

# The Arditti String Quartet

Irvine Arditti and David Alberman, Violinists

Garth Knox, Violist

Rohan de Saram, Cellist

with

Ursula Oppens, Pianist

Saturday Evening, November 21, 1992, at 8:00

Rackham Auditorium, Ann Arbor, Michigan

## PROGRAM

*One Atmosphere (for Ursula)* for piano quintet ..... Julius Hemphill

*Kottos* for solo cello ..... Iannis Xenakis

String Trio for violin, viola, and cello ..... Sofia Gubaidulina

## INTERMISSION

Duo for Violin and Piano ..... Elliott Carter

*Officium Breve*, Op. 28, for string quartet ..... Gyorgy Kurtag

In Memoriam Andrae Szervansky

1. Largo

2. Piu Andante

3. Sostenuto, quasi giusto

4. Grave, molto sostenuto; quasi doppio piu lento-calando al fine

5. Presto

6. Molto agitato (canon a 4)

7. Sehr Fliessend (canon a 4); free, after last movement

of Webern's 2nd Cantata, Op. 31

8. Lento

9. Lento

10. Sehr Fliessend

11. Sostenuto

12. Sostenuto, quasi giusto

13. Sostenuto, con slacio

14. Disperato, vivo

15. Larghetto

*Last Spring* for piano quintet ..... Bun Ching Lam

The Arditti String Quartet is represented by Latitude 45, Montreal.

Ursula Oppens is represented by Colbert Artists Management Inc., New York.

The Arditti String Quartet records for Disques Montaigne.

## PROGRAM NOTES

### ***One Atmosphere (for Ursula)* (1992)**

Julius Hemphill (b. 1938)

Julius Hemphill split his attention between music and sports while growing up in the fertile musical environment of Fort Worth, Texas. He picked up experience playing in blues bands and jazz groups and began focusing on his musical career in earnest after moving to St. Louis in 1966, following a stint in the Army.

Two years later, he played an integral role in developing the Black Artists Group, an interdisciplinary collective that also included future World Saxophone Quartet members Oliver Lake and Hamiet Bluiett.

He moved to New York in 1973, and in 1976, as a founding member and principal composer/arranger for the World Saxophone Quartet (also including David Murray, Oliver Lake and Hamiet Bluiett), Hemphill continued his dance on the edge of free jazz. Hemphill's performances with the WSQ can be heard on *World Saxophone Quartet Plays Duke Ellington and Dances and Ballads* (Elektra/Nonesuch) and *Rhythm & Blues* (Elektra/Musician).

A prodigious composer who writes stunning, shimmering sonorities, he is as comfortable writing for full orchestra as he is for his Big Band, and he is frequently sought after by librettists, writers, and choreographers for collaboration. One commission destined for international exposure is *The Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin: The Promised Land*, for the choreographer Bill T. Jones and featuring the Julius Hemphill Sextet. Another dance collaboration, *Long Tongues: A Saxophone Opera* received its world premiere in Washington, D.C. in 1989.

Hemphill's new work, *One Atmosphere (for Ursula)*, was commissioned by the Composers' Forum with funds provided by the New York State Council on the Arts.

### ***Kottos for solo cello* (1977)**

Iannis Xenakis (b. 1922)

Born in Romania of Greek parents, Xenakis was studying engineering in Greece when he joined the Greek resistance against the Nazis in 1941. His involvement in armed conflict in 1945 left him blind in one eye. Two years later he settled in Paris and became a French citizen. In Paris he began composing in earnest under the inspiration of Olivier Messiaen. He continued to pursue an interest in engineering, and after meeting Le Corbusier, he worked in close collaboration with the famous architect. His twin pursuits of composition and architecture have led him to devise a highly complex musical theory founded on abstract, mathematical principles as well as an institute dedicated to further research in music theory.

His startling early works, such as *Metastasis* (1954) and *Pithoprakta* (1956), display his penchant for shifting masses of sound—"a brilliantly iridescent web of glissandos moving at different speeds," in the words of Michel Philippot. Those works, and *Kottos* as well, show Xenakis's penchant for giving his works Greek titles, suggesting his link to ancient Greek concepts.

Xenakis writes:

*Kottos* was written as the required piece for the International Violincello Competition, which was held during the International Meeting of Contemporary Art (Recontres Internationales d'Art Contemporain) at La Rochelle, France, in 1977.

