



THE CROSSING

D O N A L D N A L L Y — C O N D U C T O R

The Crossing @ Winter

Sunday

January

4th

2009

The Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill

PROGRAM

First Snow (1996) Bo Holten

1. First Snow
2. Hermit Peak

I want to live (2005) David Lang

Variationen mit Celan-Gedichten III (1997)..... Erhard Karkoschka

1. Wiegenlied
2. Grabschrift für François

INTERMISSION – 15 MINUTES

How Love Bleeds..... Paul Spicer

1. Christmas (2003)
2. Nativity (2004)
3. Carol (2005)
4. Festival (2005)

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A time for everything (1996)..... Bo Holten

this performance dedicated to the memory of Hank Van de Water

It is time (2008) David Shapiro

world premiere

Someday (2005) John Kennedy

The Crossing thanks the The Alpin J. and Alpin W. Cameron Memorial Fund and the Aaron Copland Fund and for generously supporting this program.

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This afternoon's concert is being recorded by Paul Vazquez: www.digitalmission.com 973-886-1862

THE CROSSING

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Donald Nally, conductor

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We're very grateful to the congregation and staff of the Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill, Music Director Mark Anderson and Reverend Cindy Jarvis.

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The Crossing is a member of Chorus America.

The Crossing is grateful to be selected by the Philadelphia Music Project at The Pew Center for Arts and Research for participation in Arts Action Research consultations with Nello McDaniel.

Our ongoing thanks to Jeff Dinsmore, Rodrigo Mattos, and all our friends at BeSeen Communications who continue to take care of us by donating their marketing and graphic talents.

Special thanks to Maren Montalbano Brehm for scheduling/personnel/finances, Rob Phillips for stage management/logistics, Steven Gearhart for our "re-gift this gift" cds, Shari Alise Wilson for our post-concert receptions, and our friend Beth Van de Water for generously ensuring our receptions are a success!

We're very grateful to the following for having made financial contributions to help make this concert possible:

Anne Bancroft
The Blanchard Family
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Maestro Studios/Robert E. Bradshaw
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...and the members of The Crossing

*Contributions in memory of
Hank Van de Water*
Pat and Frank Folk
Joan Santos
Elizabeth Van de Water
The members of The Crossing

NOTES AND TEXTS

THE CELAN PROJECT

"As J.E. Cirlot states in *A Dictionary of Symbols*, "two circles are sometimes used to symbolize the Upper and Lower worlds, that is heaven and earth." In the poetry of Celan, the two worlds break down between the void or darkness before life and the void or darkness after death. The two circles intersect to form life, where the living remember, observe, and create art, which grows the memories of the dead, through the express medium of language. The poet, then, is an alchemical creature, a Hermes, that creates between the two doors. Further, through this creation of man, God becomes whole." –Keith Harvey

This afternoon, we embark on a project of artistic creation that has been a year in the planning, The Celan Project: new works on the poet's words. Erhard Karkoschka's *1997 Variations on Celan Poems* inaugurates the project, followed by the first of three premieres, David Shapiro's *It is time*. Later in our season, we will sing "Celan premieres" of Kirsten Broberg and Kile Smith.

Celan's poetry is largely open to the interpretation of the reader; he makes no effort to convey the sources of his imagery and his later poetry becomes increasingly cryptic. Perhaps this is why his poems have met a recent popular Renaissance with composers; wholly evocative on their own, and owing to their inherent vagueness, they invite musical meditation of great variety, as in the works we hear today: not dissimilar poems inspire works of widely divergent musical languages. This is what our project is about. I like to think Celan would have approved.

Despite the spectrum of perceptions they inspire, the themes that run through Celan's *oeuvre* are consistent:

- the conflict of a German-speaking Jew in post-war Europe; "There's nothing in the world for which a poet will give up writing, not even when he is a Jew and the language of his poems is German."
- the search for home – the isolation of the wanderer: "Poetry is a sort of homecoming."
- the invitation to be born and to die:
 You were my death:
 you I could hold
 when all fell away from me.
- the greenness of living: "I understand ... the grateful pride in every homegrown thing that stands ready to refresh anyone who comes by; just as I comprehend the joy in every newly won, self-felt word that rushes up to strengthen him who is receptive to it."
- time, memory, and the uncertainty of existence:
 Your face quietly shrinks away
 if suddenly
 there is lamplike brightness
 inside me, at the point
 where most painfully one says, No.

