

CERDDORION
vocal ensemble

directed by
Susanne Peck

presents

Gothic Echoes

Steve Friedman, Assistant Conductor

Sunday, May 23, 1999
4:00 pm
Church of St. Luke in the fields
487 Hudson Street
New York, New York

CERDDORION

Sopranos

Eric S. Brenner
Maria Hladczuk
Marilyn Lenat
Amy Litt
Lisa Rein
Jeanette Rodriguez
Ellen Schorr
Thais Solomon

Altos

Grace Check
Susan Glass
Kate Troast Kurz
Leonore Max
Laurie Rios

Tenors

David J. Deschamps
Philip Gallo
Philip Hilton
Tim Hutfilz
Steve Parkey

Basses

Raphael Biran
Peter Cobb
Shawn Hall
Norman Holman
Peter Kurz

Instrumentalists

Oboes

Diane Lesser
William Meredith

English horn

Marcia Butler

Bassoons

Kim Laskowski
Maureen Strengé

Trumpets

Kevin Cobb
Susan Radcliff

Trombones

Michael Powell
Thomas Hutchinson

Bass trombone

Jeffrey Caswell

Gothic Echoes

Johannes Ockeghem
(ca 1410-1497)

Missa "L'homme armé"

Igor Stravinsky
(1882-1971)

Mass for Mixed Chorus and
Double Woodwind Quintet

Soprano: Amy Litt
Alto: Grace Check
Tenor: Tim Hutfilz
Bass: Raphael Biran

INTERMISSION

Benjamin Britten
(1913-1976)
Words by W. H. Auden

Hymn to St. Cecilia
Soprano: Jeanette Rodriguez
Alto: Leonore Max
Tenor: Tim Hutfilz
Bass: Raphael Biran

There will be a reception after the concert. Please join us!

Notes and Texts

"Every dissonance doesn't have to resolve itself if it doesn't happen to feel like it, any more than every horse should have its tail bobbed just because it's the fashion."

—Charles Ives

THE INTERPLAY OF DISSONANCE AND CONSONANCE accounts for much of music's passion and urgency. Dissonance is generally defined as a combination of tones that create an unpleasant or tense effect on a listener; consonance, conversely, is defined as a pleasing or relaxed combination of notes. But dissonance is in the ear of the beholder—a matter of perception that changes from era to era and culture to culture. For instance, in the 12th and 13th centuries, the third—today considered the most consonant of intervals—was perceived as a dissonance. Compounding this ambiguous relativity of dissonance, some scientists have theorized that there is a psycho-neurological component at play in determining human reactions to combinations of tones. In other words, there may be some correspondence between the sound waves produced by some notes and our own brain waves.

Whatever the reasons that lead listeners to perceive certain combinations of notes as discordant, masters such as Ockeghem, Stravinsky and Britten employ dissonance as an effective technique to bring an exquisite intensity to their music. Though the three pieces we are performing tonight—Ockeghem's *Missa "L'Homme armé,"* Stravinsky's *Mass in C* and Britten's *Hymn to Saint Cecilia*—were composed across a span of nearly five hundred years, there is a similar emotional beauty created in each by the use of sustained harmonic dissonance. And to my ears, there is also a similarity in the type of dissonance used in these three masterpieces.

Johannes Ockeghem (circa 1410–1497), along with Josquin and Dufay, is considered one of the greatest composers of the 15th century. He was so well regarded in his day, not only as a superb composer and teacher but as a brilliant singer and an exceptional citizen, that upon his death, celebrated poets such as Cretin, Molinet and Erasmus lamented his passing. (Molinet's "Nymphes des Bois," set to music by Josquin and recently performed by Cerddorion, is considered one of the masterworks of the Renaissance.)

Ockeghem began his career as a chorister in Antwerp and later joined the chapel of the King of France. In royal service until his death, he composed some sixteen masses, the *Missa "L'Homme Armé"* being one in a tradition of works (others notably by Josquin, Palestrina and Dufay) based on the popular French folk song "L'homme armé." A *cantus firmus* mass, which uses a pre-existing melody as a compositional springboard for melodic and contrapuntal development, *Missa L'Homme armé* foreshadows later 16th-century works in its independence of melodic lines and its treatment of the *Agnus Dei*, the last movement, as a culminating point for the mass.

