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Eighth Blackbird: The Music of Stephen Hartke

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Modlin Center for the Arts

Wednesday • November 7, 2007
7:30 pm
Camp Concert Hall, Booker Hall of Music

eighth blackbird: The Music of Stephen Hartke

Tim Munro, *flutes*

Nicholas Photinos, *cello*

Michael J. Maccaferri, *clarinets*

Matthew Duvall, *percussion+*

Matt Albert, *violin & viola*

Lisa Kaplan, *piano*

The Horse with the Lavender Eye, Episodes for violin, clarinet and piano (1997)

I. Music of the Left

II. The Servant of Two Masters

III. Waltzing at the Abyss

IV. Cancel My Rumba Lesson

Meanwhile, Incidental music to imaginary plays (2007, world premiere)

Procession—Fanfares—Narrative—Spikefiddlers—Cradle-songs—Celebration

intermission

Tituli for five solo male voices, violin and two percussionists (1999)

Jeffrey Riehl, *countertenor*

Mike Kotrady, *tenor*

Geoffrey Williams, *tenor*

Jim Weaver, *baritone*

Olinda Marseglia, *tenor*

I. *Lapis niger* (The Black Stone)

II. *Dedicatio* (Offering)

III. *Columna rostrata* (Triumphal Monument)

IV. *Elogium parvuli* (Epitaph for a Small Boy)

V. *Tabula Panormi* (Shop-sign from Palermo)

VI. *Sortes* (Oracles)

VII. *Instrumenta* (Inscriptions on Portable Objects)

This concert is sponsored, in part, by the Department of Music.

* *The artists will participate in a Talk Back Session after the show. Join us in the concert hall!*

+ *Matthew Duvall endorses Pearl Drums and Adams Musical Instruments.*

Visit the ensemble's official Web site at www.eighthblackbird.com.



Please silence cell phones, digital watches and paging devices before the performance. The use of any recording device, either audio or video, and the taking of photographs, either with or without flash, are strictly prohibited.

The Modlin Center for the Arts thanks *Style Weekly* and *Richmond.com* for media sponsorship of the 2007-2008 season.

About the Artists: eighth blackbird



Photo: Luke Ratkov

Described by *The New Yorker* as “friendly, unpretentious, idealistic and highly skilled,” eighth blackbird promises its ever-increasing audiences provocative and engaging performances. It is widely lauded for its performing style—often playing from memory with virtuosic and theatrical flair—and its efforts to make new music accessible to wide audiences. A *New York Times* reviewer wrote, “eighth blackbird’s performances are the picture of polish and precision and they seem to be thoroughly engaged...by music in a broad range of contemporary styles.” The sextet has been the subject of profiles in *The New York Times* and on NPR’s *All Things Considered*; it has also been featured on Bloomberg TV’s *Muse*, CBS’s *Sunday Morning*, *St. Paul Sunday*, *Weekend America* and *The Next Big Thing*, among others. The ensemble is in residence at the University of Richmond in Virginia and at the University of Chicago.

The centerpiece of eighth blackbird’s 2007-2008 season is its kinetic program “The Only Moving Thing,” featuring new commissions by Steve Reich and maverick composers David Lang, Michael

Gordon and Julia Wolfe. The group is also premiering *Mirrors*, a ground-breaking new multimedia work by composer Tamar Muskal and interactive digital artist Danny Rozin, as well as a new work by Stephen Hartke as part of the group’s “Sound Mirror” program. This season, eighth blackbird makes their debut at Carnegie’s Zankel Hall and the Pittsburgh Chamber Music Society, returns to the Kennedy Center and is in residence at DePauw University and the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. eighth blackbird also inaugurates its hometown series at the Harris Theater at Millennium Park.

In previous seasons the sextet has appeared in South Korea, Mexico, Canada, Amsterdam and throughout North America, including performances at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center’s Alice Tully Hall, the Metropolitan Museum, the Kennedy Center, the Library of Congress, the Cleveland Museum of Art and the La Jolla Chamber Music Society and has performed as soloist with the Utah Symphony and the American Composers Orchestra. The group has appeared several times at Cincinnati’s Music X, the

About the Artists: eighth blackbird

Great Lakes Music Festival, Caramoor International Music Festival and Norfolk Chamber Music Festival. They have also appeared at the Tanglewood Music Center, the Bravo! Vail Valley Music Festival and in 2006 made their debut at the Ojai Music Festival, where the group was named music director for the 2009 season.

