



Chameleon
Arts Ensemble
of Boston

PROGRAM NOTES

Chameleon Arts Ensemble of Boston

Deborah Boldin, Artistic Director

2023-2024 chamber music season

chamber series 5: **Water, water, every where**

Saturday, May 18, 2024, 8 PM at First Church in Boston

Sunday, May 19, 2024, 4 PM at First Church in Boston

Program:

Guy Ropartz, *Prélude, Marine et Chansons* for flute, violin, viola, cello & harp

Hanns Eisler, *Fourteen Ways to Describe the Rain* for flute, clarinet, violin, viola, cello & piano

David Bruce, *The Consolation of Rain* for oboe, cello, percussion & harp

Franz Schubert, Quintet in A Major for piano & strings, D. 667, “Trout”

Program notes by Gabriel Rice

Guy Ropartz (1864-1955) was a French composer and conductor born and raised in Côtes du Nord (now Côtes d’Armor). After graduating from his law studies, he moved to Paris and enrolled in the Conservatoire to study composition with Dubois, Massenet, and later Franck. While in Paris he was also involved in literary circles and published two volumes of poetry. Though never a modernist, Ropartz rejected academic orthodoxies and developed a reputation for high craft and excellent taste. At the age of thirty he was named director of the conservatory in the city of Nancy, where his impact on the musical life was significant. In 1919 he was named director of the Strasbourg Conservatoire and then retired ten years later, returning to his beloved Brittany to compose at his leisure well into his eighties.

Prélude, Marine et Chansons was composed in 1928 for the Quintette Instrumental de Paris, an ensemble of flute, harp, and string trio founded by Pierre Jamet, who would later become Professor of Harp at the Paris Conservatoire. Other composers who wrote for Jamet and his group included Koechlin, Roussel, and Joseph Jongen.

As a self-identified as a Celtic-Breton, Ropartz wrote that he came from a country “where the fairies and the enchanters have as a field the forest of Brocéliande; where the spirits of the unburied dead appear all white above the waters.” A playful, rustic, maritime air permeates *Prélude, Marine et Chansons*, and the last movement is based on a Breton folksong, “Pe trouz war an douar” (What is this noise on earth).

Hanns Eisler (1898-1962) was the son of the liberal Viennese philosopher Rudolf Eisler. His early interest in music was encouraged as much as possible, although the family was not able to keep a piano in the house. Along with his brother Gerhart, he was involved with progressive youth groups in school, developing the seeds of his lifelong socialist political philosophy. After serving in a Hungarian regiment in World War I, Eisler returned to Vienna to study at the New Vienna Conservatory, leaving in favor of private composition study with Schoenberg and Webern. Schoenberg recommended his earliest numbered works, including the Opus 1 Piano Sonata, to Universal Editions, but Eisler's growing Marxist convictions, application to the German Communist party in 1926, and public statements against the direction of new music, led to a serious rift with his teacher. He began writing choral works and "marching songs" that became classics of the socialist movement throughout Europe. In 1930 Eisler met and befriended Bertolt Brecht, and their collaborations continued throughout the lives of both men.

Hitler's ascent to power in 1933 was of course a monumental event, and Eisler's life and career were affected as much as or more than any artist who didn't end up in a concentration camp. His music was banned, and he spent 15 years in exile from Germany. Most of his compositional activity was spent in opposition to fascism, including his largest-scale work, the *Deutsche Sinfonie*, a sequence of cantatas and instrumental movements. He moved to New York in 1937 to take a teaching position at the New School for Social Research, then accepted a visiting position at the Mexico Conservatory. In 1940 he and Theodor Adorno received a three-year grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to research the function of film music, resulting in a co-written book titled *Composing for the Films*. Their charge was to explore the ways in which the new music of the twentieth century could help film music break its patterns of cliché.

14 Ways Of Describing The Rain came out of this period of film music study. It was written to accompany the 1929 experimental film *Regen* (Rain), by Dutch filmmaker Joris Ivens. The music, like the film, expresses the attributes of rain in various ways, ranging from, in Eisler's words, "making rain better than Nature does" – directly synchronized naturalism – to sections of wide contrast with the images, "reflections" beyond the picture. At the same time, Eisler conceived of the piece as a tribute to his old teacher Schoenberg for the master composer's 70th birthday. He used the 12-tone technique, incorporating Schoenberg's initials and grouping the 66 bars of the seventh variations in accordance with the date September 13th: three times 13 + 9 bars. The instrumentation is also the same as *Pierrot Lunaire*, minus the sprechstimme.