Ockeghem's method of composing was probably similar to most of his 15th-century contemporaries in that he wrote or borrowed complete melodies and then layered other parts on top of the original melody. Each line has an implied harmonic logic, with accidentals inserted to fit with this logic and the prevailing taste at a particular time or

region. Hence, Ockeghem was not very concerned with the vertical harmonic implications of some of these accidentals, which create stark, dissonant-sounding shifts. The constant shifting from G mixolydian mode (G-A-B-C-D-E-F-G) to G major (G-A-B-C-D-E-F sharp-G) to G minor (G-A-B flat-C-D-E flat-F-G), throughout the piece, provides for a varied and surprisingly modern and beautiful texture, while creating an atmosphere of spiritual introspection.

Dissonance and shifting harmonic sonorities also create a mood of spiritual reflection in Stravinsky's *Mass in C*, though in this case it was almost certainly a more deliberate use of dissonance. Born in Russia, Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) studied orchestration with the Russian master Rimsky-Korsakov. In 1908, he met the Ballet Russe impresario Sergei Diaghilev and began a long collaboration that resulted in some of his best-known works, including *The Firebird*, *Petroushka* and *The Rite of Spring*. He later immigrated to the United States, where he composed the *Mass in C* from around 1944 to 1948.

Firmly rooted in Stravinsky's neo-classical period, the *Mass in C* was intended for liturgical use (though rarely used for it) and employs what the composer himself called "very cold music, absolutely cold, that will appeal directly to the spirit." This statement almost certainly refers to Stravinsky's austere and brilliant use of dissonance. As in many neo-classical pieces of this period, the structural and compositional devices employed in the mass are simple: a bit of canonic imitation and a quiet, almost chant-like declaration of the text (the most complex it gets is with a four-part fugue for the *Pleni sunt coeli*, which lasts for just twelve measures). Using subtly insistent and often dissonant harmonic language, Stravinsky creates a mood that is at once inspirational and chilling.

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976), a prolific English composer, studied at the Royal College of Music with John Ireland and Frank Bridge. He composed many operas (among them *Peter Grimes*, *Billy Budd* and *The Turn of the Screw*), orchestral works, chamber pieces, song cycles and various choral works. Written in 1942 as Britten was returning by ship to England following a three-year visit to America, *Hymn to Saint Cecilia* employs the text of three W. H. Auden poems. It's easy to imagine Britten composing aboard the ship when one hears the lilting, expansive setting of the first poem with its swaying 6/4 meter and shifting harmonies. The setting of the second poem, which employs canonic imitation, contains discordant seconds and sevenths created by the layering of melody on top of melody; the resulting dissonance, though different in kind, was created in much the same way as the dissonance of Ockeghem's mass: In the third setting, primarily in A Lydian mode (A-B-C sharp-D sharp-E-F sharp-G sharp-A), Britten's use of harmonic dissonance, with its pedal notes and polychords, is much more reminiscent of Stravinsky's insistent harmonic language. It is Britten's sophisticated use of dissonance that infuses his settings of Auden's poems with the same spiritual intensity that pervades the masses by Ockeghem and Stravinsky—though in the case of *Hymn to Saint Cecilia*, the composer favors boldness and drama over haunting introspection.

As the works on today's program demonstrate, Ockeghem, Stravinsky and Britten not only created pieces of extraordinary complexity and deeply felt beauty, but also emerged as innovators in their use of sustained harmonic dissonance. Indeed, were Charles Ives with us tonight, he would undoubtedly remark that these three masters of dissonance refused to bob their compositional tails in the prevailing fashion.

—David Deschamps

*L'homme armé doit on douter? On a fait partout
crier, que chacun se viegne armer
d'un haubregon de fer.*

*Oh, the man, the man at arms; fills the folk
with dread alarms, everywhere I hear them
wail, "find, if you would breast the gale, a good
stout coat of mail."*

Kyrie-eleison,
Christe eleison,
Kyrie eleison.

Kyrie

Lord have mercy upon us,
Christ have mercy upon us,
Lord have mercy upon us.