Since its founding in 1996, eighth blackbird has been active in commissioning new works from eminent composers such as George Perle, Frederic Rzewski, Joseph Schwantner, Paul Moravec and Stephen Hartke, as well as groundbreaking works from Jennifer Higdon, Derek Bermel, David Schober, Daniel Kellogg, Carlos Sanchez-Gutierrez and the Minimum Security Composers Collective. The group received the first BMI/Boudleaux-Bryant Fund Commission and the 2007 American Music Center Trailblazer Award and has received grants from BMI, Meet the Composer, the Greenwall Foundation and Chamber Music America, among others.

The ensemble is enjoying acclaim for its four CDs released to date on Cedille Records. The first, *thirteen ways*, was selected as a Top 10 CD of 2003 by *Billboard* magazine. Their second disc, *beginnings*, was summed up by *The New York Times*: "The performances have all the sparkle, energy and precision of the earlier outings...It is their superb musicality and interpretive vigor that bring these pieces to life." About *fred*, featuring the music of Frederic Rzewski, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported: "The music covers all kinds of moods and approaches, from

dreamy surrealism to caffeinated unison melodies and the members of eighth blackbird deliver it all with their trademark panache." Their fourth CD, titled *strange imaginary animals*, was released in 2006. That same year, the group debuted on the Naxos label in a performance of *The Time Gallery*, commissioned by eighth blackbird from 2004 Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Paul Moravec.

The members of eighth blackbird hold degrees in music performance from Oberlin Conservatory, among other institutions. The group derives its name from the Wallace Stevens poem "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird." The eighth stanza reads:

*I know noble accents
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;
But I know, too,
That the blackbird is involved
In what I know*

Notes on the Program by Stephen Hartke

Stephen Hartke (b. 1952) has been hailed by The New York Times as one of America's "Young Lions." His music reflects the diversity of his musical background, from medieval and renaissance polyphony, of which he was once quite an active performer, to very personal syntheses of diverse elements from non-Western and popular music. He has enjoyed commissions and performances from numerous groups throughout the world, including the New York Philharmonic, the National Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Philharmonic and the Moscow State Philharmonic Orchestra, among many others. He recently completed a full-length opera, *The Greater Good, or the Passion of Boule de Suif*, for *Glimmerglass Opera*. In 2004, he was awarded the Charles Ives Living Composers Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the purpose of which is to free him from the need to devote his time to any employment other than music composition. Hartke's music is available on CD on CRI, ECM New Series, EMI Classics, Naxos American Classics and New World Records. Stephen Hartke lives in Glendale, California and is professor of composition at the University of Southern California.

The Horse with the Lavender Eye Episodes for violin, clarinet and piano

I've always been fascinated by non-sequiturs and the way that sense can suddenly appear out of nonsense. I also find imagery derived from words and pictures to be a great stimulus to my musical thinking, even if the relationships between the images I seize upon are not necessarily obvious or logical. The sources for the titles of this trio are quite disparate, ranging from Carlo Goldoni to Japanese court music to the cartoonist R. Crumb,

as well as 19th-century Brazilian novelist Machado de Assis and Looney Tunes; a bewildering array of references, to be sure, but one that somehow whets my musical appetite. Here are examples of just how: the ancient Japanese court, borrowing from the Chinese, was divided into left and right sides with ministries and music specific to each. The image of this official Music of the Left, suggested, first, the rather ceremonial character of my trio's first movement and also its technical quirk: all three instruments are to be played by the left hand alone.

