



Chameleon
Arts Ensemble
of Boston

PROGRAM NOTES

Chameleon Arts Ensemble of Boston

Deborah Boldin, Artistic Director

2024-2025 chamber music season chamber series 1: Exercises en Route

Saturday, October 5, 2024, 7:30 PM at First Church in Boston

Sunday, October 6, 2024, 4 PM at First Church in Boston

Program:

Ernest Bloch, Three Nocturnes for violin, cello & piano (1924)

Arnold Schoenberg, *Ein Stelldichein* (A Rendezvous) for oboe, clarinet, violin, cello & piano

Earl Kim, *Exercises en Route* for soprano, flute, oboe, clarinet, violin, cello & percussion

Franz Schubert, String Quintet in C Major, Op. 163, D. 956

Program notes by Gabriel Rice

From the perspective of his impact on the composers who followed him, **Arnold Schoenberg** (1874-1951) can credibly be called the most influential composer of the 20th century, despite the fact that, more than half a century after his death, his music is still controversial enough to be polarizing for many mainstream audiences. His personality and his compositional career were marked by a painfully honest, uncompromisingly sincere quest for truth and innovation. Despite his late start and nearly complete lack of formal musical training, Schoenberg became one of the greatest composition teachers of all time. The foreword to his *Harmonielehre*, a textbook he wrote for the study of harmony, contains the following passage: “I hope my students will search! Because they will know that one searches only for its own sake, that finding is indeed the goal, but can easily mean the end of striving.”

Schoenberg was born to a Jewish family in Prague and lived most of his life in Austria and Germany, immigrating to the United States in 1933 and settling in Los Angeles to teach at UCLA. His family was somewhat poor, and most of his early musical studies were on his own. His first composition teacher was Alexander von Zemlinsky, who, only three years older, had had the benefit of studies at the Vienna Conservatory. Always independently minded, Schoenberg was his own best teacher, however, and studied the great composers of earlier times with tremendous depth and insight. Even after the development of the twelve-tone method in the early 1920s, his composition pupils were required to cultivate an exhaustive understanding of traditional form, harmony and counterpoint. His method of serial, or twelve-tone, composition has had a profound impact on every serious composer in the tradition of Western art music since,

whether or not they choose to utilize its methods in their own work. Prominent contemporaries such as Stravinsky and Hindemith, who at first ignored or even opposed the twelve-tone method, eventually experimented with serial composition techniques. Often decried for destroying the language of tonality, Schoenberg in fact considered himself to be furthering the traditions in which he was raised; he considered his compositional methods to be the necessary extension of chromatic tonality as practiced by Gustav Mahler.

Ein Stelldichein (A Rendezvous) was begun in 1905 and clearly originally intended to be a much larger work. He had been writing songs at this time and was basing this instrumental work on a poem of Richard Dehmel. It seems likely that his intention was to create another programmatic instrumental piece like the earlier *Verklärte Nacht* (Transfigured Night) but with the more advanced harmonic language he had been developing. Although Schoenberg left many sketches and fragments of pieces, *Ein Stelldichein* was unusually close to complete, and it is surprising he never finished it; it's possible that he lost interest in the programmatic aspect and simply decided to abandon it in favor of his Chamber Symphony, Op. 9 (1906). Every performance of *Ein Stelldichein* involves a choice; Austrian composer Frederich Cerha created a completion in 1966 using Schoenberg's sketches, but we have chosen to play only music that was composed entirely by Schoenberg, ending after 77 measures.

A Rendezvous

It was like this even then. The stifling air hung so silently over the earth, and under the roof of the mourning beeches the scent of elder blooms got caught up at the garden's edge; silently she took my moist hand, silent with happiness.

It was like the smell of the grave... I am not at fault! You pale shade over there in the mist, how you stand like a shrouded ghost — fade out, you reminder of a broken soul! Why do you stare at me with godlike eyes? I did not break her; she did it herself. Why do I torment myself with others' misfortune?

The ground becomes gray; the night brings no spark, in the fog the willows look like smoke, the heavy sky seems to have sunken into the grain. The foliage hangs silently on the wet shrubs as if the leaves had drunk poison; now she lies so motionless too. I wish for my death.

Ernest Bloch (1880-1959) was the son of a Swiss businessman. His talent for composition and the violin were encouraged early, and he left home as a teenager to study in Brussels with Eugène Ysaÿe and others. After further studies in Frankfurt, Munich and Paris, he came to the United States in 1916, soon joining the faculty of the new Mannes College of Music in New York. Bloch's reputation grew quickly, with many performances and conducting engagements with American major orchestras. He continued to be a leading figure in musical higher education as the founding director of the Cleveland Institute of Music (1920-1925), director of the San Francisco Conservatory (1925-1930), and, after a decade living mostly back in Switzerland, professor at the University of California at Berkeley from 1940 until he retired in 1952. He died following an unsuccessful surgery for cancer.