Gloria in excelsis Deo
et in terra pax omnibus bonae voluntatis.
Laudamus te, benedicimus te, adoramus te,
glorificamus te.
Gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam
tuam.
Domine Deus, Rex caelestis, Deus Pater
omnipotens.
Domine Fili unigenite Jesu Christe.
Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris.
Qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis:
Suscipe deprecationem nostram.
Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris, miserere nobis.
Quoniam tu solus sanctus, tu solus dominus,
tu solus altissimus, Jesu Christe.
Cum Sancto Spiritu in gloria Dei Patris.
Amen.

Gloria

Glory be to God on high,
and in earth peace to men of goodwill.
We praise You, we bless You, we worship
You, we glorify You.
We give thanks to You for Your great glory.

Credo in unum Deum, patrem
omnipotentem,
factorem caeli et terrae,
visibilium omnium et invisibilium.
Et in unum Dominum Jesum Christum,
filium Dei unigenitum.
Et ex patre natum ante omnia saecula.
Deum de Deo, lumen de lumine, Deum
verum de Deo vero.
Genitum non factum con substantialem patri
per quem omnia facta sunt.

O Lord God, heavenly King, God the Father
Almighty.
O Lord, the only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ.
O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
who takes away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer,
who sits at the right hand of the Father, have
mercy upon us.
For you only are holy. You only are most
high, Jesus Christ.
With the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the
Father. Amen.

Credo

I believe in one God, the Father almighty,
maker of Heaven and earth,
and of all things visible and invisible.
And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-
begotten Son of God,
and born of the Father before all ages.
God of God; Light of Light, true God of
true God;
begotten not made; consubstantial with the
Father,
by whom all things were made.

Qui propter nos homines et propter nostram salutem descendit de caelis.

Et incarnatus est de spiritu sancto ex Maria virgine et homo factus est.

Crucifixus etiam pro nobis sub Pontio Pilato passus et sepultus est.

Et resurrexit tertia die secundum scripturas

et ascendit in caelum

sedet ad dexteram patris.

Et iterum venturus est cum gloria iudicare vivos et mortuos.

cuius regni non erit finis.

Et in spiritum sanctum Dominum et vivificantem

qui ex patre filioque procedit.

Qui cum patre et filio simul adoratur et conglorificatur

qui locutus est per prophetas.

Et unam sanctam catholicam et apostolicam ecclesiam.]

Confiteor unum baptisma in remissionem peccatorum.

Et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum.

Et vitam venturi saeculi. Amen.

Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus, Dominus Deus sabaoth.

Pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria tua.

Osanna in excelsis.

Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.

Osanna in excelsis.

Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven.

And was incarnate by the Holy Spirit, out of the Virgin Mary; and was made man.

He was crucified also for us. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, and was buried.

And on the third day He rose again according to the scriptures;

and ascended into heaven;

and sits at the right hand of the Father;

and He shall come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead;

of whose Kingdom there shall be no end.

And (I believe) in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life;

Who proceeds from the Father and the Son;

Who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified.

Who speaks by the Prophets.

And in one holy catholic and apostolic church.

I confess one baptism for the remission of sins

and I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Sanctus

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts.

Heaven and earth are full of Your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

Agnus Dei

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.

Dona nobis pacem.

Lamb of God, who takes on the sins of the world, pray for us.

Grant us peace.

I

In a garden shady this holy lady
 With reverent cadence and subtle psalm,
 Like a black swan as death came on
 Poured forth her song in perfect calm:
 And by ocean's margin this innocent virgin
 Constructed an organ to enlarge her prayer,
 And notes tremendous from her great engine
 Thundered out on the Roman air.

Blonde Aphrodite rose up excited,
 Moved to delight by the melody,
 White as an orchid she rode quite naked
 In an oyster shell on top of the sea;
 At sounds so entrancing the angels dancing
 Came out of their trance into time again,
 And around the wicked in Hell's abysses
 The huge flame flickered and eased their pain.

*Blessed Cecilia, appear in visions
 To all musicians, appear and inspire:
 Translated Daughter, come down and startle
 Composing mortals with immortal fire.*

II

I cannot grow;
 I have no shadow
 To run away from,
 I only play.

I cannot err;
 There is no creature
 Whom I belong to,
 Whom I could wrong.

I am defeat
 When it knows it
 Can now do nothing
 By suffering.

All you lived through,
 Dancing because you
 No longer need it
 For any deed.
 I shall never be
 Different. Love me.

