

Today's program

SETH KNOPP, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Yellow Barn

Summer Artist Residency Concert

July 12, 2020 | 2:00 and 7:30 | The Big Barn, Putney, VT

Lei Liang (b.1972) Trans for solo percussion and audience (2013)

Eduardo Leandro, percussion

Anton Webern (1883-1945) Five Movements for String Quartet, Op.5 (1909)

Heftig bewegt
Sehr langsam
Sehr bewegt
Sehr langsam
In zarter Bewegung

Emma Frucht, Alice Ivy-Pemberton, violins; Roger Tapping, viola;
Coleman Itzkoff, cello

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) Elegy for Solo Viola (1930)

Roger Tapping, viola

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904) Bagatelles, Op.47 (1878)

Allegretto scherzando
Tempo di minuetto. Grazioso
Allegretto scherzando
Canon. Andante con moto
Poco Allegro

Emma Frucht, Alice Ivy-Pemberton, violins; Coleman Itzkoff, cello;
Seth Knopp, harmonium

Frederic Rzewski (b.1938) To The Earth (1985)

Eduardo Leandro, percussion

Tonight's wall program was created by **Bill Kelly**.

Program Notes

Lei Liang (b.1972)

Trans for solo percussion and audience (2013)

Trans: transience – transmutate – transcribe – transfigure – transform – trance.

The soloist performs from three staves, each reflecting a state of mind – the “outward space” (outwardly expressive), the “inward space” (inwardly contemplative), and the “immovable space” (at the same time fully engaged and detached). It is in three sections: “3=1,” “1=1,” and “1=3”.

The piece is not contrapuntal elaborations of a single mindset, but the simultaneous unfolding of different impulses. The difference and contrast between the three spaces are to be articulated by choice of instrumentation, interpretation and performance presence.

The soloist engages the audience by initiating responses in sound. The audience forms “sonic clouds” by playing pairs of rocks, in response to the initiation of the soloist and the performance environment.

For the premiere performance, 60 pairs of pebbles are distributed to the audience to form the “sonic clouds.” It can be made by other objects (such as paper, breath, wood, etc.) and can be performed by fewer or greater number of audience members depending on the occasion and the performance situation.

The soloist uses his/her own discretion to initiate, conduct, and determine the length, timing, and the extent to which the audience participates in the performance. The performer should strive to achieve, at some points during the performance where the sonic environment (created by the audience) and the work (performed by the soloist) become indistinguishably unified.

—Lei Liang

Anton Webern (1883-1945)

Five Movements for String Quartet, Op.5 (1909)

“Baby shoes, for sale, never worn.” The power in this famous short story comes from its brevity, from what is left unsaid. The six words on the page guide the reader toward a unified tragedy, but completing that tragedy relies as much on the imagination of the reader as that of the writer. Though this work is often attributed to Hemingway, the earliest version was published in a small American newspaper in 1906. In Vienna that same year, the composer Anton Webern, known for his

hallmark of brevity, began his studies as the pupil of Arnold Schoenberg.

Webern's reverence for Schoenberg lasted a lifetime, and began during his years of study from 1905-1908. While he started out as a devotee of late Romantics like Wagner and Strauss, Webern was quickly drawn to the coherence in Schoenberg's way of writing. In Webern's *Fünf Sätze* for String Quartet written in 1909, one can hear the shifting of a great mind—a mind that is in no way divorced from romanticism that came before him, but is looking toward music of the future. Webern struggled with harmony and counterpoint before coming to Schoenberg; his very early music has the feeling of trying to conform with the past, but not quite fitting in. Schoenberg gave Webern the strength to break away from perceived expectations. His teaching credo was, "Have the courage and force to approach everything in such a way that it becomes unique through the manner in which it is seen."

When Webern left Schoenberg's class in 1908, he needed to find himself in the absence of his beloved teacher. Webern turned to the poetry of Stefan George as artistic inspiration for his Op. 3 and 4 text settings. Beginning with these songs, and continuing in his Op. 5 movements for string quartet, Webern honed the skill of brevity. Every note in these pieces is carefully placed, and so incredibly imaginative. As with the short story, it takes a great amount of thought to write a 14-bar movement. The longest movement in *Fünf Sätze* is 55-bars, the shortest 13. Even 55-bars is barely the length of the exposition of a Beethoven quartet. Yet this twenty-minute piece is packed with color and texture.

It is easy to get wrapped up in logic and "math" when studying music of the Second Viennese School. Webern's music is filled with passages of aurally obscured symmetry, which is sometimes more observable through analysis on paper than analysis by ear. One should never forget, however, that Webern was writing primarily out of intuition. On many of his musical sketches, he would write a quick verbal cue to remind himself of the feeling he wished to communicate—such as on one, "coolness of early spring."

