

# MUSICAL EVENTS

*Feast of Reason, Flow of Soul*

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CHARLES WUORINEN has been in fluent, fertile vein, composing copiously and composing well. In six April days, works of his appeared on the bills of at least five New York concerts; two of them were world premières, one was new to America, and one new to New York. I heard three of the premières; they were exhilarating pieces that left one regretful they were done only once. The most captivating of all was the Horn Trio (1981), given its first performance, last week, at a Group for Contemporary Music concert in the Kaufmann Hall of the 92nd Street Y. It lasts ten and a half minutes. It is for horn, violin, and piano, and was played by Julie Landsman (to whom it is dedicated), Benjamin Hudson, and the composer. Their performance was cultivated, witty, and brilliant. The work's demands, especially on the lips and breath of the hornist, are virtuoso. Wuorinen has lately forsworn writing program notes, believing (so a program note for the Horn Trio said) "that the listener should simply listen." I simply listened. The first epithet that occurs to me is "Haydnish," by which I would indicate a play of musical ideas so dexterous, inventive, and happy that a listener to them smiles with pleasure. The music dances on its way, changing gait sometimes at a proposal from one of

the three instruments, sometimes as if on a new impulse commonly shared. There is a seductive waltz episode. The work, in one movement, is "classical" in being a discourse on pregnant motifs, even on melodious themes. Excellently Haydnish is the surprise when an apparent close in (more or less) C proves to be not final: it dissolves, and there are two more turns in the path and a delightful stretch through which the players tripple merrily before the true, satisfying end is reached.

The other pieces employed consorts more exotic. "Archaeopteryx" (1978), for bass trombone and ten players, was given its New York première by the St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble in Merkin Hall three days before the Horn Trio. It is one of two works composed some years ago for the trombonist David Taylor; the companion is "Archangel," for bass trombone and string quartet, which the Group introduced in December, 1978. Where "Archangel" is severe, dark, declamatory, "Archaeopteryx" is more jerkily animated. Wuorinen's renunciation of program notes leaves the listener guessing why the piece is named for a prehistoric bird, but the title inevitably sets up images in the mind. Rightly or wrongly, they seemed to be reflected in the music. The work lasts fifteen min-

utes. It begins with scrappy, punchy sounds, and then the soloist embarks on short flights, some of which inspire cadenza exchanges with members of the ensemble (three flutes, two clarinets, two horns, tuba, piano, and marimba). Sustained melodies alternate with skittering and dithering. Eventually, the music "fossilizes" (as the archaeopteryx did). Hard, bright stratified chords made a strange new sound that has continued to haunt me.

Two days earlier, the New Music Consort, in Carnegie Recital Hall, gave the world première of the Trio for Bass Instruments (double-bass, bass trombone, and tuba, played by Joseph Tamosaitis, Mr. Taylor, and David Braynard). It was composed in 1981. It is eight minutes of lively, diverting Stravinskian play—not an important piece but an attractive one, and lighter in touch than the forces involved would suggest. Wuorinen's debts to Stravinsky are unconcealed, joyfully acknowledged: in this Trio, in the Two-Part Symphony (a twelve-note symphony in C), in the layered wind sonorities of "The Winds" and "Archaeopteryx." He is moving on paths toward which Stravinsky pointed. His music has been always exuberant, often glittering, never dull. In the latest works, there seems to be a new refinement and precision.

—ANDREW PORTER