

ALEA III

Theodore Antoniou, Music Director

Wednesday, May 1, 1985
Thursday, May 2, 1985
Suffolk University Theatre

8 PM
Boston, MA

Two Evenings of Chamber Opera
Conducted by Theodore Antoniou
Directed by Craig Wich

PROGRAM

Embers (1984) Peter Child (b. 1953)
A Chamber Opera in One Act
Text adapted from *Embers*, by Samuel Beckett

Cast

Henry	David Ripley
Ada	Joanne Wangh

INTERMISSION

Le Pauvre Matelot (1927) Darius Milhaud (1892-1974)
(The Poor Sailor)
A Ballad in Three Acts
Text by Jean Cocteau

Cast

The Poor Sailor	William Hite
His Wife	Lynn Torgove
His Father in Law	Jonathan Barnhart
His Friend	Mark Aliapoulios

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Set Designs by Craig Wich and Joe Levendusky

Lighting Designs by Joe Levendusky

Stage Manager Meryl Perkins

Costumes and Props Meryl Perkins

Make Up Peter Rempelakis

For ALEA III

House Manager E. Amelia Rogers

Financial Adviser Jane Culbert

Office Managers Mark Miller

Lee Chandler Carter

Special Thanks to Mrs. Peter Dragonas, Jane Culbert, Rodolfo Cardona, Marilyn Plotkins, and Mrs. Theodore Antoniou.

ALEA III Personnel

Flute

Michelle Sahn

Piano

Seth Kimmelman

Oboe

Sandra Ayers

Percussion

Jeffrey Fischer

Clarinet

Diane Heffner

Violin

Clayton Hoener

Judith E. Cohen

Bassoon

Sandra L. MacDonald

Viola

David Allcott

Horn

Ellen Michaud-Martins

Cello

Karen Kaderavek

Trumpet

Thomas Cook

Double Bass

Michael Gorajec

Trombone

Robert Couture

Director's Notes

With this evening's double bill we include two of the most prolific and critically acclaimed playwrights of the twentieth century: from Samuel Beckett's *Embers*, an austere dramatization of the human voice, to Jean Cocteau's *Le Pauvre Matelot*, a *complainte* or tragic ballad.

In our first opera we explore the obsession of Henry, a protagonist typical of Beckett's genius and predilection. Henry is surrounded by hectoring voices. He is a man who finds himself trapped in his imagination with his stories, a prison echoing with guilts, memories, regrets, fears, protests and fixations. His obsession is with the menacing sea and a particular story about two men, Holloway and Bolton. The story holds perhaps a clue to Henry's relationship with his father and his father's drowning, but Henry cannot finish it. Instead, there is nothing. "Nothing, all day, nothing. All day all night, nothing. Not a sound."

Beckett has always explored the extraordinary potential of the human voice, its inflection and meaning. This virtuosic play, conceived for radio and first performed by the BBC in 1959, is no exception. Combined with Peter Child's atonal composition, it is extraordinary.

In conceiving this radio play for the stage, it is essential to preserve the work's hermetic poeticism. Symbolic use of gesture and design creates tangible representations through which reality can be transformed into abstraction.

The evening's second piece tells the story of a young sailor who has left home in search of fortune, leaving his wife, father-in-law and a close friend. At the heart of the tale is mythology, an important element in all of Cocteau's work. In this case he uses the *Odyssey*, specifically the homecoming, when Odysseus returns incognito and discovers his wife's fidelity. In addition there is the more modern myth of movie stardom, as the wife plays her tragic role expecting the ending to be happy. Cocteau's use of myth, however, serves as an ironic backdrop for the petty actions of modern man and orients the play in the realm of fantasy, thereby undermining anything realistic in character or action. As a result, our imagination is

free from the restrictions of reality. Cocteau's characters are transplanted from everyday life into the world of myth without astringency. Reason is established, and with reasoning, morality is betrayed. This indifference to logic leads us to Cocteau's true aesthetic. The friend unwittingly delivers reason in the form of a hammer. Morality is betrayed by reason and Cocteau's "*Le truc c'est l'art*" is complete. All this is disguised in the form of a ballad, with dancing melodies and distorted sea chanties, orchestrated effectively by Milhaud.

- Craig Wich

Composer's Notes for Embers

Synopsis: Henry, middle-aged or older, is on a beach, by the sea. He is alone, but his remarks are addressed to his dead father, who used to respond to Henry from the dead, but no longer does. We observe Henry command his imagination to hear sounds (hooves and, later, a drip). Henry reveals that his father was drowned in this sea. The sound of the sea upsets and unnerves him: several times he cries out "Listen to it!" and he talks obsessively in order to try and drown out its sound, either by trying to communicate with people who knew him but are now dead, or by telling "stories" to himself.