In Webern's view, he was very much a product of his time and was not trying to refute the validity of music that came before him. He equated the relationship between the Second Viennese School and the late Romantics to the relationship between Bach and Handel: inseparable because they lived and operated during the same period, and yet, as he put it, "one shouldn't mention the two in the same breath!"

—Annie Jacobs-Perkins

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

Bagatelles, Op.47 (1878)

Antonín Dvořák's (1841-1904) name is synonymous with Czech folk music. Dvořák was born in a small village north of Prague to František and Anna Dvořák. His father was a butcher and an innkeeper who played the zither as a hobby. When Antonín began playing the violin as a six-year-old, his parents quickly recognized a profound musical gift. They worked hard to ensure him the best education possible. He studied in many different cities surrounding his hometown, and eventually landed in Prague where he began his career as a violist in a folk ensemble in 1859.

Dvořák's first compositions date from 1865. As early as 1866 he turned away from traditions of Germanic romantic music and focused instead on Slavonic folk music—music connected to the Earth from which he grew. In the beginning stages of his career Dvořák was strapped for money. He annually submitted his scores to the Austrian State Stipendium, which allotted him prize money for his work. From 1874-1877 he submitted his work to this prize, and each year Johannes Brahms sat on the panel and was impressed with this young composer's work. Finally in 1877, with the submission of his Moravian Duets, Brahms sent a letter to his publisher, Simrock, expressing support for Dvořák and requesting that his duets be published. This marked the beginning of Dvořák's success.

Unfortunately, because Dvořák's music was so overtly nationalistic and because of stressed European politics, he was not easily accepted in Austrian and German circles. Dvořák believed that "an artist too has a fatherland in which he must have a firm faith and which he must love," and was unwilling to return to Germanic musical models to appease German audiences. For this reason, his success in England following a trip in 1884 was a relief. Here was a place he could compose without having to censor himself.

In 1891, New Yorker Jeannette Thurber approached Dvořák about becoming the artistic director of the National Conservatory of Music. Thurber lamented the fact that America had no national style of music and looked to Dvořák to help find America's voice. Dvořák accepted Thurber's offer, but seemed to have a more modern and progressive view of America and American music than his contemporaries. He immediately recognized that America already had its own music—just not where people bothered to look. Dvořák wrote, "I am convinced that the future music of this country must be based on what are called [African-American] melodies....these beautiful and varied themes are the product of the soil. They are the folk songs of America and your composers must turn to them." The works he wrote while living in New York, including the "From the New World" Symphony and the "American" Quartet, take inspiration from tonal characteristics of African-American spirituals and Native American folk music. Dvořák returned to

Prague in 1895 and in his last years devoted his time to composing programmatic music and operas. He died after illness in 1904.

—Annie Jacobs-Perkins

Frederic Rzewski (b.1938)

To The Earth (1985)

Born in 1939, the avant-garde composer Frederic Rzewski has artistically internalized the political conflicts of the last century. As the child of Polish immigrants who left Europe after WWI, historical context, personal experience, and political backbone play a major role in Rzewski's body of work. He describes his childhood as a second-generation Polish-Jewish-American in Westfield, MA as being like something from a Philip Roth novel or *The Godfather*.

With two pharmacists for parents, Rzewski did not immediately expect to have a career in music. When he began school at Harvard University in 1954, he thought he might be a scientist or a classical scholar. He reveled in the fact that the "American university is like a supermarket. You walk around and take a look at this and take a look at that." However, by the end of his degree it was clear that he was a musician. After his compositional studies at Harvard with Walter Piston, Rzewski completed his Masters degree with Robert Sessions and Milton Babbitt at Princeton. He then followed these studies with a Fulbright scholarship in Florence with Dallapiccola and lessons with Elliott Carter in Berlin. In 1966 Rzewski founded Musica Elettronica Viva in Rome, an experimental group devoted to performing free improvisations with electronics. Rzewski has lived most of his adult life in Europe. From 1977-2003 he was professor of composition at the Liège Conservatory in Belgium.

His most famous work, *The People United Will Never Be Defeated* for solo piano, was composed in 1975 in support of Chilean peoples oppressed under the rule of Augusto Pinochet. This work has followed him all over the world; as recently as 2015, Rzewski performed it in on an upright piano in Wholey's Fish Market in Pittsburgh. He performs his music in diverse venues, but tries never to say too much about it. "If it's any good," he says, "somebody will get curious and start thinking about it...Let the music defend itself." Other political issues that Rzewski has tackled over the course of his career include gay rights, the Attica State Prison riots of the 1970s (by setting the letters of inmate Sam Melville to music), and the imbalance of wealth and destruction of the working class.

—Annie Jacobs-Perkins