

Music of Virko Baley

An 80th Birthday Celebration

PROGRAM

Nocturnal No. 4 (1971; 1987) for piano

Virko Baley
(b.1938)

- I. Toccata (attacca)
- II. 13 Interludes (13 Ways of Looking at a Blackbird)
 - i. The Eye of the Blackbird (tenuto; repentimente!)
 - ii. A Fear Pierced Him (staccatissimo)
 - iii. Cry out Sharply...(An Indecipherable Cause) (lugubre)
 - iv. I Was of Three Minds/Like a tree (cantabile)
 - v. It was Evening All Afternoon (come di lontananza)
 - vi. The Edge/Of One of Many Circles (ironicamente)
 - vii. The Blackbird Whirled in the Autumn Wind (leggiero e virtuoso; fantasioso)
 - ix. A Man and a Woman are One (con calore)
 - x. The Blackbird Whistling (strepitoso; tutta la forza)
 - xi. Why Do You Imagine Golden Birds? (dolce; con alcuna licenza)
 - xii. I Know Noble Accents/And lucid, Inescapable Rhythms (tempo rubato e malinconico)
 - xiii. Icicles Filled the Long Window/With Barbaric Glass (quasi campanelle)
- III. Caccia

Timothy Hoft, piano

Song Without Words: Der Abschied (2003)
In memoriam: Valentin Bibik

Song Without Words: A Poem for Aleks (2007)

Andrew Smith, cello
Timothy Hoft, piano

from Partita No. 5 for flute and piano (2009–18)
(work in progress)

- II. Canto: Soleares
- III. Persona III (Luisa Triana)
- IV. Cante Hondo: Pajarillo (Little bird)

Jennifer Grim, flute
Timothy Hoft, piano

INTERMISSION

Nocturnal No. 5 for Piano (1980)

Laura Spitzer, piano

Orpheus Singing (1994)

A Divertimento for Oboe and String Quartet

I. Recitative

II. Aria

III. Cabaletta: Kolomyikas

Stephen Caplan, oboe
Ambroise Aubrun, violin
Ying Zhang, violin
Kate Hamilton, viola
Andrew Smith, cello

from The Emily Dickinson Songbooks, Books 1 & 2

I. There is a Solitude of Space (Bk. 1, No. 4)

II. I Held a Jewel in my Fingers (Bk. 1, No. 3)

III. Love Can Do All But Raise the Dead (Bk. 1, No. 1)

IV. Oh, Honey of an Hour (Bk. 1, Mo. 1xx, No. 2)

V. Hope is a Thing with Feathers (Bk. 2, No. 2)

Lucy Shelton, soprano
Virko Baley, piano

Thursday, November 8, 2015

7:30 p.m.

**Dr. Arturo Rando-Grillot Recital Hall
Lee and Thomas Beam Music Center
University of Nevada, Las Vegas**

Program Notes by Virko Baley

Nocturnal No. 4 (1971; 1987)

The seven Nocturnals are works of dreamtime, the pleasures and horrors of the night, which envelops each piece in its protective, yet frightening, amniotic fluid. Basically contemplative, they do not shy away from *sturm und drang*. Nocturnal No. 4 (originally titled Music for Piano I) was composed soon after we arrived in Las Vegas, in 1970. I decided formally to follow the Bachian Toccata: first an improvisational and very rhetorical fast – then a lyrical slow – and finally a lively fast fugal — all performed without a break. By this time I was quite fascinated by the idea of the aboriginal dreamtime belief, and so in many ways it penetrated my old fascination with night-music (nocturnes and the like). I composed the toccata movement in a few days (2 or 3); then, the 13 Interludes in a single night: started around 7:30 pm and worked until early morning, around 6:30 – 7:00 am. Caccia was finally revised and completed in 1987. The 13 Interludes are a series of dreamtime events (some as short as 4-5 seconds), being recalled in the early moments of wakefulness. The headings for each are from a terrific poem by Wallace Stevens: "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird."

Songs Without Words: Der Abschied & A Poem for Aleks (2003; 2007)

I have over 11 such Songs Without Words by now; many of them are instrumental versions of actual songs (mainly from the *Emily Dickinson Songbooks*); but this evening you will hear two that were composed for the cello originally. *Der Abschied* (Farewell) was composed in memory of a wonderful Ukrainian composer Valentin Bibik, who died 2003 from a brain tumor. He was a good friend and I miss him; the use of German for the title is a reference to Mahler, which you may hear in the piece. An important aural image are bells; the piece begins with what I somewhere described as "dissonant bells." These opening "bells" are important, "as they provide the harmonic and melodic material for the movement and give the listener the first indication of the sound of bells throughout the piece." Near the end, the cello quotes a lovely series of melodic phrases from *Seven Miniatures* for String Orchestra, Op. 20 by Bibik. *A Poem for Aleks* was composed for Aleksander Tengedal's graduation recital, a very gifted cello student of Andrew Smith, tonight's performer. It is essentially a "simple song" that is ambushed in the middle by a collage of quotes in the piano from my various pieces, but manages to find its way back.

