

presents

A CONCERT OF MUSIC BY JAMES BEALE

B42
1986
1-9
DUB

with artists

- Randolph Hokanson, piano
- Joel Salsman, piano -
- James Beale, piano
- Henry Siegl, violin -
- Paul Coletti, viola
- Tom Collier, percussion

January 9, 1986

8:00 PM, Meany Theater

Tape CD
10.941 II

PROGRAM

NINTH PIANO SONATA (1985)

Allegro Assai - Adagio - Tempo Primo
Allegro

9:53

Joel Salsman, piano

2 SONATA FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO (1956)

Allegro - Poco Lento
Vivace

Cantabile - Allegretto

Henry Siegl, violin

Joel Salsman, piano

21:13

INTERMISSION

SONATA FOR VIOLA AND PIANO (1985) - first performance

3 *Maestoso - Andante - Allegretto*

4 *Allegro*

Paul Coletti, viola

Randolph Hokanson, piano

15:30

5 PISCES ASCENDING (1972)

Tom Collier, percussion

James Beale, piano

11:52

PROGRAM NOTES

Lean, lucid, lyrical music . . . engaging, full of vigor and individuality . . . True piano music, constantly providing stimulating and valuable food for thought . . . engaging . . . a strong work, with its unresolved ending . . . a stimulating piece . . . hugely enjoyable . . . Beale is sure of what he wants to say . . . warm, charming . . . a jewel of lyricism—reviewers from around the United States and from Europe have often used the same words in describing the music of James Beale. Beale expresses himself simply, his considerable technical skills always taking second place to his search for meaning.

James Beale's roots are firmly in New England. One great-grandfather was a member of the Boston *literati* and a friend of Emerson. A great-grandmother had been a celebrated amateur singer. Beale was born in Wellesley Hills, Massachusetts, in 1924. He was a musical prodigy who played piano by ear from the age of four, learning all of the popular songs of the day as if they were nursery tunes. With the help of Dr. Stanley Chapple he received a fine classical training in piano and improvisation.

Luckily, at Harvard Aaron Copland took an interest in the young composer and arranged for him to continue study with him at Tanglewood. Copland at the time was writing *Appalachian Spring*, certainly a masterpiece of our own American style. The genius of Copland as a teacher, Beale recalls, was his uncanny ability to point right to the spot in a piece that the student had labored over most. Both Copland's teaching and his music had a powerful influence.

Beale's exposure to the wonderful popular songs of the twenties and thirties, and solid classical training at Harvard gave him a rich backlog of musical material as well as the framework through which to develop it. In 1947 his *Piano Trio, Op. 5* won first prize in composition at Yale—evidence that he was on the right track. As pianist for the New Haven Symphony Orchestra, he was gaining valuable first-hand experience for later orchestral writing.

The crucial phase of James Beale's development as a composer occurred, however, when he was brought to the University of Washington by Stanley Chapple, then new director of the School of Music. Here a truly unusual atmosphere prevailed. Extremely fine musicians who had come over from Europe cared not a whit for East Coast fame. Seattle was still relatively isolated. In this atmosphere of involvement and eagerness for meaning, Beale thrived. During the next decade, from age 24 to 34, he turned out a stunning succession of large works: seven piano sonatas, two orchestral works, a string quartet, a cello concerto, and the violin-piano sonata which we are to hear tonight.

The *Sonata for Violin and Piano, Op. 22* is a large work in four movements. It was first performed here by two of this small coterie of musicians, Emanuel Zetlin and Berthe Poncy Jacobson. The resources of the violin are

fully exploited, the form is secure and clear, the harmonies are always on target and the tunes often seem to suggest some popular song just out of reach. In a way, it is the crown work of Beale's youthful period, after which his musical instinct seemed to say, I have finished feeding off this backlog of tunes and rhythms, now let's move on to something new.

In 1958, a Guggenheim-sabbatical year spent in France produced the "Cressay" Symphony, performed later by the Seattle Symphony under Milton Katims. This second symphony is a kind of watershed work, branching over into the post-Webern style then sweeping Europe. This atonal style, with its impartial use of all twelve half-steps of the chromatic scale, gave fresh colors and impulses, subtle shadings and less binding key centers.

A radical change in the sound of Beale's music followed his year in France. The rhythms in his works of the sixties, such an engaging feature of his earlier style, seemed to have been transmuted to a state of suspended animation. *Five Still Lives, Op. 32* for ten instruments, written in 1964, reveals the composer's new artistic search—to grapple somehow with the effect that atonality has upon rhythms.

Pisces Ascending, Op. 38, tonight's finale, meets this rhythmic challenge head-on. In 1972 Beale had just returned from a year in Pittsburgh as Composer-in-Residence at Carnegie-Mellon University. Perhaps stimulated by East Coast influences, he tackled his own working-through of the post-Webern style. The floating melodic figurations alternate with brilliant piano chords, which seem to be borne upward by the frenetic beat.

Two all-Beale concerts have preceded the one presented this evening. The first was produced in Seattle by Mu Phi Epsilon in 1961, coming "on the cusp" of his first change of style. Then, in 1977, an enthusiastic singing group called *The Elizabethans* sponsored a concert in the Chicago area at which the DuPage Civic Symphony also performed the *Chamber Symphony, Op. 10*. This second retrospective program marked the end of Beale's allegiance to the international flags of the post-serial style.

What, we may ask, of the two new works on the program tonight, both emerging in 1985? There is a suggestion in the new *Ninth Piano Sonata* and in the *Sonata for Viola and Piano* that the composer's point of view is changing. Chords are reaching out farther, melodies are honing in closer, as if familiar things were being seen in a new light. Yet we shall have to be content with what Charles Ives called "the beauty of the an unanswered question" until another evolution puts James Beale 1985 into perspective.

Upcoming Concerts:

January 17, Faculty Recital: January Jazz and Contemporary Buffet featuring Tom Collier, Roy Cummings, Stuart Dempster, and William O. Smith.

January 29, The University Symphony with David Kappy, *horn*. Robert Feist, *conductor*.

February 10, Faculty Recital: The Soni Ventorum.

February 11, Faculty Brahms Recital with Toby Saks, *cello*, Neal O'Doan, *piano*, and William McColl, *clarinet*. Brahms exhibit in the lobby.

February 18, The Wind Sonfonia. Richard Byrnes, *director*.

February 21, The University Symphony: All-Italian Program with guest soloists Augusto Pagliarunga, *tenor*, and Frank Guarrera, *baritone*. Robert Feist, *conductor*.