Harry Partch: The Complete Works for Adapted Viola and Intoning Voice

March 10th, 2017, 7:30 PM
Brechemin Auditorium

Luke Fitzpatrick: Adapted Viola and Intoning Voice

Program

Two Psalms (1931) Harry Partch (1901-1974)
1. The Lord Is My Shepherd (23rd Psalm) 3' 17
2. By the Rivers of Babylon (137th Psalm) 5' 28

Seventeen Lyrics by Li Po (1930-33) Harry Partch
3. The Long Departed Lover
4. On the City Street
5. An Encounter in the Field
6. The Intruder
7. On-Ascending-the-Sin-Ping-Tower
8. In the Spring-time on the South Side of the Yangtze Kiang
9. The Night of Sorrow
10. On Hearing the Flute in the Yellow Crane House
11. On Hearing the Flute at Lo-cheng One Spring Night
12. A Dream

Intermission

13. On Seeing off Meng Hao-jan
14. On the Ship of Spice-wood
15. With a Man of Leisure
16. A Midnight Farewell
17. Before the Cask of Wine
18. By the Great Wall
19. I Am a Peach Tree

20. The Potion Scene from Romeo and Juliet, Act IV, Scene 3 (1931) Harry Partch

Luke Fitzpatrick, Adapted Viola and Intoning Voice
Program Notes by Luke Fitzpatrick

1931 was a transitional time for Harry Partch, both personally and compositionally. Having recently arrived in San Francisco, the Two Psalms (1931) represent a development in his writing for Intoning Voice. Seeking a more accurate representation of human speech, Partch transcribed Psalm 23 by Cantor Reuben Rinder, of the Congregation Emanu-El in San Francisco. This transcription became the basis of the vocal part for the first setting of the Two Psalms. Using this vocal transcription as a guide, Partch was able to complete By The Rivers of Babylon (137th Psalm). He later re-orchestrated the Two Psalms for Voice, Chromelodeon, Kithara and Adapted Viola/Cello.

Harry Partch’s 17 Lyrics by Li Po (1930-33) were composed following Partch’s dissolution with Western music. Partch sought to expand the 12 tone equal-tempered scale through just intonation, exploring 29 notes before reaching his well-known 43-note scale and others. Partch’s first of many instruments was his Adapted Viola. Using a custom viola built with a cello neck, Partch fashioned a series of brads along the neck indicating his initial 29-note scale. His first work he did not destroy, Partch sets the music in the 17 Lyrics by Li Po to the poetry of Li Bai (701-762) so the “vitality of spoken inflection is retained in the music.” Li Bai’s passion for sweet wine, the pain of lost love and his exploration of the human condition made it a natural fit with Partch’s music.

The Potion Scene (1931) from Romeo and Juliet was dedicated to Rudolphine Radil, a vocalist who Partch had gotten to know shortly after moving to San Francisco. Interestingly, an early version of A Dream from his 17 Lyrics by Li Po also contains a dedication to Rudolphine Radil. The Potion Scene also utilizes the flattened bridge, which allows the top three strings to be played simultaneously, that is featured in the second half of the 17 Lyrics of Li Po. Similar to the Two Psalms, Partch would later explore this work again. In 1955, he arranged The Potion Scene for 3 Voices, Chromelodeon, Kithara, Adapted Viola/Cello, Bass Marimba and Marimba Eroica.

Special thanks to Charles Corey for rediscovering the scores for The Potion Scene and the Two Psalms, and his help putting together these works.

The Potion Scene and Two Psalms: Harry Partch Estate Archive, Sousa Archives and Center for American Music, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.