

NO JOKE: PART DEUX

The Notes

Some of you may remember the April First: No Joke recital Valerie Anastasio, Bruce Berg and I played a couple years ago. This is the second installment. I guess part of the joke is that it's not on April 1st.

The twentieth century in music was one of exploration and experimentation. Composers experimented with new music languages, some rejecting the tonal language that was their inheritance, some expanding the boundaries of traditional tonality. Composers also experimented with new sounds, in an effort to expand their palette. We will hear some of these today in key-claps and flutter tonguing. Composers explored new ways of structuring pieces, sometimes working with traditional forms in new ways, sometimes creating entirely new schemes. Each of the composers on today's program worked with or against the musical tradition of their predecessors. I hope you will enjoy the results.



Edgard Varèse was born in Paris on November 22, 1883 and died in New York City on November 6, 1965, just 16 days before his 85th birthday. Although his father wanted him to be an engineer, he was intent on becoming a composer. In 1903, at the age of twenty, he began to study composition first at the Schola Cantorum with d'Indy and then at the Paris Conservatoire with Widor. He met Strauss and Busoni during trips to Berlin between 1908 and 1915. During this time he also discovered Schoenberg's music and became acquainted with Debussy. He emigrated to the United States in 1915. He destroyed all his works composed before this period, with the exception of *Bourgogne* (1908). His new compositions were comprised of dissonant chords, complex rhythms for combinations of percussion and/or winds.

System was anathema to Varèse. He was as suspicious of tonality as he was of serialism, considering them a composer's abdication of his responsibility to create something new. He viewed music as organized sound. Sound's properties of pitch, timbre and intensity were elements to be used in constructing a piece. Pitches existed for him independent of their polyphonic or harmonic possibilities. This is evident in *Density 21.5* in various ways. Many of the melodies consist of pitches whose lengths are determined by a specific ratio. The piece as a whole seems to explore the gradual expansion of the opening three-note pattern to include an increasing part of the flute's range.

Robert Dick, flutist and composer, has this to say about this piece: "Varèse changed the way composers think about a solo voice with this piece. It is the first work to recognize that every note on the flute, or any other acoustic instrument, sounds different from all the other notes, has an individual timbre."

Varèse wrote *Density 21.5* for the inauguration of Georges Barrere's platinum flute. 21.5 is the density of platinum. It was premiered by Mr. Barrere on February 16, 1936, when Varèse was 56 years old. It was the last piece he wrote for almost 20 years – in large part from frustration and depression in not gaining financial support for his musical endeavors.

Jacques Ibert was born in Paris on August 15th, 1890 and died there in February 5th, 1962 at 71 years of age. He studied at the Conservatory between 1910 and 1914, when left to fight in WWI. In 1919 he won the Rome prize. He was one of the most famous composers of his day. When he died, he was working on a piece commissioned by the Boston Symphony Orchestra to celebrate their 75th anniversary.



Jacques Ibert

Ibert's music, like Debussy's, was closely associated with the other arts. It was an "expression of an interior adventure." In this piece the voice and flute are treated as equal partners. The flute provides almost pictorial commentary on the imagery in the text. The opening of the

piece is a good example of the “interior adventure”. It is not possible to ascertain the meter or the key of the movement until several bars into the piece.



Victor Segalen

The poems Ibert used in *Deux Stèles* are taken from *Stèles*, a series of poems by Victor Segalen in 1912. The songs were written in August, 1925, and first performed at a house concert on January 26, 1926 by Pierre Bernac, voice and Louis Fleury, flute. Ibert was thirty-six.

Segalen was born on January 14th, 1878. His poetry is strongly influenced by the cultures he encountered as a naval doctor.

In 1908 he became interested in China and moved there in 1910. The first edition of *Stèles* was published in Beijing. Segalen returned from the orient, ill, in 1917. He attempted to found a cultural center for the far East in Paris in 1918. He died in Algiers after a two-month convalescence in May of 1919.

In his preface to *Stèles*, Segalen explains “During the Han dynasty, two thousand years ago, stèles were the supports designed to facilitate placing coffins in the earth. Commentaries were written on them as a funeral prayer. They are now stone plaques, placed on a pedestal, pointing toward the sky and bearing an inscription.”

