

THE CONTEMPORARY GROUP
April 21, 1968

CONCERT NOTES

I. STRAVINSKY: Four Songs

These four songs were taken from two earlier works; Nos. 1 & 2 from the Four Russian Songs of 1918-19 (nos. 1 & 4 respectively) and Nos. 3 & 4 from the Tales for Children 1915-17 (nos. 2 & 1 respectively), and instrumented for performance at the Los Angeles Monday Evening Concerts in 1954. With the earlier Balmont Songs, Japanese Lyrics and Four Russian Peasant Choruses, these works represent both workbook and outgrowth of Stravinsky's major work of the World War I period, Les Noces. As such these songs demonstrate the use of short melodic folk-shapes in ever-varied pulse groupings. And with the instrumentation of 1954 subtle color variance both confirms and deepens these characteristics.

1. The Drake

Drake, dear gray Drake, crested Drake,
go out and find your seven baby ducks.
Drake, catch up with your duck, you nice young duck.
Go home, duck, good gray girl;
You've got seven ducklings at home
and your drake makes eight.
Now our bold, brave duck goes on a diving spree,
running from meadow to burrows and bushes,
dazzling passers by.

2. Russian Spiritual

Snowstorms, blizzards wild,
Closed are my ways to Thy Kingdom.
No path is open to man or horse,
To my Father Who art in Heaven.
Into his Kingdom all my sisters and brothers
He chooses in love and in spirit.
To God the glory, to Christ the omnipotence,
For ever and ever, Amen.
Thanks be to thee.

3. Geese and Swans

Geese and swans once flying near the ground
Saw a bare field where they all came down.
In the field they built a bath.
A good place to scratch their bugs.
Busy sparrows split the wood
While the cockroach warmed the water.
When the mouse brought water
The louse bathed his daughter.
Look, white worms under the bathing mat,
And a jumping flea.
But the flea broke her leg;
No wonder the bugs all cried:
My God I've had enough of bathing!

4. Tiliim-bom

Tiliim-bom, Save the goatshed from its doom!
Mother Goat while grazing, Sees her home blazing,
Waves her stumpy little tail, Calls for water, pail on pail.
Pussy, on the bell string, with might she rings,
Tiliim-bom, Save the goat-shed from its doom!
Mistress Hen a bucket brings, water quickly flings...
Tiliim-bom...
The folk some tearing, shouting...
Hark the fire-bell ringing loud.
Come, good folk don't stand about.
Help to put the firece flames out.
Tiliim-bom...
Now goat and hen and pussy too,...
On the grass sit down in a row,
And the song they sing runs so:
Tiliim-bom, Mother goat we've saved your home!

II. DAVID BURGE: Sources III (1967)

David Burge, composer-pianist, was born in Evanston, Illinois, in 1930, and studied at Northwestern University, the Eastman School of Music, and the Cherubini Conservatory in Florence. He is founder-director of the annual Festival of Contemporary Music at the University of Colorado and Musical Director of the Boulder Philharmonic. He has recorded for Vos and Advance records and is, by all critical account, one of the leading pianists in the performance of contemporary music.

Sources III, for clarinet and percussion, organizes both musical and stage action into a totality which projects drama, lyricism and humor. With the extinguishing of the candles on stage, within a darkened concert hall, the visual focus of the audience is both changed from place to place and from light to darkness, underlying the musical structure with an atmosphere which is unmistakable.

III. GEORGE ROCHBERG: Contra Mortem et Tempus (1965)

Written for Lewis Kaplan and the Aeolian Chamber Players, this work presents a new direction in Rochberg's creative path, away from the world of serialism toward a broader existential base, represented by the use of "quotation" (from the Ives Trio, for instance), triadic pitch association, and the dramatic juxtaposition of dynamic, aggressive, dissonant shape with relaxed, sustained and non-propulsive sonority. All is based in a notation which is partially improvisatory - "to permit maximum flexibility of performance" - in rhythmic relationships.

IV. STRAVINSKY: Two poems of Balmont, Three Japanese Lyrics (1911, instr. 1954)

Together with the Four Songs, these two song-sets were instrumented for performance in 1954 for the Los Angeles Monday Evening Concerts.

