

BOSTON CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY MIT MUSIC AND THEATER ARTS FACULTY

Saturday, January 9, 2010 • Kresge Auditorium, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Forum 4:00-5:30 p.m.

Michael Scott Cuthbert, Music Historian (MIT), Moderator
Sara Brown, Director of Design/Music and Theater Arts (MIT)
Robert L. Jaffe, Physicist (MIT)
Libby Larsen, Composer

Concert 8:00 p.m.

Imbrie **Serenade for Flute, Viola and Piano**

Allegro vivace

Siciliano

Adagio

Fenwick Smith, *flute* Marcus Thompson, *viola* Randall Hodgkinson, *piano*

Larsen **Black Birds, Red Hills**

Pedernal Hills

Black Rock

Red Hills and Sky

A Black Bird with Snow-Covered Hills

Thomas Hill, *clarinet* Marcus Thompson, *viola* Randall Hodgkinson, *piano*

Crumb **Eleven Echoes of Autumn, 1965**

Fenwick Smith, *flute* Thomas Hill, *clarinet* Ida Levin, *violin*

Randall Hodgkinson, *piano*

I N T E R M I S S I O N

Ravel **Piano Trio in A minor**

Modéré

Pantoum: Assez vif

Passacaille: Très large

Finale: Animé

Ida Levin, *violin* Astrid Schween, *violoncello* Randall Hodgkinson, *piano*

ANDREW IMBRIE (1921–2007)

Serenade for Flute, Viola and Piano

Andrew Imbrie was born in New York in 1921 but spent most of his early years in Princeton, New Jersey. After early studies with Leo Ornstein, he went to Paris in 1937, where he spent a summer studying with Nadia Boulanger, then returned to pursue composition at Princeton. The principal influence on his music was his teacher at Princeton, Roger Sessions. Imbrie received his degree in 1942 and was noticed early: His senior thesis at Princeton, his first string quartet (1942), won the New York Critics Circle Award and was later recorded by the Juilliard Quartet.

After service in the army during World War II, Imbrie followed Sessions to Berkeley; there he earned his M.A. and was soon appointed instructor. He taught there from 1949 until his retirement in 1991. He became Professor of Music at Berkeley in 1960, serving also as chairman of the composition department at the San Francisco Conservatory from 1970. During his career as teacher and composer, he has received numerous awards including two Guggenheim Fellowships.

He wrote in most genres, including five string quartets, three symphonies, two operas, and a large number of chamber and vocal works. His largest score was the opera *Angle of Repose*, commissioned by the San Francisco Opera for the American Bicentennial and based on Wallace Stegner's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel. He composed his Serenade in 1952 on a commission from a San Francisco couple, Mr. and Mrs. Edward Hohfeld.

The Serenade is cast in three movements that Imbrie describes as following a progression “from the surface to the interior.” The first, *Allegro vivace*, is marked by a steady rhythmic activity that suggests a Baroque character heightened by the contrapuntal interaction of the three performers, a sort of “Brandenburg” in miniature. At one point the energy “falters and stops, like a clock, without slowing its basic pulse” (the composer's description). The intensity of the movement lessens as it draws to an end with an ostinato that continues underneath a lighter and lighter texture, until finally all that is left is silence.

The second movement, *Siciliano*, is “intended to evoke a sense of nostalgia” with the typical rocking rhythm of the Italian genre. Flute and viola each has a cadenza during the course of the movement, during which the siciliano rhythm evaporates, but it returns, hesitantly at first, as the piano picks up the close of the viola's cadenza and brings all three players back together for a gentle close.

The hush at the end of the second movement continues into the sustained opening of the final *Adagio*. Here Imbrie “presents, and attempts to reconcile, the extremes of expressive contrast.” From the quiet opening he builds to a passage of climactic intensity, starting as what seems to be a sweet lyric passage led by the flute, but the viola takes over with a rather more passionate air (still very lyrical nonetheless), until the three members of the trio burst forth in a driven, dynamic outburst, the most dramatic moment in the piece. Echoes of its expressive power remain in assertive isolated chords in the piano before the flute and viola once again take over the lyric element and sing the serenade to sleep.

LIBBY LARSEN (b. 1950)

Black Birds, Red Hills: A Portrait of Six Paintings by Georgia O’Keeffe, for Viola, Clarinet and Piano

Libby Larsen established herself early as one of the liveliest composers of the younger generation of Americans. A native of Delaware, she has been most closely associated with the state of Minnesota, having studied composition at the University of Minnesota with Dominick Argento, Eric Stokes, and Paul Fetler. It was there, too, that she co-founded, with Stephen Paulus, the Minnesota Composers Forum, in 1973; ten years later she and Paulus were jointly selected as composers-in-residence of the Minnesota Orchestra, which resulted in the first orchestral recordings of their music. Larsen’s *Symphony: Water Music*, is an homage to Handel and Debussy, yet entirely her own, the work of a composer from the “land of 10,000 lakes.” Later she was the composer-in-residence with the Charlotte Symphony and with the Colorado Symphony Orchestra, for which she composed her fifth symphony, *Solo Symphony*. Her output includes roughly a dozen operas, large and small; dozens of orchestral works; a wide range of chamber music; and many vocal works for solo voices or chorus.