When G. Schirmer began publishing Bloch's works in 1918, they created a trademark logo especially for him, with the initials E.B. inside a Star of David, firmly establishing Bloch's Jewish identity with the musical public. Many of his most often performed works are on Jewish themes, most notably the series of large pieces known as the "Jewish Cycle," including settings of several Psalms for solo singers and orchestra, a symphony entitled *Israel* (1912-1916), and *Schelomo* for cello and orchestra (1915-1916). Actually, no more than about a quarter of Bloch's works are overtly Jewish; he drew on a broad spectrum of inspiration, from nature to urban life, from his native Europe to American Civil War songs and spirituals, and his musical vocabulary was just as wide-ranging, including Asian scales and sonorities, French impressionism, quarter-tones, Neoclassicism and even occasional elements of 12-tone serialism.

The Three Nocturnes for violin, cello, and piano were composed in 1924, shortly before Bloch's move from Cleveland to San Francisco. They are colorful character pieces with no particular unifying programmatic element other than the evocation of nighttime. The first draws on impressionistic influences, with exotic scales and ethereal textures. The second is a gentle lullaby suggesting folk songs, and the final nocturne, "Tempestoso," with its driving, syncopated rhythms, can only be described as a late-night dance party – but with an underlying tension that hints at mystery and danger.

Earl Kim (1920-1998) was born in Dinuba, CA, the third son of Korean immigrants. He studied with Arnold Schoenberg at UCLA and then with Ernest Bloch at Berkeley, where his degree was interrupted by deployment to the Army Intelligence Service during World War II. As an Asian-American, he was often mistreated by fellow soldiers and sometimes even mistaken for a Japanese spy. This tension of being both a proud American and a perpetual outsider was a central part of Kim's identity throughout his life. In the course of his duties he flew over Nagasaki just hours after it was bombed, and he formed a lifelong conviction against nuclear weapons, co-founding *Musicians Against Nuclear Arms* in the 1980s. After the war, Kim first returned to Berkeley to study with Roger Sessions and then found his way to the east coast. He served on the faculty of Princeton University from 1952 to 1967, and Harvard University from 1967 until his retirement in 1990.

Kim's music is revered for its unique combination of expression and economy of means; "I am reducing everything to its maximum." Inspired by the stone garden of the Ryoanji temple in Kyoto, Japan, where the fifteen stones are spaced so that it is impossible to see all of them at once, he wrote: "I realized then that such a tranquility had to be my inner focus, and I must keep faith with it...It summed up my theory of composing: discrete images not taken in by the eye or ear at once, but seen or heard consecutively. At the end, there is a whole that is somehow synthesized from all these separate pieces." His Harvard colleagues, in a *Harvard Gazette Memorial Minute*, described his music as "inhabit[ing] a sound-world which indeed is sparse but never desolate; elegant though tough; refined yet bold; elusive but precise; beautiful in its complexity; profound in its simplicity." He was also a gifted conductor and pianist, bringing the same aesthetic to performance. Kim felt a particular affinity for the enigmatic, crystalline writing of Samuel Beckett and was one of very few composers to receive Beckett's permission to set his texts. Earl Kim passed away in November of 1998 of lung cancer, at his home in Cambridge.

Exercises en Route was composed over the course of seven years from 1963 to 1970, and Kim conducted the 1971 premiere with American soprano Benita Valente. The vocal writing is directly and unmistakably influenced by Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, the revolutionary melodrama that utilized the technique of *sprechstimme*, or "speech-song," a mode of delivering text somewhere between reciting and singing. In *Exercises*, Kim calls on the singer to speak, sing, and essentially everything in between. Each of the four parts comes from a different Beckett work: "dead calm" is from the addendum to *Watt*; "they are far out" from the novel *Malone Dies*; "gooseberries, she said" from the play *Krapp's Last Tape*; and "rattling on" from *The Unnamable*.

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 compositional 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.

The String Quintet in C Major was composed in September and October of 1828, during the final illness that would take Schubert's life in November. He was unable to interest his publisher in the work, which was not premiered until 1850 and not published until 1853. It is known as the Cello Quintet because of the instrumentation of string quartet plus cello, common to the works of Boccherini but unlike the string quintets of Mozart and Beethoven, which add a viola. Some scholars have suggested a conscious effort in Schubert's last compositions to claim the mantle of Beethoven, who left a C Major string quintet unfinished at the end of his life. Despite its initial neglect, Schubert's quintet has become one of the very most beloved works in the chamber music repertoire, symphonic in both length and breadth of emotional material and a masterpiece of melodic and harmonic invention. The second movement Adagio has earned a particularly special place in the hearts of musicians and music-lovers; the pianist Artur Rubenstein was reported to request that it be performed at his funeral, and on a personal note, a recording of it was played at my own grandfather's memorial.

- Gabriel Rice

© 2024 Chameleon Arts Ensemble, all rights reserved