

THE DETAIL OF THE PATTERN

Kevin Vondrak, conductor
In partial fulfillment of the Master of Music
student of Donald Nally

Friday, November 11th, 2016 at 6pm
Mary B. Galvin Recital Hall, Northwestern University

NOTES + TEXTS

“Everybody has a song which is no song at all: it is a process of singing”
—John Cage, Lecture on Nothing (1951)

Shiitake Mushroom

“This piece is made up of two distinct parts: The first is a percussive, heavily rhythmic section, made up of short fricative consonants. In stark contrast, the second is a slower chordal section, made up of sustained nasal consonants and vowels. This juxtaposition is also encapsulated within the sonic qualities of the title, *Shiitake Mushroom*.” —composer Leo Chang

Leo is focused on electroacoustic and acoustic new music. Growing up in a multi-lingual, multicultural environment, Leo developed an interest in cultural translation and ecological sonic vocabulary. His compositions are therefore always seeking to capture the original essence and unique nuances of sound traditions. Leo holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Music Composition and Psychology from Washington University in St. Louis, where he studied with Christopher Stark and Juri Seo. He is currently pursuing his Master's in Music Composition at New York University, where he is studying under Tae Hong Park.

Partita for 8 Voices

“*Partita* is a simple piece. Born of a love of surface and structure, of the human voice, of dancing and tired ligaments, of music, and of our basic desire to draw a line from one point to another.” —Caroline Shaw

Written over the course of 2009-2012 for Roomful of Teeth—the innovative and oddly eclectic vocal octet of which Caroline Shaw is a founding member—*Partita for 8 Voices* won the 2013 Pulitzer Prize in Music (making Shaw, at 30, the youngest to receive this honor).

Composed in the mold of a Baroque dance suite, with each of the four movements corresponding to specific dance forms with characteristic rhythms and patterns, the polished writing raids the vocal traditions of different eras and traditions to assemble something fresh, yet familiar.

Shaw, who began playing violin at age 2, was drawn to the instrumental form of a dance suite through the partitas and sonatas for solo violin by J.S. Bach, a composer she says she admires for “abstracting already from these dance forms.” *Partita for 8 Voices* takes the dance form structure as its basis and expands further—both playfully through reference to the physical-spatial nature of dancing, and abstractly via the text directions from Sol LeWitt’s *Wall Drawings* series (which is on exhibit at MASS MoCa, the contemporary art museum which serves as Roomful of Teeth’s summer residency).

The beauty of *Partita* comes from the seamless weaving of ostensibly disparate elements into a rich and detailed whole. The first movement, *allemande*, mixes square dance calls and directions from LeWitt’s *Wall Drawings* with exuberantly simple vocal eruptions, illuminating connections between the patterns of human interaction, abstract musical form, and contemporary visual art. The spacious ending of this movement perfectly captures the breadth and immediacy of these links through the composer’s original text: “Far and near are all around. Round and around and through: toward you.”

Originating in 16th-century Mexico, *zarabanda*—the early form of *sarabande*—was first likely performed with a lively double line of couples with castanets before moving across the Atlantic to Spain, where it was condemned as indecent and vulgar. By the time the form had spread to the French nobility in the 17th century, the dance had transformed into a slow, elegant court dance in triple time. Shaw’s second movement, *sarabande*, uses this history of the dance to craft a modern tale of passion and restraint. The movement is grounded by the women, who sing a graceful progression of chords colored by an expressive abstraction of a Korean *P’ansori* articulation. They are joined by the men, whose unison line quickly breaks loose and fervently climaxes on the seventh scale degree before receding back into the texture.

The third movement, *courante*, begins with textured breaths and the expressive tempo description “silk shoes gliding over marble mosaic.” While sensual and evocative at first, the technique—related to the Inuit throat singing tradition—settles into a consistent pace and ultimately forms the rhythmic backbone of the movement. *Courante*, derived from the French verb *courir* (“to run”), is the name given to a family of Baroque triple meter dances characterized by running and jumping steps, and “the passion or mood of sweet expectation.” (Johann Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, 1739). The familiar tune, which Shaw inserts into the middle of the movement, is “Shining Shore” by George F. Root, a popular Civil War-era hymn that compares the passing from earth into heaven with Israel’s crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land. Underpinning the text is a feeling of acceptance and trust in the journey, with Shaw’s music delightfully capturing the sentiment:

“My days are gliding swiftly by,
And I, a pilgrim stranger,
Would not detain them as they fly –
Those hours of toil and danger.

For now we stand on Jordan’s strand;
Our friends are passing over;
And, just before, the shining shore
We may almost discover”

In the final movement, *passacaglia*, patterns of text inspired by LeWitt’s *Wall Drawings* reappear and weave above a firm chord progression. The rich sonorities are grounded by parallel open fifths

in the bass voices, lending a distinct ‘rock music’ sound to the pervasive feeling of *basso lamento*. As the tight grip of the *passacaglia* begins to loosen, the voices wander with increasingly blurred harmonies and *sygyt*, *kargyraa*, and *xöömei* styles of traditional Tuvan throat singing practice. Eventually, all that is left is the chatter of LeWitt’s text. As the harmonies begin to reappear amidst the speaking, all voices blur to a collective vocal fry before launching into a final statement of the *passacaglia* theme.

Ad Latus

Dieterich Buxtehude’s 1680 cantata cycle *Membra Jesu nostri* (Limbs of our Jesus) was written for Passion Week and dedicated to his friend and patron, the Swedish Court Music Director Gustav Düben. The cycle of seven cantatas, known as the first Lutheran oratorio, allegorically interprets the seven limbs of the crucified Christ hanging on the cross, with cantatas addressed to the feet, knees, hands, side, chest, heart and face.

