

Barbara Kolb: Millefoglie and other works
New World 80422-2

Barbara Kolb's musical aesthetic is most often concerned with the building of vertical structures by juxtaposing discrete and recognizable rhythmic or melodic units. These units then undergo harmonic change or melodic and rhythmic variation, with corresponding effects on the vertical structure. Some works have horizontal development with clear beginnings, middles, and ends, while others invite the ear to perceive sets of musical objects from all sides, as if looking at sculpture. Kolb creates lyrical and expressive subaqueous seascapes inhabited by musical objects which appear, change, and vanish. Often one is drawn inexorably toward an intense yet transforming encounter; sometimes the material leads progressively to a cataclysmic climax. Other works succeed in bringing specific images or poems to musical life. Kolb's music most often finds its source in particular poetic ideas or visual images rather than preconceived mathematical models. It is emotive and evocative—the progeny of Ravel and Debussy, with occasional reminiscences of American jazz.

Millefoglie, a nineteen-minute one-movement work for chamber orchestra and computer generated tape, is concerned with the multiple ways in which layers of harmonic and rhythmic structures can be superimposed. The layers are both vertical and horizontal: that is, they exist at the same instant in time and through time. Moreover, they constantly undergo expansion and contraction, thus creating interplay between the horizontal and vertical layers. The work also contains a buildup to one of the most intense climaxes in Kolb's music.

The beginning of the work, a four-minute section, is scored for instruments alone without the tape. The basic material is a six-bar rhythmic phrase combined with a chosen set of pitch materials; the rhythmic phrase is presented in the first bars of the piece in its original form. The tape then enters, creating a supplementary layer above the continual expansion and contraction in the instruments. Two lyrical sections follow: the first for tape alone, and the second for marimba, harp, and vibraphone.

The central section is an extended five minute crescendo. It is comprised of seven subsections of thirty seconds each, followed by a final subsection of ninety seconds. Each of the eight subsections contains eight harmonic permutations, the last and longest being a contraction of the material from the seven preceding ones. The crescendo builds to an extreme emotional and dynamic intensity and then, abruptly, a tranquil section concludes the work.

Extremes is a duo for flute and cello, in which Kolb explores and contrasts various pairings of musical polarities. The most evident are the opposites in timbre represented by the flute and the cello, and the contrast between the lyrical opening of the first movement and the rhythmic second movement. The extremes are presented with intense succinctness in two uninterrupted vignette movements of three to four minutes each. The first movement begins with an extended melodic solo cadenza for the flute. Underneath the cadenza is a pedal point in the cello on the open C string. At the end of the cadenza the cello rises to fortissimo and begins developing motivic patterns in sixteenth notes. The flute joins in, and the two instruments move increasingly toward pianissimo with more and more sustained notes, giving the impression of a ritardando, until the passage extinguishes itself.

The second movement, in obverse parallel to the first movement, begins with a rhythmic cadenza in the solo cello punctuated by the sixteenth-note triplets in the flute, which become increasingly embellished and motivic. The rhythmic structure gradually contracts until the two return to the speed and pitches of the movements opening.

Two short obverse movements—two extremes; extremes within extremes; continua from one extreme to the other; extremes in isolated stasis; all in delicate balance.

Chromatic Fantasy is a work for narrator and six instruments that sets to music a poem by Howard Stern. It is divided into three sections. The first contains a condensed variation of the poem; in the second, the narrator presents the poem in its entirety, and the third consists of an impressionistic extract of phrases and ideas from the poem. The musical setting is "chromatic," both in the strictly musical sense and in the coloristic choice of widely varied instruments: amplified alto flute, oboe, soprano saxophone, electric guitar, and vibraphone. The tone is witty, fanciful, and surreal, as elements of jazz and the blending of instrumental colors join to present and comment on the poem.

Solitaire is written for piano and two-channel tape with vibraphone. The piece is made up of a large number of lyrical motivic units that are fragments of real and imaginary eighteenth and nineteenth century melodies, including an extract *in medias res* from the Chopin Prelude in A flat major.

The motivic units are organized into ten sections, which occur and recur in juxtaposition like cards played out in a game of solitaire. Each section remains exactly the same upon each recurrence but, as the superimposition of sections proceeds, barely perceptible enharmonic modulations develop until all the suits have been played out and the game won. The whole presents the image of a musical mobile created from the flotsam and jetsam of Western music of the past. —PETER M. WOLRICH

Peter M. Wolrich, who holds a degree in philosophy from Brown University, is the managing partner of an international law firm in Paris. He has written notes on contemporary music for various orchestras in the United States and for IRCAM in Paris.