Larsen has been an active musical citizen, working with organizations like the National Endowment for the Arts, ASCAP, and the League of American Orchestras as a persuasive advocate for the arts. As this drive to communicate might suggest, she has been interested from the beginning in connecting with listeners, and her music has done that by its energy, color, imaginative titles, and recognition of musical traditions both classical and popular. In 2003–4 she held the Harissios Papamarkou Chair in Education and Technology at the Library of Congress. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology bestowed on her the Eugene McDermott Award in the Arts, and she has received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Black Birds, Red Hills, inspired by six paintings of Georgia O’Keeffe, was commissioned by the University of Alabama for Thea Engelson and Scott Bridges in 1987. The four movements are the composer’s response to six paintings featuring the red mountains around O’Keeffe’s New Mexico home, where, as Larsen noted, she “found the flow of time and color in music inspiring to her work as a painter.” In these paintings, O’Keeffe concentrates on and magnifies the horizon line, black rocks, and black birds. Larsen comments:

Movement one, three, and four reflect the “V shape” of the hills just outside O’Keeffe’s window. She describes this shape as the arms of two great hills, “reach[ing] out to the sky and holding it,” suggesting to me an abstract cradle. In movement II, I liken the music to O’Keeffe’s image of the black rocks. O’Keeffe found these rocks on her walks to the Glen Canyon dam. She became fascinated with the effect of time on the rocks, noting that time has turned them into objects which are precious to look at and hold. Finally, to paint the black birds which lived in the hills near her, O’Keeffe covered the red hills with snow and focussed on the bird as a metaphor for time, “always there and always moving away.”

(Courtesy of Libby Larsen. Used with permission.)

The specific paintings that inspired Libby Larsen’s music are the following (they are all oils on canvas and are in the O’Keeffe collection unless otherwise mentioned):

Movement I: *Pedernal and Red Hills*, 1936 (Private collection)

Movement II: *Black Rock with Blue Sky and White Clouds*, 1972

Movement III: *Red and Orange Hills*, 1938 (Collection of Judge and Mrs. Oliver Seth); *Red Hills and Sky*, 1945 (Private collection)

Movement IV: *A Black Bird with Snow-Covered Red Hills*, 1946 (Collection of Susan and David Workman); *Black Bird Series* (In the Patio IX), 1950

GEORGE CRUMB (b.1929)

Eleven Echoes of Autumn, 1965, for Violin, Alto Flute, Clarinet and Piano

George Crumb grew up in a musical family and learned from childhood to play the clarinet and piano. He took his undergraduate degree in composition at Mason College of Music and Fine Arts in his native Charleston, West Virginia, then went to the University of Illinois for his master's degree and to the University of Michigan for his doctorate. There he studied with Ross Lee Finney, who, after his father, became the strongest musical influence on him. He has been on the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania from 1965 until his retirement. In addition to numerous grants and awards from the Koussevitzky Music Foundation, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the American Academy of Arts and Letters, he received the Pulitzer Prize in 1968 for *Echoes of Time and the River*.

Crumb's early music grew out of short musical subjects in which timbre played as important a role as pitch and rhythm. His music has continually been marked by an extraordinarily refined ear for color and astonishing inventiveness in the creation of sounds, often using novel methods of tone production, occasionally with amplification to pick up the delicate overtones that might be lost otherwise. Much of his music has been programmatic, often drawing on a zodiacal cycle or number symbolism or such quasi-dramatic elements as masked performers, to serve the cause of musical illustration with vivid sounds, ranging from the sweet and delicate to the threshold of pain.

Much of Crumb's best-known music is vocal, and almost all of that sets the Spanish poetry of Federico García Lorca, who was shot by Franco's soldiers at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, and whose plays and poems are marked with a passionate intensity and a generally tragic view of life. Crumb encountered Lorca's poetry when he was a student in Ann Arbor. As he noted in an interview, "I immediately identified with its stark simplicity and vivid imagery...." Even in purely instrumental works, such as *Eleven Echoes of Autumn*, the imagery of Lorca helps to shape the piece.

Crumb composed *Eleven Echoes of Autumn, 1965* in the spring of 1966 for the Aeolian Chamber Players, on a commission from Bowdoin College. It is cast in eleven sections played without interruption, each of which is labeled by the Italian word for "echo." The echos are extraordinarily diverse in color and mood. As the composer has explained:

Each of the *echi* exploits certain timbral possibilities of the instruments. For example, *eco* 1 (for piano alone) is based entirely on the 5th partial harmonic, *eco* 2 on violin harmonics in combination with 7th partial harmonics produced on the piano (by drawing a piece of hard rubber along the strings). A delicate aura of sympathetic vibrations

emerges in *echi* 3 and 4, produced in the latter case by alto flute and clarinet playing into the piano (close to the strings). At the conclusion of the work the violinist achieves a mournful, fragile timbre by playing with the bowhair completely slack.

The most important generative element of *Eleven Echoes* is the “bell motif”—a quintuplet figure based on the whole-tone interval—which is heard at the beginning of the work. This diatonic figure appears in a variety of rhythmic guises, and frequently in a highly chromatic context.