We may open a small window into Celan's creative life through his comments to a fellow poet: "to that in your work which did not – or not yet – open up to my comprehension, I responded with respect and by waiting: one can never pretend to comprehend completely – that would be disrespect in the face of the Unknown that inhabits – or comes to inhabit – the poet: that would be to forget that poetry is something one breathes; that poetry breathes you in."

Paul Celan was born Paul Antschel in Bukovina, part of Romania that is now part of Ukraine. His father was a Zionist who insisted on a strict Hebrew education; his mother made German the language of their home. During the war, Bukovina was first occupied by Russia, then by Germany, who created Jewish ghettos. Both parents would die in Nazi camps after the ghettos of Bukovina were dissolved in 1942; Celan spent two years in Romanian labor camps that were themselves dissolved when the Russians reclaimed the area in 1944. Fleeing the impending Soviet rule of his homeland, Celan went first to Vienna and then settled in Paris in 1948. His poetry and translations gained recognition soon after his move there and his style and thought evolved further under the influence of Martin Heidegger. He committed suicide by drowning in the Seine in 1970.

NOTES AND TEXTS

Bo Holten: First Snow

Born – 1948, Denmark; living in Brussels where he conducts the Flemish Radio Choir

Written for – Pro Coro Canada; they suggested these texts of the Icelandic poet Stephan G. Stephansson, who emigrated to Wisconsin in 1872, then to Alberta in 1889, where he farmed and wrote poetry about the often harsh environment in which his family lived.

We discovered him – last spring, searching for works in a modern musical language with a tie to the Tudor era. (Holten has such a work, *In nomine*, which we will sing on our May 22 concert; it's based on an excerpt from a mass of John Sheppard of 1538.) We subsequently devoured *all* his choral music, much of it written for and recorded by BBC Singers, and decided to feature him as our 'season composer' to introduce our audiences to the varied textures of this modern voice who so effectively combines quite traditional sounds in new and often bold guises.

In this piece – (Holten writes) he uses "composing methods of great simplicity to match the austere atmosphere of the fascinating landscapes at the edge of the Rockies in northern Alberta." Holten is a master of choral textures. This is obvious in "First Snow," in which a treble choir evoking quiet sounds of falling snow is juxtaposed with a lower-voice choir singing Stephansson's elegant words in an extended chorale; together, words and music form a meditation on nature's beauty and its harsh truths.

Such contrasts are further explored in "Hermit Peak." Whereas the division of the choir in "First Snow" is between upper and lower voices, here we have the ensemble divided into two equally-voiced choirs, thus creating the inevitability of more frequent and obvious dissonances between the two groups. As before, the second choir sings chorale-like music, but, unlike in "First Snow" where the chorale breaks the 'silence' of the snow, here the chorale provides stability while the first choir, largely in octaves, offers an impassioned description of the mountain – the angular melody bows and crooks as if it were the wind – or heather, or crag – bending around the immovable granite face. There is awe and joy, sorrow and reverence in this music – a love of the world, and of its mystery and power.

First Snow

You lucid, lustrous, tender snow,
who paint the landscape all one shade,
the living, dead, ugly, fair,
you colour all things equal – white.
You fled your mother's warm arms,
into the air as blue mist:
turned home again one blizzard night,
so pure, but grim and cold.

Hermit Peak

Hermit soars so far above the low
that heather rags stare at him stunned
and the copsewood is giddy climbing so high
and crag blossoms lose their foothold.
Though the squall must biting blast his peak
so naked, he nowhere yields.
He stands like the holy image of health
and honesty, axed in granite.

