



PROGRAM NOTES

Manitoba Chamber Orchestra Dame Evelyn Glennie

Sunday, September 20, 2009
4 PM

Piccolo Concerto in C major, RV 443

Antonio Vivaldi

b. Venice, Italy / March 4, 1678; d. Vienna, Austria / July 28, 1741

Arranged for vibraphone by Evelyn Glennie

In Vivaldi's time, it was common practice for a composition to be played on several different instruments. Composers were happy just to have their music heard, and they weren't fussy about whether it was performed on a violin, flute or harpsichord. Given this attitude, as well as Vivaldi's well-known love of instrumental colour, it's quite likely that he would have welcomed the chance to hear one of his works sounding in an attractive (and what would have been new to him) medium such as the vibraphone.

He intended the delightful concerto that Dame Evelyn Glennie will perform at this concert for the smallest member of either the flute family, the piccolo, or the recorder family, the sopranino model. It's one of just three that he composed for this instrument, perhaps under the inspiration of a virtuoso soloist. The lively outer movements are filled with high, bird-like trills that suit either piccolo or vibraphone admirably. In between comes a stately, almost melancholy slow movement that displays the solo instrument's lyrical side.

Airs d'Espagne

José Evangelista

b. Valencia, Spain / August 5, 1943

José Evangelista pursues an artistic path by which he has explored ways of making a music based exclusively on melody. His music draws its roots from an enlarged vision of tradition. To his Spanish origins he has added the influence of the Indonesian gamelan, the Western avant-garde and that of modal musics. He began his musical studies with Vicente Asencio while simultaneously studying physics. Later work in computers led him to Canada. Settling in Montreal in 1970, he studied composition with André Prévost and Bruce Mather. Since 1979, he is a professor at the University of Montréal. He has received several awards and numerous commissions, among others, from the Kronos Quartet and the CBC, and served as Composer-in-Residence with the Montréal Symphony Orchestra from 1993 to 1995.

The composer has written:

Airs d'Espagne (Spanish Melodies) consists of 15 folk melodies from Spain. They include work songs, lullabies, entertainment songs and religious songs. They come from a variety of regions and most of them are probably fairly old. The melodies are presented as such, or at most repeated, without formal development or modulations. My purpose was to emphasize the melodic character of this material. This piece was commissioned by the CBC (Winnipeg).

Snowblind for solo percussion and strings

Joe Duddell

b. Norwich, England / July 26, 1972

Joe Duddell studied music at Salford University where he took up the position of Reader in Music in 2007. His works have been performed at many major festivals and venues and he has received several commissions from the BBC, including *Parallel Lines* for the percussionist Colin Currie. *Not Waving but Drowning*, his first major orchestral work, commissioned by the BBC, was premiered at the 2002 Huddersfield Festival. A further work for Colin Currie, *Freaky Dancer* for vibraphone and guitar quartet, was commissioned by the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet. Recent commissions include an orchestral work for the London Symphony Orchestra.

Duddell composed *Snowblind* in 2001. He writes of it:

In *Snowblind* the percussion soloist principally has a melodic and harmonic role throughout the piece. On the whole, percussion concertos are more concerned with the rhythmic and colouristic possibilities of the instrument(s). Whilst these are not abandoned in *Snowblind*, I wanted the percussion to be able to ‘sing’ with the ensemble, hence the use of just marimba, vibraphone, crotales and temple blocks. The use of the larger (and potentially louder!) percussion instruments would, I think, have been unsuitable for the intimate nature of this piece.

The three movements (lasting about 18 minutes) are primarily concerned with unity rather than the Romantic notion of conflict/resolution between the soloist and ensemble – the work as a whole is more Baroque in outlook, having ritornello sections throughout the piece. The first violin, viola and cello are used as ‘link’ instruments between the soloists and ensemble, and have virtuosic sections themselves. The title is purely abstract and as usual for me comes from a non-music source – it was the title of a book I was reading at the time of embarking on writing the piece.

Snowblind was commissioned by the BT Scottish Ensemble with subsidy from the Scottish Arts Council and the Friends of the BT Scottish Ensemble. The first performance was given by Colin Currie and the BT Scottish Ensemble, 3 April 2002, Eden Court Theatre, Inverness, Scotland.

Mirage?