Each of the eleven pieces has its own expressive character, at times overlaid by quasi-obbligato music of contrasting character...

Although *Eleven Echoes* has certain programmatic implications for the composer, it is enough for the listener to infer the significance of the motto-quote from Federico García Lorca: “...y los arcos rotos donde sufre el tiempo” (...and the broken arches where time suffers). These words are softly intoned as a preface to each of the three cadenzas (*echi* 5–7) and the image “broken arches” is represented visually in the notation of the music which underlies the cadenzas.

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MAURICE RAVEL (1875–1937)

Piano Trio in A minor

Ravel enjoyed spending the summer in his Basque homeland. In the summer of 1913, he arrived at St.-Jean-de-Luz fresh from the scandalous world premiere of Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring* in Paris, at which he had been abused by an indignant upper-crust lady in the audience when he requested that she stop shouting her disapproval of Stravinsky’s score. The Basque country must have seemed exceptionally peaceful after such a hullabaloo, and Ravel found it almost impossible to tear himself away. He devoted himself to the composition of a piano trio, his first new piece of pure chamber music since the string quartet of a decade earlier (though he had been contemplating the trio since 1908), and, after the briefest possible return to Paris in the winter, he finished the first movement by the end of March.

Completion of the new work was interrupted by Ravel’s fruitless attempt to compose a piano concerto based on Basque themes. Once he had gotten bogged down with the concerto, he seemed to have difficulty in returning to the trio and even told a friend that he was getting disgusted with the piece. The impetus to finish the work came when Germany declared war on France in August. Composition became the means by which Ravel sought oblivion from the horrors that were inevitable.

Ravel had tried to offer his services to his country by joining the infantry but was rejected for being two kilos under the minimum weight. Always very sensitive about his small size, Ravel no doubt took the authorities’ assurance that he was serving France by writing music as a patronizing rejection, and he wrote to a friend, “So as not to think of all this, I am working—yes, working with the sureness and lucidity of a madman.” So it was that in just under four weeks, by August 29, 1914, he had completed the entire score of the trio. (Soon afterward, he was accepted into the air force, where he was put in charge of a convoy and composed virtually nothing else until

his discharge in 1917.)

For all the haste with which it was finished, and despite Ravel's distraught mind during the composition of the last part, the Trio remains a remarkable solid, well-shaped work, one of the composer's most serious large-scale pieces (and it most assuredly is a large-scale work, despite the fact that it is only for three instruments and not for an orchestra).

The opening *Modéré* presents a theme written in 8/8 time with the melody consistently disposed into a 3+2+3 pattern that Ravel identified as "Basque in color." The second theme is a lyrical diatonic melody first presented in the violin and briefly imitated by the cello. These two themes and a tense connecting passage serve as the major ideas of the movement, building with increasing pace and intensity to a solid climax followed by a gradual descent to a gentle close.

The heading for the second movement, *Pantoum: Assez vif*, refers to a verse form borrowed by such French Romantic poets as Victor Hugo from Malayan poetry. What connection it has with Ravel's music is a mystery. The movement serves, in any case, as the scherzo of the work, playing off a rhythmic string figure colored by the insertion of pizzicatos throughout and a simple legato theme that serves as the foil to the rhythmic motive.

As indicated by its heading, the *Passacaille: Très large* derives its shape from the Baroque form, more frequently labeled by its Italian name *passacaglia*, in which an ostinato melody or harmonic progression is repeated over and over as the skeleton background for a set of variations. Ravel's approach to the form is, not surprisingly, a good deal freer than that of those Baroque composers who employed it, but the pattern is there to provide the framework for this wonderfully tranquil movement.

By contrast the *Animé* of the Finale offers gorgeous splashes of instrumental color in a masterly display of brilliant writing for each of the instruments—long trills in the strings serving as a foil for dense chords in the piano in a triumphant close.

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**BOSTON CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY
MIT MUSIC AND THEATER ARTS FACULTY**

Saturday, January 16, 2010 • Kresge Auditorium, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Forum 4:00-5:30 p.m.

Martin Marks, Film Music Historian (MIT), Moderator
Peter Child, Composer (MIT)
Bruce Brubaker, Chair of the Piano Department (New England Conservatory)
Deborah Stein, Music Theorist (New England Conservatory)

Concert 8:00 p.m.

