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Concert: Contemporary Chamber Ensemble

Ithaca College Contemporary Chamber Ensemble

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CONTEMPORARY CHAMBER ENSEMBLE

Ford Hall
Monday, April 17, 2006
8:15 p.m.
PROGRAM

Chain 1 for Fourteen Instruments  
Witold Lutoslawski  
(1913-1994)  
Devin Hughes, conductor

Concerto for Saxophone Quartet (1995)  
Phillip Glass  
(b. 1937)

Movement I  
Movement II  
Movement III  
Movement IV

Craig Poissant, soprano saxophone  
Jacob Eisenman, alto saxophone  
Heidi Bellinger, tenor saxophone  
Allison Dromgold, baritone saxophone

Oiseaux Exotiques  
Olivier Messiaen  
(1908-1992)

Peter Cirka, piano  
Benjamin Aneff, conductor

Personnel

Lutoslawski  
Amy Thiemann, flute  
Monica Eason, oboe  
Meggan Frost, clarinet  
Jessica Tortorica, bassoon  
Nikola Tomic, trumpet  
Dan Carter, horn  
Rick McGrath, trombone  
Matthew Donello, percussion  
Joshua Horsch, harpsichord  
Chris Jones, violin 1  
Christian Simmelink, violin 2  
John Glew, viola  
Elizabeth Meszaros, cello  
Ben Reynolds, bass

Messiaen  
Melissa Bravo, piccolo  
Elizabeth Golden, flute  
Monica Eason, oboe  
Lauren Del Rey, Eb Clarinet  
Mathew Libera, Bb Clarinet  
Anne Woodard, Bb Clarinet  
Wolcott Humphrey, bass Clarinet  
Jessica Tortorica, bassoon  
Danny Carter, horn  
Rose Valby, horn  
Joseph Brown, trumpet  
Mathew Donello, xylophone  
Josh Oxford, glockenspiel
Lutoslawski applied the title *Chain* to three of his late works. What they have in common is consistent use of a technique of composition designed to achieve continuity, as an alternative to traditional large-scale forms. In a chain-form work phrases or larger sections overlap, new material not waiting for old material to end before entering. Otherwise, there is no relationship among the three "Chain" pieces, nor are they the only Lutoslawski works to use this technique, which is actually rather prevalent in his later music. This nine minute piece, therefore, is one of the most important of Lutoslawski’s works. It was written in response to repeated requests from Michael Vyner, conductor of the London Sinfonietta and is scored for fourteen instruments (four woodwinds, three brass, five strings, harpsichord, and a percussionist. It lasts about nine minutes. It follows a typical pattern for a late work by Lutoslawski. The first "Stage" of the work is fragmentary, static, with little seeming musical action or development. It only springs into motion and development in Stage 2, which is in continuous and cantabile melodic lines. Stage 3 is merely a minute-long winding down. Stage one announces a motive played in unison by almost the whole orchestra. The unison texture suddenly unfolds into an immense chord containing all twelve notes. These fold back in to a different unison note. This spreading and reclosing idea is a major element of the piece, both as a motive and as a formal idea.

Stage 2 also begins with a unison, only it takes considerably more time for the sound-structure to open up into a complete twelve-note chord. This Stage of the composition includes some aleatoric passages, where the players are given individual material and allowed to play them ad libitum so that they coincide in different combinations each time the piece is played. These are a series of melodic lines in counterpoint (in the first case) and thereafter are chord-like bundles of notes. Throughout the melodic material chain-links itself to both the preceding and succeeding material. The piece builds towards a climax, but the individual parts are kept loosely related, so that each part’s high point occurs at a slightly different time than that of the others. This spread-out climax is suddenly stopped by a stroke of the deep tam-tam (gong) while one chord hangs on, only to “evaporate.” Chain I is probably the work that pushes Lutoslawski’s mid-period interest in ad libitum aleatory counterpoint to the maximum extent. There is a very low percentage of traditional, measured conducting and organization of the ensemble by means of a common "beat." Overall, the sound of the work is dissonant and complex; although it was written so as to give the members of the London Sinfonietta a maximum of melodic solo playing, most of this occurs at the same time.

The Concerto for Saxophone Quartet and Orchestra (1995) was commissioned by the Schleswig-Holstein Festival, the Swedish Radio Orchestra, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, the Dortmund Symphony, and the I Fiamminghi Chamber Orchestra; premiere July 27, 1995 by the Raschèr Saxophone Quartet at the Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival, Hasselburg, Germany.

The work is in four movements (slow-fast-slow-fast), with each movement featuring a different member of the quartet.
The Concerto for Saxophone Quartet and Orchestra was written for and dedicated to the Raschèr Quartet. In the period 1995-1997, the Raschèr Quartet performed the Concerto with more than 30 European and American orchestras, making it one of Glass' most widely performed orchestral works. This evening's performance is an orchestral reduction for saxophone quartet alone.

Olivier Messiaen was a French composer, organist, teacher, and ornithologist whose music is distinguished by his deep devotion to Catholicism, exoticism, and nature. At the age of 11 he entered the Paris Conservatoire, studying organ and improvisation with Marcel Dupré and composition with Paul Dukas. In 1930, he became the principal organist at La Trinité Cathedral in Paris, a post he held for more than 40 years. His distinguished teaching career is marked by appointments in Darmstadt (1950-53), his famous courses in harmony and analysis at the Paris Conservatoire beginning in 1947, and his appointment as professor of composition there in 1966. His impressive list of students includes Boulez, Stockhausen, and his second wife, keyboardist Yvonne Loriod, among many others.

Throughout his life, Messiaen was fascinated by the musical phenomenon of birdsong. Carefully transcribed fragments of birdsong can be found throughout his works, forming an important part of his musical language. Messiaen was drawn to the unfixed pitches, repetition, and rhythmic insistence of birdsong, reflections of his own musical interests. Oiseaux exotiques, along with Catalogue d'oiseaux, was the successor to the seminal Réveil des Oiseaux, and all three works exemplify Messiaen's love of birdsong and his ability to absorb it into his own compositional style. Scored for piano, eleven winds, and percussion, Oiseaux exotiques is constructed as a series of tuttis and cadenzas made up of the calls of dozens of birds. Messiaen, as Paul Griffiths indicates, copied birdsong so as to copy nature; however, Messiaen also altered and composed the various birdsongs to suit his needs, producing harmonies that could not be found in nature, but rather could exist only in an aviary. The texture of Oiseaux exotiques also differs radically from its predecessor, Réveil des Oiseaux, in that the former features dense harmonies mixed with complex contrapuntal textures, whereas the latter is an example of Messiaen's penchant for monophony. In addition to bird calls, Messiaen uses rhythmic patterns taken from ancient greek and Indian cultures, forming a dense catalogue of sound unique to Messiaen.