

*“There must be some kind of order, but not too much of it . . .”*

—*György Ligeti*  
*Interview with Péter Várnai (1978)*

San Francisco Contemporary Music Players

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Center for the Arts Forum

# HUNGARIAN TRIOS

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## *Performers*

Tod Brody, flute  
William Wohlmacher, clarinet  
Lawrence Ragent, French horn  
Thomas Schultz, piano (Kurtág, Ligeti)  
Ellen Wassermann, piano (Bartók)  
Roy Malan, violin  
Nancy Ellis, viola  
Stephen Harrison, cello  
Steven D'Amico, contrabass

## **BÉLA BARTÓK** *Contrasts (1938)*

I. Verbunkos (Recruiting Dance)  
II. Pihenő (Relaxation); III. Sebes (Fast Dance)

## **SÁNDOR VERESS** *String Trio (1954)*

I. Andante; II. Allegro Molto

— INTERMISSION —

## **GYÖRGY KURTÁG** *Bagatelles, op. 14d (1981)*

I. Duhös Korál (Furious chorale); II. Hommage à J.S.B.  
III. Mint az mezei viragoc ... (Dirge) [In memoriam Ilona Ligeti]  
IV. Vadul és szelíden (Wild and tame)  
V. Virág az ember ... (Flower we are, mere flowers)  
VI. La fille aux cheveux de lin arragée  
(The crazy girl with the flaxen hair)

## **GYÖRGY LIGETI** *Horn Trio (1982)*

I. Andantino con tenerezza  
II. Vivacissimo molto ritmico  
III. Alla Marcia  
IV. Lamento. Adagio

## BÉLA BARTÓK (1881-1945)

One of the most important musicians of the twentieth century, Béla Bartók had many musical careers and many spheres of influence. Composer and pianist, educator and ethnomusicologist, he revolutionized international perceptions of Hungary's musical heritage and its role in contemporary music. For subsequent generations of Hungarian composers, Bartók has been a source of national pride, and for countless others on both sides of the Atlantic, he provided significant and successful strategies for negotiating between modernist abstraction and the special kind of communicative power that springs from cultural rootedness.

Bartók's earliest training was as a pianist, and throughout his career, when health permitted, he would supplement his sometimes meager income by performing his own music. In addition, some of his most influential works, such as the collections *Mikrokosmos* and *For Children*, were essentially teaching pieces, designed to introduce students to the keyboard and to musical modernism through examples drawn from folk materials and from his own experiments with rhythms and modal scales. Unlike Schoenberg or Stravinsky, Bartók devoted a great deal of time and attention to piano pedagogy and to the creation of music with an explicit social function, thus eschewing the more extreme manifestations of the philosophy "art for art's sake." Whether he was responding to practical considerations or a genuine feeling of obligation toward his fellow citizens—or some happy combination of the two—Bartók chose to maintain closer ties with his audiences than many of his contemporaries.

Turn-of-the-century Budapest was hardly a cultural backwater, yet Bartók and other intellectuals still looked to Paris, Vienna, and the music centers of Germany for their musical news. Bartók's fascination with Strauss and Debussy during his student years eventually led to his own experiments in expressionism and impressionism: the tone poem *Kossuth* (1903) and the dramatic works *Bluebeard's Castle* (1911) and *The Miraculous Mandarin* (1918-19). In the later 1910s and 20s, Stravinsky's influence was inescapable, and Bartók produced a string of works that seem to share Stravinskian preoccupa-

tations: Bartók's *The Wooden Prince* of 1914-15 followed hard on the heels of Stravinsky's *Petrushka*, and his *Village Scenes* (1924-26) may have taken its cue from the Russian composer's *Svadebka* (*Les Noces*). Pieces like Bartók's First Piano Concerto (1926) or the Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion (1937) show that, for a time, both he and Stravinsky were reacting against the supposed excesses of romanticism by preferring clear forms and percussive sounds instead of lush melodies or sentimental harmonies.