Stephan J. Stephansson (1853, Iceland
– 1928 Alberta, Canada)
Trans. Kirstjana Gunnars (adapted by the composer)

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David Lang: I want to live

Born – 1957, Los Angeles; living in New York

Written for – *Trio Mediaeval* (Oslo) and *musikFabrik* (Cologne) and premiered as a multi-media work in Cologne and at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 2005

We discovered him – through his intriguing work for chorus and orchestra *The Passing Measures*; subsequently, our performance of his *I lie* (for women) attracted David's attention and he has become a true friend of The Crossing. (We had dinner last spring in Chicago where David gave us a copy of *I want to live*, suggesting it as perfect for our women. A month later he won the 2008 Pulitzer Prize!)

In this piece – David simply repeats this seven-syllable sentence: "I want to live where you live," a seemingly inconsequential phrase that in Lang's hands is revealed to be a statement of courageous, bold simplicity. We explore vulnerability, (the opening is marked "gentle and naïve"), as the small range and subtly evolving rhythms lead us to a very primary emotional place. However, mid-work, the singers are directed, "suddenly very strong"; they momentarily insist. Lang's persistent minimalism serves this single sentence well, its story revealed in the extended closing section, "very fragile – almost whispered."

I want to live where you live.
- David Lang

Erhard Karkoschka: *Variationen mit Celan-Gedichten III*

Born – 1923 Moravská Ostrava, Czechoslovakia, living in Stuttgart

We discovered him – combing the stacks of Van Pelt Library at the University of Pennsylvania for new works. We fell in love with his fascinating compositional voice, singing his *Est ist ein Schnitter, heist der Tod* in October 2007.

Written for – an ongoing series; Karkoschka has written seven substantial works on Celan's poetry over the last twelve years, each for a different combination of instruments and voices (ranging from saxophone quartet to children's choir).

In this piece – Karkoschka employs a bold palette of vocal techniques (singing, speaking, humming, 'timbre glissandos' – i.e., sliding through vowel spectrums) to capture his idea of Celan's world: the two doors of the world, birth and death. The composer provides with the score an extensive explanation of his interpretation of the poem's imagery: he has amended "Lullabye" to Celan's title, as the poem is of a mother – the "string" an umbilical chord, the "fragment" a placenta – and adds, "the following intimation of a lullaby could then be understood as a daydream of the "musing" mother." Emulating the two circles that "intersect to form life" (see above discussion of Celan), Karkoschka places a solo quartet between choirs he specifies as right and left. The quartet provides the substantive material around which the "musing" of the choirs is heard.

Celan's *Epitaph* was written for his son Francois who was born and died in October 1953. Karkoschka considers it the other circle, the antithesis of *She combs her hair*: "Could it perhaps also be understood that this child with its wish to be born of these parents, opened both doors, indeed both so quickly following each other?" With great care, the composer has drawn on his compositional lineage by quoting a chorale of Bach and an Intermezzo of Brahms, the latter which he says is "so analogous of the grave." In his words: "The composition of Brahms is necessarily changed, though it remains clearly and easily recognized. In the variation that follows, the text of the chorale *Komm, süsßer Tod* by J.S.Bach is sung almost unchanged by female voices, while the male voices sing Celan's text in a very simple melody that is harmonically integrated but nevertheless remains a foreign object; thus, the music corresponds with the simultaneously sung texts which are, in time and style, vastly removed from each other. But it's not only remoteness that determines these relationships, as Brahms' music too does not stand foreign facing Bach's music from afar. Such interrelationship of contradiction and connection might give the "unknown" of Celan an outstretched hand, wherein also doubt and hope – or even belief – are combined."

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Sie kämmt ihr Haar (Wiegenlied)

*Sie kämmt ihr Haar wie mans den Toten
kämmt:
sie trägt den blauen Scherben unterm
Hemd.*

*Sie trägt den Scherben Welt
an einer Schnur.*

Sie weiß die Worte, doch sie lächelt nur.