In the second movement, the title of Carlo Goldoni's play, *The Servant of Two Masters*, seemed to me an apt description of the performance dynamic involved in this particular combination of instruments where the piano, in somewhat of a frenzy, serves alternately as the accompaniment to the clarinet while the violin clamors for attention and vice versa. The third movement was suggested by a very short chapter in Machado de Assis' novel *Dom Casmurro* wherein the narrator, observing that his story seems to be waltzing at the abyss of final catastrophe, seeks to reassure his reader (falsely, as it turns out) by saying: "Don't worry, dear, I'll wheel about."

For the finale, I had in mind a panel from one of R. Crumb's underground comics of the late '60s showing a character dashing about in an apocalyptic frenzy, shouting, among other things, "Cancel my rumba lesson!" The connective thread of all these images began to dawn on me only in the midst of composing the work: all the movements have to do in one way or another with a sense of being off-balance—playing

Notes on the Program by Stephen Hartke

music with only one side of the body; being caught between insistent and conflicting demands; dancing dangerously close to a precipice and only narrowly avoiding tumbling in; and, finally, not really being able to dance the rumba at all. Nonetheless, in the very end (the rumba lesson having been canceled, I suppose), a sense of calm and equilibrium comes to prevail.

Meanwhile

Incidental music to imaginary plays

Meanwhile was composed by a commission from eighth blackbird and the Barlow Foundation. It is one of several works of mine that has grown from a long-standing fascination I have had for various forms of Asian court and theater music and in preparing to write this piece, I studied video clips of quite a number of puppet theater forms, ranging from the elegant and elaborate, nearly-life-sized puppets of Japanese *Bunraku* to Vietnamese water puppets, both Indonesian and Turkish shadow puppets and to classic Burmese court theater that mixes marionettes with dancers who look and act like marionettes.

This piece is a set of incidental pieces to no puppet plays in particular but one in which the ensemble has been reinvented along lines that clearly have roots in these diverse Asian models. The piano, for instance, is prepared for much of the piece with large soft mutes to resemble a Vietnamese hammered dulcimer. The viola is tuned a half-step lower in order to both change its timbre and to open the way for a new set of natural harmonics to interact, sometimes even microtonally, with those of the cello. The percussion array includes 18 wood sounds, plus four cowbells, two small cymbals, a

water gong and a set of bongos. Finally, there is a set of three flexatones, whose tone is rather like that of small Javanese gongs and so I have given this new instrument the name of "flexatone gamelan."

Meanwhile is played as a single movement, with 6 distinct sections: *Procession*—which features the flexatone gamelan; *Fanfares*—with the piccolo and bass clarinet linked together much as a puppeteer and his marionette; *Narrative*—in which the bass clarinet recites the "story" of the scene in an extravagant and flamboyant solo reminiscent of the reciter in Japanese *Bunraku*; *Spikefiddlers*—which requires a playing technique for the viola and later the cello that stems from Central Asian classical music; *Cradle-songs*—the outer parts of which feature natural harmonics in the viola and cello combined with bell-like ninth-partial harmonics from the piano; and *Celebration*—where the flutist and clarinetist take up flexatones to play the closing melody.

Tituli

Titulus—*tituli* in the plural—is the Latin word for an inscription or a notice. All the texts set in this work are inscriptions, either carved in stone or scratched on metal, from pre-Imperial Roman times. Thus they are not literary texts but rather represent different facets of daily life in ancient Italy in the period between 600 and 100 BCE. The first two movements set the two oldest known Latin texts, first the *Lapis niger*, a fragment of sacred law, followed by an offering inscribed on the bottom of a three-legged pot. Both these texts are in fact so ancient that they cannot be translated with any accuracy. The third and fourth texts are more formal: the *Columna rostrata*, taken

Notes on the Program by Stephen Hartke

from a triumphal monument celebrating the first major Roman victory in the First Punic War and an epitaph from the grave of a small boy named Optatus (meaning "the desired one"). A bilingual shop-sign from Palermo in slightly garbled Latin and Greek provides the text for the fifth movement: "Inscriptions arranged and engraved here for holy temples by public labors through we (*sic*)." The final two movements involve compilations of many quite short texts. *Sortes* is a collection of oracular

texts, most of them scratched on metal foil or on rods that were used for fortune-telling. The last movement, *Instrumenta*, sets inscriptions from personal belongings. The first three texts are in Etruscan with the remainder in Latin and each has either the name of the owner or of the person who presented the object as a gift.

