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CURRENTS

the professional ensemble for new-music
at the University of Richmond

Fred Cohen *Artistic Director*

October 28, 1992
8:15 pm
North Court Recital Hall



PROGRAM

THE SURMA RITORNELLI (1983) **Christopher Rouse**
(b. 1949)

piccolo/flute, clarinet, French horn, trumpet, trombone
3 percussionists, piano, violin, cello, contrabass

WOODWIND TRIO (1992) **Fred Cohen**
(b. 1958)

1. **Con moto**
2. **Lento, espr.**
3. **Lontano—Agitato**
4. **Energico**

oboe/English horn, clarinet, bassoon

OCTANDRE (1923) **Edgard Varèse**
(1883-1965)

1. **Assez lent**
2. **Très vif et nerveux**
3. **Grave**

flute/piccolo, oboe, clarinet/piccolo clarinet, bassoon
French horn, trumpet, trombone, contrabass

*****intermission*****

KAMMERKONZERT (1970) **György Ligeti**
(b. 1923)

1. **Corrente**
2. **Calmo, sostenuto**
3. **Movimento preciso e meccanico**
4. **Presto**

flute/piccolo, oboe/English horn/Oboe d'amore, clarinet, bass clarinet
French horn, trombone, piano/celeste, keyboards
2 violins, viola, cello, contrabass

THE SURMA RITORNELLI (1983) **Christopher Rouse**

PROGRAM NOTES

What makes a work modern? Certainly chronology is an important factor, but so too are other criteria, such as adherence to traditional Western musical formal models, types of instrumental sounds, use of tonality, and general aesthetic principles. Chronologically, the oldest work on tonight's program is **Edgard Varèse's** 1923 classic, *Octandre*. Considered one of Varèse's core works and one of the dominating musical landscapes of modern music, *Octandre* demonstrates Varèse's unique musical language, which he described in terms of colliding geological masses and spatial relationships gleaned from the Cubist aesthetic.

Varèse was born in Paris in 1883. He attended the Schola Cantorum, studied composition with Vincent d'Indy and Charles Widor, and, in 1907, received the *Première Bourse artistique de la ville de Paris*. Varèse left Paris the same year to begin a seven-year sojourn in Berlin, where he worked with Ferruccio Busoni and Richard Strauss. In 1915 Varèse arrived in New York, which he made his home until his death in 1965.

Like other composers of his generation (Bartók, Schoenberg, Stravinsky), Varèse began writing music in the flavor and style of his teachers, only to reject their aesthetic and set forth in a different direction. For Varèse, this journey involved creating music where sound would be treated as "living matter" to "liberate sound." Varèse required new instruments to achieve his vision, and was able to realize it fully in the 1950's with the advent of magnetic tape recording machines.

Octandre is a lively piece in three movements with no break between the second and the third. This evening's performance uses a 1966 revision of the 1924 edition of the score which takes into account Varèse's manuscript as well as a reference copy of a 1924 edition edited by Varèse.

Christopher Rouse was born in Baltimore and studied composition at the Oberlin College Conservatory and later with George Crumb, ultimately receiving his doctorate in composition from Cornell University where he worked with Karel Husa and Robert Palmer. He was appointed to the department of composition at the Eastman School of Music in 1981, where he introduced the first course on rock music to receive full accreditation from a leading American school of music. Among his awards are three grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and a League of Composers Award. Mr. Rouse became composer-in-residence with the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra in 1985, and held the same position with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra during 1989-91. His works have been performed by a number of major symphony orchestras, including those of Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, Pittsburg, and St. Louis.

The Surma Ritornelli describes, in musical terms, the anatomy of a monster's mouth. Surma is a demon in Finno-Ugric mythology, the guardian of Kalma, goddess of the grave. Surma was feared for his immense mouth, the agent of many



PERSONNEL

Patricia Werrell *flute, piccolo*
Michael Lisicky *oboe, English horn, Oboe d'amore*
Charles West *clarinet, bass clarinet*
Karen Blackenship *clarinet, bass clarinet (Ligeti)*
Bruce Hammel *bassoon*
Alan Paterson *French horn*
Michael Davison *trumpet*
Ronald Baedke *trombone*
Laura Roelufs Park *violin*
Helen Coulson *violin (Ligeti)*
Philip Clark *viola*
Jennifer Combs *cello*
Paul Bedell *contrabass*
Paul Hanson *piano, celeste*
Joanne Kong *keyboards*
Donald Bick, Greg Giannicoli, Tony Delusio *percussion*
Fred Cohen *conductor*



a wayward traveler's death. Any who came too close to Kalma's abode were summarily and ferociously devoured by Surma.

