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New Works Premiere The Soldier's Tale

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The BIG

RICHMOND'S SUMMER MUSICFEST PROGRAM

JULY 7-22 1990

Produced by Downtown Presents... and the University of Richmond Department of Music.

NEW WORKS PREMIERE THE SOLDIER'S TALE

CURRENTS

The Ensemble for New Music at the University of Richmond
Fred Cohen, Artistic Director

Friday, July 13, 1990
8:00 p.m.

Chamber Symphony for Currents (1990)
(first performance)

Ben Johnston
(b. 1926)

Patricia Werrell, flute Philip Teachey, Oboe
Douglas Monroe, clarinet Bruce Hammel, bassoon
Rolla Durham, trumpet Amy Crawford, French horn
Pam Barton, trombone
Pamela Hentges, Jill Foster-Woodburn, violins
Nina Falk, viola Anne Stokes, cello
Mark Stevenson, contrabass
Fred Cohen, conductor

Another Sunrise (1990)
(first performance)

Jonathan D. Kramer
(b. 1942)

Patricia Werrell, flute, piccolo Philip Teachey, oboe, English horn
Bruce Hammel, bassoon, contrabassoon
Nina Falk, viola Anne Stokes, cello
Hope Armstrong Erb, piano Steven Barton, percussion
Fred Cohen, conductor

intermission

Another Sunrise was commissioned for the CURRENTS new-music ensemble, Fred Cohen, Artistic Director, by The Big Gig, Richmond's Summer Musicfest with support from the Virginia Commission for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts.

The story of *The Soldier's Tale* was distilled from Alexander Afanasiev's collection of Russian tales. It is the story of Faust, the man who sold his soul to the devil in exchange for riches, power, youth, wisdom, a story that strikes resonance in every heart. Underlying it is the Biblical text: "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his soul?" In real life, it is not so much a matter of gaining "the whole world" as of the day-to-day decisions when we are tempted to compromise between ideals and ease or expediency for the sake of quick reward. Stravinsky's lifelike Faust--the Soldier in *The Soldier's Tale*--is closer to our everyday experience than the heroic Fausts of Marlowe and Goethe. He is not vastly ambitious. He is not faced with one tremendous decision, a solemn bargain signed in blood. The Soldier gets second chances. He makes his various decisions--to barter his fiddle, to have a go at winning the princess, to gamble away his remaining cash--almost casually. He gets good advice from the Narrator and gets bad from the Devil. He gets cheated. It seems unfair, almost, that at the end, the Devil wins.

"I received the idea of *The Soldier's Tale* in the spring of 1917...The set of work I envisaged would have to be small enough in the complement of its players to allow for performances on a circuit of Swiss villages, and simple enough in the outlines of its story to be easily understood."

The score and definitive text of *The Soldier's Tale* were first published in 1924, having been much changed since the 1918 version. This work marks Stravinsky's break with the Russian school composition in which he received his musical training. The instrumental ensemble "was influenced by a very important event in my life at the time, the discovery of American jazz....*The Soldier's Tale's* ensemble resembles the jazz band in that each instrumental category--strings, woodwinds, brass, percussion--is represented both by treble and bass components....My knowledge of jazz was derived exclusively from copies of sheet music, and as I had never actually heard any of the music performed, I borrowed its rhythmic style not as played, but as written. I could imagine jazz sound, however, or so I liked to think."

There are Lutheran chorales. There is a tango. From folk tales, from dream and memories, from diverse musical sources that span the ages, an inspired work was created--international, timeless. It can be enjoyed and re-enjoyed on many levels--for its bright instrumental colors, its tunes, its moving drama. Its masterly economy, conciseness, and precision have made it unfading.

PROGRAM NOTES

NEW WORKS PREMIERE/THE SOLDIER'S TALE

Composer **Ben Johnston** was born in Macon, Georgia, and holds degrees from William and Mary College, Cincinnati Conservatory of Music and Mills College. He joined the faculty of the University of Illinois in 1951, and retired as Professor Emeritus in 1983 in order to devote full time to composition. In 1987 he moved his residence from Urbana, Illinois, to Rocky Mount, North Carolina.