*Sie mischt ihr Lächeln in den Becher Wein:
du mußt ihn trinken, in der Welt zu sein.*

*Du bist das Bild, das ihr der Scherben zeigt,
wenn sie sich sinnend übers Leben neigt.*

Grabschrift für François

*Die beiden Türen der Welt
stehen offen:
geöffnet von dir
in der Zwiernacht.
Wir hören sie schlagen und schlagen
und tragen das ungewisse,
und tragen das Grün in dein Immer.*

She combs her hair (Lullaby)

She combs her hair as one
combs the hair of the dead:
she carries the blue fragment under her shirt.

She carries the fragment world on a string.
She knows the words, but she only smiles.

She mixes her smile in the goblet of wine:
you must drink it, to be in the world.

You are the picture that the
fragment shows her,
while she bows, meditating over life.

Epitaph for Francois

The two doors of the world
stand open:
opened by you
in the twilight.* (* late afternoon)
We hear them slam and slam
and carry the uncertain,
and carry the green into your always.

*[Komm, süßer Tod, komm selge Ruh!
Komm führe mich in Friede,
Weil ich der Welt bin müde,
Ach komm! ich wart auf dich,
Komm bald und führe mich,
Drück mir die Augen zu.
Komm, selge Ruh!]*

*[Come, sweet death, come blessed rest!
Come lead me to peace
For I am weary of the world,
Oh come! I wait for you,
Come soon and lead me,
Close my eyes.
Come, blessed rest!]*

J.S. Bach, BWV 478,
in Georg Christian Schemelli's
Musicalisches Gesangbuch.

— Paul Celan (1953),
from *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle*, 1955

NOTES AND TEXTS

Paul Spicer: How Love Bleeds: Four Carols for Dark Times

Born - 1952, Cheshire, England

Written for - The Birmingham Bach Choir (2003-2005), which Paul has directed for sixteen years.

We discovered him - while working at St. Mark's Church on Locust Street; Paul came to guest conduct works of Kenneth Leighton and Herbert Howells (who was his teacher). We've kept in touch and he sends us his new works.

In this piece - we hear why Paul Spicer is one of England's eminent choral musicians and his recordings with The Finzi Singers are renowned. His compositions are so perfectly suited to choirs - to the timbres, expressive gestures, and audible harmonies of choirs - that they sometimes feel as if the choir is spontaneously generating the music, as they would speak. He is careful to choose lean and direct texts, with vivid images that he enhances subtly through harmonic description (rather than through madrigalisms). Anglican priest and famed Welsh writer of religious works, R S Thomas' poems seem to affect Spicer in a very direct manner and he often lets the text speak for itself, to be heard as sentences. (Consider the richness of snow as "ermine to trim our sins with" and the range of musical possibilities therein, and then consider Spicer's economic setting and how much he leaves for the listener to interpret.

When we programmed this work, it seemed that the darkness of these texts and Paul's music would dominate our concert; instead, we feel a new spirit around us, and the richness of these works stands in contrast to the hope offered in the works to follow.

1. Christmas

7
There is a morning;
Time brings it nearer,
Brittle with frost
And starlight. The owls sing
In the parishes. The people rise
And walk to the churches'
Stone lanterns, there to kneel
And eat the new bread
Of love, washing it down
With the sharp taste
Of blood they will shed.

(Not that He Brought Flowers, 1968)

2. Nativity

The moon is born
and a child is born,
lying among white clothes
as the moon among clouds.
They both shine, but
the light from the one
is abroad in the universe
as among broken glass.

(Experimenting with an Amen, 1986)

3. Carol

What is Christmas without
snow? We need it
as bread of a cold
climate, ermine to trim

our sins with, a brief
sleeve for charity's
scarecrow to wear its heart
on, bold as a robin.

(Later Poems, 1983)

4. Festival

This Christmas before
an altar of gold
the holly will remind
us how love bleeds,

the mistletoe remind
how pale and puny
the knuckles of the few
fingers clenched upon faith.