Much of what set Bartók apart from Stravinsky and his neoclassicism—which favored objectivity over personal expression—can be found in the Hungarian composer's extensive experience with folk music. Although Bartók considered folk music "anti-expressive," believing that its collective nature was a remedy against romantic individualism, his love for folk melodies counter-balanced the temptation toward abstraction and extreme dissonance that was so much a part of mid-century aesthetics—an inclination which he certainly shared. While Stravinsky sometimes tried to hide his compositional debt to Russian folk songs, Bartók went to the other extreme, attempting to ground his innovative melodic and rhythmic practices by finding (or even inventing) folk precedents. He collected and made transcriptions of folk musics from Hungary, Romania, and Serbia as well as Turkey and North Africa. Although some of his earliest ethnological explorations were undertaken on behalf of a Hungarian government deeply interested in "racial purity," his own compositions demonstrate that he valued the cultural hybridity that folk songs embodied. He once proclaimed this ideal in a letter to a Romanian music historian: "the brotherhood of peoples, brotherhood in spite of all wars and conflicts. I try—to the best of my ability—to serve this idea in my music; therefore I don't reject any influence, be it Slovak, Romanian, Arabic, or from any other source. The source must only be clean, fresh, and healthy!"

In the late twenties and thirties, Bartók wrote some of his most dissonant, aggressive, and structurally complex music—the Third and Fourth String Quartets (1927, 1928) and the *Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta* (1936)—works that continue to captivate even the most analytically minded theorists. But by the end of the decade, as political tensions were escalating all over Europe, Bartók

developed a more accessible style that delighted audiences and confused critics. The Violin Concerto of 1938, for example, displays a lyricism and emotional warmth that belie its sophisticated synthesis of folk and twelve-tone melodic elements. Ironically, as Hungarians found themselves trapped by the power and demands of their National Socialist neighbors, Bartók's music became more expansive and less constrained. In 1940, almost immediately after the death of his mother made it feasible for Bartók to emigrate, he left for the United States, where he remained until his death in 1945. Though hampered by poor health, he continued his folk music scholarship, teaching, and concertizing in addition to producing two of his most beloved works: the *Concerto for Orchestra* (written on a Koussevitzky commission in 1943) and the Third Piano Concerto (all but finished at the time of his death). With virtually his entire creative output framed by the cataclysmic conflicts of World Wars I and II, Bartók could not help but respond to contemporary politics and to questions of national identity in music. What is remarkable is the fact that his responses so effectively combine technical sophistication and creative expression.

### ***Contrasts* (1938)**

*for clarinet, violin, and piano*

*Contrasts* is a light-hearted piece from a difficult time. Bartók began work on a piece for clarinet, violin, and piano after being approached in 1938 by his friend, the Hungarian violinist József Szigeti on behalf of American jazz clarinetist Benny Goodman. Szigeti had been the soloist at the premiere of Bartók's First Violin Rhapsody and had convinced Goodman to finance a piece that would resemble this popular showpiece in its virtuosity, accessibility, and (at least initially) in its structure: a rhapsodic (*lassú*) introduction followed by a faster (*friss*) finale. In a letter to his countryman, Szigeti wrote, "If possible, the composition should consist of two independent parts (with the possibility of playing them separately—like the first rhapsody for violin) and of course we hope that it will also contain brilliant clarinet and violin cadenzas." Although Goodman had requested a work short enough to fit on a 78rpm record, and although Bartók completed the commission in less than a month, the original two movements of the work ("Verbunkos" and

"Sebes") were rather longer than Goodman had wanted. Tongue-in-cheek, the composer apologized: "Generally the salesman delivers less than he is supposed to. There are exceptions, however—as for example if you order a suit for a two year old baby and an adult suit is sent instead—when the generosity is not particularly welcome." It turned out that Bartók had even more music to offer: he felt that the work needed a slower central movement, and apparently completed one by September 1938; but he did not mention this to Goodman or Szigeti, who premiered the two-movement version under the title *Two Dances* at Carnegie Hall in January 1939 with pianist Endre Petri. The now standard three-movement work was retitled *Contrasts* and received its first performance (and recording on Columbia) in April 1940 with the composer at the piano.

