

Kyle Adam Blair presents:

EVOICATIONS/FANTASIES

4.25.2014 / 7 PM
Conrad Prebys Concert Hall

Aaron Copland – *Piano Variations* (1930)

Donald Martino – *Fantasies and Impromptus for solo piano* (1981)

Fantasy

*Maestoso—Andante cantabile; Sempre ansioso;
Maestoso giubilante—Cadenza and Coda*

Impromptu

Sospeso; Tempo rubato

Impromptu

Giocosso

Impromptu (Omaggio)

Andante flessibile

---pause---

Fantasy

Meditativo—Adagietto cantabile—Meditativo

---pause---

Impromptu

Tempo rubato; sempre ansioso

Impromptu

Vivace; Animato

Impromptu

Tempo di cadenza

Fantasy

*Drammatico; Allegro molto—Allegretto—Allegrettino—
Andantino sentimentale—Allegro molto—Allegretto—
Andante sostenuto; Veloce—Ipnoticamente—Maestoso*

---10-minute intermission---

Carl Ruggles – *Evocations: Four Chants for Piano* (1934-1943, rev. 1956)

I – *Largo* (1937)

II – *Andante con fantasia* (1941)

III – *Moderato appassionato* (1943)

IV – *Adagio sostenuto* (1940)

Elliott Carter – *Night Fantasies* (1980)

Thank you,

Aleck Karis, Ashley Richardson, Bryan Neal Blair, Charles and Karen Blair,
Jessica C. Flores, Steve Lewis, Todd Moellenberg, Steve Solook, Tiffany DuMouchelle

In partial fulfillment of the Doctor of Musical Arts in Contemporary Music Performance degree.

Performer's Notes

The aim of this program is to explore two extremes with regard to ideas: those that are outwardly expressed and those that marinate in the realms of the conscious and subconscious minds. This is an exploration of the polarity of the outspoken and the imaginative. Each half offers an example of a bold and declamatory piece followed by and juxtaposed against a moody, imaginative piece borne out of fantasy.

EVOCATIONS

At the time of writing the *Piano Variations*, Copland was just beginning to gain traction in the United States after spending his younger years in Paris studying with Nadia Boulanger. In an autobiographical sketch from 1939, Copland wrote regarding his return to America, "Looking backward to that time, I am rather amazed at my own ignorance of musical conditions as they affected composers. How a composer managed to get his compositions performed or published and how he was expected to earn his living were equally mysterious."

Considering that Copland's status as an American composer was not yet firmly established in 1930, I hear *Piano Variations* as a bold artistic statement calling for respect and recognition.

This is established immediately within the theme of the *Variations*, a pointed declaration based on four individual pitches—E, C, D# and C#. Through the variations this cluster of pitches (and the intervals they imply) develops both melodically, through transposition and elaboration, and harmonically, resulting in a landscape largely dominated by dissonant intervals. Two defining features of this piece are clarity and leanness-- Copland rarely includes material that doesn't serve the immediate purpose of development of the theme.

Unlike the case of *Piano Variations*, Carl Ruggles (1876-1971) composed his only solo piano work, *Evocations*, relatively late in his career and revised the set until 1956. Ruggles composed extremely slowly and painstakingly revised his scores, resulting in only about ten surviving pieces throughout his career.

The declamatory, rhetorical sense one might get from hearing *Evocations* is a product of several musical factors. Firstly, rather than presenting a melody or countermelody in single notes, Ruggles often presents the line in octaves in order to thicken and reinforce the statement. Secondly, the piece contains very few sudden or dramatic dynamic changes, Ruggles preferring instead to create gradually building, cresting, and receding waves of energy. Thirdly, melodic material generally develops through sequences, transpositions, and juxtaposition with intervallicly similar lines. Ruggles' focus on calculated, logical, and gradual musical gestures sharply contrasts the suddenness, shiftiness, and emotional aspects of the "fantasy" pieces of this program.

FANTASIES

For me, Martino's *Fantasies and Impromptus* and Carter's *Night Fantasies* evoke a sense of internality through hybridity and shiftiness, qualities that I associate not with rhetorical declaration but rather with the delicacy of uncertainty, perspective, and mood.

As one glances at the program listing for *Fantasies and Impromptus* one might notice all the italicized markings that attribute qualities to each of the nine movements of the work. Some of these words translate to "anxious", "jubilant", "playful", "meditative", and "dramatic"; all of these adjectives describe moods which, when taken in quick succession as they sometimes are here, result in musical forms guided more by emotional states than rhetoric. One could say this is the very definition of the "Fantasy" as a genre, and perhaps even the "Impromptu," a genre lacking premeditation.

Hybridity relates to the overall form of this piece. At first glance the piece appears to be a set of nine individual movements. However, many of these movements are to be performed *attacca*, so the pauses before and after the central fantasy (movement 5) trisect the piece into relatively similar durations. The first of these durations is dominated by music that is either fast in tempo or dense in activity, the second by slow and expansive music, and the third once again by fast, active music. The fast-slow-fast nature of these durations places this nine-movement work somewhere in the gray area between a loose Sonata form and a suite or cycle.

Formal references to classical structures are not Martino's only debts to older music in *Fantasies and Impromptus*. Although Martino employs twelve-tone techniques in some of the movements, *Fantasies and Impromptus* owes a tremendous amount to the German Romantic tradition; it seems at times that the textures were borrowed directly from Brahms, Chopin, or Liszt (especially in the two Impromptus subtitled "Omaggio").

On *Night Fantasies*, Carter writes:

"*Night Fantasies* is a piano piece of continuously changing moods, suggesting the fleeting thoughts and feelings that pass through the mind during a period of wakefulness at night. The quiet, nocturnal evocation with which it begins and returns occasionally, is suddenly broken by a flighty series of short phrases that emerge and disappear. This episode is followed by many others of contrasting characters and lengths that sometimes break in abruptly and, at other times, develop smoothly out of what has gone before. The work culminates in a loud, obsessive, periodic repetition of an emphatic chord that, as it dies away, brings the work to its conclusion.

In this score, I wanted to capture the fanciful, changeable quality of our inner life at a time when it is not dominated by strong, directive intentions or desires—to capture the poetic moodiness that, in an earlier romantic context, I enjoy in works of Robert Schumann like *Kreisleriana*, *Carnaval*, and *Davidsbündlertanze*."

In *Night Fantasies*, Carter often references moments of sleep or near-sleep with combinations of harmonic perfect fifths which seem to float about without strong relationships to one another, an interesting correlation when considering the spontaneity of unconscious thoughts and the absence of tension within perfect intervals. This rest is interrupted by manic, scurrying gestures that dart about quickly. These gestures shift through rhythmic states via polyrhythms and metric modulation, a technique attributed to Carter in which consistent subdivisions are grouped in different ways resulting in a shift of tempo. Given the programmatic intent of the work, the modulations hint that dreams and thoughts in the night can take unexpected, irrational turns.