Fleshold

Sunday 25 August 2002
7:00pm Pre-concert talk
8:00pm Concert

Iwaki Auditorium
ABC Southbank Centre
Luciano Berio  
**Sequenza X**

The tenth of Berio’s *Sequentzas* was composed for trumpeter Thomas Stevens. (The latest in the series is *Sequenza XIV* for cello, which received its premiere this year.) It is one of two in the series — the other being *Sequenza VII* for oboe, also requiring an offstage drone — to require two instruments. As with all the *Sequentzas*, the work exploits the tension between its basis in a series of harmonic fields and the essentially melodic nature of the solo instrument. Here this tension acquires another aspect: a piano is also on stage, with a pianist who depresses a series of silent chords. Although the strings are not themselves struck, they resonate sympathetically, allowing the work’s harmonic fields to be for once explicitly (if distantly) heard. The writing for trumpet itself makes little use of unorthodox techniques or timbres — although there is frequent and evocative use of flutter tonguing and exaggerated vibrato, and the wide tessitura brings some unusual areas of the range into play.

Pierre Boulez  
**Sonatine**

The form of Boulez’ flute *Sonatine* is explicitly derived from that of Arnold Schoenberg’s *Kammersymphonie*, whose ambition of single and multiple movement form is inherited in turn from Liszt’s B minor piano sonata. There is doubtless some intentional irony in Boulez’ double choice of an instrument laden with pastoral associations and a form associated with playful inconsequentiality. The work fully embodies the vigour with which the young composer strode on to the musical scene after the second world war — in the words of Olivier Messiaen, “like a young lion that has been flayed alive”. The *Sonatine* employs a wide range of serial techniques, including canons of rhythm as well as pitch. It also foreshadows the manner in which strict serialism would eventually move to the background in Boulez’ work: the series is frequently subsumed into purely colouristic effects such as piano glissandi and percussive clusters.

Matthew Bieniek  
**Fleshold: at the crossing over**

“Fleshold: at the crossing over” began its life not as a work for solo clarinet but, rather, as a concerto for clarinet and imaginary orchestra. The intention was to create a dynamic piece of music for clarinet in which the clarinetist would perform the solo line while also reading, or referring to from memory, the orchestral part. The psychological effect of this interplay between the soloist and orchestra would affect the performer’s state of mind, with audible results. Throughout, audiences would hear only the soloist’s music, but the solo part was to be written in such a manner that it would suggest an accompaniment, orchestral or otherwise, when performed.

As the piece evolved, the notion of a “silent” or “imagined” orchestra became less relevant as the solo line developed and absorbed elements of the putative orchestra. Ultimately, the orchestral part was discarded and the solo clarinet part retained. The relationship between the soloist and a defunct imaginary orchestra is alluded to via regular, if transitory, disappearance, through flirtation with silence (implying an “imaginary orchestra”), of the clarinet from the audible plane of perception. In effect, the music crosses over between actual sounds and imagined sounds (silence).

“Fleshold” may broadly be divided into three sections, each headed by subtitles referring to the relative character of the musical materials within the larger context of the structure of the piece as a whole. In order of appearance: “At the crossing over” is an initial presentation, and refers to the imminent transformation of material; “The crossing over” is that point where the material reaches a state — a *ne plus ultra* — from which it can only retreat; and “Beyond the crossing over” is the vestigial aftermath of the preceding climax: a “what happens after”.

“Fleshold” is, then, about the “crossing over” — the transformation or movement — of material from one place or state, sounding or silent (imagined), to another.

Premiered by Carl Rosman on 29 November, 2001 during an Ensemble Offspring concert held in the Paddington Uniting Church, Sydney, Australia.

Matthew Bieniek

Chris Dench  
**’atsiluth/shîn**

When I finally began to compose the kind of music that I felt comfortable calling my own, in the mid-seventies, I almost at once hit a snag. The most important aspect of any music is its architectural coherence (or, handled carefully enough, incoherence); this is also the most large-scale and challenging aspect of organising one’s sonic ideas. After much contemplation, it dawned on me that the form that most naturally suited my then-current musical thinking was that of the Creation Myth, the ‘nothing-into-something’ trajectory. I proceeded to write a sequence of large ensemble piece that unfolded to a greater or lesser extent in mimicry of Big Bang cosmology: the first symphony, the 1982 brass nonet, *énoncé*, *symphony 2/afterimages*. However, I could not seem to get past this persistent obsession, and in 1992 I decided to finally exorcise myself by writing *’atsiluth/shîn*, which, unlike the previous hard-science-derived works, draws its ideas from the kabbalistic model of the world as emerging from the continual operation of a zone of archetypes. *’Atsiluth* — named after the highest of the four realms of the Tree of Life, from which reality continually emanates — initially presents an amorphous world ‘prior’ to the birth of melody and harmony, and, as the music progresses, accrues more and more perceptible definition. The end result of this *autopoiesis*, or self-organisation, is the concluding bass flute solo, *shîn*, which demonstrates the fully-evolved sonic world that only existed as a potentiality at the beginning of the work.