Beethoven **String Trio in E-flat major, Opus 3**

Allegro con brio
Andante
Menuetto: Allegretto
Adagio
Menuetto: Moderato
Finale: Allegro

Jennifer Frautschi, *violin* Roger Tapping, *viola* Andrew Mark, *violoncello*

Child **Skyscraper Symphony (String Quartet No. 3)**

Harumi Rhodes, *violin* Jennifer Frautschi, *violin*
Marcus Thompson, *viola* Andrew Mark, *violoncello*

I N T E R M I S S I O N

Dvořák **String Quintet in E-flat major, Opus 97, “American”**

Allegro non tanto
Allegro vivo
Larghetto
Finale: Allegro giusto

Jennifer Frautschi, *violin* Harumi Rhodes, *violin*
Roger Tapping, *viola* Marcus Thompson, *viola* Andrew Mark, *violoncello*

Skyscraper Symphony (1929), by Robert Florey, is included in the National Film Preservation Foundation's DVD set, *More Treasures from American Film Archives, 1894-1931*, and presented from the DVD with permission of George Eastman House and the NFPE.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827)

String Trio in E-flat major, Opus 3

Though his major instrument was the piano, Beethoven was familiar with the stringed instruments too; as a teenager he made his living playing viola in the opera orchestra of his native Bonn. His earliest large-scale works, at the age of fifteen, were a piano quartet and a concerto. Later on, his first published compositions to be graced with an opus number were a set of piano trios, which highlighted the keyboard, while his second publication was a set of piano sonatas.

By the time he produced these works, he was living in Vienna, where Haydn was the great figure (and, for a short time, Beethoven's teacher). In his early years Beethoven seems to have avoided direct comparison with Haydn for a time. He did not compose either a symphony or a string quartet—the two forms in which Haydn was notably pre-eminent—until after he had made his mark in other ways. And the string quartet, in particular, he approached by way of the string trio.

The string quartet already had a tradition, through the work of Haydn and Mozart, that might well have overwhelmed a diligent newcomer of the highest artistic standards, but the string trio was an entirely different matter. Only one undeniable masterpiece of the genre came from the earlier classical period, and that was by Mozart, who, having died five years before Beethoven published his work, was clearly no longer a rival. Mozart's Divertimento K.563 in E-flat major was written in 1788 and published in 1792, the very year Beethoven arrived in Vienna. It served as the obvious model for Beethoven's work in the same key for the same selection of instruments. And if Beethoven could not surpass the greatness of Mozart's first two movements (who could?), the work still shows that he is already, in his twenties, a master of string textures. The six-movement Trio falls clearly into the divertimento tradition, with two minuets and two slow movements.

The first movement already employs Beethoven's favorite designation, *Allegro con brio*, and if the themes are somewhat stereotyped, their development takes them to surprising places. The *Andante* makes use of a favorite Beethovenian device, a thematic idea that consists of little more than a single note rhythmically repeated. The first minuet is a graceful little piece, followed by a richly beautiful *Adagio* in A-flat major. The second minuet flows along without stopping, while its unexpected Trio features the atmosphere of gypsy fiddlers on the violin. That Trio and the witty *Finale* are the two most Haydnesque moments in this lively work, which clearly enjoyed a great popularity in its own day, for the best of reasons.

PETER CHILD (b. 1953)

***Skyscraper Symphony* (String Quartet No. 3)**

Peter Child was born in Yarmouth, England, in 1953. He took his first composition lessons with Bernard Barrell at the age of 12. In 1973 he came to the United States through an exchange scholarship with the University of Keele that allowed him to complete his bachelor's degree in composition at Reed College in 1975. A Watson Fellowship took him to India to study karnatic music in Madras (now Chennai) in 1975–76, after which he pursued his doctorate in composition at Brandeis University, where his principal teachers were William Albright, Arthur Berger, Martin Boykan, Jacob Druckman, and Seymour Shifrin, completing the degree in 1981.



Still images from *Skyscraper Symphony* (1929) by Robert Florey
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He has been on the faculty of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he is now Professor of Music and Margaret MacVicar Faculty Fellow, for many years. From 2005–8 he was composer-in-residence with the Albany Symphony Orchestra and currently holds the same position with the New England Philharmonic.

He composed *Skyscraper Symphony* in 2003 as a score for a classic black-and-white film of 1929 by Robert Florey, an impressionistic documentary of New York's skyline—which explains why a work for string quartet bears the confusing title “symphony.” The Lydian Quartet recorded the score for the film's soundtrack at the time of composition. The performance tonight is the premiere live performance of the music.

The composer has provided the following note:

I took the movie *Skyscraper Symphony* by Robert Florey to be, paradoxically enough, a dance movement for Manhattan's tall buildings. Postures, movement, and mood are determined primarily by the camera—its angle, its motion, the light—and the broad form of the choreography is clearly demarcated by slow fades and sharp juxtapositions. These features suggested the shape of the music that I wrote to accompany the film, its form, phrases, cadences, etc, and, equally, the character of the musical material. Thus, for example, the film begins with bold, majestic poses, followed by a rather tipsy, vertiginous, somewhat comical section, followed in turn by darker, more sinister shots. These changes of mood are reflected in the music.

In 1928, when *Skyscraper Symphony* was made, the iconic tall buildings of modern Manhattan, such as the Chrysler Building and the Empire State, had not yet been erected, and, of course, in the nascent twenty-first century the tallest buildings of New York became the site of inestimable tragedy. Viewing the film from a remove of three-quarters of a century, I am sure that these ironies also affected the music's tone.