Henry tries to reconstruct a story that depicts an old man, Bolton, and his friend a doctor, called Holloway. Bolton has called Holloway to his house on a cold winter's night, having told him to bring his doctor's bag. Bolton pleades desperately with Holloway (we don't know specifically for what); Holloway denies Bolton. The fire in the grate gradually dies into embers, and eventually becomes cold.

Henry fails to finish the story, and becomes tired of talking to his father because he will not respond. He calls to his dead wife, Ada, who answers him. Henry and Ada converse about mundane matters, she tries to get him to smile or laugh, which he did so charmingly once, they recall the music and riding lessons of their daughter Addie and their early romances here on the beach. Ada tells Henry that the sound of the sea, which upsets him so much, is only on the

surface: "Underneath all is as quiet as the grave. Not a sound. All day, all night, not a sound." She predicts that eventually, like Henry's father, no one will respond to Henry: he will be quite alone in the world with his voice. In a final aria before her exit, Ada describes the last time she had seen Henry's father before he died.

Ada exits, and Henry experiences an immediate deterioration of his powers: he can no longer command his imagination to hear sounds, and Ada will no longer respond to him. He tries to reconstruct Ada's closing remembrance of his father, and fails; he tries to finish the Bolton-Holloway story, and fails. Finally, he looks forward to a bleak future in language that recalls Ada's description of the sea: "Saturday... nothing. Sunday...Sunday...nothing all day. Nothing, all day nothing. All day all night nothing. Not a sound."

Comments: The text of *Embers* is adapted from a radio play by Samuel Beckett. Characteristically for Beckett, it has no "plot," in the traditional sense of a standard narrative scheme. Rather, it presents a situation in which events happen according to their own inner logic and are richly interpretable symbolically. Similarly, the way we understand the drama more closely resembles the way we might interpret a poem than how we might experience a more traditional play.

The sea, as well as the embers of the Bolton-Holloway story, represent death: the gradual deterioration and ultimate extinction of our material reality, and with that the deterioration of the faiths that sustain us through life. In Bolton, we have a depiction of the raw despair that is the experience of the emptiness that is conferred upon life by death. In Henry, we have a depiction of the vigor - ultimately futile - with which a person might fight off confronting this reality. He imagines other sounds (perhaps even his conversations with the dead are only imagined) in order to blot out the sound of the sea, and he tells us that his obsessive talking is to drown out that sound. These are Henry's techniques for denying the realities of death and despair, and the deterioration of those powers toward the end of the

opera represents the inevitability with which he must eventually accept those realities.

The Music: Thematic Elements: The sea: always calm, it is depicted musically by a variety of rhythmically gently undulating, harmonically slow moving figures.

Henry's reaction to the sea: Several times he cries out "Listen to it!" The setting of the first utterance is syllabic and quite simple; each subsequent setting becomes more melismatic and elaborate, and eventually quite high in register, to suggest the impression of accumulating anguish.

The Bolton-Holloway story: I imagined Henry relating it in a breathless, agitated fashion, which I tried to capture in the rhythms of the setting. The text is highly motivic and repetitive, and the motivic structure of the melody closely corresponds to that of the text.

The embers: these are depicted by a chromatic figure that is derived from the inner voice of Chopin's *Grande Valse #5* in A flat. The waltz itself is quoted at times to represent remembered sentimentality and romance from Henry and Ada's past. The use of this waltz was suggested by the fact that Beckett cites it in his original radio play: it is what Addie, Henry and Ada's daughter, is playing at her music lesson.

Henry's closing utterances: their motivic parallelism with Ada's description of the sea ("Not a sound. All day, all night, not a sound") is underscored musically. Against Henry's speech, we hear Ada (offstage) vocalise the music of her earlier speech, while the orchestra combines this with the embers motive.

- Peter Child

About the Composer

Peter Child is a major composer in the Boston area, and in recent years has held teaching appointments at Boston University, Brandeis University, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He holds degrees from Reed College and Brandeis, and has been a resident of the MacDowell Arts Colony and the Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood, where he was the recipient of the Leonard Bernstein Fellowship. He has studied composition with Martin Boykan, Jacob Druckman, Arthur Berger, and Seymour Shifrin, among others.

Mr. Child has received commissions from most of the important music groups in the Boston area, including the New England Conservatory, the MIT Experimental Music Studio, the Emmanuel Wind Quintet, Boston Musica Viva, and ALEA III, for which he composed this evening's work.

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when we will present concerts featuring the finalists
in the Kucyna International Composition Competition.