Chris Dench

György Ligeti, Johannes Brahms  
**Trios**

Brahms’ Horn Trio dates from 1865, and is the second of his published piano trios; György Ligeti’s counterpart was composed in 1982 for the trio of Saschko Gawriloff (violin), Hermann Baumann (horn) and Eckart Besch (piano). In addition to its dedication (*Hommage à Brahms*), Ligeti’s work makes a number of references,
both more and less explicit, to its predecessor. The movement headings are clearly derived from those of Brahms, although they are reordered — giving the work a distinctly less optimistic trajectory. The movements also take some of the texture types of Brahms’ op. 40 as a starting point: Brahms’ two quick rhythmic movements in triple time become a deconstructed march and a rapid ostinato in irregular groupings.

As with the horn parts in all Brahms’ orchestral works, that in the op. 40 trio was conceived for a valveless ‘natural’ horn, although the greater versatility of the valved horn had seen it largely supplant its ancestor. Brahms retained an allegiance to the simpler form of the instrument, which he had played in his childhood, and even the intricate solos in the second and third symphonies use only notes available to the valveless horn, although it seems unlikely that he ever heard them performed on this instrument. Ligeti’s trio also makes reference to the principle of the ‘natural’ horn. Many of the harmonics available from the valveless horn are out of tune with the equally-tempered scale of the piano: performance in a traditional harmonic context requires a combination of subtle hand and lip adjustments which have a distinctive effect on tone colour, and these effects are sometimes consciously deployed by Brahms even in his orchestral works. Ligeti uses these same harmonics for microtonal rather than colouristic effect — the player is directed to leave the intonation unadjusted, and sometimes even to remove the right hand from the bell of the instrument entirely. This has the effect of alienating the instrument from the harmonic world inhabited by its colleagues — with particular effect in the last section of the march movement, where the hornist is directed to “blare at full volume, without consideration of the violin and piano”. (These microtonal effects are even more spectacularly employed in Ligeti’s recent Hamburgisches Konzert, for horn soloist, doubling valved and natural horn, and an ensemble including four horn players — all on various sizes of valveless instrument, and thus each with a different reservoir of microtones.)

Both trios are dominated by a memorable lament. In Brahms’ work this is the third movement, a mournful Wiegenlied reportedly composed in memory of his childhood, and explicitly designated mesto (sadly) — the first of only two works in which Brahms used this indication. It makes reference to the folksong Dort in den Weiden steht ein Haus, in a brief duo for horn and violin (the movement’s only sustained excursion into the major) just before the movement’s climax. Despite the customary quick finale, it is perhaps this moment which persists in the memory — at least in part because the finale is entirely based on this same folksong, at a much quicker speed. Ligeti foregrounds his Lamento movement even more starkly by placing it last. He also employs for the first time a texture, prominent in his recent works, which he has explicitly designated a “lamento motif” — a network of descending chromatic scales across all the instruments, which quite overbalances the movement’s nominal passacaglia structure.

Luciano Berio Sequenza X (1984)
Pierre Boulez Sonatine (1946)
Matthew Bieniek Fleshold: at the crossing over (2000)
György Ligeti Trio (1982)

I. Andante con tenerezza
II. Vivacissimo molto ritmico
III. Alla marcia – Più mosso – Tempo primo
IV. Lamento. Adagio

Chris Dench ʼatšiluth/shîn (1991)
Johannes Brahms Trio in Es opus 40 (1865)

I. Andante – Poco più animato
II. Scherzo: Allegro – Molto meno Allegro
III. Adagio mesto
IV. Finale: Allegro con brio

Libra Ensemble gave its first public performances in 1992, and since then has enjoyed consistent critical acclaim as one of Australia’s most respected presenters of new music. Libra has established itself as an important part of the diversity of the Australian concert music scene, with a strong track record of advocacy in adventurous new music composition and performance. This is reflected in Libra’s growing audience base of committed listeners with roots in both new and more established classical music traditions, seeking an alternative to the standard concert hall diet.

One of the most pressing concerns for new repertoire is the widening gap between it and the ‘conventional’ repertoire familiar to audiences. Libra Ensemble aims to bridge this gap by presentation of core 20th-century repertoire largely neglected by other Australian performing organisations.

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Libra’s repertoire encompasses widely varying ensembles based around a core instrumentation of flute, clarinet, piano, percussion, guitar, violin and cello. This has been expanded up to chamber orchestra for works such as Berg’s Kammerkonzert, Henze’s Kammermusik 1958, and the Australian premiere of Elliott Carter’s Clarinet Concerto.

3
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