*Blessed Cecilia, appear in visions
 To all musicians, appear and inspire:
 Translated Daughter, come down and startle
 Composing mortals with immortal fire.*

III

O ear whose creatures cannot wish to fall,
 O calm of spaces unafraid of weight,
 Where Sorrow is herself, forgetting all
 The gaucheness of her adolescent state,
 Where Hope within the altogether strange
 From every outworn image is released,
 And Dread born whole and normal like a beast
 Into a world of truths that never change:
 Restore our fallen day; O re-arrange.

O dear white children casual as birds,
 Playing among the ruined languages,
 So small beside their large confusing words,
 So gay against the greater silences
 Of dreadful things you did: O hang the head,
 Impetuous child with the tremendous brain,
 O weep, child, weep, O weep away the stain,
 Lost innocence who wished your lover dead,
 Weep for the lives your wishes never led.

O cry created as the bow of sin
 Is drawn across our trembling violin.

O weep, child, weep, O weep away the stain.

O law drummed out by hearts against the still
 Long winter of our intellectual will.

That what has been may never be again.

O flute that throbs with the thanksgiving breath
 Of convalescents on the shores of death.

O bless the freedom that you never chose.

O trumpets that unguarded children blow
 About the fortress of their inner foe.

O wear your tribulation like a rose.

*Blessed Cecilia, appear in visions
 To all musicians, appear and inspire:
 Translated Daughter, come down and startle
 Composing mortals with immortal fire.*

ABOUT US

CERDDORION (the name means "musicians" in Welsh) is a chamber ensemble comprising some of New York City's finest choral singers.

Founded by Susanne Peck in 1995, Cerddorion is dedicated to setting new standards for extraordinary choral performance. As the group's name suggests, Cerddorion aspires to musicianship in its fullest sense, using the human voice to explore and fulfill the expressive potential of the art. Audiences have quickly come to know Cerddorion for its interpretive depth as well as its technical excellence.

Cerddorion's repertoire spans the choral literature, from the early Renaissance to new works. Past programs have focused on Josquin Desprez; Monteverdi; early American hymns and spirituals; double-choir works by Bach and Schütz; Brahms, Schubert, and Rheinberger; Delius, Elgar, and other post-Romantics; Hindemith and his contemporaries; and 20th-century New York City composers.

Although a relative newcomer, Cerddorion has attracted significant recognition. In August 1998 the group served as the resident teaching ensemble for the inaugural Dennis Keene Choral Festival in Kent, Connecticut and will be serving in the same capacity in August 1999. Other prestigious invitations include collaborations with the acclaimed early music ensemble Concert Royal in performances of Bach's *Cantata 140* and Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*. Since October 1997, Cerddorion has been Artist-in-Residence at the New York Public Library's Tompkins Square branch.

Gannet Newspapers critic Francis Brancaleone called Cerddorion's Fall 1997 program "a connoisseur's concert, tastefully rendered [...] The success of the performance was a product not only of technique and preparation but of understanding." And noted choral conductor Peter Bagley, who worked closely with the ensemble at last summer's Dennis Keene Choral Festival, has said: "Cerddorion's clean intonation and focused tone allow the purity of the musical message to emerge beautifully intact. They exemplify the direction in which chamber vocal ensembles should be moving."

Please visit our Web site (www.fairchildpub.com/cerddorion) this summer to learn of upcoming events.

OUR DIRECTOR

Much of what sets Cerddorion apart can be traced to the rare fusion of talents found in its founder and artistic director.

SUSANNE PECK is a sought-after soprano as well as an accomplished conductor. As a performer, Ms. Peck commands a repertoire ranging from medieval to contemporary works, with particular expertise in oratorio, French Baroque opera, and 19th-century art song. A winner of the 1992 Schubertiade Lieder Competition, she has performed with New York's finest professional ensembles and may be heard on recordings by ANGEL/EMI, DELOS, and CRT.

Ms. Peck is music director at South Presbyterian Church of Dobbs Ferry, NY, and assistant artistic director of the Dennis Keene Choral Festival. She also founded and directs Charis Chamber Voices of Westchester, now in its sixth season.

Assistant conductor Steve Friedman has been an assistant conductor with The Dessoff Choirs, Cantabile, The Mannes Chamber Singers, and Cerddorion. His vocal arrangements are widely performed from New York to Tokyo.

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