

Program Notes – From Baroque to Berkeley

The program is a symbiosis of instrumental-cultural and temporal sensibilities. **Michael Berkeley** is represented by compositions for oboe and piano. He has dedicated *Fierce Tears I* and *II* to two beloved figures in his life, inspired by a line of poetry by Dylan Thomas,

“And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears,
I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.”

Fierce Tiers I was written in 1983 in memory of Janet Craxton, an oboist for whom he had written his *Oboe Concerto* in 1979. *Fierce Tears II* is in memory of the composer’s father, Sir Lennox Berkeley. Both works form part of a group of pieces exploring the emotions of grief and anger following loss or bereavement, and both develop a line in the *Elegy In Memoriam Benjamin Britten*, the final movement of Michael’s 1979 *Oboe Concerto*. Benjamin Britten was a close friend of the composer’s father, and was Michael’s godfather.

The first piece on the program takes a firm, lively grip on its instrumental properties. It is the *Sonata No. 3 in B-flat* by Jan Dismas Zelenka (1679–1745), known during his lifetime primarily for his sacred works. He also had a great gift for writing virtuosic music for double-reed instruments. Katarina Russell, a Baroque bassoon specialist is traveling from England just for this program, The Zelenka is followed by selections from François Couperin (1668–1733), *Pièces de clavecin*. These are favorite works of the composer-pianist Thomas Adès (b. 1971) whose *Sonata da caccia*, Op. 11 (1993) is inspired by them: “My ideal day would be staying at home and playing the harpsichord works of Couperin – new inspiration on every page.” He chooses Baroque instruments for this late Twentieth Century work, the oboe, horn and harpsichord. The oboist for *Sonata da caccia* is Gerard Reuter, an esteemed, long-time contributor to our musical well being. Hornist Andrew Clark comes back from England after two highly successful tours with us in 2001 and 2006. Christopher Oldfather joins us in the role of harpsichordist and pianist. We take full advantage of the presence of Mr. Clark with Joseph Haydn’s rarely played *Divertimento a tre, in E-flat*, Hob.IV:5 for horn, violin and ’cello, from 1767 for a virtuoso in the Esterhazy Court Orchestra named Printser to close the first half.

After intermission we bring out the piano for Michael’s *Fierce Tears I & II*, described above. And who better to tie it all together for us than Hr. Haydn. This program acknowledges his timeless genius, giving the ultimate pride of place to his *Sextet in E-flat*, Hob.II:40 (1781) for oboe, horn, bassoon, violin, viola, ’cello and bass, an American premiere! That is seven, not six instruments. Publishing was not at all consistent in the 18th century, nor was it helped with

such a prolific composer as Joseph Haydn, who employed at least four copyists to write out parts from the scores he produced. Furthermore, if he could get added income by slight adjustments to instrumentation to please an interested patron he was happy to oblige. So what began in manuscript residing today in the Municipal Library of Dresden as a “Cassation,” apparently without its last movement, is described in Haydn’s trusted copyist and cataloger, J. Elssler’s description in the “Haydn Verzeichnis” residing in the National Library, Budapest, as a string quartet, and in Haydn’s own “Entwurf-Katalog” (German State Library, Berlin) as “a Sei Stromenti” as well as a quartet. The present edition by Kurt Janetzky relies on C.F. Pohl’s thematically listed catalogue as “Sextett No. 14.” (We’ll get to the bottom of this sort of thing, where ever that might be, in the next season, when we explore a lot more music by Joseph Haydn.)

The likely reason the work has waited this long for its American premiere is the fact that each of the instruments is treated soloistically. In the case of the horn, its extremely high tessitura puts it out of reach for all but a few players, and among those who can squeek out the highest notes, are even fewer with the nerve to try in public, and still fewer who are musically attuned to the beauties of such music. You get all those qualities in this program from Andrew Clark. He is the last to claim there won’t be a moment or two in the “normal course of events” that make him wonder why he agreed to perform such a challenging work. But he’s a good sport, as you will hear. As a result we are afforded the opportunity to hear a neglected work by a master brought to our ears 216 years after its composition.