

THE 39TH ANNUAL BOWLING GREEN NEW MUSIC FESTIVAL

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 18

7:30 pm, Kobacker Hall

Tehillim (1981).....**Steve Reich**

Musicians of the College of Musical Arts

Emily Freeman Brown, conductor

On Distant Shores (2011).....**Aaron Jay Kernis**

BGSU New Music Ensemble

Mercedes Diaz-Garcia, conductor

- intermission -

BGSU Wind Symphony, Kenneth Thompson, director

Cyclotron (2017).....**David Biedenbender**

Diver[city] (2015).....**Emily Koh**

Symphony no. 2, "Voices" (2016).....**James M. Stephenson**

II. SHOUTS and MURMURS

III. Voices of One

Bruce Moss, conductor

Program Notes

Tehillim (pronounced "teh-hill-leem") is the original Hebrew word for "Psalms". Literally translated it means "praises", and it derives from the three letter Hebrew root 'hey, lamed, lamed' (hll) which is also the root of halleluyah. *Tehillim* is a setting of Psalms 19:2-5 (19:1-4 in Christian translations), 34:13-15 (34:12-14 in Christian translations), 18:26-27 (18:25-26 in Christian translations) and 150:4-6.

The chamber version is scored for four women's voices (one high soprano, two lyric sopranos, and one alto), piccolo, flute, oboe, cor anglais, 2 clarinets, six percussion (playing small tuned tambourines with no jingles, clapping, maracas, marimba, vibraphone and crotales), two electric organs, two violins, viola, cello and bass. The voices, winds and strings are amplified in performance. In orchestral version there are full strings and winds with amplification for the voices only.

The first text begins as a solo with drum and clapping accompaniment only. It is repeated with clarinet doubling the voice and with a second drum and clap in canon with the first. It then appears in two voice canon and at last the strings enter with long held harmonies. At this point all four voices, supported by a single maraca, doubled by two electric organs and harmonised by the strings sing 4 four-part

canons on each of the four verses of the first text. When these are completed the solo voice restates the original complete melody with all drums and full string harmonisation. The second text begins immediately after a short drum transition. Here the three verses of text are presented in two or three voice harmony in a homophonic texture. Sometimes the voices are replaced by the cor anglais and clarinet or by the drums and clapping. Soon the melodic lines begin augmenting (or lengthening) and then adding melismas. The effect is of a melodic line growing longer and more ornate. After a pause the third text begins in a slower tempo and with the percussion changed to a marimba and vibraphone. The text is presented as a duet first between two and then all four voices. This third text is not only the first slow movement I have composed since my student days, but also the most chromatic music I have ever composed (with the possible exception of *Variations for Winds, Strings and Keyboards* of 1979). The fourth and final text resumes the original tempo and key signature and combines techniques used in the preceding three movements. It is, in effect, a recapitulation of the entire piece which then, in a coda based solely on the word "Halleluyah", extends the music to its largest instrumental forces and its harmonic conclusion. This last movement affirms the key of D major as the basic tonal centre of the work after considerable harmonic ambiguity.

The tambourines without jingles are perhaps similar to the small drum called "tof" in Hebrew in Psalm 150 and several other places in the Biblical text. Hand clapping as well as rattles were also commonly used throughout the Middle East in the Biblical period as were small pitched cymbals. Beyond this there is no musicological content to *Tehillim*. No Jewish themes were used for any of the melodic materials. One of the reasons I chose to set Psalms as opposed to parts of the Torah or Prophets is that the oral tradition among Jews in the West for singing Psalms has been lost. (It has been maintained by Yemenite Jews.) This meant that I was free to compose the melodies for *Tehillim* without a living oral tradition to either imitate or ignore.

In contrast to most of my earlier work, *Tehillim* is not composed of short repeating patterns. Though an entire melody may be repeated either as the subject of a canon or variation this is actually closer to what one finds throughout the history of Western music. While the four-part canons in the first and last movements may well remind some listeners of my early tape pieces *It's Gonna Rain* and *Come Out*, which are composed of short spoken phrases repeated over and over again in close canon, *Tehillim* will probably strike most listeners as quite different from my earlier works. There is no fixed meter or metric pattern in *Tehillim* as there is in my earlier music. The rhythm, of the music here comes directly from the rhythm of the Hebrew text and is consequently in flexible changing meters. This is the first time I have set a text to music since my student days and the result is a piece based on melody in the basic sense of that word. The use of extended melodies, imitative counterpoint functional harmony and full orchestration may well suggest renewed interest in Classical or, more accurately, Baroque and earlier Western musical practice. The non-vibrato, non-operatic vocal production will also remind listeners of Western music prior to 1750. However, the overall sound of *Tehillim* and in particular the intricately interlocking percussion

writing which, together with the text, forms the basis of the entire work, marks this music as unique by introducing a basic musical element that one does not find in earlier Western practice including the music of this century. *Tehillim* may thus be heard as traditional and new at the same time. -SR

