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STRING QUARTET / GROWTH AND MASSMURDER / LIFT-TILT-FILTER-SPLIT / BEFORE THE UNIVERSE WAS BORN //

Friday
December 9
8 pm

PERFORMANCE

JACK Quartet

THE TITLES ARE CURTIS R. PRIEM EXPERIMENTAL MEDIA AND PERFORMING ARTS CENTER
EMPAC
THE MESSAGE

JACK Quartet

Friday, December 9, 2011

Studio 2

Earle Brown	<i>String Quartet</i>	1965
Peter Ablinger	<i>Wachstum und Massenmord</i> <i>für Titel, Steichquartett und Programmnote</i>	2010
Alex Mincek	<i>String Quartet No. 3 "lift-tilt-filter-split"</i>	2010

-intermission-

Horatiu Rădulescu	<i>String Quartet No. 5</i> <i>"before the universe was born"</i>	1990/95
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JACK Quartet

Christopher Otto, violin
Ari Streisfeld, violin
John Pickford Richards, viola
Kevin McFarland, cello

Curated by Argeo Ascani and Johannes Goebel

PROGRAM NOTES

Earle Brown, *String Quartet*

In the early 1950s Earle Brown was deeply impressed by the action painting of Jackson Pollock and by the sculptural mobiles of Alexander Calder – so much so that Brown decided to experiment, first with compositional methods that would be spontaneous, intuitive, and rapidly carried out (like action painting), and second with the production of mobile “open forms” rather than finished scores of the traditional type.

The score of this string quartet is fully written out in more-or-less conventional music notation. It consists of a sequence of 18 sections, each one of which is a self-contained musical unit, that lasts for about 10 seconds to more than 2 minutes. These are played in the order in which they appear in the score and not in sequences chosen by the performer. Within the various sections of the score, the musical elements are notated with varying degrees of precision. In some, pitches are notated normally; in others not. Durations are generally freer and are for the most part notated proportionately. Except for a few places, Brown also specifies that tight ensemble cuing is to be avoided, especially in moving from section to section. This is done to loosen up the effect of the block structure of the complete composition and to make it more “mobile”.

—Lejaren Hiller

Peter Ablinger, *Wachstum und Massenmord*

(from: “Instruments &”)
for Title, String Quartet

The Woman Who Married a Dog

There was once a woman who had a daughter. When the daughter grew up, the mother in vain encouraged her to find a man to marry, but the daughter rejected all men. At last the mother became angry and told her dog to marry the daughter. The dog did so, and it lived with the girl. Thus having punished her daughter, the mother after some time had the daughter sent to a small island, and here the daughter had a litter of puppies as her children. The dog was not brought to the island with the girl, and when the dog tried to swim over to her, the mother suddenly took pity on her daughter and strapped some stones around the neck of the dog so it drowned when it tried to swim to the island. The girl’s father used to row over to the island with meat to feed his daughter’s off-spring. One day the daughter told the puppies, “When your grandfather arrives to feed you, you shall tear him apart and eat him!” And they did so. Afterwards the daughter placed all the puppies in the sole of a kamik boot and set them to sea. When they drifted away from shore she said, “You will live from now on without ever needing anything!” They tell that the puppies floated away to some far-off country where they turned into white men, and from them all white men come.

Told by Jonasine Nielsen of Saattoq, Greenland From: *The People of the Polar North*, Knud Rasmussen (1908).

—Peter Ablinger

Alex Mincek, *String Quartet No. 3 "lift-tilt-filter-split"*

Even the most mechanical, the most banal, the most habitual, and the most stereotyped repetitions find a place in works of art... The more our daily life appears standardized, stereotyped, and subject to an accelerated reproduction of objects for consumption, the more art must be injected into it in order to make evident that little difference which plays simultaneously between other levels of repetition, and even in order to make the two extremes resonate – namely, the habitual series of consumption and the instinctual series of destruction and death. Art thereby connects the tableau of cruelty with that of stupidity, and discovers underneath consumption a schizophrenic clattering of the jaws...

—G. Deleuze

Horatiu Radulescu, String Quartet No. 5 “before the universe was born”

Like everything else on tonight’s program, this piece, which plays continuously for half an hour, is partly about finding a new way for the quartet to sound and to be. In this case, we are drawn into a strange, often misty yet often also glistening world of microtonal tunings, abraded sonorities, and high harmonics, a world that is always slowly but seethingly in movement, and yet a world in which change is also stability.

Radulescu began the composition in 1990 and returned to it in 1995, in preparation for the premiere, which was given in Paris that year. Because the work’s newness depends on new and challenging techniques, performances have remained rare.

Of the quartet’s sixteen strings, only four – the bottom two of the cello (C–G) and the upper two of the viola (D–A) – are tuned as normal; the rest are set to other pitches in those harmonic series which include the four unchanged notes, such other pitches being more or less displaced from equal-tempered normality. Radulescu’s purpose here is not so much to make possible microtonal melody as to create complex spectra that, across a vast range of possibilities, will have an essential unity.

