communication; in Henry Cowell's piano piece *Fabric*, with its superimposition of very independent rhythms; and in Elliott Carter's *Sonata for Violoncello and Piano*.

RUTH CRAWFORD SEEGER

Throughout the 1920s Crawford Seeger's music still belonged to a tradition showing the influence of Alexander Scriabin, as it had come to her during her piano studies with Diane Lavoie Herz in Chicago from 1924-1927 and the influence of Arnold Schoenberg through her composition studies with Adolph Weidig during the same time. In 1930 however, she was studying in New York with the American composer and musicologist Charles Seeger, and her *Diaphonic Suite No. 1*, played tonight in its flute version, shows immediately a very different world: a world of very strict discipline, based on techniques learned with Charles Seeger (with whom she was married in 1931). Seeger had developed in the 1910s—for Henry Cowell who studied with him at Berkeley—a technique for writing *dissonant counterpoint* which was supposed to guarantee a consistent and strict use of dissonances based on the reversal of the old rules of tonal counterpoint. When Ruth Crawford came to New York to study with Seeger in 1930, he revised and enriched his theory for her lessons. Crawford learned very quickly the mastery of the idiom, and the first piece which resulted from this new discipline was the *Diaphonic Suite No.1*. In this work in four short movements, one can notice how intervals are mainly dissonant (i.e. minor and major seconds, tri-

tones, minor and major sevenths, ninths), and how the rhythmic patterns are constantly changing from bar to bar. The third movement is an exception to this rhythmic rule, in that there is a constant flow of regular durations; but here the pitches are submitted to an automatic treatment by which a set of seven tones are constantly rotated and submitted to large-scale transpositions. This peculiar technique, somewhat similar to serial methods, is found again in the second of the *Three Songs*.

Crawford Seeger was, with Carl Ruggles who arrived at a similar point in his own way, the first American composer to systematically *think* the problem of non-tonal music, and find original and brilliant solutions in that idiom, independently from the European tradition. In this respect it can be affirmed that the most advanced way of treating dissonance at the time was realized by the use of *heterophony*, a concept best illustrated in her *Three Songs*. It is one of Crawford Seeger's major achievements to have been the first composer to master this idiom in a consistent manner. The consequences of this became soon afterwards internationally—and indirectly—known through the work of John Cage (who will in the following decades superimpose *sound events* of widely diverging nature), and Elliott Carter. And looking backwards, if one needs a historical antecedent to this way of thinking, it can naturally be found in the music of Charles Ives, who himself served as a direct inspiration to most of the composers represented in tonight's program.

Three Songs constitutes one of the major works of Crawford Seeger's maturity. Written after the well-known String Quartet, the Songs build on the advances of the latter piece, while maintaining the same compositional principles based on extreme independence of the parts. In the *Three Songs*, the concept is not only applied to the independence of the melodic lines in rhythms and intervallic terms, it becomes a superimposition of different compositional systems.

There are two instrumental groups: the first one, with the voice, oboe, piano and percussion is the most active group and constitutes what Crawford refers to as the "obligato." The other one, the "ostinato," plays sporadically, in the background. Seeger described the work in an interesting and insightful way:

"The piano and oboe chase each other around in the most surprising arabesques to a percussion accompaniment, the two instruments and the voice and percussion giving the impression—such is the independence of parts—of a whole small orchestra, busily engaged in a contrapuntal turn. Upon the gay irregularity of the fabric of these instruments, as concertanti, has been superimposed a slow and solemn orchestral ostinato of a purely percussive character, whose regular tread makes a very unusual effect—a counterpoint between two groups, one in florid counterpoint, the other independently homophonic."

The texts are from Carl Sandburg, a poet who was a close friend of Crawford's, and whose texts she had already set a few years earlier.

I. RAT RIDDLES:

There was a gray rat looked at me
with green eyes out of a rathole.

"Hello, rat," I said,
"Is there a chance for me
to get on to the language of the rats?"

And the green eyes blinked at me,
blinked from a gray rat's rathole.

"Come again," I said,
"Slip me a couple of riddles;
there must be riddles among the rats."

And the green eyes blinked at me
and a whisper came from the gray rathole:
"Who do you think you are and why is a rat?
Where did you sleep last night and why do
you sneeze on Tuesdays? And why is the
grave of a rat no deeper than the grave
of a man?"

And the tail of a green-eyed rat
Whipped and was gone at a gray rathole.

II. PRAYERS OF STEEL

Lay me on an anvil, O God.
Beat me and hammer me into a crowbar.
Let me pry loose old walls.
Let me lift and loosen old foundations.

Lay me on an anvil, O God.
Beat me and hammer me into a steel spike.
Drive me into the girders that hold a skyscraper together.
Take red-hot rivets and fasten me into the central girders.
Let me be the great nail holding a skyscraper through
blue nights into white stars.

The music of this second Song seems at first a rather clear illustration of the text. In its two parts, the second one being a reprise of the first after a short silence, there is a sense of forceful energy, as if the composer had taken quite literally the imagery of the hammering of old walls and foundations. But at a deeper level this is probably the Song in which the elements in each voice of the *obbligato* are most systematically worked out, in an almost mechanical way. The rigorous construction of the oboe, percussion and piano lines are thought out in such separate ways that one can speak of a heterophony of musical processes, covering up an almost inaudible motivic and harmonic unity.