The outer movements of *Contrasts* correspond roughly to the plan that Szigeti had suggested, but instead of a freely rhapsodic slow introduction, Bartók substituted a movement in another "Hungarian" style: *verbunkos*. Various associated with gypsy music, Transylvanian folk fiddling, and army recruiting songs, *verbunkos* had become a symbol of Hungarian musical identity by the early twentieth century. The violin's pizzicato accompaniment in the opening bars is related both to a folk style known as *dívő* and (according to Bartók) to the "Blues" movement of Ravel's Violin Sonata. Other stereotypically "Hungarian" references in *Contrasts* include virtuosic embellishments for both instrumentalists (Bartók graciously supplied a cadenza each for clarinet and violin), prominent dotted figures characterizing the melodies, and end-accented rhythms (short-LONG, or weak-STRONG) that echo the inflections of the Hungarian language. At the beginning of the third movement, "Sebes," in imitation of a folk fiddler (or perhaps in parody of Camille Saint-Saens's *Danse Macabre*), the violinist is required to have an extra violin on hand whose lowest string has been raised to G sharp (instead of G) and whose highest string has been lowered to E flat (instead of E). The resulting emphasis on the tritones (diminished fifths) in the open strings—G sharp/D and A/E flat—reinforces the dominant role the tritone has played in all three of the trio's movements.

By retitling the piece *Contrasts*, Bartók calls attention to the numer-

ous “contrasts” that the piece incorporates. The added middle movement, “Pihenő” (Relaxation) balances the exuberance of the stylized folk dances with something resembling the shimmering nocturnal sound world of the “Night Music” movements from his most abstract works. The timbral differentiation between clarinet and violin—this is the composer’s only chamber work using a wind instrument—provides one of the distinguishing features of the piece. Finally, there is the inevitable collision in worldviews represented by the creative collaboration between Bartók and Goodman, between Hungary and America, between art music, folk music, and jazz. Is the emphasis on the tritone in *Contrasts* an allusion to the modal scales of Hungarian folk music, the modernist dissonances of Schoenberg and Stravinsky, or the typical “blue” notes of American jazz? The answer, of course, is a resounding “yes”—an affirmation that Bartók was uniquely suited to provide.

### SÁNDOR VERESS (1907-1992)

“The spiritual and mental qualities that are represented by a really deep national culture are always universal. And further, as in the nature of every culture, it changes from time to time and, like a mirror, reflects the life of a nation from another angle. It is in this mirror that creative artists, poets and writers, who are embodied in the nation, see the contours of their work.” Sándor Veress offered these observations in a discussion of folk music and music education, but his words make an apt statement about tonight’s program, which brings together four perspectives on twentieth-century art music from native Hungarians who have lived through some of the most turbulent and changeable years in European history.

Veress’s views of nation and creation were shaped in part by his own dual artistic citizenship—first as an active participant in Hungary’s musical life and later as an emigre living in Switzerland. Born in Kolozsvár, Transylvania (then part of Hungary, now part of Romania), Veress studied composition and piano at the Budapest Academy of Music with Zoltán Kodály and Béla Bartók. From them he gained not only a familiarity with cosmopolitan musical

trends, but also a respect for the folk music of his own region and its potential impact on contemporary composition. Much of Veress’s scholarly writings document this rich musical heritage, and many of the works he wrote while in Hungary are either settings or “free adaptations” of Central and Eastern European folk melodies and rhythms; among these are *Hungarian Suite*, *Four Transylvanian Dances*, *Five Folk Songs from Moldova*, and dozens of choruses. In addition, Veress’s oeuvre shows a marked preference for genres that suggest a Bartókian influence, especially in his many piano pieces for children. Veress’s homage to Bartók reached its greatest intensity in his *Threnody (in memoriam Béla Bartók)* of 1945, originally meant to be a lament for those killed in World War II but quickly modified after the news of Bartók’s death reached Budapest.

