

PROGRAMME

spring series 1997

concert 2

clarinet quintets

november 26
pilgrim church adelaide

PROGRAMME

Moon Dance
quentin sd grant

Diamond Traces
david kotlowy

interval
(10 minutes)

Clarinet Quintet
raymond chapman smith

Clarinet Quintet, Op. 115,
Fourth Movement
johannes brahms

St. Vitus' Dance
padma newsome

Moon Dance

quentin sd grant

Off the top of my head came this wee ditty - for after writing a spacious, restrained and meditative set of piano pieces I felt a backlog of notes building up at the back of my cranium and so had to release them on to the page. A set of perky ideas that might recall gypsy or cabaret music, or perhaps the Hungarian Bela Bartok at his niggardly perkier.

Diamond Traces

david kotlowy

This composition investigates relationships, ostensibly through instrumental pairings, of surface and depth. Composing the piece, I found my concern quickly enveloped the alliance between sound and silence, form and emptiness, the eternal and the everyday. Are they not but two sides of one coin?

Our mortality is conspicuous this year, a century since Brahms and ten years post-Feldman. Painters, princesses, poets, writers, advisors, conductors, Catholic Mothers, family and friends made it so. I therefore thought an elegy would acknowledge this; one with a rhythmic structure cleverly based on divisions of 19, 9, and 7-quaver units. This structure indeed occurs throughout this piece, though I no longer think of it as a lamentation. I find that it is an affirmation of life, "this life we lead each moment."

Irina Harford is a Perth-based poet who has recently lost a close friend to cancer. I think the concluding verses of her subsequent 'Haiku on Death' are pertinent:

*you're gone
outside the pale dawn
holds no consolation*

*everywhere
life
continues*

What then, is the relation between the two sides of the coin? Some years ago I saw an exhibition of work by Sengai, the eighteenth-century Japanese artist and Zen master. I was moved by both the immediacy and subtlety of his ink paintings and calligraphy. One drawing depicted a flash of lightning erupting from a cloud, alongside which he wrote (translated): "To what shall I compare this life of ours? Even before I can say it is like a flash of lightning or a dew-drop, it is no more."

Sengai's inscription refers to a major Buddhist text, the Diamond Sutra (Sanskrit: Vajracchedika Prajñā Paramita), from which I also took my title. The sutra is so named because the text is "hard and sharp like a diamond, cutting off all arbitrary conceptions". Transience is an important feature of Buddhist thought, and is prominent within this sutra. In the text, life is likened to six evanescent phenomena: "a dream, a phantom, a bubble or a shadow. It is like dew or a flash of lightning." "Like a flickering star at dawn" is appended in another translation.

Kobayashi Issa, a contemporary of Sengai, must also have known the text. He was a great haiku poet, admired for his personal, simply phrased verses. Following the death of his two-year old daughter, he wrote: "I knew well that it was no use to cry, that water under the bridge does not return, and blossoms that are scattered are gone beyond recall. Yet try as I would, I could not, simply could not cut the binding cord of human love." He then wrote this profound haiku:

*tsuyu no yo wa
tsuyu no yo nagara
sarinagara*

The world of dew
is a world of dew, and yet,
and yet...

The pull of love, the heartache, the presence of his beloved daughter in his mourning rests in "and yet, and yet..." Intellectually we may register that each being passes away, and yet, and yet...

I feel I must continue to write music, well aware that no silence exists that is not already full of sound.

Clarinet Quintet

raymond chapman smith

Adagio cantabile, sostenuto ed intimo
Con moto, molto grazioso e leggiere
Andantino, molto cantabile ed espressivo
Con moto
Adagio, intimissimo e tranquillo

A century after Johannes Brahms' death I wanted to make at least one small homage to a composer for whom I have the greatest admiration and affection. Brahms' Clarinet Quintet was enthusiastically recommended to me back in 1967 and it was the first of his works I came to know - fortunately in a fine, live performance. Soon after, I became familiar with the late piano pieces and these works have remained close, musical companions over the intervening 30 years.