Partita No. 5, Luisa Triana (work-in-progress) (2009–2018)

What you are hearing tonight, is not the complete work, but a work in progress—very long in the making. The journey began in 2008 with a movement titled *Persona III*, written for Jennifer Grim. It is a musical portrait of one of my favorite people, the great flamenco dancer and choreographer, Luisa Triana. Partita No. 5 does not attempt to write an actual flamenco piece; rather it is a highly accented and stylized version of certain musical concepts that I associate with the *cante chico* flamenco, especially with the female dancer dancing in a cafe club environment. It uses the internal structures of the *alegrias*, *farrucas*, *siguiriyas*, *cante hondas*, *sabicas* and other flamenco forms as melodic, harmonic and rhythmic progressions that freely weave in and out throughout the movements of the piece. The flutist is an active physical presence not in only purely musical matters, but in certain gestures that closely resemble a dancer. Although still in process, having this concert pushed me (and is pushing our two performers) to get back towards completing this work, so very dear to my heart.

Nocturnal No. 5 (1980)

This Nocturnal was composed for Laura Spitzer, and is in many ways different from all the others. Imagine yourself walking through a thickly vegetated forest with a full moon as your only source of light, with exotic creatures of the night floating, dancing, and buzzing, mostly invisible around you. I think of it as an audio vision in which subterranean and night-like clustering of things one can identify and many mysteriously frightening seem to connect all the notes. Gasps, excesses, incompleteness are tied around a seemingly naive *cantilena*. This *cantilena* is surrounded by an energized field of overtones and sub tones, of dissonances and consonances, which create a dance of collisions. We are meant to hear shadows and bodies in motion. But the *cantilena* is a story: it is not a mere collection of incidents, but an examination of events that form an important link with the seeming chaos around them. The inspiration for the work was Akutagawa Ryunosuke's story *In a Grove* (the basis for Kurosawa's film *Rashomon*). In that story, there is a central event which is described differently by each of the four main characters. These versions differ from each other sometimes slightly, sometimes radically. The lines influence each other and, gradually, three of the voices begin to merge, resembling each other more closely as they approach an inexorable climax. The intent was to write (unlike a fugue) a non-imitative, contrapuntal piece using four discreet, clearly-delineated lines. This process is strongly related to a psychological condition that living creatures may all possess: that mental process is one of multitasking different lines of thoughts simultaneously. Just as we are a mix of personalities sharing a common core, we do think linearly, yet zig-zag between different narratives at the same time.

Orpheus Singing (1994)

Orpheus Singing was commissioned for Stephen Caplan by Dr. W. Howard Hoffman and is dedicated to the memory of the Polish composer, Witold Lutoslawski. The piece begins as a "Recitative" for unaccompanied oboe and moves directly into the "Aria", where the musical ideas introduced in the "Recitative" are further developed and transformed, this time with the support of the strings. The ending of the "Aria" pays homage to one of my favorite songs by Gershwin. The third part is "Cabaletta: Kolomyikas". The debt to Italian operatic form is self-evident: from the recitative, to the, at times, plaintive and, at other times, tempestuous aria, finally to the joyful dance-like cabaletta, which gathers momentum not far removed from a tarantella. But rather than borrowing the meter from Italian, the accent is definitely Ukrainian, from around the Carpathian region: this cabaletta borrows from the *kolomyika*, a simple but infinitely variable 8-bar Western Ukrainian strophic song form. In *Orpheus Singing* each *kolomyika* cartwheels into the next, the strings trying to keep up, trying to anticipate, trying to keep the oboist-bard from completely falling into a dionysian trance, but with little success. The title was suggested by Stephen Caplan, which in turn comes from the first *Sonnet to Orpheus*, by Rilke. The reference to Rilke is appropriate, since this piece generally reflects a mood of joyful acquiescence and celebration. The inner life of the piece, acknowledges *Kozak Mamai*, a mythical poet, bandura player, singer, trickster and a womanizer in the 16th and 17th centuries folk tradition in Ukraine. The demanding oboe part generally uses the instrument in the traditional manner, displaying its lyrical nature. Occasionally extended techniques are used: glissandi, double trills, and harmonics. In the last movement the oboist plays certain phrases with the reed entirely in the mouth, rather than with the lips on the reeds, mimicking the rustic tones of some folk double reed instruments.

Emily Dickinson Songbook I & II (2002-5)

These five songs are part of a long-term project titled the "Emily Dickinson Songbook". There are now two such books, each containing six songs and a third one half way done. The poetry of Emily Dickinson has become increasingly more important to me over the years. I am particularly struck by their tonal intricacies and complex juxtaposition of opposed or perhaps even irreconcilable thoughts and feelings. Each song is composed around a central musical metaphor, usually stated in the piano. The vocal line is both part of it and separate. Because many of the early songs in the series were essentially of strophic nature, I originally wanted to call the series "urban folk songs". But as the number of songs grew so did their nature. This series is open ended; my only structural precondition is to organize them in a series of books, each containing 6 songs, each book organized around some kind of a narrative. The project may continue as long as I am capable of writing. I have also used seven of the songs and included them in a cycle for soprano and orchestra, titled *Uniforms of Snow*.