CHROMATIC FANTASY

Text by Howard Stern

I. The young woman at the next table is wearing a long purple dress, and I consider inviting her to join me for lunch. The intensity and saturation of that purple make her a public figure, in spite of her obvious self-absorption. Presently she is joined by a second woman in purple, and I have missed my chance. But what if I appear tomorrow in a shirt of the very same hue? The following scheme would suggest itself: everyone has a wardrobe of ten colors, and my color for a given day is determined at random. Persons wearing the same color congregate for meals and exchange information on the lives they happen to be leading. This would guarantee a perfectly artificial way of making new acquaintances and hearing new arguments. Alas, the scheme requires that the art of conversation be reinvented as a general practice. Here the fantasy ends.

II. The young woman at the next table is wearing a long purple dress, and I consider inviting her to join me for lunch. This invitation will surely be declined, nor would I be

tempted to extend it under any other circumstances. But the intensity and saturation of that purple make her a public figure, in spite of her obvious self-absorption. I think fondly of Schoenberg, who supposed that a series of subscription concerts could be "private" if only representatives of the critical press were excluded. Presently she is joined by a second woman in purple, and I have missed my chance. But what if I appear tomorrow in a shirt of the very same hue, which by now must be called Schoenberg Purple. For this reason it was necessary to reject the advice of my colleague the graphic designer, who felt that the array of paint samples on my kitchen wall would be more impressive without the puzzling commercial designations. On the contrary, we wish to imagine the forms of life and figures of thought that might have yielded us Harpsichord Yellow, Editorial Beige, Cartesian Green. If a third woman in purple should now appear at table, the following scheme would suggest itself: everyone has a wardrobe of ten colors, and my color for a given day is determined at 2 random by, say, the successive digits of the natural logarithm of my Social Security number. (This seems orthodontically appropriate: what would Dr Johnson have imagined for "social security" or "automotive emission"?) Persons wearing the same color congregate for meals and exchange information on the lives they happen to be leading. This would guarantee a perfectly artificial, and hence natural, way of making new acquaintances and hearing new arguments with unusual hypersurfaces. Alas, the scheme requires that the art of conversation be reinvented as a general practice. Here the fantasy ends, and it does so with the names of three flutes: nai, venu, shakuhachi.

III. a public figure

a long purple dress with unusual hypersurfaces
an impressive wardrobe of Social Security

the critical press
the puzzling intensity of automotive emission
the natural logarithm of Dr. Johnson

forms of life and figures of thought

Harpsichord Yellow

Editorial Beige

Cartesian Green

nai

venu

shakuhachi

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Barbara Kolb, the first American woman composer to win the prestigious Prix de Rome, was born in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1939 and attended the Hartt School of Music at the University of Hartford. After studying composition with Arnold Franchetti and Gunther Schuller, she received a Fulbright Scholarship for study in Vienna. Kolb is the recipient of many awards, including Tanglewood and Guggenheim fellowships, an Institute of Arts

and Letters Award, and a Kennedy Center Friedheim Award (for *Millefoglie*). Important performances of her work include those by the New York Philharmonic, the Boston and Atlanta symphonies, the Orchestra of Radio France, and the Ensemble InterContemporain. A complete program of her work was performed in February 1992 under the auspices of the Kennedy Center's American Composers Concerts. Kolb's major commissions include those from the Koussevitzky Music Foundation (in conjunction with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center), the Fromm Foundation (in conjunction with the New York Chamber Symphony), the New York Philharmonic, and the Cleveland Museum of Art. She also composed the score for the film *Cantico* (1982), based on the life of St. Francis of Assisi. In 1983-84, Kolb was composer in residence at the Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique (IRCAM) in Paris. She has taught at Brooklyn College, Temple University, and the Eastman School of Music, and was the founder and director (from 1979 to 1982) of the "Music New to New York" concert series at the Third Street Music School Settlement in New York City.

Nouvel Ensemble Moderne was founded in Montréal in 1989 as a permanent twentieth century repertoire ensemble. Its fifteen members are among Canada's finest musicians. Unlike many contemporary music ensembles, NEM has the benefit of a steady rehearsal and performance schedule. In addition to presenting new works, they have made many of the twentieth century's most demanding works a part of their regular repertoire, including those of Berg, Boulez, Ligeti, and Stockhausen.

Lorraine Vaillancourt is highly regarded as both a conductor and a pianist. She is known in Europe and North America as an advocate of new music; in addition to founding the Nouvel Ensemble Moderne, she was also a founding member of Les Événements du Neuf, a Montreal new music concert society. A faculty member of the Université de Montreal, she is also conductor of their Atelier de Musique Contemporaine.