My little Clarinet Quintet is a single movement which divides into five, brief elegies, a formal model derived from the second movement of Brahms' String Quintet op 88 - a work which rescued me from a deep, post-adolescent hole back in 1972. Brahms' central technical concern in his late works was with the motivic and lyrical saturation of chromatic material generated by the diminished triad. A fragment of one of those ideas provides the opening paragraph, and the further unfolding of motivic material in my quintet. Where Mozart's marvellous Clarinet Quintet is an essentially concertante work, the Brahms' Quintet absorbs the clarinet into the texture - at times it functions almost as a second viola. I have, perhaps, gone a little further with this process, absolving the clarinet of any weighty, solo responsibilities.

For all the deserved fame of his big, public music - symphonies and concertos etc. - it still seems to me that Brahms is an often underrated, even misunderstood, composer. One still hears and reads all sorts of specious, ill-considered clap-trap about his inability to orchestrate; his bourgeois expressive range and his failure to influence future generations. The ignorant purveyors of these notions might take a look at Schoenberg's view of Brahms - he, at least, knew the level of mastery that is sustained

throughout Brahms' substantial work-list and the vital developments he set in motion. On becoming thoroughly familiar with the breadth of Brahms' output it becomes clear that the centre of his creativity was a lyrical impulse that is most purely embodied in the sustained flow of lieder that form the heart of his work. Close to that core are the magnificent chamber works of which the Clarinet Quintet is, for many musicians and listeners, his crowning achievement.

Clarinet Quintet, B minor, op. 115 (1892)

Fourth Movement

johannes brahms

A "Con moto" set of variations with a coda, the finale of Brahms' Clarinet Quintet is one of only two examples in his work of cyclical form. The simple, duple theme reveals its secret in the fifth variation as it transforms itself back into the dux of the works opening motive. The variations also contain references which may well originate in Klezmer and Stetli music and there is a distinctive "Baroque" quality to the piece, most notably in the first variations solo cello line - a little reminder that in the great Bach Gesellschaft Edition the first subscriber is one Dr. J. Brahms, Vienna.

St. Vitus' Dance

padma newsome

Padma wrote St. Vitus' Dance in the first weeks of his residency in Yale University where he is currently studying on a Fullbright Scholarship, with assistance from ArtSA. His early correspondence from Yale showed him to be feeling rather lost amongst his rich and powerful co-students. He also seemed to be overly obsessed with the local furry creatures: the squirrels, rabbits, mice, chipmunks and what-not that inhabit the parks of his neighbourhood. A succession of weird poems were sent out by him - might he finally be reaching the happy-go-lucky state of the permanently-bemused that we all aspire to? But he partly re-oriented himself and wrote this work. St. Vitus is the patron saint of comedians and actors; St. Vitus' Dance is the name given to the uncontrollable, jerky movements of chorea, a disorder of the central nervous system.

David Shephard has held key musical positions in London, Brisbane and Canberra, and has been at the Elder Conservatorium of Music since 1974. He gave the premiere performances of the Larry Sistky and Isang Yun clarinet concertos.

Margaret Blades is Associate Concert Master with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra as well as acting leader for the Adelaide Chamber Orchestra. She has appeared as soloist with the Adelaide, Melbourne, and Tasmanian Symphony Orchestras as well as being a regular chamber player for Musica Viva and ABC Classic FM

Julia Brittain was born in Adelaide. Will probably die in Adelaide of performance-anxiety related diseases as a direct result of current work which includes the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra and various miscellaneous gigs.

Juris Ezergailis is Principal Viola of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra and Adelaide Chamber Orchestra. He is a frequent performer of new music and has a long association with the resident composers featured in this concert.

After studying with Georg Pedersen and Janis Laurs, **Sarah Denbigh** became a permanent member of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra in 1990 and a regular player with the Adelaide Chamber Orchestra from 1991. She is married to trombonist Ian Denbigh and they have a four year-old daughter who knows the words to every song Neil Finn ever wrote.

David Sharp is a New Zealand 'cellist and conductor, currently playing with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra. He conducts the Burnside Symphony and the North Adelaide Wind Ensemble in performances covering the great works of the Classical era. This concert is his first foray into contemporary music.

in memory of Malcolm Fox
much loved composer and academic
1946 - 1997

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particularly Rhonda

NEXT CONCERT:

gabriella smart – piano
8pm wednesday december 10th
pilgrim church adelaide

Handwritten notes and scribbles on the right page, including the phrase "I feel like" and various illegible markings.