III. IN TALL GRASS

Bees and a honeycomb in the dried head
of a horse in a pasture corner - a skull
in the tall grass an a buzz and a buzz
of the yellow honey-hunters.

And I ask no better [a] winding sheet
(over the earth and under the sun).

Let the bees go honey-hunting with yellow
blur of wings in the dome of my head,
in the rumbling, singing arch of my skull.

Let there be wings and yellow dust and the
drone of dreams of honey - who loses
and remembers? - who keeps and
forgets?

In a blue sheen of moon over the bones
and under the hanging honey comb
the bees come home and the bees sleep.

In this last Song it is the background group—the *Ostinato*—which offers the closest illustration to the text. Once again the *Obbligato* follows relatively abstract procedures of construction. In spite of this, the voice and the oboe possess here a uniquely lyrical and intimate quality.

WALLINGFORD RIEGGER: Three Canons for Woodwinds, Op. 9

Wallingford Riegger was born in Albany, Georgia, and moved to New York at the age of fifteen. He studied cello and composition, continuing his education in Germany, where he also conducted professionally. Following his return in 1917, he occupied a number of teaching positions, including posts at the New School for Social Research and Northwestern University. His recognition grew steadily, and at the time of his death, he was widely recognized as the dean of American composers.

Riegger's compositional style was noted for its individualism and independence, and resulted in works of great originality and distinction, frequently austere but not humorless, marked by a new and often startling resonance, great rhythmic vitality, and a preoccupation for formal structure. *Three Canons* displays his fascination with and affinity for contrapuntal writing, and find themselves in accord with the opinion of a leading critic who described Riegger as "...an advanced and highly independent musical thinker who speaks his piece with terse, uncompromising language that says exactly what it means and stops at the right place, when it has no more to say."

ELLIOTT CARTER: Sonata for Violoncello and Piano

The programming of a piece written in 1948 may surprise in this program devoted to the 1930s, but it is a remarkable example of how one of the main aspects of the other works on the program found a continuation in the following generation of American composers. Starting with the Cello Sonata Carter's musical aesthetic clearly comes from the same vein of thought as Ives or Crawford Seeger. In his music from the Cello Sonata on, Carter develops progressively an idiom based on great independence of the parts, as well as a rhythmic complexity which places him in the company of Cowell's music and theories on rhythm. In the Cello Sonata the independence of parts is achieved by giving the sensation that the two instruments are at times moving at different speeds and with very different characters. This is not unlike some passages of Crawford Seeger's *Three Songs*, but in Carter's music, there is also a large temporal organization guiding changes of tempi as well as the thematic relationships. Here is an account of the work by Carter specialist David Schiff:

"Carter composed the second movement first. It begins as a jazzy scherzo, pitting the tonalities of B major and B flat minor against each other. A contrasting section, however, jumps into new territory: a nervous polyrhythm of five against three and an ominous sounding of the *Dies Irae*, swerves the music into a darker terrain. The slow third movement begins with a restatement of the nervous quintuplet figure from the previous movement. The sections are related by tempo ratios 6:7:8:5, a new procedure which allows the thematic ideas to take on changing characters. A similar transformation produces the tempo of the last movement into a rapid rhythmic motto. Indeed much of the last movement is a recasting of ideas from the slow movement but in a state of increasing frenzy which reaches a climax as the two instruments collide in a five-against-two polyrhythm near the end. Having journeyed so far from the small-scaled humor of the scherzo to the volcanic energy of the finale, Carter added a new opening movement which takes the idea of opposition to a further and definitive

stage. The sonata now opens with the contrasted relentless ticking of the piano and out-of-time lyricism of the cello. Both ideas are pursued as if blindly with only a few passing moments of mutual contact (and these seem accidental)."

HENRY COWELL: Aeolian Harp, Fabric

Cowell was a child prodigy, playing the piano and composing already at a very early age. Growing up in the San Francisco area, he had little formal education musically or otherwise. By age 16 he had already written over a hundred piano pieces, most of them including completely new piano techniques such as clusters, playing on the strings inside the piano, and some form of *prepared piano*. He got the opportunity to put his ideas in organized form when he studied with Charles Seeger at the University of California at Berkeley, and it is under his teacher's influence that he wrote this compendium of his thoughts on composition: *New Musical Resources*, still a thought-provoking book in our time.

Between 1923 and 1928 he made five tours in Europe as composer-pianist, where he met, among others Bartók, Kandinsky, Schoenberg, who invited him to play for his class, and Webern who conducted one of his works in Vienna in 1932. He became quickly a celebrity in the U.S. as well after his Carnegie Hall debut in 1925.