*Kottos* is a quite difficult work, but a work which has shown that the level of young violincellists today is perfectly capable of mastering the necessary technique and of expressing the musicality.

"Kottos" is the name of one of the hundred-armed Giants that Zeus fought and defeated: allusion to the fury and the virtuosity necessary to the performance of this piece.

## String Trio for violin, viola, and cello (1988)

Sofia Gubaidulina (b. 1931)

The daughter of a Tartar Muslim father and a Russian Jewish mother with Roman Catholic ancestors, Sofia Gubaidulina once claimed that “I am the place where East and West meet.”

In a 1988 interview, Gubaidulina recalled a day in her youth when she walked into a field and prayed, “Lord, make me a composer and I will endure whatever you want me to suffer.” Her prayer was answered. After earning a degree in piano at Kazan Conservatory, she began studying composition at the Moscow Conservatory, where she graduated in 1959. In recent years her music has enjoyed wider recognition, thanks to the break-up of the Soviet Union and several visits to the United States. Her catalog now includes several dozen works.

On her String Trio, Gubaidulina writes:

This work, in three parts, is principally concerned with the relationships between the three instruments, which represent three characters who reveal their individual wills. The tripartite division of the piece serves to illustrate three different relationships between them. In the first part all three act “in concert.” In the second, the violin and cello function as a duo, while the viola, has contrasting material. The third part, which is a kind of coda, sees all three acting on their own, each with different materials.

(translated by Jessy Kaner)

## Duo for Violin and Piano (1973–74)

Elliott Carter (b. 1908)

Andrew Porter, commenting on New York music in the London *Financial Times*, has written: “Although Carter’s scores look so formidably cerebral, the analogues that drift through my mind afterwards when I try to describe their effect come from the natural world. . . . After the Duo, the image rose of a flowing river and the wind-stirred forest on its bank. They do not share or exchange identities, but the beholder perceives both at once, and also the broken

reflections of the trees in the water, and the rippled light cast upward on the boughs, and he makes of it all a single ‘picture.’ . . . This sense of response to the natural world and to natural, simple truths, and of honest awe in what occurs ‘merely in living as and where we live,’ give to Carter’s music its strength. I cannot understand those who hear in it mere calculation and needless difficulty.”

Born in New York City, Elliott Carter studied composition at Harvard as an extracurricular activity. He was taught harmony and counterpoint by Walter Piston, choral composition by A. T. Davison and, for a short while, composition by Gustav Holst, a visiting professor at Harvard. He subsequently spent three years in Paris studying with Nadia Boulanger. Carter spent several summers in Europe where he came under the influence of Schoenberg, Berg, Webern, and Scriabin.

He has received many honors and awards, including Pulitzer Prizes for both the Second and Third String Quartets, the Prix de Rome, and the Sibelius Medal for music.

Carter writes:

The Duo for Violin and Piano derives its character and expression from the contrast between its two very dissimilar instruments—the bow-stroked violin and the key-struck piano. The mercurial violin music, at times intense and dramatic, at other light and fanciful, constantly changes its pace and tone of expression; the piano plays long stretches of music of consistent character and is much more regular both in rhythm and in style. The piano makes extensive use of the pedal to mask one sonority with another and then gradually to uncover the second—as in the very first measures. In fact, the long opening section for the piano forms a quiet, almost icy background to the varied and dramatic violin, which seems to fight passionately against the piano. After this beginning, the music is joined seamlessly until the end.

In the course of the work, the violin focuses on one aspect of its part after another—and often on two or more aspects at a time—playing in a rubato, rhythmically irregular style, while the piano constantly plays regular beats, sometimes

fast, sometimes slow. Toward the end, while the violin is involved in a very fast impassioned music, the piano becomes more and more detached, playing a series of regular rhythmic patterns, each successfully slower than the previous one. As the piano reaches a point of extreme slowness, the violin is heard increasingly alone, isolating for a few measures at a time the various elements of its part, with the quiet and more lyrical aspects given more prominence than previously.

The general form is quite different from that of the music I wrote up to 1950. While this earlier music was based on themes and their development, here the musical ideas are not themes or melodies but rather groupings of sound materials out of which textures, linear patterns, and figurations are invented. Each type of music has its own identifying sound and expression, usually combining instrumental color with some 'behavioral' pattern that relies on speed, rhythm, and musical intervals. There is no repetition, but a constant invention of new things—some closely related to each other, others, remotely. There is a stratification of sound so that much of the time the listener can hear two different kinds of music, not always of equal prominence occurring simultaneously. This kind of form and texture could be said to reflect the experience we often have of seeing something in different frames of reference at the same time.