By this point in his career, Veress was the leading Hungarian composer of his generation. He was teaching at the respected Budapest Academy, and was an important link between his pupils (including both György Ligeti and György Kurtág) and the Bartók and Kodály traditions. But in 1948-49, while traveling abroad, Veress made the painful decision not to return to his homeland, where communist control of cultural life had become increasingly and often oppressively apparent. Following the Soviet manifesto of 1948 that outlined the aesthetic principles of “socialist realism,” Hungarian composers, like their Russian comrades, were required to write “optimistic” and “uplifting” music, and artistic complexity was denounced as a symptom of bourgeois decadence. Veress’s growing interest in the avant-garde convinced him to settle in Bern, Switzerland, rather than risk returning to Budapest. In the relatively open aesthetic environment of Western Europe, he quickly developed a fascination with modernist abstraction in art and music. The *Hommage à Paul Klee* (1951), for two pianos and string orchestra, was inspired by the variety of textures, colors, and lines in Klee’s paintings. The Concerto for Piano, Strings and Percussion (1954), composed in honor of Paul Sacher, and the String Trio (1954) on tonight’s program represent two of the emigre composer’s most important ventures into the serial techniques of Schoenberg and Webern.

In 1950, Veress became a professor at the conservatory in Bern, and

for the rest of his career he continued to work closely with Swiss musicians such as Paul Sacher and later Heinz Holliger, who was one of his students. Works such as the *Passacaglia Concertante* (written for Holliger in 1961) and the *Musica Concertante* (written for the Camerata Bern in 1966) show the influence of these collaborations, and also a carefully maintained balance between mathematical complexity and communicative expression. Veress never abandoned his Hungarian ties—he wrote a memorial piece, *Variations on a Kodály Theme* (1962) for his former teacher—nor did he relinquish his commitment to folk music. On the contrary, for Veress folk music remained an example of what he believed all music ought to be: “an important weapon for fighting the mechanical deterioration of the human being.”

Along with his teaching positions in Budapest and Bern, Veress served as guest lecturer at many institutions in the United States and Australia. In 1949, he won (but could not collect) Hungary’s Kossuth Prize. He was awarded the Bartók-Pásztory Prize in 1985, the Swiss Musicians’ Association prize for composition in 1986, and a Music Prize from the city of Bern in 1987. Veress became a Swiss citizen a few months before his death in 1992.

### ***String Trio (1954)***

*for violin, viola, and cello*

Veress’s String Trio represents a direct engagement with his Hungarian heritage—not with the realm of folk music, but with the legacy of Bartók’s chamber works, especially the string quartets. In 1950, Veress gave three lectures on Bartók’s quartets when they were performed in Basel, drawing attention to their detailed melodic construction, their contrapuntal activity, and their dramatic impact. These are precisely the features that seem most important in the String Trio he composed four years later, a work praised by Heinz Holliger for its “precarious balance between complex, formally perfected composition and spontaneous forcefulness of expression.”

Together with his Piano Concerto and Second Symphony, the Trio also reveals the depth of Veress’s earliest experiments with serial techniques. Lyrical twelve-tone melodies for violin and viola char-

acterize the contrapuntal outer sections of the Trio’s first movement. Within this frame is a muted pastoral mid-section introduced by striking impulsive gestures—first fluttering and then passionate—that are far more expressive than abstract. The second movement, which has the playful character of a scherzo, exaggerates the emphasis on expressivity, with impetuous gestures overshadowing any lingering contrapuntal intricacies. As in Bartók’s quartets, Veress’s instrumentalists enact virtuosic dialogues, often punctuated by surprising percussive effects and colored by the use of mutes or *sul ponticello* (playing near the bridge). The juxtaposition of such different moods supports Veress’s assertion that twelve-tone composition is a powerful technique but not an arbiter of musical style. “I have experimented a great deal with the twelve-tone system,” he remarked in a 1981 interview, “but not so that I become a slave to these rows. I demand my freedom, my inner freedom.”

## **GYÖRGY KURTÁG (B. 1926)**

**G**yorgy Kurtág once wrote, “My mother tongue is Bartók, and Bartók’s mother tongue was Beethoven,” simultaneously acknowledging his Hungarian roots and relating them to what he perceived as the musical mainstream of Western Europe. Born in a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire that was later allotted to Romania, Kurtág and his family moved to Budapest in 1946 where he studied with Pál Kadosa, Leó Weiner, and Sándor Veress. Kurtág began his career as a pianist, and as such was particularly praised for his interpretations of Bartók’s music. Not surprisingly, many of his first compositions reveal Bartók’s influence in their rhythmic and melodic ties to folk song. Some of these works also demonstrate the extent to which his earliest output was shaped by the demands of “socialist realism.” However, these were not pieces that Kurtág chose to include in his compositional catalog: after the turmoil of the mid-fifties, he withdrew or destroyed most of them, and instead developed more refined preoccupations centering upon two forms that would become distinctive features of his oeuvre: the miniature and the homage.