Text summaries:

Balmont:

1. The Flower
The Forget-me-not is blooming, All for you, my love...
2. The Dove
On the window sill the rose,
And on the roof the dove.
Do you see them now, oh look,
The dove flying to the rose?...
Oh my beautiful white dove, Fly back to your waiting love.

Japanese:

1. Akahito
I have flowers of white,
come and see where they grow in my garden.
But falls the snow,
I know not my flowers from flakes of snow.
2. Mazatsumi
The spring has come.
Through those chinks of imprisoning ice
the white floes drift,
foamy flakes that sport and play in the stream.
How glad they pass, first flowers
That tidings bear, spring is coming.
Tsaraiuki
What shimmers so white far away?
You might say, is naught but cloud in hill's midst.
Full blown are the cherries,
Thou art come, beloved springtime!

Unlike the texts of the Four Songs, which are Russian poems of folk origin and contain extended narrative, the Japanese Lyrics are brief and descriptive in nature. All are about the coming of spring and according to Stravinsky: "The impression which they made on me was exactly like that made by Japanese paintings and engravings. The graphic solution of problems of perspective and space shown by their art incited me to find something analogous in music."

V. DON WILSON: Seventeen Views (1966-67), for Violin, Narrator, and Slides of Japanese Paintings and Prints

The composer, presently a teacher of composition at Bowling Green University, has provided the following commentary for "Seventeen Views", a work dedicated to the violinist Paul Zukofsky:

Each fragment (or "View") is a musical impression of one of seventeen Japanese haiku, four for each season and one on all four seasons. In its structure this work is modeled on the layout for the game, "Nine Men's Morris" or "The Mill": that is, sixteen of the seventeen fragments are distributed, together with their respective poems, on a single page in two concentric squares of eight fragments per square; the seventeenth fragment, representing the poem on all four seasons, is placed directly in the center.

A set of rules govern the progress of both violinist and narrator through this labyrinth: these specify either (1) that one performer may follow the other wherever he goes, or (2) that each performer may go his own way, oblivious to the other. In either case a set of seventeen slides of Japanese paintings and prints, one for each poem, are to be shown on a screen behind the performers, at the rate of 30 to 40 seconds per slide, to produce a counterpoint of music, literature, and art.

In a non-chronological presentation of these materials, in which there is little or no correlation moment-by-moment, it is the overall impression of the work that must be obtained and reflected upon by the auditor-spectator. There are by this means 160 ways of presenting all seventeen fragments without repetition, over 3,000 ways with repetition. In all versions the work must begin and end with the poem, music, and slide for the four seasons--to provide a satisfactory frame for each presentation of the work.

VI. JEROME ROSEN: Concerto for Synket and Chamber Orchestra (1957-1968)

A former student of Darius Milhaud and Roger Sessions, Jerome Rosen is now a professor of music at the University of California at Davis. His compositions have earned him substantial recognition, including a Guggenheim grant, two Fromm Foundation Fellowships, the George Ladd Prix de Paris of the University of California, and the Creative Arts Institute Award.

In the present work, Rosen joins the ranks of those (like Haydn and Schubert) who have dared to write a significant work for a new or experimental instrument. Rosen's involvement with the synket arose from an encounter with it (and with its prime practitioners, William O. and Jane Smith) in Rome in 1957. Fascinated by the unique potentialities inherent in a portable electronic instrument, he determined to write a concerted piece which would show off its qualities to best advantage. Today's performance is the result of many years of work and experimentation.

The synket was designed by Paul Ketoff (a Russian sound engineer living in Italy) for use by the tape studio of the American Academy in Rome. Originally intended as a sound source for electronic music, the instrument soon disclosed a personality of its own, as the present performance demonstrates.

The sounds produced by the synket are formed by three square-wave oscillators and a white noise generator, and are fed through a variety of filters and modulators. In contrast with the performance technique required by more conventional instruments, the synketist plays his part by manipulating a keyboard, an echo unit, jack wires, and numerous potentiometers and mixer controls. The total range of sound possibilities far exceeds that of conventional instruments: Virtually all conceivable distributions of rhythm, pitch and color are available at will.

Rosen's Synket Concerto projects the spirit, if not the letter, of the Classic-Romantic Concerto form: The orchestra and the electronic instrument are engaged in many styles of conflict and contrast, with clearly defined sections of tempo and mood. The work is in three parts - Molto Lento, Lento, and a Rondo-like Allegro.