## **Officium Breve, Op. 28, for string quartet (1988)**

In Memoriam Andreae Szervansky  
György Kurtag (b. 1926)

**B**orn in the Romanian town of Lugos, Kurtag studied piano as a child. He enrolled in the Budapest Academy of Music in 1946, studying piano, chamber music, and composition. There, he met composer Andreae Szervansky, who encouraged Kurtag to pursue a composing career. In 1957–58, Kurtag studied in Paris with Marianne Stein, Darius Milhaud, and Olivier Messiaen. He is now a professor at the Budapest Academy of Music.

*Officium Breve* was composed in 1988 to mark the retirement of Dr. Wilfred Brennecke, Producer of Contemporary Music for West

German Radio in Cologne. It was premiered in 1989 at the Witten Festival by the Auryrn Quartet.

*Officium Breve* typifies the brevity, eclecticism, and autobiographical nature of Kurtag's music. The piece is made up of 15 concise movements, and the whole work lasts less than 15 minutes. Kurtag is an exquisite miniaturist in a way that owes much to the terse style of Webern.

Inspired by similar attempts by Szervansky, Kurtag is also eclectic in the way he has tried to synthesize twelve-tone music with Hungarian harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic motifs. He has found inspiration in such diverse sources as the music of Webern and Nancy Sinatra's hit song "These Boots Are Made For Walking."

Kurtag's music is also autobiographical in its unceasing dialogue with his past, his friends, his teachers, and the huge range of composers he has admired—like a musical diary. Although dedicated to Szervansky, *Officium Breve* also contains personal tributes to other friends. These, like photographs on the wall of a study, recall with a brief glimpse the life of a deeply missed friend. For example, in the second movement, the tiny four-note fragment for the two violins, vaguely reminiscent of Bach's *St. John Passion*, honors the memory of Kurtag's friend, the recorder player Zsolt Baranyi.

Two direct quotations—one from Webern's *Cantata*, Op. 31, and the other from Szervansky's *Serenade for Strings*—dominate the structure of the piece, as Kurtag symbolically integrates the worlds of both composers.

*Officium Breve* opens, as befits a Breviary mass of the Roman Church, with a solemn prayer-like solo for cello. The falling fifth motif is based on the theme quoted from Szervansky's *Serenade*, which only emerges in its true colors at the very end of the piece. This falling fifth is transformed to a falling sixth, which forms the basis of movement 3. Here a simple concise duo for viola and cello blend Szervansky's music with the style of Webern. Movement 5 is Kurtag's own version of the harmonies of the Canon from Webern's *Cantata*. In movement 7, the Webern quotation is more direct, but this time the inner voices are transformed. A complete transcription of the Canon appears in movement 10, as the centerpiece of the work. From here to the end, the Szervansky quotation begins to dominate: first through a four-part

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reworking of movement 3, and then by a pair of almost unrecognizable transformations (movements 13 and 14).

The climax of this series of transformations, and of the piece, is the quotation of the beautiful C-major theme from the *Serenade*. This forms a serene end to a process by which Kurtag's and Szervansky's own musical roots are gradually uncovered, then celebrated, and finally allowed to rest in endless calm.

### **Last Spring (1992)**

Bun Ching Lam (b. 1954)

“Over the years I have composed four ‘spring’ pieces in which the various roles and possibilities of the piano in different ensemble settings are explored. This is the final piece of the series, specially written for Ursula Oppens and the Arditti Quartet.”—Bun Ching Lam.

Born in Macau, Bun Ching Lam began studying piano at the age of seven and gave her first public solo recital at fifteen. In 1976 she received a B.A. degree in piano performance from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, where she studied with David Gwilt. She then accepted a scholarship to the University of California at San Diego, where she studied composition with Bernard Rands, Robert Erickson, Roger Reynolds, and Pauline Oliveros, and conducting with Thomas Noe. She received her Ph.D. in 1981 and joined the music faculty of the Cornish College of the Arts and Sciences in Seattle, teaching composition, theory, and piano.