Taking advantage of one of the few freedoms that followed the brutal suppression of the 1956 Hungarian uprising, Kurtág traveled to Paris in 1957 and attended classes taught by Olivier Messiaen, Darius Milhaud, and the psychologist Marianne Stein. Even more important during this year abroad was his exposure to new music—in particular to the works of Anton Webern, which impressed him with their brevity, immediacy, and intensity of expression. Schoenberg once noted that Webern’s works had the power “to express a novel in a single gesture, a joy in a breath,” and that such gestures could only be understood by “those who share the faith that music can say things which can only be expressed by music.” Kurtág must have shared this faith, for a great many of his works are composed as a series of aphoristic utterances. In 1959, his first String Quartet (which the thirty-three year old composer pointedly dubbed his op. 1) presented six short movements in fourteen minutes’ time. Subsequent works took this trend to greater extremes: the Wind Quintet (1954) packs eight movements into less than eight minutes, and the Eight Piano Pieces (1960) last less than five. Even his few large-scale works, such as the 40-minute cycle *The Sayings of Péter Bornemisza* (1963-68), tend to be made up of dozens of “microforms;” the more recent *Kafka-Fragmente* of 1985 has a total of forty distinct movements! Absorbing fragments from both romantic and modernist creators—Schumann and Hölderlin, Webern and Beckett—Kurtág has developed an aesthetic in which nothing is superfluous and every nuance bears meaning. As Paul Griffiths puts it, each piece “bulges with pregnant possibilities or else sounds drained towards extinction.”

This is by nature a painstaking approach to composition, and Kurtág’s oeuvre remains relatively small. Among the thirty-five extant works to which he has granted opus numbers, there is a striking tendency toward homage or “in memoriam” pieces—as if Kurtág feels compelled to advertise connections between his own highly individual utterances and those people who have contributed most significantly to his artistic development. Many of these tiny tributes recognize his Hungarian teachers and colleagues: Kodály and Kadosa, Ferenc Farkas, András Mihály, Ferenc Szabo, and Endre Szervánszky. Others recall individual styles or personalities: J.S. Bach, Scarlatti, Schubert, Schumann, Paganini, Mussorgsky,

Ives, Stravinsky, Kabalevsky, Stockhausen, Luigi Nono, Christian Wolff, and Nancy Sinatra. The titles of these elliptical pieces—for example, *Ligatura: Message to Frances-Marie (The answered unanswered question)*—hint at their significance as highly personal communications. As scholar Hartmut Lück has pointed out, Kurtág’s musical idiom exhibits “an extremely subjective linguistic character, a musical articulation that rests on a secret language.” Whether this secret language was born out of isolated introspection or conscious engagement, whether out of involvement with or retreat from twentieth-century politics and musical trends, it remains one of Kurtág’s most distinctive contributions to contemporary music.

Kurtág has garnered many honors, beginning in the mid-fifties when he won his country’s Erkel Prize (1954, 1956, 1969) and continuing up to the present with awards including Hungary’s Kossuth Prize (1973, 1996), the Herder Prize in Hamburg (1992), Monaco’s Prix de Composition Musicale (1993), the Austrian State Award for European Composers (1994), the Ernst von Siemens Music Prize (1998), and the Order of Merit in the Sciences and Arts (2000). Though he has spent most of his life in his homeland, Kurtág has also held prestigious positions abroad in Berlin, Vienna, the Netherlands, and most recently Paris.

***Bagatelles, op. 14d (1981)***  
*for flute, bass, and piano*

Like Bartók (and Beethoven, and Webern), when Kurtág writes bagatelles, they are more than mere “trifles.” Though brief, the six vignettes of op. 14d capture a world of references. Dedicated to British flutist Michelle Lee, these pieces are in fact transcriptions of earlier pieces from the solo piano cycle, *Játékok* (Games, 1973-76), and *Herdecker Eurythmie* for speaking voice, lyre, flute, and violin (1978). *Játékok* is an adventurous compendium of piano miniatures—some only a few notes long, others in (slightly) more extended forms. According to musicologist Stephen Walsh, in this work Kurtág decided to embrace, rather than discard, his experimental jottings, both as an inspiration for young pianists and as a source of ideas for future works. Thus they form a sort of diary of his musical

thoughts, while at the same time complementing the pedagogical piano collections of Bartók and Veress.

