

The Contemporary Group

CONCERT

Sunday, November 3, 1968
3:30 p.m. HUB Auditorium

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Program Notes

Each of the three Seattle premieres presented on this afternoon's program represents a different aspect of today's new music techniques.

"Exchanges" by Lawrence Moss of Yale University, contains aleatory (chance music) portions in which the performer is given only a vague outline of what to play, leaving the exact details to improvisational and momentary inspiration. This freedom and creative responsibility of the performer is one of the prime elements in today's Jazz and has only recently become a valued addition to the musical vocabulary of the "serious" composer.

"Exchanges" consists of a succession of coloristic tableaux set off by moments of silence--just as one would find paragraphs set apart by larger areas of space. The music expresses a wide range of emotions. For example, the composer indicates that the mood of the music should move from "ferocious" to "mysterious" in the first eight measures. It is paradoxical that the precisely notated parts found at the beginning and end of the piece tend to sound more improvised than the middle improvisatory section. This is due chiefly to the intricate rhythmic relationships between parts, which produce a "random" quality often associated with improvisation.

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Niccolo Castiglione, a native of Milan, studied with Stockhausen in Germany before coming to the United States as visiting lecturer at the University of Michigan as well as the University of California at La Jolla. Currently on the faculty of the University of Washington School of Music, he has brought fresh ideas to Seattle. "Only through humor can anyone retain an equilibrium in today's corrupt and evil world," he says. This is the essence of his "Masks" for chamber orchestra, performed this afternoon.

There are two basic ideas in this work. The first is that of superimposing different musical thoughts--even whole pieces--over one another to achieve an effect similar to that of different groups of people gathered in the same room, carrying on completely unrelated conversations.

The second idea is that musical language is the result of various styles and that these can be combined effectively in one work. Thus we find strains of the Baroque, Classical, and Romantic periods alongside some of today's advanced musical sounds. The result is often very humorous and is occasionally meant to be satirical, as when popular tunes suddenly emerge from the score ("Frere Jacques," "Deck the Halls," Boccherini's Minuet, and "Scheherazade" are examples).

The basic structure of the work consists of a division of the performers into two groups. A trio (viola, horn and bassoon) plays an eighteenth-century-style Minuet with variations at random moments during the performance of the nine other instrument-alists.

On listening to the lighthearted fun of this work, one is immediately reminded of Mozart's famous ballroom scene in "Don Giovanni" in which three different Minuets are being played simultaneously by three different orchestras. The audience may feel free to smile.

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John Eaton's "Concert Piece" explores the use of microtones (intervals smaller than half-steps) --more frequently found in Oriental music, in particular the Gagaku music of Japan. The first oboe and first clarinet are tuned a quarter of a natural whole tone lower than the second oboe and second clarinet. The flute moves between these two sets of pitch levels with intricate virtuosity.

The intense musical content of the "Concert Piece" is unique in the interesting sonorities Eaton achieves. The rhythmic and technical demands made on the players make this composition one of the most difficult works in the woodwind chamber music repertoire. It was recently recorded for Decca by the Contemporary Group.

A recipient of two Guggenheim Fellowships and a Prix de Rome, Eaton has recently achieved much acclaim with composition for Synket (an electronic instrument) and orchestra, commissioned and performed by the Boston Symphony at Tanglewood under Gunther Schuller, as well as by the Los Angeles Philharmonic under Zubin Mehta.