Music Today was founded by the Elaine Kaufman Cultural Center in 1981. Specializing in the performance of new music, the ensemble has been consistently praised for its repertoire and the excellence of its performances. Members of the group represent some of the finest interpreters of modern music in New York, and are known as distinguished soloists as well as ensemble performers.

Gerard Schwarz is one of America's foremost conductors, with home bases on both coasts. He served as music director of Music Today from 1981 to 1989, and is currently the music director of the New York Chamber Symphony, New York City's Mostly Mozart Festival, New Jersey's Waterloo Festival, and the Seattle Symphony. He has made numerous recordings for New World, Atlantic, Delos, EMI/Angel, Nonesuch, Pro Arte, and RCA Red Seal.

Ray Reinhardt has a long association with the San Francisco Opera, including performances as the Major-domo in *Adriadne auf Naxos* and the Narrator in *Der Freischütz*. He has also served as host and narrator for the opera's broadcasts. Since 1965, Mr. Reinhardt has been a member of the American Conservatory Theatre, where he has appeared in more than thirty-five major roles.

Taco Kooistra is a member of the ASKO ensemble, the Dufy String Quartet, and the Archipeltrio. He has studied with Erling Blondel Bengtson, Jean Decroos, Yo-Yo Ma, and Siegfried Palm. A specialist in baroque and contemporary music, Kooistra has appeared as soloist with numerous European ensembles and has been the dedicatee of many new works.

Harrie Starreveld, a prizewinner in the Gaudeamus International Competition, has appeared throughout Europe, Asia, and North America with numerous ensembles, including the New Ensemble and the HET Trio (Harry Sparnaay and René Eckhardt). Starreveld is currently a professor of music at the Sweelinck Conservatory in Amsterdam.

Edmund Niemann has performed around the world as a member of Steve Reich & Musicians and with Nurit Tilles as half of the piano duo Double Edge. A founding member of New York City's Parnassus ensemble, he has appeared as a guest with many of the area's leading contemporary music ensembles. Niemann is on the faculty of Sarah Lawrence College and can be heard on the Nonesuch, New Albion, New World, CRI, and Cuneiform labels.

Jonathan Haas is the director of the timpani and percussion studios at the Peabody Conservatory, Aspen Music School, and Hartt School of Music. He is the principal timpanist of the New York Chamber Symphony, principal percussionist of the American Symphony, and a founding member of Music Today. Mr. Haas is a leading timpani soloist, performing 18th century timpani concertos as well as jazz timpani pieces, and he has commissioned works by leading 20th century composers.

Chromatic Fantasy was recorded November 27, 1989 at Merkin Concert Hall, New York City.

Producer: Tim Martyn

Engineer: Rob Rapley

Extremes was recorded November 25, 1990 in Amsterdam, Holland.

Producer: Judith Sherman

Engineer: Jacob Sachs

Millefoglie was recorded September 3, 1991 at Salle Claude-Champagne, Montréal, Quebec, Canada.

Producer: Jean-Pierre Loiselle

Engineer: Laurent Major

Editing: Michel de Passillie

Solitaire was recorded September 5, 1991 at Merkin Concert Hall, New York City.

Producer: Tim Martyn

Engineer: Rob Rapley

Digital mixer: Paul Zinman

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Selected Discography

Appello; Looking for Claudio; Soundings; Spring River Flowers Moon Night; Toccata. Various artists. CRI CD576.

Umbrian Colors. Benjamin Hudson, violin; David Starobin, guitar. Bridge BCD 9022.

Songs Before an Adieu. Rosalind Rees, soprano; Susan Palma, flute; David Starobin, guitar. Bridge BDG 2004.

Three Lullabies. David Starobin, guitar. Bridge BCD 9009/BDG 2001.

Three Place Settings. Julius Eastman, narrator; Barbara Kolb conducting. Desto DC 7143.

Selected Bibliography

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Jezić, Diane Peacock. *Women Composers: The Lost Tradition Found.* New York: The Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 1988.

Kimmelman, Michael. "Kolb Premiere by Chamber Symphony." *The New York Times.* May 4, 1987.

Le Page, Jane Weiner. "Barbara Kolb." *Women Composers, Conductors, and Musicians of the Twentieth Century.* vol.1. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1980.

1 MILLEFOGLIE (19:04)

Nouvel Ensemble Moderne

Lorraine Vaillancourt, conductor

2 EXTREMES (9:07)

Taco Kooistra, cello

Harrie Starreveld, flute

3 CHROMATIC FANTASY (11:16)

Music Today

Gerard Schwarz, conductor

Ray Reinhanrd, narrator

4 SOLITAIRE (13:36)

Edmund Niemann, piano

Jonathan Haas, vibraphone

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