The first, third, and fifth of Kurtág's *Bagatelles*, op. 14d, are adapted from *Játékok*. In the opening "Furious Chorale," the pianist retains the angular rhythms of the original, over which a terse melody for flute and double bass (!) is interrupted by something resembling scornful laughter. Nothing could be further from the serene "Dirge" or the crystalline austerity of "Flowers we are, mere flowers" (which incorporates materials also used in other compositions, including *The Sayings of Péter Bornemisza*). In keeping with the flexibility of Kurtág's modular formal construction, both this third movement and the fourth movement, "Wild and Tame," are considered "optional." The second and sixth movements are "homage" pieces of very different characters. "Hommage à J.S.B." (originally written for solo flute or flute and lyre) offers a serious reflection on the music of Bach, adding minimal accompaniment to a flute line that displays the steady pulse and internal polyphony of baroque melodic writing. By contrast, the final movement's title, "The Crazy Girl with the Flaxen Hair," makes whimsical reference to Debussy's piano prelude, suggesting both Kurtág's closeness to turn-of-the-century European musical traditions and the distance he wished to maintain from them.

## GYÖRGY LIGETI (B. 1923)

Of the composers on tonight's program, Ligeti has written in the widest variety of musical idioms and cultural contexts. His career was unquestionably and irrevocably influenced by mid-century changes in the political climate of Hungary and surrounding nations. Unlike his father and brother, who perished in a concentration camp, Ligeti survived World War II and made his way to Budapest by 1945. There he studied with Ferenc Farkas and Sándor Veress among others, inheriting from them a love for both Bartók and folk music. Though he wrote a great deal during these years, he later disavowed many of these works as "prehistoric" and artificially isolated from the musical modernism of Western Europe.

Like Veress, Ligeti eventually chose to emigrate to the West rather than to comply with the demands of socialist realism, but unlike Veress, he waited until after the epic events of 1956 to make his move. That fall, as Hungarian intellectuals pushed for a more flexible Communism, one that would give priority to Budapest's concerns over Moscow's, Ligeti was secretly studying scores by Western "bourgeois" composers such as Schoenberg, and listening to music by avant-gardists such as Karlheinz Stockhausen over the radio. When Soviet tanks put a forceful end to the attempted "revolution," the aftermath was terrifying for intellectuals with any liberal leanings. Ligeti planned and executed a dramatic escape: crossing into Austria on foot in the dead of winter.

Within a few months of his arrival in the West, Ligeti was already working at the forefront of electronic and other new music research in Cologne, Germany (for a while he even lived in Stockhausen's apartment). Two tape pieces, *Glissandi* (1957) and *Artikulation* (1958), are among his earliest experiments in layering and distorting sound—experiments that he soon carried into the realm of non-electronic orchestral music in works that would make him internationally famous: *Apparitions* (1958-59) and *Atmosphères* (1961). In these pieces, melody and rhythm are blurred beyond recognition through the creation of "sound complexes" or "clusters" made up of a profusion of independent but overlapping canonic musical lines. The intensity of these clusters waxes and wanes, and their timbres shift with time, but their precise pitches and rhythms remain obscure; sometimes these clusters can only be captured using non-standard music notation. As Ligeti remarked in a 1978 interview, "My idea was that instead of tension-resolution, dissonance-consonance, and other such pairs of opposition in traditional tonal music, I would contrast 'mistiness' with passages of 'clearing up.' 'Mistiness' usually means a contrapuntal texture, a micropolyphonic cobweb technique." Ligeti transferred his "micropolyphony" to the vocal medium with impressive effect in *Lux Aeterna* (1966) for sixteen soloists and chorus—a work made famous two years later by its appearance in Stanley Kubrick's film, *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Having made a name for himself in the avant-garde during the sixties, however, Ligeti gradually changed course, finding (or recover-