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK (1841–1904)

String Quintet in E-flat major, Opus 97, “American”

When Mrs. Jeanette Thurber persuaded Antonín Dvořák to come to America as the director of her National Conservatory in New York, she expected great things of him. The Bohemian composer, at the height of his popularity, brought a cheerful, friendly personality and a musical

openness that made him popular wherever he went. Quite early in his stay Dvořák was asked by reporters what advice he would offer to American composers. His response—that they should draw upon their own native musical heritage in seeking materials for their art—reflected Dvořák’s own procedure with the melodic styles and the dance forms of his native Bohemia. What Dvořák meant by that was especially the music of black Americans, which, if he knew it at all, came from concert performances of spirituals and from the popular entertainment of the minstrel show (where the music was often written by white musicians in supposed imitation of vanished “plantation life”).

His views were widely and heatedly discussed. When Dvořák made these remarks, he knew scarcely any American music, either art or folk music, nor could he have really understood the cultural diversity of this vast country, so different from his native Bohemia. And he was not yet familiar with the substantial number of talented American composers who had been getting along quite well—and even anticipating his approaches years before his music was known here. And, for all his insistence that America influenced his own music, his basic inspiration remained Bohemian to the core.

During the summer of 1893, Dvořák spent his holiday with his family at Spillville, a Czech community in Iowa, where the nostalgic composer felt immediately at home. During June and July, he composed two substantial chamber works: the string quartet in F major, opus 96, and the quintet in E-flat major, opus 97; both works were to be nicknamed “American.” Both works were premiered in January 1894 by the Kneisel Quartet, the most distinguished string quartet in America at the time (the ensemble consisted of first-chair players from the Boston Symphony Orchestra led by concertmaster Franz Kneisel).

Dvořák’s music is filled with pentatonic tunes, characteristic of the folk music of Bohemia; the secondary theme of his first movement, though, is more energetic and rhythmic, and is supposedly based on a melody he heard from a troupe of Iroquois Indians, who visited Spillville while he was there. The second movement is a scherzo beginning with a drumbeat pattern in the viola, followed by a prodigal play of melodies and countermelodies in the traditional ABA form. The slow movement comes in third place; here it is a theme with five variations. The theme begins with a repeated descending figure. Its second half is evidently based on a tune that Dvořák was sketching to the words “My country ‘tis of thee,” which he intended to propose as an American national anthem (though those words are far better known—ironically—to the tune of the British national anthem!). The dotted rhythmic figure of the first movement returns to pervade the lively rondo theme of the Finale; the percussive first interlude may be another reference to Dvořák’s single experience of American Indians, while the second is more lyrical and typical of his Czech folk music, followed by a lively conclusion.

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**BOSTON CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY
MIT MUSIC AND THEATER ARTS FACULTY**

Saturday, January 23, 2010 • Kresge Auditorium, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Forum 4:00-5:30 p.m.
Ellen T. Harris, Music Historian (MIT), Moderator
Lewis Lockwood, Music Historian (Harvard University)
Paul Matisse, Sculptor/Public Artist, Kalliroscope Gallery, Groton, MA
Stephen Tapscott, Poet (MIT)

Concert 8:00 p.m.

Mozart **Oboe Quartet in F major, K. 370**
Allegro
Adagio
Rondeau
Peggy Pearson, *oboe* Harumi Rhodes, *violin*
Marcus Thompson, *viola* Joshua Gordon, *violoncello*

Loeffler **Two Rhapsodies for Oboe, Viola and Piano**
L'étang
La cornemuse
Peggy Pearson, *oboe* Marcus Thompson, *viola* Mihae Lee, *piano*

Still **Suite for Violin and Piano**
African Dancer
Mother and Child
Gamin
Harumi Rhodes, *violin* Mihae Lee, *piano*

I N T E R M I S S I O N

Foss **Time Cycle**
We're Late
When the Bells Justle
Sechzehnter Januar
O Mensch, gib Acht
Judith Kellock, *soprano* Michael Norsworthy, *clarinet*
Joshua Gordon, *violoncello* Mihae Lee, *celeste & piano*
Robert Schulz, *percussion*

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756–1791)

Oboe Quartet in F major, K. 370

Most of Mozart's chamber music for wind instruments was composed for particular players; the Oboe Quartet is no exception. Mozart was in Munich in 1781 for the premiere there of his opera *Idomeneo*. The solo oboe part was entrusted to Friedrich Ramm, a distinguished virtuoso in the service of the court of Mannheim. A musical dictionary of the day said of Ramm, "no one has yet been able to approach him in beauty, roundness, softness, and trueness of tone on the oboe, combined with the trumpet-like depths of his forte. He plays, for the rest, with a delicacy, a lightness, and a power of expression that enchant the listener."

Mozart, obviously enchanted by Ramm's ability, tailored the quartet specifically for him, with an elaborate and demanding part, requiring from the performer lyric grace, agility, and stamina. The oboist leads the proceedings throughout, except when the violin takes over for a phrase or so to give the wind player time for a good breath. The oboe sings an aria in the Adagio, sustained lyric phrases with rich ornamental decoration and wide-ranging leaps. The lively rondo of the closing movement has an especially delightful passage in the episode following the second statement of the rondo theme, where Mozart has the oboist play in 4/4 against the prevailing 6/8 rhythm of the remaining instruments.