Text and Translation

I. Lapis niger

ho...
sakros es
ed sor...
...a ...is
recei ... io ...
... devam
quos re ...
...m kalato
rem hab ...
... tod iouxmen
ta kapia duo tau ...
m ite ri ...
... m quoi ha
velod neque ...
... od iovestod
loiu quiod qo ...

II. Dedicatio

Iove sat deivos qoi me mitat nei ted
endo cosmis virgo sied.
Asted noisi ope toitiesiai pakari vois.
Duenos med feked en manom ei-
nom duenoi ne med
malo statod.

1. The Black Stone (c. 500 BCE)

[Inscribed on four faces of a six-sided block of tufa, this is apparently a sacred law text. It was found quite deliberately buried under a black marble pavement in the Roman Forum. The text is inscribed in 'boustrophedon' fashion, that is, alternating lines written left to right, right-side up, and right to left, up-side down. As it stands, although the text is really not decipherable to any appreciable extent, certain words such as 'sakros' (sacred), 'recei' (king's), and possibly 'devam' (goddess) confirm the serious religious nature of the inscription.]

II. Offering (c. 500 BCE)

[Three sentences inscribed up-side down on a three-legged lamp, clearly intended as an offering of some sort, but so archaic as to defy any secure decipherment.]

Text and Translation

III. Columna rostrata

... Consul Segestanos socios populi
Romani Cartaginiensiom opsidioned
exemet; legionesque Cartaginiensis
omnis maximosque magistratos luci
palam post dies novem castreis
exfociont Macelamque opidom
pugnandod cepet.
Enque eodem magistratud bene rem
navebos marid consol primos ceset;
copiasque clasesque navales primos
ornavet paravetque; cumque eis
navebos claseis Poericas
omnes item maxumas copias
Cartaginiensis praesented
Hanibaled dictatored olorom in altod
marid pugnandod vicet.
Vique naveis cepet cum socieis:
septeresmom unom, quinqueresmosque
triresmosque naveis triginta, merset tredicim..
Aurom captom: numei tria milia septinentei.
Argentom captom, praeda: numei centum
milia
Omne captom: aes undetricies quater
centena milia.
Triumpoque navaled praedad
poplom donavet multosque
Cartaginiensis ingenuos duxit
ante curum ...

III. Triumphal Monument (c. 250 BCE)

... as Consul [Duilius] delivered the
Segestani from a Carthaginian blockade;
and all the Carthaginian host and their
most mighty chief after nine days fled
their camp in broad daylight;
and he [Duilius] took their town
Macela by storm.
And in the same command he as consu
performed an exploit in ships at sea, the
first Roman to do so; the first was he to
equip and train crews and fleets of fighting
ships; and with these ships he defeated in
battle on the high seas the Punic fleets and
likewise all the most mighty troops of the
Carthaginians in the presence of Hannibal
their commander-in-chief. And by main
force he captured ships with their crews:
one septreme, thirty quinqueremes and
triremes; thirteen were sunk.
Gold taken: 3600 pieces.
Silver taken, including booty: 100,000
pieces.
Total sum taken, in Roman money:
2,100,000
And in triumph he bestowed on the
people a gift of booty from the sea-battle,
and led many native free-born
Carthaginians before the curia ...

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Text and Translation

IV. Elogium parvuli

Liberus Optatus vixit annos VI menses VIII

Hic me florentem mei combussere parentes.

Vixi dum licuit superis acceptior unus,

Quoi nemo potuit verbo maledicere acerbo

... ad superos quos pietas cogi ...

... modeste nunc vos quon...

..... dicite: Optate sit tibi terra levis

.....o annorum nondum.

... cum ad mortem matris de gremio rapior

... manibus carus fui vivos carissimus illi
adverseis quae me sustulit ominibus.

Desine iam frustra, mea mater, desine fletu
te miseram totos exagitare dies,
namque dolor talis non nunc tibi, contingit uni
haec eadem et magneis regibus acciderunt.

