

## THE CONTEMPORARY GROUP

February 4, 1968

### CONCERT NOTES

#### I. JAMES BEALE: Three Miniatures for oboe, clarinet and viola (1947)

This group of three tiny pieces forms a prelude to the third Contemporary Group concert of the current series. James Beale's Miniatures are an early example of the composer's fine sense of tone color, and employ an unusual trio of instruments.

The opening allegro, arising from a twelve-note row, utilizes the three instruments equally in imitative counterpoint. The middle movement, slow and rhapsodic, pairs the oboe and clarinet in a series of linear patterns; the viola weaves melodic garlands of its own. The final section is a dance-like creation in 6/8 time. Once again the two wind instruments are pitted against the viola; an opposition of duple and triple rhythms adds to the overall effect of tension and excitement.

#### II. ALASTAIR HOOD: Illuminations (1966)

In contrast with the more rigorously constructed works on today's program, Illuminations is largely a product of intuition. Free associations of musical thoughts, a total lack of serial organization and great freedom of rhythm and tempo support the composer's assertion that this is music for the ear and heart, not for the analyst's eye.

The instrumentation is basically pointillistic, and aims to compare and contrast differing timbres and modes of attack. A group of melodic instruments (flute, bass clarinet, violin) usually functions as one unit, opposed by a keyed percussion team (vibraphone, piano, celesta). The solo percussionist takes his own pathway; his role is confined almost entirely to a multi-colored cadenza toward the end of the work.

Traditional ideas of architectural form and dramatic direction do not apply here. Rather, Hood has created a musical monad, whose elements are reflections or connotations of each other. Any apparent dramatic motion (or lack of it) relates directly to surrounding materials, but does not interfere with the overriding sense of stasis.

#### III. KENNETH BENSHOOF: Three Songs on Roethke (1965); Two Folk Songs (1961, 1956)

This pairing of Kenneth Benshoof and Theodore Roethke speaks eloquently for the vitality of the arts in the Pacific Northwest. Both men have rooted their works solidly in native soil; prevailing trends or conventions are of minor consequence.

Set in a free, parlando style, "The Waking" evokes a sense of early morning stillness; occasional melodic shudders do little to dispel this. "Dinky" is a riddle song - and Benshoof's setting treats it as such. Perhaps Dinky is a child's Bogey Man; or perhaps he's a lecherous kind of Dirty

(reflected in a funky Blues section); we will never know. "The Cow", of course, is the answer to a dairyman's prayer.

Benshoof's two folk song settings preserve the familiar tunes associated with each. The piano accompaniments, however, provide moments of commentary on the words: "The Fox", for example, conjures up the memory of a broken-down banjo. John Brown, according to historical record, was a sour, embittered religious fanatic; the second song becomes macabre when re-cast in this context.

#### IV. DONALD MARTINO: Strata for bass clarinet solo (1966)

Music for the bass clarinet has always been rare; so Strata is indeed an abundance of riches. The composer, Donald Martino, is Associate Professor of Composition at Yale University. In recent years he has become one of the leading voices in contemporary musical aesthetics. It is consistent with his musical aims that he has chosen to exploit the resources of instruments (such as this one) which are slighted by most composers.

The dramatic, improvisational effect of the piece masks an extreme amount of internal organization. Values of pitch, duration, attack and loudness are all determined with mathematical exactness. The solo clarinetist must be a virtuoso performer; His task is complicated by the use of flutter-tonguing, clicking of keys, quarter tones and many other unusual devices.

#### V. ARNOLD SCHOENBERG: String Trio, Op. 45 (1947)

The String Trio must be counted among a handful of masterpieces written by Schoenberg. A sophisticated product of his last years, it has received much critical attention in this country, but a scanty number of hearings. Although the work is now twenty years old, this marks the first performance of it in the Pacific Northwest.

Written in one long movement, the Trio unquestionably draws on some unstated dramatic design. We may look on Thomas Mann's statement as one possible exposition of the music's inner values:

"Schoenberg told me about the new trio he had just completed, and about the experiences he had secretly woven into the composition - experiences of which the work was a kind of fruit. He had, he said, represented his illness and medical treatment in the music, including even the male nurses and all the other oddities of American hospitals. The work was extremely difficult to play, he said, in fact almost impossible, or at best only for three players of virtuoso rank; but, on the other hand, the music was very rewarding because of its extraordinary sonic effects."

Recent remarks by George Rochberg are also appropriate:

"There is an inner 'program', a deeply personal one, in this work that I am convinced provided Schoenberg with the scenario for these psycho-dramatic musical events which unfold very much like the images of certain contemporary theater and film. The String Trio is, in this sense, Schoenberg's most contemporary work, for in it he expresses musically what is the most painful aspect of contemporary consciousness - its alienation and disorientation, its disaffection with purpose and direction. Extremes of psychological tension and exhaustion mixed with violent outbursts and the most painful tenderness characterize the emotional life of the gestures of the Trio. Its sensuous impact on our nervous system is cruel in the way the sensuous impact of modern theater can be cruel in breaking through our urbane, sophisticated poses and spiritual hypocrisies and in revealing the human heart in all its desperate nakedness."

VI. LEO KRAFT: Concerto for Thirteen Players (1966)

A member of the music faculty of Queens College, New York, Leo Kraft is well-known for two widely used books on sight singing. His contributions as a composer, however, are meritorious. A writer in all forms - choral, instrumental, electronic - his bold, angular style owes little to the influence of his teachers, Karol Rathaus, Randall Thompson and Nadia Boulanger.

The Concerto performed today explores the possibilities for opposing sonorities implicit among the instruments chosen. Avoiding classical concerto rhetoric, Kraft does however allow the various solo instruments to come to the fore; each one illustrates various idiomatic styles appropriate to it.

Unlike much present day music, the Concerto espouses no particular harmonic system, save for an occasional use of synthetic scales. It is in one movement containing sections of differentiated tempo.

--Harrison Ryker

THE WAKING

I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.  
I feel my fate in what I cannot fear.  
I learn by going where I have to go.

We think by feeling. What is there to know?  
I hear my being dance from ear to ear.  
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Of those so close beside me, which are you?  
God bless the Ground! I shall walk softly  
there,  
And learn by going where I have to go.

DINKY

O What's the weather in a Beard?  
It's windy there, and rather weird,  
And when you think the sky has cleared  
--Why, there is Dirty Dinky.

Suppose you walk out in a Storm,  
With nothing on to keep you warm,  
And then step barefoot on a worm  
--Of course, it's Dirty Dinky.

As I was crossing a hot hot Plain,  
I saw a sight that caused me pain,  
You asked me before, I'll tell you again:  
--It looked like Dirty Dinky.

THE COW

There Once was a Cow with a Double Udder  
When I think of it now, I just have to Shudder!  
She was too much for One, you can bet your life:  
She had to be Milked by a Man and his Wife.

Light takes the Tree; but who can  
tell us how?  
The lowly worm climbs up a winding stair;  
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Great Nature has another thing to do  
To you and me; so take the lively air,  
And, lovely, learn by going where to go.

This shaking keeps me steady. I should  
know.  
What falls away is always. And is near.  
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.  
I learn by going where I have to go.

Last night you lay a-sleeping? No!  
The room was thirty-five below;  
The sheets and blankets turned to snow.  
--He'd got in: Dirty Dinky.

You'd better watch the things you do,  
You'd better watch the things you do.  
You're part of him; he's part of you  
--You may be Dirty Dinky.