CHARLES MARTIN LOEFFLER (1861–1935)

Two Rhapsodies for Oboe, Viola and Piano

Too long almost forgotten, a member of an overlooked generation of American composers, the school active in and around Boston at the turn of the twentieth century, Charles Martin Loeffler is suddenly beginning to reappear in our musical life, largely through recordings of songs and instrumental music in recent years. Moreover, a first-rate biography by Ellen Knight gives the general reader at last a full view of this fascinating, gifted, sometimes contradictory musician. Born in Berlin in 1861 (though for personal reasons he always claimed to be Alsatian, a fiction that appears in every study of the composer before Knight's), Loeffler spent formative years in Russia (where he began violin studies), Hungary, and Switzerland, then undertook advanced work with Joachim, becoming one of his favorite pupils and chamber music partners. Later, in order to learn a different school of violin technique, he went to Paris, where he studied violin with Massart and composition with Ernest Guiraud. He spent a time as a member of the private orchestra of an immensely rich Russian Baron, Paul von Derwies, who spent his winters in Nice and summers at Lake Lugano, complete with his private orchestra and opera company (another distinguished American immigrant composer, Victor Herbert, also spent some time in the baron's orchestra before leaving Europe).

In 1881, when he was just twenty, Loeffler went to New York; the following year he joined the Boston Symphony Orchestra, then beginning its second season, as assistant concertmaster to Franz Kneisel. Kneisel and Loeffler shared the BSO's first desk for twenty years, when both resigned, Loeffler to devote himself full time to composition, Kneisel to concentrate on his string quartet, which had become the most distinguished chamber ensemble in America. In the meantime, though, Loeffler had become an established composer and a very popular soloist with the Boston Symphony. Most of his orchestral works received their world premieres with the BSO, and much of his chamber music was written for musicians in the orchestra.

From 1910 until his death in 1935, he lived the life of a gentleman farmer in Medfield, composing actively, pursuing such seemingly contradictory musical passions as Gregorian chant and jazz (he was a close friend of George Gershwin's, and the two used to visit hot jazz spots together whenever Gershwin was in Boston for the tryout of a new show).

Loeffler's music is distinctly French in its orientation; this made him unique among Boston composers of the day, most of whom had taken all their training in Germany. In fact, Loeffler played a major role in introducing recent French music to Boston in the early years of the century, thus preparing the ground for the change of taste that was to occur so dramatically right after World War I. It is too simplistic, though, just to call him an American impressionist. He was an avid reader of classical literature and of modern French poetry and absorbed cosmopolitan elements from a wide range of sources—French, Russian, medieval European, Irish, Spanish, jazz, and so on. Many of his works have evocative titles or even programs, though these are never intended to be purely descriptive. Rather, they suggest images or a frame of mind in which to listen without being in any sense prescriptive.

This is true of his best-known chamber work, the *Two Rhapsodies* for oboe, viola, and piano. The unusual combination of instruments has recommended this piece especially to violists and oboists on the lookout for repertory, an attitude that has allowed Loeffler's superb string quartet, *Music for Four Stringed Instruments*, to be unjustly neglected, not to mention such other chamber works as a string quintet calling for three violins (!), an octet (for five strings, two clarinets, and harp), and the *Ballade carnavalesque* for flute, oboe, saxophone, bassoon, and piano.

The *Two Rhapsodies*, published in 1905, bear a literary motto drawn from poems of Maurice Rollinat (published in *Les névroses*, 1883). The first piece was dedicated to the memory of Leon Pourteau, the second to Georges Longy, then the celebrated principal oboist of the Boston Symphony. It has only recently become known that the rhapsodies are instrumental reworkings of two songs from a set of three that Loeffler composed for bass voice, clarinet, and piano; the manuscripts of the songs were in the personal collection of Loeffler's good friend, Isabella Stewart Gardner, and remained unpublished until 1988. (The third song, *La villanelle du diable*, served Loeffler as the basis of a work for violin and orchestra of the same title.) Like Liszt, who converted some of his Petrarch settings into solo piano pieces, Loeffler took the musical ideas generated in the songs and reworked them for a unique ensemble—oboe, viola, and piano. Though the mood of the poems is thus clearly reflected in the rhapsodies—one being a fantastic description of a stagnant pond, the other speaking of a ghostly bagpipe—in neither case is the imagery more than mere suggestion; the three instruments are blended, opposed, and varied in wondrously imaginative ways. The listener may well hear the strains of the *Dies irae* melody in *L'étang*, conjuring up the mysterious quality of the fetid pool, but it also reflects Loeffler's love of Gregorian chant (he, like Rachmaninoff, had a predilection for slipping the *Dies irae* into his works). Rollinat's poems were translated by long-time BSO program annotator Philip Hale, whose renditions have become almost a part of the work:

L' étang

*Plein de très vieux poissons frappées de cécité,
L'étang, sous un ciel bas roulant de sourds tonnerres,
Étale entre ses joncs plusieurs fois centenaires
La clapotante horreur de son opacité.*

*Là-bas, des farfadets servent de luminaires
A plus d'un marais noir, sinistre et redouté;
Mais lui ne se révèle en ce lieu déserté
Que par ses bruits affreux de crapauds poitrinaires.*