In the two piano pieces performed tonight, Cowell demonstrates his discovery of extended techniques on the piano, such as playing on the strings inside the piano, in *Aeolian Harp*, and his interest in rhythmic complexity, in *Fabric*. In the latter piece one can hear a superimposition of very different types of rhythms: at the beginning the measure is divided in one part in 6 equal values, in another one in 5 values, and in a third one in 8. But all this is just the vehicle for a lovely neo-romantic little piece ending in B flat minor. This type of rhythmic complexity was to remain dormant until the 1950s where it was revived by composers such as Karlheinz Stockhausen in Europe and Milton Babbitt in the US.

JOHN CAGE: First Construction (in metal)

The choice of instruments sets this work apart in our program: almost all the instruments are metal percussion, as the title indicates. The idea of a percussion ensemble, without any other instrument, belongs historically to the French composer Edgar Varèse, with his *Ionisation*, for 13 players. *Ionisation* was written in 1931 and premiered in March 1933 in New York, with Henry Cowell at the piano. *First Construction (in metal)*, in turn, was premiered in New York in 1943 in a concert with Henry Cowell's percussion piece *Ostinato Pianissimo*.

Because of the choice of metal instruments and the coexistence of several temporal levels, the influence of Balinese Gamelan has been mentioned often in relation to this piece. It is however clearly a piece of Western music, and one which shows immediately the originality of the young Cage: juxtaposition of short sequences, absence of tension resulting from a musical development—be it rhythmic or timbral—lack of discursivity in the unfolding of the phrases. The sense of continuity that is created over large sections of the work in spite of this absence of traditional methods of composition is the result of a careful control by the composer of the general proportions, through a repetitive pattern of measures in which the musical elements are fitted:

"*Construction in Metal*, for six percussionists was written in 1939 in Seattle. Since Arnold Schoenberg had impressed upon me the structural function of tonality, I felt the need of finding some structural means adequate to composing for percussion. This led me eventually to a basic reexamination of the physical nature of sound. Sounds, including noises, it seemed to me, had four characteristics (pitch, loudness, timbre, and duration), while silence had only one (duration). I therefore

devised a rhythmic structure based on the duration, not of notes, but of spaces of time. The whole has as many parts as each unit has small parts, and these large and small, are in the same proportion. Used for the first time in the *Construction*, this principle appears in nearly all my work (symmetrically or asymmetrically) until 1952. It is analogous to Indian Tala (rhythmic method), but it has the Western characteristic of a beginning and an ending.

In this work, the rhythmic structure is 4-3-2-3-4, 16 times 16 measures of 4/4. The first four 16 are an exposition of individual bodies of material characterized by differences of rhythmic pattern and instrumentation. The remainder is development (without reexposition), to which is added a 12-measure coda (in fact it is 9-measure long). The instruments used are orchestral bells, 5 thundersheets, piano muted by metal cylinders manipulated on the strings by an assistant to the pianist (the pianist also sweeps the bass strings with a timpani stick, a 12-gong gamelan, 8 cowbells, 3 Japanese temple gongs, 4 automobile brake drums, 8 anvils, 4 Turkish and 4 Chinese cymbals, 4 muted gongs, water gong, suspended gong, and tamtam."

(John Cage).

CARL RUGGLES: Angels, for 6 brass instruments

A close contemporary of Charles Ives, Carl Ruggles was born in Massachusetts, moving first to Minnesota in 1907 and to New York in 1917, where he quickly became friends with most of the avant-garde composers of the time: Henry Cowell, Charles Seeger, Carlos Salzedo, Edgar Varèse, as well as Ives. *Angels* was premiered in 1922 in New York in one of the concerts organized by the *International Composers Guild* which had been founded in the previous year by Varèse and Salzedo. The piece was announced for that concert as the second movement of a symphonic poem entitled *Men and Angels*, which was never completed. It was originally scored for six trumpets, but is nowadays often done in other instrumental combinations, such as four trumpets and two trombones, or even six clarinets. Like so many works of the beginning of the 20th century the piece caused quite a riot at its premiere. The main causes for surprise in the audience were the original instrumental color, and the constant use of dissonance. This dissonant aspect is particularly interesting here because it put Ruggles immediately at the forefront of the modern music of his time, and in direct relation with the aesthetic of most of the other members of the *Guild*. Charles Seeger in particular immediately recognized in Ruggles' music a model in the treatment of dissonance according to his ideals, and Ruggles would often ask Seeger for help and moral support in his compositional endeavors at the time. With only twenty two measures of music, and lasting about three minutes, *Angels* follows a simple ternary form. The first part consists of two phrases; the second part is characterized by a series of overlapping phrases, each reaching a higher point until the climax; the last part is a reprise of the first, with an additional measure; it is followed by a short coda. *Angels* is dedicated to Charles Seeger.

Special thanks to Judson Jay Scott who prepared the group before Linda Moorhouse took over.

Special thanks to Tom Collier who helped prepare the group for this performance.

CHARLES IVES: String Quartet No. 1

"Ives wrote his First String Quartet in 1896, when he was 21 and a student at Yale. Like the First and Second Symphonies, the other major works of his national *Romantic period*, the First Quartet is tonal, uses traditional forms, and shows a thorough grasp of late-19th-century style. The last three movements were composed for a church service, using themes paraphrased from American hymn tunes, and the first