Each of the cantatas follows a similar structure: instrumental introduction—choral movement with biblical texts—vocal soli with a sacred text from the Middle Ages—repetition of the choral movement. The biblical words for the choral movements were chosen for their mentioning of the specific member of that cantata. For *Ad Latus*, the allegorical reference to the “clefts of the rock” and “hollow of the cliff” symbolize Christ’s side. The aria verses take their text from stanzas of the Medieval hymn *Salve mundi salutare* by Arnulf of Leuven.

Ad Latus

*Surge, amica mea
speciosa mea, et veni,
columba meo in foraminibus petrae,
in caverna maceriae*

*Salve latus salvatoris,
in quo latet mel dulcoris,
in quo patet vis amoris,
ex quo scatet fons cruoris,
qui corda lavat sordida*

*Ecce tibi appropinquo,
parce, Jesu, si delinquo,
verecunda quidem fronte,
ad te tamen veni sponte
scrutari tua vulnera*

*Hora mortis meus flatus
intret Jesu, tuum latus,
hinc expirans in te vadat,
ne hunc leo trux invadat,
sed apud te permaneat*

To the Side

Arise, my love,
my beautiful one, and come,
my dove in the clefts of the rock,
in the hollow of the cliff
—Song of Songs 2:13-14

Hail, side of the Saviour,
in which the honey of sweetness is hidden,
in which the power of love is exposed,
from which gushes the spring of blood
that cleans the dirty hearts.

Lo I approach You,
Pardon, Jesus, if I sin,
With reverent countenance
freely I come to You
to behold Your wounds.

In the hour of death, may my soul
Enter, Jesus, Your side
Hence dying may it go into You,
Lest the cruel lion seize it,
But let it dwell with You.

—Arnulf of Leuven (c. 1200—1250)

Warum ist das Licht gegeben dem Mühseligen

In his largest and most powerful unaccompanied choral work, Brahms displays all his compositional might in full force, leaving little doubt as to his mastery of vocal writing. Written during his period of “high maturity” while on summer vacation in southern Austria, the other main work of this period in the mountains was his Second Symphony.

Brahms assembled the texts himself—a skill he also employs in his Requiem—drawing on three Biblical passages translated by Martin Luther, as well as Luther’s poetic paraphrase of the *Nunc dimittis*. The combination of texts articulates Brahms’ belief about confronting death with a spirit of patience and acceptance. Evidence of Brahms’s firm grasp on both biblical and artistic considerations is evident in his clever placement of the New Testament reference to Job in the third movement, harkening back to the first movement, which takes its text from that Old Testament book.

The music is a masterful synthesis of the aesthetics of the Baroque and late Romanticism. Brahms’s tight grasp on contrapuntal techniques of fugue and canon are illuminated in severely “correct” fashion, while the highly expressive turns of harmony are seductively sensual.

The motet is clearly modeled after J.S. Bach, most notably by the placement of a harmonized Lutheran Chorale as the last movement. Additionally, Op.74 is symbolically dedicated to Phillip Spitta, the general editor of the first Complete Bach Edition (to which Brahms subscribed during his lifetime). While this dedication caused a small ruckus in the music community at the time of its publication—was Brahms implying that he himself was the heir to the crown of Bach?—Brahms’ reputation as a master contrapuntist stands firm no matter who is invoked in comparison.

*Warum ist das Licht gegeben dem Mühseligen,
und das Leben den betrübten Herzen,
Die des Todes warten und kommt nicht,
und grüben ihn wohl aus dem Verborgenen,
Die sich fast freuen und sind fröhlich,
daß sie das Grab bekommen,
Und dem Manne, deß Weg verborgen ist,
und Gott vor ihm denselben bedeckt?*

Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery,
and life unto the bitter in soul;
Which long for death, but it cometh not;
and dig for it more than for hidden treasures;
Which rejoice exceedingly, and are glad,
when they can find the grave?
Why is light given to a man whose way is hid,
and whom God hath hedged in?

—Job 3:20-23

*Lasset uns unser Herz
samt den Händen aufheben
zu Gott im Himmel.*

Let us lift up our heart
with our hands
unto God in the heavens.

—Lamentations 3:41

*Siehe, wir preisen selig,
die erduldet haben.
Die Geduld Hiob habt ihr gehört,
und das Ende des Herrn habt ihr gesehen;
den der Herr ist barmherzig,
und ein Erbarmer.*

Behold, we count them happy
which endure.
Ye have heard of the patience of Job,
and have seen the end of the Lord;
that the lord is very pitiful,
and of tender mercy.

—James 5:11

*Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin,
in Gottes Willen,
getrost ist mir mein Herz und Sinn,
sanft und stille.*

*Wie Gott mir verheissen hat:
der Tod ist mir Schlaf worden*

With peace and joy I travel to that place,
according to God's will;
my heart and soul are comforted,
gently and quietly.

As god has promised me,
death has become sleep to me.

—Martin Luther (1483—1546)

ENSEMBLE

Partita/Shiitake Choir

Gabrielle Barkidjija
Hannah Dixon McConnell
Dimitri German
Sam Grosby
Kevin Krasinski
Frank Laucerica
Chelsea Lyons
Kaileigh Reiss

Brahms/Buxtehude Choir

Carl Alexander
Gabrielle Barkidjija*
Matthew Cummings
Victor De La Cruz
Hannah Dixon McConnell*
Bradley Fielding
Charles Foster
Sam Garcia
Dimitri German*
Liana Gineitis
Sam Grosby*
Steven Hyder
Dan Kazenel
AJ Keller
Kevin Krasinski
Chelsea Lyons*
Shallece Peters
Bahareh Poureslami
Elizabeth Smith
Anna Ucik
Nathaniel Voth

*Buxtehude Soloist