*Or, la lune qui point tout juste en ce moment,
Semble s'y regarder si fantastiquement,
Que l'on dirait, à voir sa spectrale figure,*

*Son nez plat et le vague étrange de ses dents,
Une tête de mort éclairée en dedans
Qui viendrait se mirer dans une glace obscure.*

La cornemuse

*Sa cornemuse dans les bois
Geignait comme le vent qui brame,
Et jamais le cerf aux abois,
Jamais le saule ni la rame,
N'ont pleuré comme cette voix.*

*Ces sons de flûte et de hautbois
Semblaient râlés par une femme.
Oh! près du carrefour des croix,
Sa cornemuse!*

*Il est mort. Mais sous les cieux froids,
Aussitôt que la nuit se trame,
Toujours, tout au fond de mon âme,
Là, dans le coin des vieux effrois,
F'entends gémir, comme autrefois,
Sa cornemuse.*

Maurice Rollinat

The Pond

Full of old fish, blind-stricken long ago,
The pool, under a near sky rumbling dull thunder,
Bares between centuries-old rushes
the splashing horror of its gloom.

Over yonder, goblins light up more than
one marsh that is black, sinister, unbearable;
But the pool is revealed in this lonely place
Only by the croakings of consumptive frogs.

Now the moon, piercing at this very moment,
Seems to look here at herself fantastically;
As though, one might say, to see her spectral face,

Her flat nose, the strange vacuity of teeth—
A death's head lighted from within,
About to peer into a dull mirror.

The Bagpipe

His bagpipe groaned in the woods
As the wind that belleth;
And never has stag at bay,
Nor willow, nor oar,
Wept as that voice wept.

Those sounds of flute and hautboy
Seemed like the death-rattle of a woman.
Oh! his bagpipe,
Near the cross-roads of the crucifix!

He is dead. But under cold skies,
As soon as night weaves her mesh,
Down deep in my soul,
There is the nook of old fears,
I always hear his bagpipe
Groaning as of yore.

Translation by Philip Hale

It is ironic that Hale's name has become connected in this way with this piece, because the conservative Hale generally regarded Loeffler's music as "decadent," an opprobrious term that puritanical writers enjoy slinging around freely. Today it makes more sense to revel in the immediate beauties of sound that Loeffler evokes with just three instruments so dissimilar in character—and then to reply, "Decadent, perhaps. But oh—such gorgeous decadence!"

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Photo of sculpture *Gamin* by Augusta Savage.

<http://www.imamuseum.org/art/collections/artwork/gamin-savage-augusta>

Gamin, by Augusta Savage (© Indianapolis Museum of Art)

WILLIAM GRANT STILL (1895–1978)

Suite for Violin and Piano

The prolific composer William Grant Still was experienced in just about every aspect of music in American life, and his talents were such that he became a pathbreaker in all of them. He was the first black composer to have a symphony performed by a major orchestra, the first to conduct a major symphony orchestra, the first black to have an opera produced by a major opera company (*Troubled Island*, a treatment of the liberation of Haiti from French domination in the 1790s, performed by the New York City Opera in 1949), and the first to conduct a white radio studio orchestra. He worked in both “popular” and “classical” styles. After studies at Wilberforce University (which he left without a degree) he worked for W. C. Handy. Later he enrolled at Oberlin Conservatory, where he was encouraged to compose. He played the oboe in theater orchestras (including that for Sissle and Blake’s landmark show *Shuffle Along*) and studied in New York with Varèse. George Chadwick offered him a scholarship at the New England Conservatory and encouraged him to compose specifically American music. He worked privately with Chadwick while in Boston with *Shuffle Along*, but never enrolled at the Conservatory.

He was an arranger for Handy, Paul Whiteman, and Artie Shaw. He conducted the CBS studio orchestra for the radio show “Deep River Hour” in New York, and he worked in Hollywood for films and television (including “Gunsmoke” and “Perry Mason”). Still was a prolific composer in all musical forms, creating a total of five symphonies, nine operas, four ballets, and many other works. His *Afro-American Symphony* was performed by the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra in 1931; it marked a breakthrough for serious concert music by black composers.

In addition to his commercial and concert work, Still played a role in bringing the music of other cultures—the kind of thing now sometimes called “world music”—into the concert hall in formal settings. Sometimes he celebrated his African roots, but he also was partly Hispanic, and especially after settling in California he composed works that were based on the typical rhythms and melodies of the Spanish-speaking countries of the New World.

Among Still's staunchest musical supporters were the violinist Louis Kaufman and his pianist wife Annette. In May 1943 he composed for them the Suite for Violin and Piano, finding inspiration for each of the three movements in a sculpture by a contemporary African-American artist. Ever practical, he produced alternative versions as well—a version of the complete suite for violin and orchestra, and a chamber orchestra version of the first and third movements (with the title Preludes) for string orchestra, flute, and piano. Louis Kaufman gave the first performance of the Suite with pianist Vladimir Padwa in Jordan Hall, Boston, on March 14, 1944.