Eisler moved to Hollywood in 1942 and resumed collaborations with Brecht, but five years later was brought before the Committee on Un-American Activities. A worldwide protest was organized, and Eisler's case was supported by such luminaries as Copland, Matisse, Einstein, Picasso, Thomas Mann, and Charlie Chaplin. Nevertheless, he was deported in 1948, returning to Berlin by way of Prague and Vienna. He held a professorship at the Berlin Hochschule für Musik and was elected to the German Academy of Arts. The last 12 years of his life were spent mostly devoted to the "angewandte Musik," or "applied music" for theater, cinema, television, and other broadly public media that best served his political philosophies and goals.

Born in Stamford, Connecticut in 1970, **David Bruce** grew up in England and now enjoys a growing reputation on both sides of the Atlantic. Bruce's music draws on the wild dances and heart-felt laments of gypsy music, flamenco, klezmer and other folk traditions, as well as having a direct connection to composers like Stravinsky, Janacek, Berio and Bartok who shared similar passions. Often witty and always colorful, pulsing with earthy rhythms, Bruce's music has a directness rarely heard in contemporary music, but also contains an emotional core of striking intimacy and sensitivity.

Since the premiere of *Piosenki* (2006) in Carnegie Hall, Bruce's career in the US has flourished. Carnegie Hall itself has been a huge supporter, going on to commission *Gumboots* (2008), *Steampunk* (2011), and *That Time with You* for mezzo-soprano Kelley O'Connor, which premiered at the hall in October 2013. In 2009, Dawn Upshaw premiered the song-cycle *The North Wind was a Woman*, commissioned for the gala opening of the Chamber Music Society of the Lincoln Center's 2009 season. In 2013-14 Bruce was Associate Composer with the San Diego Symphony Orchestra, for whom he wrote three pieces: *Night Parade* for the orchestra's Carnegie Hall debut in October 2013; the violin concerto *Fragile Light* for Gil Shaham; and *Cymbeline* featuring mandolinist Avi Avital.

Other notable commissions in the United States include his one-act opera *A Bird in Your Ear* (2008) for Bard College, NY and Dawn Upshaw and *Cut the Rug* for Yo-Yo Ma and the Silk Road Ensemble. The piece received its premiere at Carnegie Hall in October 2013 as part of the ensemble's 15th anniversary celebrations and was toured to numerous high-profile venues around the world.

In the UK, recent commissions include *Prince Zal and the Simorgh* (2012) for the London Philharmonic Orchestra for their BrightSparks series; *Fire* (2012), one of 20 "20x12" commissions celebrating the Cultural Olympiad; *Saudades* for long-time collaborators Chroma; the chamber opera *The Firework Maker's Daughter* (2012) co-commissioned by The Opera Group and Royal Opera House 2; and *Nothing*, a full length opera co-commissioned by Glyndebourne and the Royal Opera House. Based on the award-winning novel by Janne Teller, *Nothing* premiered at Glyndebourne in February 2016. *The Independent* called it "a pretty well flawless piece" and *The Stage* noted "It's as moving, authentic and thought-provoking an opera you're likely to see for some time."

Bruce has received numerous awards and prizes, including the Lili Boulanger Memorial Prize and the Royal Philharmonic Society Composition Competition. He studied at Nottingham University, the Royal College of Music, London, and completed a PhD in Composition at King's College, under the supervision of Sir Harrison Birtwistle.

Complementing his work as a composer, Bruce runs the music and technology company Red Balloon Technology Ltd whose sites include the popular sheet music site 8notes.com and the composers' site CompositionToday.

Composer's program note:

We all take consolation from different things, and without wanting to be overly morbid, I

would like to think that after I die, my loved ones could take consolation from the sense that I was quite literally all around them, in the air, water and earth as part of the natural cycle of things. There are numerous poems on this theme, including the famous “Do not stand at my grave and weep” by Mary Elizabeth Frye in which, rather than being dead, the deceased speaks directly to us: “I am a thousand winds that blow, I am the diamond glints on snow, I am the sunlight on ripened grain, I am the gentle autumn rain.” Clearly, I am not alone in my way of thinking there is something very moving about the idea that you can reconnect with someone you’ve lost simply by looking at nature.

Perhaps an inevitable topic for an Englishman, the focus in this piece is rain. Taking Debussy’s method of portraying the sea in *La Mer* as something of a model, the piece is primarily an abstract musical construction, but one that constantly and variously evokes different aural images of rain, whether it be rippling, glistening, dripping, rumbling, swooshing, or showering; gathering pace or subsiding; distantly echoing or vigorously present. But throughout, the impression is of rain not as dark and depressing, but as something positive, consoling, life-affirming and renewing – the “gentle autumn rain” mentioned in the Frye poem.

