



Thursdays at Noon: *Clear Things May Not Be Seen*

Bob Becker Ensemble

Bob Becker, Colleen Cook, Tiago Delgado, Maxime Despax, Heng-Han Hou, Lindsay Kesselman, Midori Koga, Andrea Ludwig, Christopher Norton, Louis Pino, Allison Rich and Gloria Yip

Thursday, February 6, 2020 at 12:10 pm
Walter Hall, 80 Queen's Park

PROGRAM

Never in Word (1998)

Lindsay Kesselman, soprano
Bob Becker, vibraphone
Christopher Norton, marimba
Louis Pino, glockenspiel/crotales
Midori Koga, piano

Bob Becker (lyrics by Conrad Aiken)

To Immortal Bloom (2017)

Andrea Ludwig, soprano
Bob Becker, vibraphone
Allison Rich, cello
Midori Koga, piano

Bob Becker (lyrics by Conrad Aiken)

Cryin' Time (1994)

Lindsay Kesselman, soprano
Bob Becker, vibraphone
Christopher Norton, marimba
Midori Koga, piano

Bob Becker (lyrics by Sandra Meigs)

Clear Things May Not Be Seen (2018)

Lindsay Kesselman and Andrea Ludwig, sopranos
Tiago Delgado and Colleen Cook, clarinets
Heng-Han Hou and Gloria Yip, violins
Maxime Despax, viola
Allison Rich, cello
Bob Becker, vibraphone
Louis Pino, marimba
Christopher Norton, conductor

Bob Becker (lyrics by Conrad Aiken)

PROGRAM NOTES

Never in Word was composed in Toronto during July/August 1998. It is scored for soprano, piano, marimba, vibraphone, celesta or glockenspiel, and crotales. The lyrics are from a short poem by the American author Conrad Aiken (1889 - 1973). The poem itself is untitled, but appears as number eighty-three in an extended series of ninety-six poems under the collective title *TIME IN THE ROCK or Preludes to Definition* (first copyrighted in 1932 and published in 1953 by Oxford University Press). The piece begins in a very fast tempo, which is maintained until the palindromic line in the second stanza: “time in change and change in time”, when the tempo shifts to a somewhat slower pace. Two places in the poem suggest extended musical development. The first is after the last line of the first stanza: “but music heard”. There is no punctuation following the word “heard”, even though the first word of the succeeding stanza is capitalized. It is as if the poet pauses here momentarily to listen, perhaps to some imagined music. This section of the piece is purely instrumental – the singer is tacet. The second development occurs after the last line of the fifth stanza (the very end of the poem): “never in word”. This time the development includes vocalise – wordless singing. The piece ends with a return to the fast tempo and opening material, played by the instruments alone.

To Immortal Bloom was composed during June/July 2017 and is scored for soprano, vibraphone, cello and piano. The lyrics are drawn from poem XXI of Conrad Aiken’s *Preludes for Memnon* (1931), with the text edited by the composer. The obvious musical and numerical references, as well as a feeling of reverie in the concluding imagery, were the inspiration for the musical setting. The melodic and harmonic material is strictly derived from a matrix of four nine-tone scales that has been the basis for all of my music for the past twenty years.

Cryin’ Time was composed during July/August, 1994 and is scored for vibraphone, marimba, piano and soprano solo. The lyrics were adapted from a poem by the distinguished Canadian artist Sandra Meigs. The poem, along with an elaborate series of oil paintings, formed an installation entitled *Baby*, first shown in June, 1994 at the Susan Hobbs Gallery in Toronto. In its original form, the poem is a horrifying story that deals with the morbid fear of a young mother: She accidentally stumbles and drops her new baby into a deep river canyon. At the same time, the somewhat matter-of-fact narrative style gives the text something of the feeling of a “hurtin’” country/western love song. I wanted the musical piece to play even more on this ambiguity, which was the reason for “adapting” the text (done with the artist’s permission). I did this primarily by substituting the word “you” for “baby” or “the baby”, deleting a number of verses that didn’t maintain the love song concept, and, occasionally, contracting verbs and making minor changes in syntax to make the text more “singable”.

Clear Things May Not Be Seen was composed during 2017 and 2018. It is scored for two soprano soloists, string quartet, clarinet, bass clarinet, marimba and vibraphone. While a college student I discovered the work of American author Conrad Aiken, and became enamored of his distinctive poetry. During 1996/97 I selected and edited a large amount of text drawn from Aiken’s epic cycle *Time in the Rock* (subtitled *Preludes to Definition*), comprised of 96 individual poems. A year later I began an extensive project, still ongoing, to set this material in various musical formats. The lyrics for *Clear Things May Not Be Seen* are drawn from three of Aiken’s poems: *Miracles*; and poems XCII and LXXXIX from *Time in the Rock*.

Coming up at Thursdays at Noon

Feb 13 *What Makes Human Compositions Human?* (Part 1): lecture-recital with the Interro Quartet

SPECIAL PRESENTATION

Feb 28 *Friday at Five*: Amatis Piano Trio

Join us as we welcome the Amatis Piano Trio to our Irene R. Miller Piano Trio Residency program.