The first movement aims to capture the gestures of Richmond Barthé's 1933 statue *African Dancer* with an assertive, driving figure in the main section and a bluesy middle section. The second movement is a sweet, gentle response to *Mother and Child* by Sargent Johnson, a Boston-born artist who spent most of his life in California. The final movement is filled with humorous vitality, depicting the best-known sculpture of Augusta Savage, *Gamin*, a 1930 bust of a street-smart young man.

LUKAS FOSS (1922–2009)

Time Cycle

Lukas Foss demonstrated precocious musical gifts when he began studying piano and theory as a small child in his native Berlin, working on the music of the great Classical masters. In 1933 his family moved to Paris, where he studied piano, composition, orchestration, and flute. In 1937 his family came to America, and the talented teenager continued his studies at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. He continued to develop as a triple threat—pianist (working with Isabella Vengerova), conductor (with Fritz Reiner), and composer (with Rosario Scalero and Randall Thompson). In 1940 he was invited by Serge Koussevitzky to be part of the first class at the Berkshire Music Center, where, like his fellow student that summer, Leonard Bernstein, he was eager to pursue all aspects of music. Foss came back to Tanglewood for each of the next several summers. Then, in 1944, the year he turned twenty-two, his large-scale cantata for chorus and orchestra, *The Prairie* (a setting of Carl Sandburg's poem), made a considerable splash when it was premiered by Robert Shaw and his Collegiate Chorale, receiving the New York Critics' Circle Award. For the next six years he was the pianist of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, an appointment Koussevitzky made in order to give him plenty of time to work on his own music.

After some time spent in Rome as a Fellow at the American Academy in 1950, Foss moved to Los Angeles to teach at UCLA. He also directed the Ojai Music Festival and founded the Improvisation Chamber Ensemble at UCLA, in order to experiment with musical improvisation in a contemporary style of concert music.

Though he has never ceased composing, Foss also became very active as a conductor; he was named music director of the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra in 1963, and later of the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra and the Brooklyn Philharmonic, where he oversaw a particularly interesting and adventurous program. After he retired from the responsibilities of a music director, he joined the faculty of Boston University in 1991, dividing his time between Boston and New York. Foss passed away at his home in Manhattan in January 2009.

Foss has always been interested in the whole range of musical possibilities. From the early years to the present his works show the record of an inquiring mind, and—more than that—the mind of someone who loves music and who absorbs ideas and procedures from all over, then transmutes them with the philosopher’s stone of his own imagination into new guises. On the surface one would be hard put to identify the composer of *The Prairie*, with its spacious, almost romantic rhetoric, with the composer of *Time Cycle*, with its improvised interludes; or to find the rather Stravinskyan *Parable of Death* emanating from the same musical imagination as the *Baroque Variations*, which cheerfully twist passages from some of the most familiar Baroque composers; or yet again the Third String Quartet, with its obsessive, hypnotic repetitions, as opposed to the *Renaissance Concerto*, which the composer has described as “living myself into an era.” These diverse pieces, ranging widely in mood and character, share an extraordinary technical aplomb controlled by a searching, open musical mind that has never lost its sense of wonder.

It was while at UCLA that Foss composed *Time Cycle*, his first work that grew out of the improvisatory practices of the ensemble that he founded there. As he said in a published interview (Cole Gagne, Tracy Caras, and Gene Bagnato, *Soundpieces: Interviews with American Composers* [Scarecrow Press, 1982]):

Time Cycle was the transition point between my earlier and my recent style. There is a break. The break occurred about 1956. I was at UCLA. I was professor of composition, and I wanted to get my students away from the tyranny of the printed note. So I invented a form of non-jazz ensemble improvisation. It was meant to change my students; well, it changed me.

The earliest experiments were tonal, but, said Foss, they sounded like “music badly remembered,” so he tried to come up with ways to create and improvise music that would not possibly sound like what one had heard before.

In its original form, *Time Cycle* was composed for soprano and orchestra. It was premiered by the New York Philharmonic under the direction of Foss’s old friend Leonard Bernstein in 1960. At that time the piece included chamber improvisations between the four movements.

A rather dubious idea [says Foss], one which I jokingly offered to...Bernstein.... We didn’t take the idea very seriously, but that night I got a call from the New York Philharmonic, engaging the Improvisation Ensemble to do just that, to appear like a *commedia dell’arte* group of clowns and improvise between the songs. This became rather famous, and I was stuck with this format for *Time Cycle*, so that I even had to bring my clowns to the Berlin Philharmonic for the European premiere.

In preparing the chamber version of *Time Cycle*, though, Foss removed the idea of collective improvisation between the movements, which he prefers because “no one else really can improvise in a way that would be relevant to the style of the songs.”

As it stands, then, *Time Cycle* is a completely notated work, though one that had grown out of Foss’s activities with the Improvisation Chamber Ensemble. It sets four texts, two in English and two in German, each of which has some reference to time or clocks.

Text removed due to copyright restrictions.

- "We're Late" by W. H. Auden
- "When the Bells Justle" by A. E. Houseman
- Excerpt from Franz Kafka's Diaries, January 16, with translation from German by the composer
- "O Man! Take Heed!" from *Thus Spake Zarathustra* by Friedrich Nietzsche, with translation from German by the composer.

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