On Distant Shores was written in collaboration with choreographer Pascal Rioult, for his company, Rioult, which premiered the work at the Joyce Theater in New York City. The music combines old and new, incorporating an arrangement of the composer's popular *Air* for cello (1995) with new, alternately dreamy and turbulent music inspired by the ballet's focus on the character of Helen of Troy. In the ballet, Pascal Rioult imagines that Helen is brought to Troy against her will. Four men from her past appear, first dancing as a group of warriors then partnering one by one with Helen in fleeting, expressive duets. As her memories of the heroes fade into a dream, she continues to walk her path forward into history. *On Distant Shores* was commissioned by RIOULT for its 2011 Joyce Theater season, with funding from the O'Donnell-Green Music and Dance Foundation and the American Music Center Live Music for Dance program.

Cyclotron was commissioned by Kevin Sedatole and the Michigan State University Wind Symphony. A cyclotron is a type of particle accelerator in which charged particles accelerate outwards from the center along a spiral path, using a static magnetic field and accelerated by a rapidly varying (radio frequency) electric field. Cyclotrons serve many purposes, including to create high-energy beams for nuclear physics experiments and in particle therapy to treat cancer. Nuclear physics research began at Michigan State University in 1958, and the National Superconducting Laboratory (NSCL) is one of the world's flagship nuclear science research facilities. Hundreds of researchers come to MSU each year to take advantage of the NSCL facilities and explore the inner workings of atoms and their role in the universe.

In this piece I use the cyclotron as a launching point for my creative process. I imagined a fictional and playful sonification of the cyclotron and of what happens to particles when they are smashed together at nearly half the speed of light. These violent nuclear collisions tend to cause strange things to happen, and, among other things, at MSU's cyclotron, the experimental observations of these collisions have led to the discovery of completely new types of nuclei (isotopes). In fact, the infinitesimally small particles that make up atoms generally behave in bizarre—though not totally unexpected—ways (thanks to quantum physics) when compared to our understanding of the visible world. Among many peculiar subatomic phenomena, light particles called photons can behave both like particles and waves and particles can simultaneously be in two different places at once!

The music develops out of a small collection of motifs and gestures, which are layered and transformed over time to try to portray things like time dilation (accelerated particles experience slower time) through acceleration/deceleration and expansion/contraction, particle versus wave-like motion, cyclical and spiraling motion, the Doppler effect to convey speed and direction, and mechanical, machine-like sounds. It is my hope that, in some small way, this music captures the strange and mysterious beauty of the sub-atomic world.

diver[city] is a play on the word 'diversity'—a word commonly used to describe my hometown of Singapore. While the idea of racial harmony is not new in Singapore, the recent Freddie Gray protests in Baltimore (a city I called home for 2.5 years), prompted me to think more globally about racial discrimination, and other types of discrimination—gender, age, religion, disability etc. Discrimination exists because people tend to see differences more than they do similarities. What if we all identify with our similarities and learned about our differences? What would that world be? In *diverse[city]*, I describe a utopia where numerous diverse musical motifs that are first introduced in the beginning, evolve organically throughout the piece to create a new, cohesive musical landscape. Together, we make a better world if we all stand together as one.

Recently, I was awaiting an international flight, when I heard the distinct sound of laughter coming from behind me. Because I could not see the people laughing, it occurred to me that it was a universal language of happiness; one which cannot evoke any judgment based on racial, religious, gender, social, or any other type of prejudice. I decided to not turn around, but rather to enjoy the laughter for what it was. It was this decidedly delightful sound of the human voice that inspired my 2nd symphony for wind ensemble.

Voices. They come in so many forms. Some high, some low. Extremely loud, or extremely soft. Some are menacing, or angelic. A voice is completely unique to each individual, and instantly recognizable to a close friend or relative. As a verb, it is used to express or vocalize an opinion. Used together, voices can express opposition, or unification. It occurred to me that all of these and more can be represented within the scope of a wind ensemble. The symphony No. 2 is an exploration of as many voices as I could formalize, resulting in a kind of concerto for wind ensemble. The culmination of the symphony is one of a unified voice, bringing together all of the different "cultures" and "individual voices" of the wind ensemble to express an amassed vision of hope and love; a vision I believe to be shared throughout all the world, yet disrupted continually by misguided and empowered individuals. I could think of no better messenger for such a work than the US "President's Own" Marine Band – the commissioners of the work – who not only stand among the best musicians of the world, but also represent a country based on the principles of all-inclusiveness and celebrated diversity. It is because of this that no text is used for the mezzo-soprano voice used in this symphony. Instead, the singing voice is another instrument in the ensemble, joining in, or emerging from, the surrounding textures.

I would like to personally thank Lieutenant Colonel Jason K. Fettig for his invitation to compose such a significant work, and also the members of the band, many of whom I'm honored to call friends, for their remarkable musical gifts and dedication to our country.

~ Jim Stephenson; September, 2016