

that which remains..

D.M.A Recital: Peter Ko, cello

Saturday, February 25th, 2023 - 5:00 p.m.

Conrad Prebys Concert Hall

Figura V / Assonanza (2020)

Matthias Pintscher

Pavan (p. 1605)

Tobias Hume

Adagio, from “Ciaccona, Intermezzo e Adagio” (1945)

Luigi Dallapiccola

Captain Hume’s Galliard (p. 1605)

Tobias Hume

Woodycock (ca. 1580)

Anonymous

rara avis (2015)

Carolyn Chen

Woodycock (ca. 1580)

Anonymous

Program Notes - that which remains..

Assonance (noun) -

1. a. relatively close juxtaposition of similar sounds, especially of vowels (as in "rise high in the bright sky")
 b. repetition of vowels without repetition of consonants (as in stony and holy), used as an alternative to rhyme in verse
2. resemblance of sound in words or syllables

At the very last figure of **Matthias Pintscher's** *Figura V / Assonanza*, he includes a note that roughly translates to "The trilling fingers remain in the previous position, so that the trill still shines through like a residual shadow through the tonelessness of the [bowing] action on the bridge ("Assonance")."

Therein lies the essence of the piece; the music is underpinned by a series of focal pitches such as the harmonic B in the beginning. The purity of pitch is complicated, destabilized with actions that often interfere or nearly cancel out these sonorities—be it through the fluttering actions of the trills and bouncing bow, the traversing contact point of the bow between bridge and fingerboard, and adjustment of pressure from the bow and left hand, all independent of how they may factor in creating a balanced, "ideal" sound. Through this obfuscation and transformation of pitch, what we manage to still hear and comprehend from the base sonorities, what remains is what Pintscher intends to be as "assonance."

The *Pavan* and *Captain Hume's Galliard* both come from *The First Part of Ayres* (1605), a large collection of music composed by **Tobias Hume**. The publication of this work was born out of a certain passion and ambition from Hume; he wanted to prove that the bowed viol could either be equal or superior to the then dominant lute of the time. In the foreword, Hume asserts of his own "genius", taking pride in the fact that all of the music in the collection was purely of his own composition, not simply transcriptions or copies of other tunes at the time. He even goes as far to write "These are mine own Phansies... which if thou dost dislike, let me see thine."

Despite his ambitions, he was wildly unsuccessful; he only managed to procure enough funding to publish one other volume of works, and historically had very little to no

impact on his musical contemporaries. He had no success in trying to integrate himself into court life, and had to make a hard living as a career mercenary. Little other information about him has survived to this day. His musical work was only really appreciated centuries after his death, which happened in the poorest of circumstances in 1645.

Through what has survived, we can glean an eccentric and unconventional musical personality compared to his contemporaries. The phrase lengths were sometimes oddly proportioned, and the harmonic shifts could often be quite surprising. He included a variety of expressive markings and phrases in his music, which was not the norm of the time. Thanks to his fanatical devotion to the bowed viol, his music contained a particular crafted quality that was honed specifically; we have our earliest recorded instance of *col legno* in his music, for example. All of which to say, the beauty of his music lies in its particularity, the unabashed self-assertion and non-conformity that can be heard in these pieces.

A *pavan* was a type of processional dance and music prominent during the Renaissance, one that would be played as the nobles walked into court. The *pavan* was felt in a large slow two, a tempo that was not too brisk or slow, but one that lent itself to a stately poise. Often what would follow after was a *galliard*, a lively dance in three that was also quite popular at the time. Hume uses these forms as a vehicle, guided by the interiority and materiality of the instrument and his relationship to it.

It should be noted that **Luigi Dallapiccola** was initially a “true believer” in the fascist propaganda of Mussolini, and was originally inspired to composition by his encounter with Wagner’s music. By the 1930s, he grew disillusioned by the fascist ideology, and that disavowal greatly affected his music. The music he composed prior was withdrawn from the public, forbidden to be performed again, and he wrote that his music would never be as light and carefree as it once was before.

By the 1940’s, Dallapiccola had fully embraced the serialist twelve-tone composition method, a style that was often denounced by the fascist regimes of the 20th century for being formalist and “degenerate”, in part due to its association with dissonance and academics. The *Ciaccona, Intermezzo e Adagio* was one of his earlier works written in that style. However, Dallapiccola’s music never lost its melodious and expressive

qualities—curiously, even the dissonances of his music can take on a surprisingly consonant, beautiful quality. Perhaps it in part has to do with his connection to the rich Italian heritage of music; we can trace our way back to the madrigals of the Renaissance, the beautiful genre of songs that pioneered the use of dissonance to heighten the expressive potential of the music. Or that of Monteverdi, who in the turn from the Renaissance to Baroque period, embraced a freer use of dissonance, much at the chagrin of his contemporaries of the time.

The *Adagio* from the *Ciaconna, Intermezzo e Adagio* calls for the cello to be muted, the music is composed of three distinct materials; a string of perfect fifths, a yearning melody, and an uncertain searching through chromatic shifts in pitch. Each time each section returns, it is transformed, modulated, taking on different expressive qualities. There is an immense sense of melancholy that permeates through this music; it is reticent at times, stoically pure at others, sweetly impassioned, and much more ... it is difficult, or perhaps even impossible to neatly encapsulate the expressive character of this music into a word or phrase. One has to wonder how the twelve-tone method factored into how the expressivity of the music was rendered—my sense is that it was only possible thanks to that.

rara avis (noun) -

1. A rare or unique person or thing.
2. Another term for rare bird

From Juvenal's Satires (6.165): *Rara avis in terris nigroque simillima cycno* (“a bird as rare upon the earth as a black swan”).

This version of *Woodycock* was notated for solo bass viol, in 1580 by an anonymous composer. It is not a stretch to surmise that the tune had been around for much longer previous to its inscription on paper, and that it derived itself from an oral tradition at some point. The tune that evokes the soft cooing of a wood dove, which is explicated upon, the pitch and rhythm divided into further parts, transformed and explored, introspectively and intimately. In particular, the way it modulates between the F# and F in its melody evokes a certain poignancy.

Carolyn Chen's *rara avis* is composed in relation to *Woodycock*. As Chen writes, it

“spins out from figures of the tune – concentrating, worrying, gradually shifting and returning to its harmonies and rhythmic lilt. Listening through a slowly turning kaleidoscope.” It takes on a much larger scope than its source material—three minutes versus over thirty—and it is through that we are given the space to meditate on the essence of *Woodycock*, with the process of exploring, obsessing, comprehending the music fully laid out, bare. From the high dyads that materialize the implied harmonies of *Woodycock*, the proportions of the phrases, the gestures that slowly evolve step by step, the large leaps and shifts, the lilt, fullness versus stillness . . . one can almost think of *rara avis* as simply continuing the tradition, the spirit of exploration that must have initially existed with *Woodycock* when all of its variations from the initial melody was still being materialized.

Thank you for joining me through this program, in this set time and space.