The cello’s lowest note is the core or foundation of the whole piece. All the players generally use their left hands not, as usual, to stop the strings and so have other notes sound, but rather to bring forward harmonics – sometimes extremely high harmonics – on the open strings: notes that emanate from and are contained in the cello’s C.

Also possible, and adding to the effect of nebulous unity, is the arrival at unisons, or quasi-unisons, produced by different harmonics on different strings. A notable instance comes about three-quarters of the way through, where a middle-register F[#] bulges forward, with contributions from every member of the ensemble.

All this imagery of unity and differentiation, of the whole and the wisp, of restlessness and stasis, of the individuated and the unshapen, the precise and the chaotic, and of all these things folding into one another, relates very directly to the teaching of the *Tao Te Ching*, from which, in Stephen Mitchell’s version, Radulescu took not just his title (“There was something formless and perfect before the universe was born”), but also phrases he placed at the top of each of the score’s twenty-nine pages, proceeding through the text from the first chapter (“The unnameable is the eternally real.... Darkness within darkness. The gateway to all understanding.”) to the twenty-ninth (“The world is sacred. It can’t be improved.”)

According to Bob Gilmore, the leading Radulescu authority and creator of an informative website devoted to the composer, these phrases were meant to influence the musicians’ thinking and possibly also their rhythmic articulation, though this was not worked out in detail, either in the score or in the few performances the composer helped rehearse. We as listeners maybe should let the words fade and hear the music as its own Tao.

BIOS

The **JACK Quartet** electrifies audiences worldwide with “explosive virtuosity” (*Boston Globe*) and “viscerally exciting performances” (*New York Times*). David Patrick Stearns (*Philadelphia Inquirer*) proclaimed their performance as being “among the most stimulating new-music concerts of my experience,” and NPR listed their performance as one of “The Best New York Alt-Classical Concerts Of 2010.” The *Washington Post* commented, “The string quartet may be a 250-year-old contraption, but young, brilliant groups like the JACK Quartet are keeping it thrillingly vital.” Alex Ross (*New Yorker*) hailed their performance of Iannis Xenakis’ complete string quartets as being “exceptional” and “beautifully harsh,” and Mark Swed (*Los Angeles Times*) called their sold-out performances of Georg Friedrich Haas’ *String Quartet No. 3 In iij. Noct.* “mind-blowingly good.” The quartet’s recording of Xenakis’ complete string quartets appeared on “Best Of” lists from the *Los Angeles Times*, *Boston Globe*, *New Yorker*, *NPR*, and as “one of 2009’s most impressive recordings” from *Time Out New York*.

JACK has performed to critical acclaim at the Muziekgebouw aan ‘t IJ (Netherlands), Festival Internacional Cervantino (Mexico), Donaueschinger Musiktage (Germany), Library of Congress, Miller Theatre, Morgan Library & Museum, and Kimmel Center with recent and upcoming performances at the Ultraschall Festival (Germany), Da Camera Society (Los Angeles), Monday Evening Concerts, Town Hall Seattle, Les Flâneries Musicales de Reims (France), Arcana Festival (Austria), Wigmore Hall (United Kingdom), and Strathmore Hall.

The members of the quartet met while attending the Eastman School of Music, and they have since studied with the Arditti Quartet, Kronos Quartet, Muir String Quartet, and members of the Ensemble Intercontemporain.

Earle Brown, a major force in contemporary music and a leading composer of the American avant-garde since the 1950s, died on July 2, 2002 at his home in Rye, New York. He was associated with the experimental composers John Cage, Morton Feldman, and Christian Wolff who, with Brown, came to be known as the New York School.

Brown was born in 1926 in Lunenburg, Massachusetts and, in spirit, remained a New Englander throughout his life. Like other artists from that region – Ives, Ruggles, Dickinson – he spoke with his own voice and found his own path. To America, these artists were iconoclasts, but to Europe they embodied America – and Brown was no exception: his music has been most frequently performed, studied, lauded, and revered by Europeans. Brown’s interest in a broad range of aesthetic expressions, ranging from the writings of James Joyce and the poetry of Gertrude Stein, Kenneth Patchen, and others to the work of the Abstract Expressionist painters – and particularly Jackson Pollock and Alexander Calder – informed his own work. He said, as recently as in 2000, that “the earliest and still predominant influences on my conceptual attitude toward art were the works of Alexander Calder and Jackson Pollock...the integral but unpredictable ‘floating’ variations of a mobile, and the contextual ‘rightness’ of the results of Pollock’s directness and spontaneity in relation to the materials and his particular image of the work...as a total space (of time).”

Earle Brown's influence on the avant-garde community has been philosophical as well as tangible and practical. His conducting techniques and experiments with "time notation," improvisation, and open-form compositional structure have become part of contemporary compositional usage. Among Brown's most frequently performed and reinterpreted works is *December 1952*, the score of which is a stark, abstract series of floating rectangles – a musical equivalent to a Calder mobile.