(Residues, 2002)

- R S Thomas (1913-2000, Wales)

NOTES AND TEXTS

Bo Holten: A time for everything

Written for – The Jutland Chamber Choir (Denmark) in 1990

In this piece – Holten writes a small dramatic cantata for choir, with a concluding chorale from which the preceding musical material is drawn. The poem is a somewhat surprising variation on the well-known *Ecclesiastes* poem (“To everything there is a season.”) Holten’s opening implies the metered ticking of clocks, setting the tone for a journey that will lead through the sorrows and joys of our mundane lives, to the shocking paradoxes we experience at certain moments – in the moment. As the work evolves, two choirs – women and men – emerge, exchanging opposing emotions – Embrace tenderly, Anger, Joyful, Beat them hollow. The conflict is left unresolved, but a calm emphasis on “Embracing” leaves us with hope there will be “Time to search, to lose your mind.” The concluding, simple chorale (clearly central to this composer’s language) demonstrates Holten’s grasp of the nostalgic power of simple, tonal music and the palpable emotional effect it can have in a modern work.

A time for joy.	A time to fight.	A time to sow.
A time for sorrow.	A time to follow.	A time for reaping.
A time for heartbreaks, a time for schemes.	A time to search, to lose your mind.	A time for pain a Folly be.
A time to tear, to dare tomorrow.	A time to bat, to beat them hollow.	A time to wrath, a time for weeping.
The time we’ve got, the time it seems.	The time we thought we’d left behind.	The time we lost eternally. - Ole Dalggaard (b. 1950)

David Shapiro: It is time

Born – 1969, Elizabeth, New Jersey, living in Mt. Airy

Written for – The Crossing, completed in July 2008 and premiered today.

We discovered him – it seems like a few decades ago, but it was only in 2000 – first as the wife of our colleague Ulrike, then as one of handful of very close composer friends; he has written for The Crossing, The Choral Arts Society of Philadelphia, The Spoleto Festival Choir, and The Bridge Ensemble.

In this piece – Shapiro works with Celan’s poem as if it were wrought iron, bending it around curves and planes to reveal what may be underneath or within. (In fact, Shapiro’s music often sounds as if it is turning a corner only to discover another corner to be turned.) It is an elusive poem – the last Celan wrote before leaving Vienna in 1948 for Paris, where he would remain the rest of his life. Being Jewish, and a camp survivor, in Vienna in 1948 was uncomfortable, and yet Celan’s poetry speaks of love and only hints at the past and its potential for personal apocalypse: “then time returns to the shell.” (Shapiro employs this phrase as a kind of refrain, giving structure to his work; through its repetition, it becomes self-fulfilling and takes on new meaning, of repose and introspection.) Time is the topic; the fragile “poppy” of forgetting, the hope of memory – of “recollection” – and the wish that the power of love may move us beyond all this. All lead to the stark simplicity of Celan’s closing, “It is time it were time. It is time.” – an image the poet discovered first in Rilke, who wrote in *Autumn Day* of 1902, “Lord: it is time, the summer was immense” and “the leaves are falling, falling distantly...” From this Celan forged complex images of truth, of love, and, to Shapiro, the climactic wish that “the stone [make] an effort to bloom.” From this apex, springing from the stone – so central to Celan’s poetry (he shoveled rocks in a wartime work camps) – Shapiro slowly releases Time’s linear hold on the music as we recede back into a place only music can describe.

Autumn eats its leaf out of my hand: we are friends.
From the nuts we shell time and we teach it to walk:
then time returns to the shell.
In the mirror it’s Sunday,
in dream there is room for sleeping,
our mouths speak the truth.

My eye moves down to the sex of my loved one:
we look at each other,
we exchange dark words,
we love each other like poppy and recollection,
we sleep like wine in the conches,
like the sea in the moon’s blood ray.

We stand by the window embracing, and people
look up from the street:
it is time they knew!
It is time the stone made an effort to bloom,
time unrest had a beating heart.
It is time it were time.

It is time.
- Paul Celan (1948), “Corona” from *Poppy and Memory* (1952), trans. by Michael Hamburger

John Kennedy: Someday

Born – 1959, Albert Lea, Minnesota

Written for – The Choir of the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, New York in 2005 and dedicated to its director, Kent Tritle.