Among his works which have been widely performed are the string *Quartets Nos. 2, 4, and 8*, which made up a program presented by the acclaimed Kronos Quartet at Kennedy Center in May, 1988. The Kronos's recording of his *Amazing Grace (String Quartet No. 4)* has been outstandingly successful, resulting in performances all over the world.

In 1987 the Illinois Arts Council commissioned *Journeys*, a work for chorus, orchestra and contralto soloist for the Governor's Awards Ceremony. The Cleveland Chamber Orchestra commissioned *Songs of Loss* for tenor and orchestra the following year. The North Carolina Arts Council commissioned *Symphony in A* for the Tar River Symphony Orchestra in 1988, and the Stanford Quartet commissioned *String Quartet No. 9* the same year.

Among the honors Ben Johnston has received are a Guggenheim Fellowship (1959), a grant from the National Council on the Arts and Humanities (1966), and Associate Membership in the University of Illinois Center for Advanced Study (1966). In 1968 the Smithsonian Institution awarded him two commissions: for a film score and for a sound environment.

Chamber Symphony for Currents was commissioned for the CURRENTS new-music ensemble, Fred Cohen, Artistic Director, by The Big Gig, Richmond's Summer Musicfest with support from the Virginia Commission for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Jonathan D. Kramer was educated at Harvard University and the University of California, Berkeley. His teachers include Leon Kirchner, Andrew Imbrie, Roger Sessions, Karlheinz Stockhausen and John Chowning. He served on the faculties of the University of California, Berkeley, Oberlin Conservatory, Yale University, the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, and is currently Professor of Music at Columbia University. Since 1980 he has been program annotator for the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, a position he has also held with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra. He has received grants from the Martha Baird Rockefeller Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the American Music Center, among others.

His *Renaissance* was one of three American works performed at the 1980 World Music Days in Israel. *Music for Piano IV* (1980) won the International Rostrum of Composers Competition in 1983, and played at the 1985 World Music Days in the Netherlands.

As a music theorist, Kramer has been interested primarily in musical time; his articles and papers have been published in the *Musical Quarterly*, *Perspectives of New Music*, *Journal of Music Theory*, and elsewhere.

David Pelton Narrator
Bernadine Simmons Devil
Christopher Harrison Soldier

Pamela Hentges, violin
Douglas Monroe, clarinet Bruce Hammel, bassoon
Rolla Durham, trumpet Pam Barton, trombone
Mark Stephenson, contrabass Steven Barton, percussion
Fred Cohen, conductor

Fred Cohen is currently Assistant Professor of Music at the University of Richmond where he conducts the University of Richmond Orchestra and teaches theory and composition. He is the founder and Artistic Director of Currents, and is also the organizer and director of the University's music technology lab. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of California, and the Masters and Doctor of Musical Arts from Cornell University. As a conductor, Dr. Cohen has led a diverse number of musical organizations, from opera and chamber opera to Gilbert and Sullivan, from numerous world premiere performances of all descriptions to historically authentic performances of classical music. According to the Richmond Times-Dispatch, his work with Currents has earned him the appellation "the city's maitre d' of modern music." Dr. Cohen's musical output includes opera, chamber music, works for orchestra, film music, and electronic/computer music compositions. His works have been performed widely throughout America and in South America.

Currents is an ensemble of professional musicians specializing in the music of our time. Founded in 1986 by Dr. Fred Cohen, Currents has performed over forty Richmond premieres and six world premieres. Repertoire ranges from contemporary American to exciting new Eastern European works to the classic works of the twentieth century. Special attention is given to music by Virginia composers, and Currents is proud to sponsor an annual Currents Commissions concert featuring new music by regional and nationally acclaimed composers.