“Their orientation is significant. The stèles pointing south indicate empire and power, those toward the north speak of friendship, those toward the east (e.g. those in tonight’s program. Author’s note), of love, those toward the west speak of things military. Placed along a road, they are addressed to those who would encounter them by chance during their wanderings; others, pointing inward are those meant for the me, the self.”



Peter Schickele

Peter Schickele has been involved in many areas of the music business. He has written music for classical, jazz, rock and folk groups. He has written music for concerts, film, television, radio and plays. He has written for groups as diverse as the St. Louis symphony and Sesame Street, even some of the music and lyrics for *Oh, Calcutta!*

Mr. Schickele writes, of *The Lowest Trees Have Tops*, “The cantata has the emotional shape of an arch, in which the position of the sun in the sky (*Morning Song, Noon Song, Evening Song*) reflects the progress of the protagonist’s love. We see her move from the abstract comments on love contained in *The Lowest Trees Have Tops*, through the controlled passion of *Hot Sun, Cool Fire*, to the zenith of happy union, *My True Love Hath My Heart*, and from there down through the nostalgic sorrow, derangement and resigned acceptance of death in

the three Herrick Poems.” The first performance was given by the Jubal Trio and John Graham, viola, in the fall of 1975 at a WBAI Free Music Store concert in New York City. Mr. Schickele was forty.

Mr. Schickele pays homage to the musical style of the period in which the poetry was written. Harmony in music, during the sixteenth century, was modal, not tonal. In *The Lowest Trees Have Tops*, there is not a single dominant to tonic cadence. This sort of cadence is the hallmark of tonal harmony.

He also pays homage to Debussy, whose work for the same instrumental ensemble closes this today’s performance. In the opening flute solo, for example, there is a melodic element that is drawn directly from *Syrinx*, Debussy’s work for solo flute. In addition, there are many passages in the piece where the flute and viola play in unison, a compositional device Debussy uses frequently in his *Sonate* for flute, viola and harp.

Ruth Crawford-Seeger was born in Ohio on July 3, 1901. She died in Chevy Chase, MD on November 18, 1953. Her early training was in Florida and Chicago, and in 1929, she moved to New York. She studied there with Charles Seeger, the famous musicologist, whom she later married. She is Pete Seeger’s stepmother.



Ruth Crawford-Seeger

In 1930 she was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship and studied in Berlin and Paris. The first performance of the *Diaphonic Suite for solo flute (or oboe)*

was in New York City on March 1, 1930 at a League of Composers concert when Ms. Crawford was 29.

Ruth Crawford abandoned composition between the 30's and the 50's and concentrated instead on transcribing folk music with her husband. She returned to composition in 1952 to write the *Suite for Woodwind Quintet* in 1952. She died of cancer in 1953.

Diaphonic Suite for flute solo is an atonal work. The opening and closing movements are constructed almost like poetry, with the phrases "rhyming" in their use of rhythmic motifs. She once said "One can draw a kind of rhythmic or dynamic pleasure from the very smallest things." She uses this credo in the *Diaphonic Suite* in several ways: each movement is short, only a few minutes in length; her use of time signatures -- she uses 1/4 time signature throughout. The third movement is a gem of economy of means. She referred to it as a "triple passacaglia perpetuo mobile." The "triple passacaglia" refers to the three 7s used in its composition. It is in 7/8, used as 7 note row that is repeated 7 times, each time on the subsequent note of the row. The entire structure of the piece, both its pitch content and form are determined in the first seven notes. She repeats the row in its original form twice, then twice each in inversion (upside-down), retrograde (backwards) and retrograde inversion (backwards and upside-down). The final iteration of the row is on its original pitch in retrograde.



Henri Dutilleux

Henry Dutilleux was born January 22, 1916 in Angers, France. From 1933-1938 he attended the Paris Conservatory, studying with, among others, Phillippe Gaubert, famous flutist and conductor of the Paris Opéra. He won the prestigious *Prix de Rome* in 1938 and since then has enjoyed many high profile positions, including professor of composition at the Paris Conservatory.

Dutilleux dislikes most of his early compositions; he thinks they were written before he had fully formed his compositional voice. It is true that his later works are much denser and darker, but aspects of his music he himself has described, "avoidance of prefabricated formal scaffolding, a penchant towards a certain type of sonority (with priority given to what might be called 'the joy of sound'), . . . the absolute necessity of *economy* of means", are clearly evident in this work.

