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Concert: Ariadne String Quartet

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ARIADNE STRING QUARTET

Susan Waterbury, violin
Rebecca Ansel, violin
Debra Moree, viola
Elizabeth Simkin, cello

Guest artists:
Heidi Hoffman, cello
Judith Kellock, soprano

Hockett Family Recital Hall
Sunday, April 9, 2006
4:00 p.m.
PROGRAM

"Lyric Suite" (1926)

I. Allegretto gioviale
(First Meeting)

II. Andante amoroso
(Portrait of Hannah and her two Children)

III. Allegro misterioso
(Their Declaration of Love)

IV. Adagio appassionato
(Love and Passion)

V. Presto dilirando
(Depiction of Horrors and Pains of Following Nights)

VI. Largo desolato
(Acceptance of Hopelessness of Affair)

PAUSE

String Quintet in C Major, D. 956

Allegro ma non troppo
Adagio
Scherzo: Presto - Trio: Andante sostenuto
Allegretto

Alban Berg
(1885-1935)

Franz Schubert
(1797-1828)
PROGRAM NOTES

The programmatic character of the Lyric Suite has always been quite clear, considering the movement names Allegretto gioviale, Andante amoroso, Allegro misterioso (Trio estatico), Adagio appassionato, Presto delirando, and Largo desolato, and which contains text-associated quotations from Tristan und Isolde and from Zemlinsky's Lyric Symphony that are explicitly identified in the original edition of the score.

In the summer of 1976 a dramatic discovery was made that raised new questions about the work. The American musicologist Douglass M. Green discovered that a manuscript draft of the finale in the Osterreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna contained a cryptic shorthand text. Neither he nor I was yet aware that Douglas Jarman had already noted the presence of such a text but had found it impossible to decipher. Professor Green eventually succeeded in deciphering Berg's cryptic notations as Stefan George's translation of Baudelaire's De profundis clamavi. The composer had kept that text a secret and had disguised its presence in his draft of the last movement. Had he kept comparable secrets about the other movements? Were not the curious numerological relations a strong hint that this was the case? Through the quotation from Zemlinsky's song cycle we have always known that there is word-associated music in the fourth movement of the Lyric Suite. Now we were given a complete text for the finale. The musical cross-references throughout the work connect the four remaining movements with the two that contain explicit, though unstated, verbal texts. If in all these years we did not know the text of the finale, nor even that there was a text, what might we still not know about the remaining movements and about the work as a whole? Professor Green's discovery only deepened the mystery of the Lyric Suite.

On January 24, 1977, I discovered an annotated copy of the published score which solved that mystery. Prepared by the composer himself for Hanna Fuchs-Robettin, wife of a prominent Prague industrialist and sister of Franz Werfel, "for whom and only for whom - in spite of the official dedication . . . every note of this work was written," it contains meticulous insertions in the composer's own hand on almost every page. The annotations, in red, blue, and green ink, calligraphic in their elegance and neatness, unfold a secret program for each movement and for the work as a whole. Hanna's initials combine with Berg's to give us the notes of the basic cell, H FA B (b f a bb). The composer calls Hanna's attention "to our numbers, 10 and 23," by showing these as factors of the numbers of bars comprised in each movement and in sections of movements. The musical cross-references and quotations are identified. The suppressed texts of the quotation from Zemlinsky and of the finale are restored and carefully laid out so that the implied vocal setting of each syllable is unmistakable.

Describing this movement as the "most beautiful music I have ever written" in a letter to Hanna before the work had yet been performed or published, Berg wrote: "Even an unsuspecting listener will feel, I believe, something of the loveliness that hovered before me, and that still does, when I think of you, dearest."

The Largo desolato, however, is provided with a text that underlays the music of the printed score so that a vocal line is unambiguously implied, a vocal line so perfectly integrated with its text that the movement must be conceived as it never has been hitherto - a song, not a "song without words" but a song whose words, and with them the singer, have been suppressed.

The setting of every syllable is indicated through the redrawing, in red ink, of the stem, flag, and beam of each note that is to be duplicated in the vocal part. If we assume that the voice part is to be understood as doubling at the unison the instrumental parts that are underlaid with text, its range is altogether unrealistic. But indications of some of the octave transpositions required to accommodate a realistic vocal range are given in the manuscript draft, and in m. 31 not only are octave transpositions explicitly shown but, at the climax of the movement, a note is assigned to the voice where the instrumental ensemble is silent. The way in which the inferred vocal part is incorporated into the instrumental ensemble of the finale is entirely consistent with Berg's practice in the vocal works that follow the Lyric Suite.
Excerpts from notes on the Lyric Suite by George Perle
De profundis clamavi Charles Baudelaire

J'implore ta pitié, Toi, l'unique que j'aime,
Du fond du gouffre obscur où mon cœur est tombé.
C'est un univers morne ; l'horizon plombé,
Où nagent dans la nuit l'horreur et le blasphème;

Un soleil sans chaleur plane au-dessus six mois,
Et les six autres mois la nuit couvre la terre;
C'est un pays plus nu que la terre polaire
ô Ni bêtes, ni ruisseaux, ni verdure, ni bois!

Or il n'est pas d'horreur au monde qui surpassé
La froide cruauté de ce soleil de glace
Et cette immense nuit semblable au vieux Chaos;

Je jalouse le sort des plus vils animaux
Qui peuvent se plonger dans un sommeil stupide,
Tant l'Écheveau du temps lentement se dévide!

German translation by Stefan George
Zu dir, Du einzig Teure, dringt mein Schrei,
Aus tiefster Schlucht darin mein Herz gefallen.
Dort ist die Gegend Tot. Die Luft wie Blei
und in dem Finstern Fluch und Schrecken wallen.

Sechs Monde steht die Sonne ohne Warm,
In sechsen lagert Dunkel auf der Erde.
Sogar nicht das Polarland ist so arm.
Nicht einmal Bach und Baum noch Feld noch Herde.

Erreicht doch keine Schreckgeburt des Hirnes
Das kalte Grausen dieses Eisgestirnes und diese Nacht!
Ein Chaos riesengroß!

Ich neide des gemeinsten Tieres Los,
Das tauchen kann in stumpfen Schlafes Schwindel...
So langsam rollt sich ab der Zeiten Spin del...

English translation by Judith Kellock
To you my cry is raised, Thou whom alone I love,
Out of the deepest valley where my heart is fallen.
It is a completely dead existence, the air like lead,
And in the dark, terror and cursedness well up.

For six moons of every year, the sun stands fireless
Six moons the earth is dark.
No polar land is so desolate:
Not even a stream, a tree, nor field, nor flock here!

But no terror the brain can imagine can compare
With the cold horror of that cold ice-star
And this night, a colossal chaos;

I envy the fate of the lowliest animal
That can plunge into senseless, dizzy sleep...
So slowly rolls the spindle of time...