Winner of the 1991 Rome Prize fellowship, Lam has also won first prizes in the Aspen Music Festival, the Northwest Composer's Symposium, the Hong Kong Conservatory Art Songs Competition, and the highest honor at the Shanghai Music Competition. Her works have been performed at several festivals, including the Aspekte (Salzburg), ISCM World Music Days and the First Contemporary Chinese Composers' Festival (Hong Kong), Bang on a Can (New York), and the 24 Hours Communications (Brussels). She has received several commissions, including one from the Composers' Forum for *Last Spring*, which was premiered by Ursula Oppens and the Arditti String Quartet in New York on February 27, 1992.



*The Arditti String Quartet*

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specializes in the performance of contemporary music and the music of the 20th century. This gives them a vast and varied selection of works encompassing many different styles. With a handful of exceptions, they have worked with every contemporary composer whose music they play; they consider this vital in the process of interpreting modern music. Part of their objective is to encourage composers of all styles to write for the medium of the string quartet. As a result, each season brings a fresh crop of first performances for the Arditti String Quartet. Recent seasons have included premieres of works by Aperghis, Boesmans, Bryars, Bussotti, Cage, Carter, de Pablo, Donatoni, Dusapin, Ferneyhough, Gubaidulina, Harvery, Kagel, Kurtag, Nancarrow, Nono, Pousseur, Reynolds, Rihm, Scelsi, Sciarino, Sorensen, Xenakis, and Yun.

The Arditti String Quartet has given master classes in many countries for performers and composers, and since 1982, its members have been resident string tutors at the Darmstadt Summer Academy for New Music.

The Arditti String Quartet last appeared in Ann Arbor for the TWICE Festival of Contemporary Music in 1989, for which it performed the U. S. premiere of Xenakis's *Akea* and the world premiere of String Quartet #2 (“Vortex”) by Gerard Pape. Tonight marks the Quartet's debut with the University Musical Society.



### *Ursula Oppens*

Lauded as one of the major pianists before the public today, **Ursula Oppens** continues to win equal acclaim for her interpretations of both the standard repertoire and contemporary music. She has performed in concert with many of the major orchestras of the U. S. and Europe and in recital in countless cities. This season she performs concerti with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Seattle Symphony, and orchestras in South Carolina, Westchester, and Milwaukee. She gives recitals in San Francisco and cities in Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maine, and Oklahoma. She performs with the Arditti String Quartet in Ann Arbor and Minneapolis. In Europe, she will appear with the Rotterdam Philharmonic in the Netherlands; in Vienna, she makes her recital debut and performs on television with conductor Michael Gielen.

Miss Oppens continually expands her repertoire with commissions and performances of new work. In 1971, she founded Speculum Musicae, an ensemble dedicated to bringing contemporary music to modern audiences. She has premiered works by John Adams, Anthony

Braxton, Elliott Carter, Anthony Davis, John Harbison, Tobias Picker, Conlon Nancarrow, Frederic Rzewski, Christian Wolff, and Charles Wuorinen. Last year, she gave the world premiere of Francis Thorne's Piano Concerto No. 3 with the Albany Symphony Orchestra, and earlier this year, performed it in Carnegie Hall with Dennis Russell Davies leading the American Composers Orchestra. In 1988, she performed Carter's Piano Concerto with the American Composers Orchestra at a Carnegie Hall celebration in honor of the composer's eightieth birthday.

Ursula Oppens is a native New Yorker and the daughter of musical parents. In addition to training with her mother, Edith Oppens, she received her Master of Music degree at The Juilliard School. A graduate of Radcliffe, where she majored in English literature and economics, she became the first woman Chief Marshal at Harvard's 1990 commencement exercises.

Under the auspices of Young Concert Artists, Miss Oppens made her New York debut in 1969 at Carnegie Recital Hall. After winning first prize at the 1969 Busoni International Piano Competition, she started on a route marked by such honors as the 1970 Diploma d'Honore of the Accademia Chigiana, an Avery Fisher Career Grant in 1976, which led to a performance with the New York Philharmonic, and the 1979 Record World Award for her recording of Rzewski's "The People United Will Never Be Defeated."

Miss Oppens has a remarkably varied output of recordings. She made an album containing John Adams's *Phrygian Gates*, Carter's *Night Fantasies*, and six tangos by various composers. New World Records captured her live performance of Carter's Piano Concerto with Michael Gielen and the Cincinnati Symphony in 1986. She won the Critics' Choice Award in August 1984 from *High Fidelity* magazine for her Nonesuch release of music for two pianos, played with the late Paul Jacobs. Due for release this fall are two recordings on the Music and Arts Label: an all-Beethoven disc and an album of American piano music composed especially for her.