Christos Hatzis

b. Volos, Greece / March 21, 1953

With an unusually large number of presentations of his music on an international scale, a continuous stream of commissions by an international list of soloists and ensembles, and several recording projects by major and independent labels, 2006 Juno award winner “Christos Hatzis is enjoying a growing international reputation as one of the most important composers writing today” (CBC Records).

The composer writes:

Commissioned by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation for Dame Evelyn Glennie and the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra, *Mirage?* was composed during the winter months of 2009. It was a time when the world was entering an economic downturn which has often been compared with the Great Depression of the 1930s. This dark period was preceded by years of greed, selfishness, political and economic opportunism and plain disregard for basic human rights all over the world, which necessitated the present period of cleansing and testing so we can hopefully reclaim our humanity and faith through the trials and tribulations of today’s economic and geopolitical crucible.

Looking back at the previous period of careless and callous accumulation of wealth by the few at the expense of many, one wonders if the exorbitant life-style which we, the residents of the developed nations, managed to sustain for several decades at the expense of the developing world and the underprivileged among us was real or a mirage: sweet, lovely and seductive, but a mirage non-the-less. The unmistakable connection between the years preceding the present crisis and the “roaring twenties” accounts for the particular musical styles used in the composition and the question mark in the title.

The music of *Mirage?* is permeated by a sense of sadness, and at one point, of despair. It is lamenting the loss of something pleasurable that could not be held on to: of a way of living that less fortunate generations in our post-apocalyptic future may find hard to believe as possible and relegate instead to the domains of myth and legend, like the myths and legends of lost continents and civilizations of our distant past that are still pounding at the threshold of our collective memory. Were they mirages too or are we failing the same test over and over again, destroying ourselves and others in the process while blotting our legacy in the collective memory of humankind?

I don’t know if the music of *Mirage?* answers any of these questions, but these were the questions that led to its being. Perhaps there is still hope, that is hope for human solutions before God and nature take matters into their own hand, but during the days of composing this work that too seemed like a mirage.

Chamber Symphony, Op. 118a (after String Quartet No. 10)

Dmitri Shostakovich

b. St. Petersburg, Russia / September 25, 1906; d. Moscow, Russia / August 9, 1975

Transcribed for string orchestra by Rudolf Barshai

The 15 string quartets that Shostakovich composed between 1938 and 1974 offer as virtually complete a portrait of the composer as do the equal number of symphonies. At times they provide even deeper insights, speaking as they do a more intimate language.

The Russian conductor Rudolf Barshai (b. 1924) enjoyed a close personal relationship with Shostakovich, dating back to Barshai's studying composition with Shostakovich. The bond continued as Barshai, first as a violist (he was a founding member of the prestigious Borodin Quartet) and subsequently as a conductor, has performed his teacher's music frequently and with compelling insight. In 1969, he conducted another ensemble he founded, the Moscow Chamber Orchestra, in the world premiere of Shostakovich's *Fourteenth Symphony*.

Barshai received Shostakovich's permission to transcribe String Quartets Nos. 8 and 10 for full string orchestra. He has continued to produce such arrangements in the years following the composer's death. To date he has prepared transcriptions of three further quartets.

Shostakovich composed *String Quartet No. 10* at the Composers' Retreat in Dilizhan, Armenia, between July 11 and 20, 1964. He dedicated it to a friend, the composer Moisei Weinberg. The Beethoven Quartet, who gave the first performances of all his quartets except for the first and last, premiered it (in addition to the recently composed *String Quartet No. 9*) in Moscow on November 20, 1964.

As with much of Shostakovich's music, the first movement, *Andante*, poses more emotional questions than it answers. He delivers one, temporary response through the brusque gestures and high-tension rhythms of the aptly named second movement, *Allegretto furioso*. For the third movement, *Adagio*, he reached back to the Baroque era for a *passacaglia*. In form a set of variations, this example has a deeply grieving character.

The two-part finale follows on without a pause. In the opening section, a tune with the personality of a Russian folk dance, its inherent cheekiness undercut by Shostakovich's imposing a slow tempo upon it, competes for attention with other, sombre material. Themes from the previous movements reappear, including the *passacaglia* from the preceding movement. In the finale's second panel, much – but not all – of the music's tension gradually dissipates. Shostakovich's lifelong Q&A session would resume, another day.

Program Notes written (Vivaldi, Shostakovich) or edited (Evangelista, Duddell, Hatzis) by Don Anderson