We discovered him – long ago, as a percussionist and orchestra manager at the Spoleto Festivals. He's gone on to become a conductor, composer, and head of Santa Fe New Music. Kent Tritle's recording of *Someday* brought him back to mind.

In this piece – Kennedy interprets in music Teilhard's visionary theory of the tripart evolution of the earth: the geosphere, during which the inanimate earth was formed, the biosphere, during which biological life populates it, and the noosphere, when mankind reflects upon itself. To Teilhard, all matter seeks to complexify upon itself; the ever-increasing connection between human beings exemplifies this and will lead to a critical threshold, the Omega point, or highest point of consciousness. This will bring on the noosphere, when consciousness will rupture through time and space and assert itself on a higher plane of existence from which it can not come back.

The composer writes: "In *Someday*, I use the vocalization of the syllable 'noo' to create a musical 'noosphere' for Teilhard's radiant text. Individual parts are woven to form a 'mass consciousness' and concordance. I combined different passages from his book that speak of love as fire and the 'burning layers' of the divine presence, that to me exemplify his ecumenical spirituality and his expansive notion of creation."

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Someday, after we have mastered the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of Love. Then for the second time in the history of the world, we will have discovered fire.

We are part of a harmonized collectivity of consciousness equivalent to a sort of super-consciousness. The earth is not only becoming covered in myriads of grains of thought, but is becoming enclosed in a single thinking envelope, so as to form a single vast grain of thought, the plurality of individual reflections grouping themselves together and reinforcing one another in a single unanimous reflection.

All around us, to right and to left, in front and behind, above and below, we have only to go a little beyond the frontier of sensible appearances to see the divine welling up and showing through. But the divine presence is not only close to us, and in front of us; it has sprung up universally, and we find ourselves surrounded and transfixed. By means of all created things, without exception, the divine assails us, penetrates and moulds us. Though we imagined it as distant and inaccessible, in fact we live steeped in its burning layers.

- Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, 1957

Come.

Mark your calendars...

The Crossing's Month of Moderns:



Hear.

Month of Moderns I

Path of Miracles - Joby Talbot

Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill

Saturday, May 16, 2009 8pm

The first concert of our Month of Moderns will feature a single work: Joby Talbot's Path of Miracles (2005) a gripping emotional journey across Northern Spain on the Camino Francés, the revered pilgrimage route to the Cathedral of St. James at Santiago de Compostela. Like the Camino, Talbot's hour-long work is about the journey itself, with its five languages and eclectic style embracing chant, medieval rhythms, and modern harmonies – an exotic world full of fear, perseverance, commitment, and love, with moments of great invention and extraordinary beauty.

Month of Moderns II

Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill

Friday, May 22, 2009 8pm

We look back at 16th-century England in 3 diverse works:

- Bo Holten's mammoth, yet intimate, In nomine (1999), based on a mass of John Taverner
- 2005 Pulitzer winner Stephen Stucky's nostalgic "Whispers" (2002), drawing on Byrd's beloved Ave verum corpus
- Peter McGarr's undulating, kaleidoscopic "Dreaming England" (2005) on a famed soliloquy from Shakespeare's Richard II.

THE CELAN PROJECT: World premiere of a new work from Chicago composer Kirsten Broberg

Our organist Scott Dettra (of Washington National Cathedral) returns for Petr Eben's thoughtful Bilder der Hoffnung (1998)

Month of Moderns III

Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill

Friday, June 5, 2009 8pm

- THE CELAN PROJECT: World premiere of a new work from Philadelphia composer Kile Smith (whose Vespers was an enormous hit with our audiences last January)
- Bo Holten's challenging, virtuosic, and intense "Rain and Rush and Rosebush" (1991)
- Famed minimalist Arvo Pärt's stark and stunning "I am the true vine" (1999)
- Colorado composer Paul Fowler's peaceful, introspective "Potter's Clay" (2007)
- Jackson Hill's "Voices of Autumn" (1989, on a 9th-century Japanese poem), combining the sounds of East and West
- John McCabe's moody "Scenes in America Deserta" (1986)

Then join us June 10 in Center City as The Crossing sings a free concert at Chorus America's National Conference

Now.

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