The *Sonatine* is a one-movement work, divided into sections by cadenza-like passages for the flute. The opening section, in 7/8 time is followed by slow, lyric passages which, in turn are followed by the closing section, in a sprightly 2/4. It was premiered January 17, 1944 by Gaston Courelle, flute and the composer at the piano. He was 28. The flute *Sonatine* was commissioned as a "test piece" for the Paris Conservatory in 1943. These test pieces are required of flutists who want to graduate from the Conservatory. They play a recital that includes the test piece which they receive a month before the performance. If they are awarded a first prize, they graduate.

Claude Debussy was one of the most influential composers of the twentieth century. He was born on August 22, 1862 and died in Paris on March 25, 1918. He entered the Paris Conservatory in 1872 where he studied theory with Lavignac. He won the *Prix de Rome* in 1884.

Debussy's intimately weaves the voices in this work. Each voice has occasion to work with the theme; indeed, this sonata is often like a dance with constantly changing partners. At times the flute will dance with the melody, and pass him to the viola (e.g., in the opening bars of the first movement), or the viola will be partnered with the melody and hand her to the harp.



Claude Debussy

This sonata, one of the last pieces Debussy wrote, breaks ground in many ways. Formally, Debussy stretches the boundaries by experimenting with traditional forms. Tonally, he pushes boundaries as well. For example, tonal works include sections in keys related to the key of the opening of the movement. In the third movement of this piece, however, the main sections are in F and B natural, a key relationship with no tonal implications. In the end, however, Debussy bows to tradition and closes the piece in F major. The final movement brings to mind Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, writ small.

I'd like to thank the other performers on this recital. Without their generous help and hard work, this program could not have been. I'd like to dedicate the performance to my college flute teacher, "Prof" Fred Schroeder, who died in January.

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The Players

Matthew Doherty is a founding member of the Arcadian Winds woodwind quintet and has appeared as a soloist at the Warebrook Contemporary Music Festival in Newport, Vermont. He also performs regularly with The Gilded Harps of Boston and Copley Chamber Players of Boston. Having received his Bachelor of Music Degree from the Baldwin-Wallace Conservatory his Master of Music Degree is from Boston University. He coaches chamber music for the Greater Boston Youth Symphony Orchestra.

John Ranck, a Community Music Center faculty member, is a frequent recitalist, both in this country and abroad. Co-principal flutist with the New England Philharmonic for many years, he has played with such other orchestras as the Faust Festival Orchestra in Dornach, Switzerland. His D.M.A. degree is from the Manhattan School of Music, where he studied with Thomas Nyfenger. He was graduate assistant to Samuel Baron at SUNY Stony Brook, where he earned his M.M. degree. He is President of the James Pappoutsakis Flute Competition and is on the advisory board of the Greater Boston Flute Association.

Frances Rios studied viola with Karen Tuttle at the Manhattan School of Music where she was also coached in chamber music by Lillian Fuchs and Ariana Bronne. While living in New York City she taught violin and viola at the Harlem School of the Arts. At the Shawnigan Music Festival in British Columbia she worked with William Primrose. Frances has also studied with Patricia McCarty, Louis Kievman, Hugh Brown, and Eugene Lehner. She is a founding member of the Lavazza String Quartet, freelances throughout New England and teaches violin and viola lessons in the Milton (Mass.) ALP program.

Kaja Schuppert sings professionally throughout New England. She has performed in the last three seasons of Raylynmor Opera in Keene, NH, as Josephine in H.M.S. Pinafore, Papagena in The Magic Flute, and Mabel in The Pirates of Penzance. She has also performed with Ocean State Lyric Opera, Longwood Opera, the Harvard Radcliffe Gilbert and Sullivan Players, Harvard Lowell House Opera, and Opera North. Kaja is a 1995 graduate of Dartmouth College and holds a Master's Degree from the New England Conservatory, where she currently studies voice with Mark St. Laurent.

Stephen Yenger, a Community Music Center faculty member, has taught at the Louisiana State University and is a frequent adjudicator and lecturer on music and the humanities. He is the founder and director of Chamber Music at Corrymore House, a summer music festival on the island of Achill in Ireland, and has had many of his compositions performed by the Premier quartet of the Shreveport Symphony. He has a Master of Music degree from Boston University and a Bachelor of Music degree from Wittenberg University.