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Guest Artist: Marilyn Nonken, Piano; October 16, 2002

Marilyn Nonken Piano
Illinois State University

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Illinois State University
School of Music

Guest Artist
Marilyn Nonken, piano

"Signature Pieces"

Center for the Performing Arts
Wednesday Evening
October 16, 2002
8:00 p.m.

The Eighteenth Program of the 2002-2003 Season.

Program

Sliding Scales
12-Step Program (2002)

David Rakowski

Echoes' White Veil (1996)

Jason Eckardt

North American Spirituals (1998)

Michael Finnissy

Intermission

Allegro Penseroso (1999)

Milton Babbitt

A Collection of Caprices (2002)

Paul Nauert

Program Notes

I am pleased to present these five works, all of which were written for me between 1995 and 2002. Over these years, I have had the pleasure of working closely with these composers in performing and recording their music. Their voices are original and powerful. To me, each of their works is more like a dance than a song, and, in their performance, the physical is ennobled, as it is in ballet or the forms of modern dance which require physical discipline, in addition to artistic sensitivity. While this music challenges the performer's technique, however, it also engages the mind, the heart, and the imagination.

Sliding Scales 12-Step Program (2002)

David Rakowski

12-Step Program and *Sliding Scales* are two out of a collection of more than forty etudes written by Rakowski, each obsessing on some particular performance problem or compositional issue, and two out of five etudes written specifically for Ms. Nonken. *Twelve-Step Program* is a two-part piece obsessing on chromatic scales and chromatic wedges, and was written in memory of Earl Kim. This etude takes off on a very striking vocal chromatic wedge from Kim's *Exercises en Route*, heard at the outset in strange counterpoint with itself. The first part is leapy and disjunct, while the second part is more continuous. *Sliding Scales* is a "gonzo etude on scales" that takes fast scale-playing pretty much to its limit, sometimes counterpointing scales with slightly slower versions of themselves, and sometimes simply going wild with them. That anyone can play either etude is nothing less than a miracle.

Program Notes (cont)

David Rakowski studied at New England Conservatory, Princeton, and Tanglewood with Milton Babbitt, Luciano Berio, Peter Westergaard, Paul Lansky, and Robert Ceely. He has received plenty of awards and commissions, is published by C.F. Peters, and was twice a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Music: in 1999 for *Persistent Memory*, commissioned and premiered by the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra; and in 2002 for *Ten of a Kind*, commissioned and premiered by "The President's Own" U.S. Marine Band. Currently he teaches composition and theory at Brandeis University.

Echoes' White Veil (1996)

Jason Eckardt

The title of this piece is derived from W.S. Merwin's prose poem, *Echoes*:

Everything we hear is an echo. Anyone can see that echoes move forward and backward in time, in rings. But not everyone realizes that as a result silence becomes harder and harder for us to grasp - though it in itself is unchanged - because of the echoes pouring through us out of the past, unless we can learn to set them at rest. We are still hearing the bolting of the doors at Thermopylae, and do not recognize the sounds. How did we sound to the past? And there are sounds that rush away from us: echoes of future words. So, we know that there are words in the future, some of them loud and terrible. And we know that there is silence in the future. But will the words recognize their unchanging homeland?

I am sitting on the shore of a lake. I am a child, in the evening, at the time when the animals lose heart for a moment. Everyone has gone, as I wanted them to go, and in the silence I call across the water, "Oh!" And I see the sound appear running away from me over the water in her white veil, growing taller, becoming a cloud with raised arms, in the dusk. Then there is such silence that the trees are bent. And afterward a shock like wind that throws me back against the hill, for I had not known who I was calling.

Echoe' White Veil was written for Marilyn Nonken, to whom it is gratefully dedicated.

Jason Eckardt has received commissions from Carnegie Hall, the Koussevitzky and Fromm Foundations, and percussionist Evelyn Glennie; awards from the League/ISCM (National Prize), Stadt Wesel (Symposium NRW Prize), ASCAP, and the University of Illinois (Martirano Prize); and fellowships from the Fondation Royaumont, MacDowell and Millay Colonies, Fritz Reiner Center, and the Yvar Mikhashoff Trust. His works have been recorded for the CRI, Metier, Helicon, and Mode labels and performed on four continents at festivals including Darmstadt, the ISCM World Music Days, Voix Nouvelles, Musica Nova Sofia, Currents in Musical Thought-Seoul, and Musik im 20 Jahrhundert.