Peter Ablinger was born in Schwanenstadt, Austria in 1959. He began studying graphic arts and was enthused by free jazz, but completed his studies in composition with Gösta Neuwirth and Roman Haubenstock-Ramati in Graz and Vienna. Since 1982 he has lived in Berlin, where he has initiated and conducted numerous festivals and concerts. In 1988 he founded the Ensemble Zwischentöne. In 1993 he was a visiting professor at the University of Music, Graz. He has been guest conductor of Klangforum Wien, United Berlin and the Insel Musik Ensemble. Since 1990 he has worked as a freelance musician. Peter Ablinger is one of the few artists today who uses noise without any kind of symbolism - not as a signifier for chaos, energy, entropy, disorder, or uproar; not for opposing something, or being disobedient or destructive; not for everything, for eternity, or for what-have-you. As in all these cases of music deliberately involving noise, noise is the case, but for Ablinger: this alone. He has also come a long way in questioning the nature of sound, time, and space (the components usually thought central to music), and his findings have jeopardized and made dubious conventions usually thought irrefutable. These insights pertain to repetition and monotony, reduction and redundancy, density and entropy.

Alex Mincek (born 1975) is a New York-based composer and performer. His music is typically characterized by unique timbres, dynamic textures, and complex repetitions. In addition to composing notated music he is also deeply committed to the art of improvisation, and has been influenced greatly by his participation in various forms of jazz, punk rock, and electronic music. He studied composition with Tristan Murail and Fred Lerdahl at Columbia University and with Nils Vigeland at the Manhattan School of Music, where he received a Master of Arts. As a performer, he studied saxophone with Richard Oatts at Manhattan School of Music (Bachelor of Arts) and with Bunkie Green at the University of North Florida.

Mincek's music has been performed frequently at major music festivals, including the Festival Présences of Radio France, Voix Nouvelles at the Abbaye de Royaumont, Festival des Musiques Démesurées, the Internationales Musikinstitut Darmstadt (IMD), the Contempuls Festival in Prague, and the Ostrava New Music Days. Mincek has collaborated with groups including the Les Percussions de Strasbourg, Ensemble Cairn, Orchestra of the SEM Ensemble, the Janacek Philharmonic, Talea Ensemble, the Kenners, and the JACK Quartet. Mincek's music has also been recognized through commissions and grants from the New Mendelssohn Chamber Orchestra-Leipzig, Ensemble XXI in Dijon, Present Music, MATA, the French Ministry of Culture, Meet The Composer, the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts, Due East, ASCAP, and the National Endowment for the Arts. From 2001-2005 Mincek was a member of the experimental ensemble Zs, with whom he performed

his own music, the music of others, and improvisations. Mincek currently serves as the saxophonist, bass clarinetist, and artistic director of the Wet Ink Ensemble, a group dedicated to contemporary music, which he founded in 1998.

Horațiu Rădulescu was born in Bucharest on January 7 1942. He studied the violin privately with Nina Alexandrescu, a pupil of Enescu, and later studied composition at the Bucharest Academy of Music (MA 1969), where his teachers included Stefan Niculescu, Tiberiu Olah, and Aurel Stroë, some of the leading figures of the newly emerging avant garde. Upon graduation in 1969 Radulescu left Romania for the west, and settled in Paris, becoming a French citizen in 1974. He returned to Romania thereafter several times for visits, beginning in 1991 when he directed a performance of his *Iubiri*, the first public performance of any of his mature works in his native country.

In the early 1970s he attended classes given by Cage, Ligeti, Stockhausen, and Xenakis at the Darmstadt Summer Courses, and by Ferrari and Kagel in Cologne. He presented his own music in Messiaen's classes at the Paris Conservatoire in 1972-73. From 1979 to 1981 he studied computer-assisted composition and psycho-acoustics at IRCAM, although his work makes relatively little use of electronic means of sound production. In 1983 he founded the ensemble European Lucero in Paris to perform own his works, a variable ensemble consisting of soloists specializing in the techniques required for his music. In 1991 he founded the Lucero Festival.

In the mid-1980s Radulescu was based in Freiburg in Germany, though for many years he retained an address in Versailles. In 1988 he lived in Berlin on a DAAD fellowship, and in 1989-90 he was resident in San Francisco and Venice as a laureate of the Villa Médici hors les murs scholarship. In the mid-1990s he moved to Switzerland, living first in Clarens and later in Vevey. He died in Paris on September 25, 2008.

Many of Radulescu's later works derive their poetic inspiration from the *Tao te ching* of Lao-tzu, especially in the 1988 English version by Stephen Mitchell: the titles of his second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth piano sonatas, and of the fifth and sixth string quartets, are taken from this source. The piano sonatas, as well as his *Piano Concerto The Quest* (1996) and other later works, make use of folk melodies from his native Romania, integrating these with his spectral techniques.