

ESSENTIAL MUSIC

GREENWICH HOUSE AUDITORIUM
27 BARROW STREET
MAY 5, 1988

ESSENTIAL MUSIC

presents

Chant John Kennedy

Frank Balluffi, John Kennedy, Charles Wood

Mountain Spirit Kyle Gann

Baptism

Renee Krimsier, Theresa Patton, flutes
Charles Wade, electronic keyboard
John Kennedy, Charles Wood

INTERMISSION

A Fine Day for the Curious (and Wet)

Mitchell Clark

Frank Balluffi, John Kennedy, Peter Pollack,
Jim Rich, Warren Stein, Charles Wood

Preponderance

Dary John Mizelle

Renee Krimsier, John Kennedy

"Nothing Lives Long, Only the Earth and Mountains"

Charles Wood

Frank Balluffi, John Kennedy, Jim Rich, Charles Wood

Tonight we have gathered to hear music of very different natures, but that shares quiet affinities of spirit and materials. Most conspicuous is a continuum of sounds from the earth: skin-headed drums, bamboo tubes, ceramic and clay vessels, and sandpaper. Each of these works betrays an affection and reverence for the sound of earthen materials, and each uses such sounds in the exploration of an original landscape.

The traversal of landscape is central to the spirit of these pieces and of this evening, which is the extension of consciousness into the natural environment. All of these works are designed with large cycles derived from or inspired by natural cycles, and expand our sense of time and being. Through them, we can hear music as being one of the original, magical elements of the ecosystem.

Chant is for nine large drums with skin heads. This is a chant of understatement, of filling empty space with gentle vibrations that suggest a greater potential resonance. The work's design is a process of gestation and birthing, in which all elements -- drums, sections, durations, and rhythms -- are in values of nine. Chant is for the wombs of these drums, and gives the drums a pleasure they rarely have: the sustained utterance of erotically satisfied murmurs.

Mountain Spirit and Baptism represent an attempt to return to a narrative prose form in music, in contrast to the "poetic" repetitions of minimalism. Like much of Gann's recent work, both are based on Native American music. Each uses a cyclical form,

the cycles of the days and seasons being perhaps one element of primitive cosmology for which the contemporary world still has an affinity. Both works are scored for two flutes, electronic keyboard, and two skin drums, with orchestra bells added in Baptism. The drums used in these performances include a Taos drum and one made by Charles Wood.

In Mountain Spirit, each instrument has a cycle of a unique prime number of beats in length, with the electronic keyboard's cycle of 107 beats corresponding to the length of the source material, the "Mountain Spirit" song of the Apache. Within the keyboard's thirteen cycles, the "Mountain Spirit" theme is repeated in its original form four times, in accordance with the Native American custom of paying homage to the North, East, West, and South within each ceremony.

Baptism is based on a song of the Apache Native American Church entitled "Son of Our Father", although there are many other references to Protestant hymns. The form of the piece, in seven sections, was suggested by, and loosely follows, the account of the seven days of creation in Emmanuel Swedenborg's Arcana Coelestia, which explains them as veiled metaphors for the seven stages of the soul. Melodically, Baptism follows the Christian concept of conversion, developing from complexity to simplicity. In terms of tonality, it goes from simplicity to complexity and back, corresponding to the Zen concept of enlightenment. After beginning with Native American Church material, the idea of baptism is expressed with a certain pantheistic irony.

A Fine Day for the Curious (and Wet) is played on the set of Hawaiian bamboo stamping tubes, kaekeke, from Wesleyan University's World

Instrument Collection. Twenty-two tubes comprise the full kaekeeke (fifteen are used here), each tube closed at its lower end with the natural node of the bamboo, and stamped on the ground. Each of the six musicians performs from an individual part (there is no full score), proceeding through a series of patterns of different durations. Changes in patterns among the players are not simultaneous, but are determined by the different durations in each part, resulting in a constant layering of moving lines and a constant transformation of the composite pitches.

Preponderance was composed in 1981 as a through-composed version of Preponderance of the Small, one of a set of 64 works for shakuhachi and various other instruments based on the 64 hexagrams of the I Ching. Preponderance is set for alto flute and percussion instruments made of earth, including the unique porcelain pieces made by artist Judith Weber, to whom the work is dedicated. The music gradually develops from isolated flute tones and percussion events into well-defined melodies and rhythmic modes which are symbolic of the trigrams for mountain, thunder, and earth. The ending of the music merges into silence.

Charles Wood composes for instruments of his own design and manufacture, using as materials wood, stone, metal, glass, and animal hide. In his work, composition is returned to its point of origin, in the composition or internal design of each musical instrument. "Nothing Lives Long, Only the Earth and Mountains" is composed for four pairs of large sandpaper blocks, each with a different grit, or texture, of sandpaper. The piece follows a natural periodicity of growth and decay, with extremely gradual changes in texture and density of motion that evoke geologic changes through time.

ESSENTIAL MUSIC

Essential Music was created in order to facilitate the production and development of new creative work which explores the nature, limits and contexts of music, and the ways in which music and the arts can participate in the development of new spiritual, ethical, and ecological paradigms. We are not a standing musical ensemble of specific instrumentation -- instead we are working to develop the flexibility to be able to assemble and organize the resources needed for the production of each individual work, on a project-by-project basis. This could involve, for instance, organizing performing ensembles, historical retrospectives of neglected modern music, construction of special instruments, or the location and securing of unusual performing spaces.

The several concerts we have planned for the next year include the performance of Dary John Mizelle's lake mountain thunder in a concert of his work at Symphony Space in October, and two concerts in November devoted to the 100th Birthday of the composer Johanna M. Beyer.

The Beyer Commemoration will be the first comprehensive examination of the music and life of an important figure in the experimental music scene in New York in the 1930's. Beyer was an immigrant from Germany, lived at 10 Jane Street, taught piano lessons at Greenwich House Music School, served as a secretary to Henry Cowell, and participated in and led WPA Federal Music Project events. Very little of her music has ever been performed, as its advocacy was in part cut short by her premature death in 1944. Essential Music will present two different concerts in a chronological and stylistic survey of 12 of her major pieces, and will publish a commemorative program including articles about her life and work, and a correct bibliography of her compositions.

To realize these and other projects down the road, Essential Music is in need of significant financial assistance, as well as the volunteer efforts of people interested in working on these projects and/or serving on our Board of Directors. It is extremely difficult for nascent organizations to obtain corporate and government grants, and such institutions use as one gauge of worthiness the willingness of individuals to help us keep moving. All donations are tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law. If you are interested in becoming a part of Essential Music, please get in touch and let us know.

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John Kennedy and Charles Wood,
Co-Artistic Directors

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What is good is given back.