Optate sit tibi terra levis

V. Tabula Panormi

Tituli heic ordinantur et sculpuntur
aidibus sacreis cum operum
publicorum.

Στελλαι εντῆαδε τυπονται και
κηρασσονται ναοις ιεροις συν
ενεργειαις δεμοσιαις.

[transliteration of the Greek text:]
Stellai entḥade tūpontai kai
kḥarassontai naois ierois sūn
energeiais demosiais.

IV. Epitaph for a small boy (c. 130 BCE)

The freedman Optatus, 6 years, 8 months old

*Here my parents burnt my body in the flower
of my youth.*

*I lived more acceptable to the gods above
than any other,*

of whom none could speak ill in bitter words

...to the gods above whom loyalty compels ...

... now modestly you ...

*... say you: Oh Optatus, lightly rest the earth
upon you.*

... without your share of years ...

*... when I am torn from my mother's bosom
to death*

*... in life I was dear to departed souls and
to the goddess who made away with me*

under unlucky omens.

*Cease now, my mother, to torment yourself
in vain sobs of wretchedness all the day,
for such grief has not befallen you alone:
the same has befallen mighty kings as well.*

Oh Optatus, lightly rest the earth upon you.

V. Shopsign from Palermo (c. 200 BCE)

[a bilingual inscription that was evidently
written by someone who was not a native
speaker of Latin or Greek, perhaps a
Carthaginian living in Palermo]

*Inscriptions arranged and engraved here
for holy temples by public labors through we.*

Text and Translation

VI. Sortes

Nunc me rogitas? Nunc consulis?
Tempus abit iam.

Mendaces multi homines sunt: credere noli.

Qur petis postempus consilium?
Quod rogas non est.

Credis quod deicunt? Non sunt it
Ne fore stultu.

Permultis prosum: ubei profui, gratia nemo.

Non sum mendacis quas dixi
consulis stulte.

Conrigi vix tandem quod
curvom est factum crede.

Est via per clivom qua vis sequi non datur ista.

Est equos perpulcer, sed tu vehi non potes istoc.

Quod fugis, quod iactas, tibi quod
datur spernere noli.

Quid nunc consoltas?
Quiescas ac vita fruaris.

VI. Oracles (mostly 1st c. BCE)

*Now you ask me? Now you seek advice?
It's too late.*

Many men are liars: don't believe them.

*Why do you seek my advice after the fact?
What you ask doesn't exist.*

*You believe what they say? Things are not so.
Don't be stupid.*

Very many I have helped, yet no one thanks me.

*We are not the liars you said.
You ask advice like a fool.*

*Do you believe that what has once been
made crooked can now be made straight?*

*The hill is steep, but you haven't the
strength to climb it.*

That is a fine horse, but you can't ride it.

*What you flee, what you throw away, what
is given you: spurn it not.*

*Why do you seek my advice?
Relax and enjoy life.*



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Text and Translation

VII. Instrumenta

[Etruscan:]

tite cale atial turce malstria^oever

ceithurneal suthina

mini mulvanice mamarce velchanas

[Latin:]

Amor med Flacca dedet.

Med Loucilios feced.

Noli me tollere. Helveiti sum.

Ne atigas. Non sum tua, Marci sum.

Claudio. Non sum tua.

Pilotimei, Lucretiei Lucii servus.

Novios Plautus med Romai fecid.

Rustiae rustiu iousit caper.

Stephanus scripsit. Hilliardi canerunt.

Makarska sociique modulati sunt.

Salve.

VIII. Inscriptions on Portable Objects

(c. 600-100 BCE)

*Titus Calus gave (this) mirror to his mother
as a gift*

Grave offering of Ceithurna

Mamarce Velchana dedicated me

Love gave me to Flacca.

Lucilius made me.

Don't take me. I'm Helveitius'.

Don't touch. I'm not yours. I am Marcus'.

For Claudius. I am not yours.

For Pilotimus, slave of Lucius Lucretius.

Novius Plautus made me at Rome.

Rustius asked Rustia to take this.

Stephen wrote this. The Hilliards sang it.

Makarski and companions played it.

Farewell.