Hungarian György Ligeti is widely considered to be one of the most important composers of the Twentieth century. Ligeti studied at the Budapest Academy of Music and his early compositions were largely based on folk music and heavily influenced by Bartók. After fleeing Hungary during the 1956 uprising, Ligeti settled first in Germany and then in Vienna. His *Kammerkonzert* (*Chamber Concerto*) is one of the most influential works of the latter half of the Twentieth century, and demonstrates the various musical means that Ligeti uses to synthesize some of the dominant ideas of modern music: rhythmic and metric complexity, a return to older instruments, a fascination with creating new sounds on existing instruments, new combinations of sounds, and melodic writing within closely confined parameters. The *Kammerkonzert* represents a development of Ligeti's style begun in his *Ten Pieces for Woodwind Quintet* and the *String Quartet No. 2*, both written in 1968. In fact, the *Kammerkonzert* is in many ways a combination of these two works both in instrumentation and in formal framing.

Ligeti is rather explicit in his description of his own music. Although this music expresses itself on many levels and is fertile ground for commentary, the composer's own description is available and valuable:

The title *Konzert* indicates that all thirteen instrumental parts are written for virtuosi of equal ability, and there is therefore no division into *sol*i and *tutti* as in the traditional concerto. Instead, different groups of soloists alternate, though the polyphonic texture is always very clear.

The musical language of this work...is neither tonal nor atonal. There are no tonal centers, nor are there any harmonic combinations or progressions which can be functionally analyzed; on the other hand, the twelve notes of the chromatic scale are not treated as notes of equal importance, as in atonal and serial music. There are specific predominant arrangements of intervals, which determine the course of the music and the development of the form. The complex polyphony of the individual parts is embodied in a harmonic-musical flow, in which the harmonies (i.e., the vertical combinations of intervals) do not change suddenly, but merge into one another; one is gradually blurred, and from this cloudiness it is possible to discern a new interval combination gradually taking shape.

Each movement of the *Kammerkonzert* is characterized by a specific rhythmic texture and type of motion. The first movement is gentle and flowing, and the heterogeneous rhythmic figures form a unified pattern of sound. The texture of the second movement is static, but then is broken up by pithy rhythmic figures. This development is of a somewhat dynamic nature, and during its course the harmonic structure changes slowly, culminating in a large agglomeration of superimposed fifths.

The third movement is quasi-mechanical, resembling some quaint, half-broken precision tool starting up. In this movement the polyrhythm and the polymeter are particularly pronounced; these techniques are also employed in the other movements, though to a lesser extent. The fourth movement is very fast and requires great virtuosity. It resembles a *perpetuum mobile*, but the *presto* motion is battered and gradually undermined; one could say the music is torn to shreds, and finally disintegrates altogether. Snatches of melody turn up, but they lead nowhere and come to nothing; it is as if the music were intertwined with creepers.

Fred Cohen's Trio for Woodwinds receives its first performance on this program. Featuring virtuoso writing throughout in the three woodwinds, the Trio explores the dynamics of the interactions of these instruments in their ranges, tone colors, rhythmic intensity, and beauty of sound. The first movement begins with a single energetic melody, shared by the three woodwinds, that gradually disbands into a complex three-voice polyphonic texture. The second movement treats the ideas expressed in the first movement to a slow, thickened development, interspersed with snatches (or reminiscences) of quicker melodies heard before. The third movement is a duet for English horn and clarinet, wherein the English horn elaborates on the ideas from the second movement in an angular, additive rhythm accompanied by an increasingly frenzied clarinet. The final movement begins with the return of the bassoon in an energetic texture, gradually evolving to a full three-voice polyphony reminiscent of the first movement.



The **CURRENTS** new-music ensemble is an ensemble of professional musicians devoted to outstanding performances of the music of our time. Founded in 1986 by Dr. Fred Cohen, Assistant Professor of Music at the University of Richmond, **CURRENTS** has introduced concert music of regional, national, and internationally noted composers to the central Virginia community in formats ranging from chamber music to orchestral works to opera. **CURRENTS** has performed American premieres by such composers as György Kurtág, Sofia Gubaidulina, Alfred Schnicke and Edison Denisov, and has commissioned a number of American composers, including Thomas Albert, Allan Blank, Joel Feigin, Jonathan Kramer, Ben Johnston and Walter Ross.

upcoming **CURRENTS** concert:

January 27, 1992

works by JS Bach, David Chaitkin, Avro Pärt

special guests: the Shanghai Quartet