I suspect – as is often the case in my work – this focus emerged out of the instrumentation, particularly the combination of harp and marimba which has a lot of potential “water” in its sound. The focus on quietness in this piece may also relate to my feeling that the very quietest tones an instrument can produce can captivate a room and make everyone collectively hold their breath at the delicacy and fragility of the sound. These are often the moments when music really does offer a sense of transcendence. *The Consolation of Rain* is in five short movements, each in a way, a kind of “song without words.”

Franz Schubert (1797-1828) is the only major composer associated with Vienna who was actually native to the city. He was only first-generation Viennese, however; his father had moved to the capital from a section of Moravia that is now part of the Czech Republic. Schubert’s family was not wealthy, but his father was a teacher so his children were well educated in academic subjects as well as music. The violin was young Franz’s first instrument, and the family string quartet was the laboratory for some of his earliest compositions. By the time he was seven years old, his family had noted enough talent to send him to sing an audition for Antonio Salieri, the court music director, and he filled a vacancy in the Salieri’s *Hofkapelle* choir in 1808. With the choir position came free tuition and board in the prestigious Imperial and Royal City College, the best school in the city for non-aristocrats. Music played a large role in the program at the College, with an excellent student orchestra in which Schubert was soon a member of the second violins. He also had the opportunity to take regular lessons with Salieri.

After five years at the Imperial and Royal City College, Schubert left for a teacher-training course, in order to follow his father and older brothers in the teaching profession. Despite producing an impressive number of compositions, he had shown no signs yet of being able to support himself as a musician. He grudgingly taught school for a number of years but was nonetheless able to continue writing music with increasing facility. The years 1814 and 1815 in

particular mark the blossoming of his skills. Always able to work fast, Schubert composed almost 150 songs, two string quartets, two symphonies, two masses, and at least four *Singspiele* – in a period of only fifteen months. His output during this time averaged at least 65 bars of music a day, which would have been remarkable for a full-time composer. Schubert was also teaching year-round at his father’s school, taking twice-weekly composition lessons with Salieri, attending operas and concerts, teaching privately, and socializing with numerous friends. Unfortunately, Schubert’s circle of friends included several whose lifestyles were largely idle and pleasure-seeking, and he spent a great deal of time and money drinking heavily and living hard.

He was eventually able to make a reasonable living and enjoy some fame as a composer, but he was the first of the major composers who did not also earn regard as a sought-after performer. By 1823, just around the time that he was beginning to be compensated well for the commissions and publications of his works, Schubert began to turn down requests to appear in person due to illness. All evidence points to the first stages of syphilis, which afflicted as many as one in five in some European cities at the time. Over the next five years until his death, Schubert was often forced to retire to his bed, to the countryside, or occasionally the hospital, trying to cure the various manifestations of the disease. Although he remained productive throughout his illness, he died just short of his thirty-second birthday. Considering the quantity and range of his output in such a short time, one can only guess what his impact on music history could have been had he lived even ten more years.

One of Schubert’s great champions was the famous baritone Michael Vogl of the Vienna Court Opera, who premiered, among other works, *Die Winterreise*. Vogl invited Schubert to spend the summer of 1819 vacationing in and around his native town of Steyr in the Upper Austrian countryside. It was the 22-year-old composer’s first trip outside of Vienna, and he fell in love with the people, the town, and the surrounding mountains, meadows, and streams, which he described in a letter as “unbelievably beautiful.” Among the musicians in Steyr was Sylvester Paumgartner, an amateur cellist and wealthy merchant, who commissioned a piece with very specific criteria: first, he requested the unusual instrumentation to accommodate the musicians at hand; and second, he asked that the musical material be based on “Die Forelle” (The Trout), a song written two years earlier by Schubert that had become widely popular. The song serves as the theme for the theme-and-variations fourth movement. Like the Octet and many of the songs, the “Trout” Quintet demonstrates Schubert’s mastery of popular forms, intended to be thoroughly enjoyed by all listeners. He wrote more innovative works in his career, but few that have been as often performed or as well-loved as this one. It is one of those very rare pieces that exudes joy from the first note to the last.

- Gabriel Rice

Bruce biography and notes provided by the composer, edited by Gabriel Rice
© 2024 Chameleon Arts Ensemble, all rights reserved