

Chamber Works by Will Ogdon



**Mandeville Recital Hall
Saturday, November 8, 2008
8pm**

Program

Variation Suite for violin and viola (1995-96)

Somewhat freely (“dreamily”) Quasi giocoso Scherzo Tranquillo
(cantabile) Scherzando Andante Quasi Marcia, meno mosso, piu vivo
Quasi giocoso Somewhat freely

János Négysesy violin
Päivikki Nykter viola

By the Isar for soprano, flute and double bass (1969)

Anne-Marie Dicce soprano
Kathleen Gallagher flute
Mark Dresser double bass

Introduction and Nine Short Variants for two violins, viola and piano (1997-98)

János Négysesy violin
Päivikki Nykter violin & viola
Isabelle Fanchiu piano

Four Tonal Songs

Philip Larson baritone
Aleck Karis - piano

A Little Suite and an Encore Tango for two violins (2008) – Premier

Night Song A Quiet Midnight Morning Bells Tango

János Négysesy & Päivikki Nykter violins

String Quartet No. 3 (ver. 1998-99)

I Cavatina Scherzo Cavatina 2 Scherzo 2 Nocturne Scherzando
Trio Scherzando 2
II Largo
III Recitativo (Adagio)

János Négysesy violin
Peter Clarke violin
Päivikki Nykter viola
Erica Erenyi cello

Will Ogdon: A Personal Tribute

When invited to interview for a job at UCSD in January 1981, I happily left behind the frost-bitten mid-West for five days in sunny California. Will Ogdon, the chair of the search committee, himself having studied at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and Hamline University, St. Paul, Minnesota, and having taught at Illinois Wesleyan University, understood both the allure and the deceptive nature of the weather here. I dressed for spring, but when the sun lowered and the afternoon temperature dropped, what seemed like 20 degrees, Will had already made provisions for this and offered me his wife’s sweater that he’d brought along, just in case. Of course, the Music Department offered much of what I was seeking – brilliant, provocative, and highly engaged musicians, most of them open to one another as well as to what I might bring. But Will’s thoughtful gesture of warmth, kindness, and vision spoke just as persuasively of the community I hoped to find at UCSD.

Will Ogdon’s music embodies this warmth, along with his honesty, depth of character, and integrity. He has written a chamber opera, *Sappho*, two theater works based on Cocteau, orchestral music, quartets, and woodwind quintets. Yet, in many ways Will is most comfortable with smaller genres – songs, piano pieces, string duos and trios – and works that last a minute or two. No space here for bravura, only tightly conceived and emotionally intense directness, expressed with a minimum of means. In an interview with me in the mid 1980s, he said, “I’m generally a small form composer. I like to think that’s true because I make an equation with learned poets.... I don’t believe in large forms. I’m not attracted to the idea of building big machines for something like that.” Sonically, in his approach to atonality, one can hear the influence of his teachers, René Leibowitz, a Schoenberg protégé with whom he studied in Paris after the war, and Ernest Krenek, his Viennese teacher at Hamline and life-long friend. Always lyrical, in part from his long collaboration with his wife, Beverly, a soprano who shares these human qualities as well as a taste for D. H. Lawrence, Will’s music expresses a very personal and almost conversational approach to musical gestures. Each part, clearly audible, sings just as long as it needs to, before another one enters in response. They diverge, they gently balance and support one another, they come together, but never resulting in the domination of one or the other.

Vision and generosity of spirit have permeated Will’s professional life. The first Chair of the Music Department in 1966, he envisioned a community like few others in American universities, mostly characterized at the time by one composer per institution, if that. He and Robert Erickson,

that embraced and promoted aesthetic diversity, which meant hiring several composers representing different traditions. He felt that, to encourage individuality in young students, they needed to encounter a wide range of music and to come to grips with these differences with the help of their peers. Will, unlike many music professors, was also very interested in teaching non-majors and wished to get beyond the typical music appreciation courses, which he called a kind of “spectator-sport” in which “superficiality must be tolerated by both parties.” In an article on the new course he and Erickson co-taught their first year at UCSD, “A New Music Education for Everyman?” *Experiment and Innovation* 1,2 (January 1968): 33-43, Will explained the educational principles underlying Music 1A, “The Nature of Music.” In this course, they challenged “the idea that good education begins with what is known” and believed that “the unfamiliar world of new music would put the student in direct touch with the essential characteristics and processes common to all music.” Quite radical at the time, they saw it as “the *a priori* necessity that the general student with little or no active experience should participate in the making of music.” Although neither he nor Erickson were performers or improvisers, they considered “improvisation and tape music composition ... as two experiences in participation ... that would not insult intelligence ... and could bypass the ability to read notation and the ability to apply a developed performance technique, that are thought to separate musicians from non-musicians.” They also considered “essential” the “critical experience, formed from a desire to change listening to music from a passive state to an active accomplishment.” By the end of the course that put these ideas into action, with the help of Barney Childs, the students practiced “group improvisation, graduated from controlled to free.” Although its definitions of diversity have expanded beyond merely the aesthetic since I founded the graduate program here in 1991, CSEP (Critical Studies and Experimental Practices in Music) evolved out the educational interests and concerns of Will Ogdon, Bob Erickson, and later John Silber.

At UCSD, Will also put into practice his belief in the importance of nurturing community. In some ways, he identified with Bach whose identity was linked to the places where he worked. In my mid-1980s interview, Will spoke of putting one’s energy into one’s home base, rather than becoming “traveling salesmen,” devoted to commissions and performances elsewhere. With this orientation together with his spirit of openness and curiosity about the many ways different sounds and musical gestures can interact, Will has written many works for his UCSD colleagues, such as violin and viola duets for János Négyesy and his wife Päivikki Nykter and a trio for Jean-Charles François (percussion), Edwin Harkins (trumpet), and Keith Humble (piano). As a teacher of both theory and composition, he also

“Tonal Songs,” not typical for their tonality, but utterly recognizable for their distinctive expressiveness and among his most beautiful music.

Since retiring in 1991, Will Ogdon has continued to write music every day. His music composed between 1995-1999 filled an entire CD, produced in 2001. We remain ever grateful for all that Will has given us and inspired in us, especially, tonight, some of his most recent creations for your listening pleasure. Enjoy!

Jann Pasler