North American Spirituals (1998)

Michael Finnissy

North American Spirituals is the second chapter of the second book of *The History of Photography in Sound*, and was at the request of Marilyn Nonken, to whom it is dedicated. Photography captures images from life on sensitive paper sometimes altering, exploring, and exaggerating these via "distorting" lenses, cropping, focusing, and editing...not unlike the processes applied to musical "images" and "memories" during composition.

The sources of this piece are (i) four spiritual songs that also appear in Michael Tippett's oratorio *A Child of Our Time: Steal Away, Nobody Knows the Trouble I See, Go Down, Moses, and Oh, By and By*-material that is rich in social and political significance and meaning, and (ii) the manner (or "style") of William Billings and Charles Ives, two North American composers who have made an enormous impact on my work-and are hereby acknowledged.

Michael Finnissy is a prolific composer whose curiosity about a wide range of music, especially traditional musics, matches his fascination with mathematical structures. Formerly President of the ISCM, Finnissy has been a featured composer at the Bath, Huddersfield, Music Factory, and Almeida festivals. As a pianist, he is highly regarded for his performances of works by living composers, including pieces

Program Notes (cont)

written for him by Judith Weir, James Dillon, and Oliver Knussen. He teaches at the University of Southampton and the University of Leuven. Of Finnissy's vast output, perhaps his most impressive work is *The History of Photography in Sound*, a piano solo cycle which lasts over four hours. Finnissy's music has been recorded for Metier, CBS, NMC, and Etcetera.

Allegro Penseroso (1999)

Milton Babbitt

Allegro Penseroso is Babbitt's latest work for piano. Its title links it with John Milton's poems *L'Allegro* (The cheerful man) and *Il Penseroso* (The pensive man), and the piece moves seamlessly between moments of melancholy and mirth. As Milton's poetry is rich with images and reference, Babbitt's music is full of contrasts, presenting the listener with a Bosch-like world of attractions and distractions. The final pages of the score, completed July 18, 1999, arrived in the mail with the note: "Herewith two copies of the remainder of your marriage present. May you wear them both (the piece and the marriage) in good health."

(*Allegro Penseroso* was commissioned by Marilyn Nonken as part of the national series of works sponsored by Meet the Composer/Arts Endowment Commissioning Music/USA with support from the Helen F. Whitaker Fund.)

Milton Babbitt (b. 1916), one of America's most important musicians, has contributed significantly to the disciplines of composition, pedagogy, and music theory. A member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Babbitt is the recipient of a Pulitzer Prize Special Citation, the William Schuman Award, and a MacArthur Fellowship. Professor Emeritus at Princeton University, he has taught at Harvard University and the Juilliard School. While maintaining a prolific creative output, Babbitt remains a dedicated supporter of recent music and is tireless in his efforts to promote contemporary composition.

Paul Nauert: A Collection of Caprices (2002)

A Collection of Caprices is not a set of character pieces; the title alludes instead to the way in which this continuous, single-movement piece frequently and capriciously shifts character. There are somber moments and passionate ones, but the prevailing quality is light and often playful.

The title of this work also marks it as a tribute to one of my favorite composers, Mel Powell (1923-1998); it comes from Powell's own description of a group of his shorter pieces from the 1960s. I never met Powell, but I encountered his exquisite, meticulously crafted music as a young teen and promptly fell in love with that world of gestures and sonorities. Is the influence on my own music evident? Perhaps so, but ultimately this influence is less a matter of style, more a matter of underlying technique.

A Collection of Caprices was written for the extraordinary pianist Marilyn Nonken, to whom it is gratefully dedicated.

Paul Nauert holds degrees from the Eastman School of Music, where he was awarded the McCurdy Prize in composition, and Columbia University, where he earned his PhD in music theory in 1997 with the assistance of a Mellon Foundation Fellowship. His principal composition teachers include Samuel Adler, Fred Lerdahl, Robert Morris, and Joseph Schwantner. His music has received several honors including awards from the Music Teachers National Association, The Guild of Temple Musicians, and BMI, and it has been performed at venues such as Merkin Hall and Miller Theater in New York City, the BGSU New Music & Art Festival in Ohio, The Cornell University Concert Series, and the Stuttgart International Guitar Festival. On the faculty of the University of California, Santa Cruz since 1996, Dr. Nauert recently completed a four-month residency at the Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique (IRCAM) in Paris, as a guest researcher developing software for computer-assisted composition. His recent scholarly publications appear in *The Musical Quarterly* and *Perspectives of New Music*, and he is the editor of *The Walden School Musicianship Course: A Manual for Teachers*, published by the Walden School (San Francisco).