ing) an appreciation for more conventional sounds and textures. As musicologist Paul Griffiths puts it, “all kinds of memories began to float on the surface: consonant chords, melodies that might suggest folk song (especially Hungarian folk song), pulsed rhythms.” Perhaps Ligeti was simply building upon works like his Second String Quartet (1968), which makes multiple allusions to music of the past. Perhaps he was exploring similarities between his own “micropolyphonic” works and the generative processes created by American “minimalist” composers such as Terry Riley or Steve Reich. Or perhaps, as Griffiths has suggested, Ligeti came to realize that “the artistic atmosphere in Western Europe in the 50s and 60s was hardly freer than the climate he had known in Hungary. Western composers, poets, and painters were unlikely to fall afoul of the secret police, but there were strong views about the right path, and those who veered off might easily lose access to publishers, broadcasting studios and record companies.”

Whatever the case may be, during the seventies Ligeti’s music became much more eclectic in style and technique. The opera *Le Grand Macabre*, which occupied him from 1974-77, combines so many musical allusions—Monteverdi, Rossini, Schumann, Verdi, and Offenbach, to name just a few—that Ligeti himself has referred to it as a kind of musical “flea market.” Since this time, Ligeti has been quite open in acknowledging a vast variety of influences, ranging from classical (Bach, Beethoven, Debussy), to contemporary (especially Conlon Nancarrow’s experiments with player piano music), to world music (African drumming, Balinese gamelan), to jazz (Thelonius Monk, Bill Evans), to fractal mathematics. With two harpsichord works of 1978, *Passacaglia Ungherese* and *Hungarian Rock*, he even reconnected with elements of his pre-1956 existence: traditional forms and the asymmetrical rhythms of Hungarian folk music—though now perceived by a composer familiar with jazz, Latin American music, and rock. This new approach to familiar sounds represents not so much a retreat from the avant garde as a rebirth of interest in conventionally communicative music. To quote Griffiths again, “Whereas once in Eastern Europe these [basic musical materials] were imposed . . . as elements of a state policy of ‘music for the people,’ now they come sounding from the ethnic music of the world. And the lesson Mr. Ligeti draws

from this international chorus is salutary: not that we must return to some presumed tradition, but rather that the basic data of music can be taken up again and reinterpreted, in works that belong to no tradition except that of humanity in general.”

Since 1964, when *Apparitions* won him first prize at the ISCM Composition Competition in Rome and he was made a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Music, each decade has brought Ligeti new honors and new champions. He has been made a member of many distinguished societies: Berlin’s Akademie der Künste (1968), the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, the International Society for New Music (1984), and the Ordre National des Arts et Lettres (1988). His awards testify to truly international acclaim: first place at the International UNESCO Competition, the Bach, Beethoven, and Ernst von Siemens Prizes (Germany), the Ravel and Honegger Prizes (France), the Béla Bartók-Ditta Pásztory Prize (Hungary), the Praemium Imperiale (Japan), the Austrian State Prize, and an award from the Fondation Prince Pierre de Monaco. His work has done very well in the U.S., receiving a Koussevitzky Foundation Prize as well as the prestigious Grawemeyer Award from the University of Louisville.

### ***Horn Trio (1982)***

*for French horn, violin, and piano*

“Half ironic, half deeply serious” . . . Ligeti described his Horn Trio as “an ‘hommage’ to Johannes Brahms, whose own horn trio hovers in the musical heavens as an unequaled example of this genre. All the same, one finds neither quotations nor influences from Brahms’s music in this piece. Composed in the late twentieth century, my trio is—both in construction and expression—music of our time.” What Ligeti’s means by “music of our time,” however, can be difficult to surmise. In a more recent assessment of the work, he readily identifies its enigmatic placement between tradition and innovation, between past and present, between imagination and reality. He reveals much about the work by saying what it is not:

The Trio cannot be pigeonholed into any neat stylistic category; it has odd angles and trick floors that do not fit in

anywhere . . . For one, it has an emotional layer (fourth movement) which cannot be described in terms of traditional categories. Nostalgia for a homeland that no longer exists? Then there is a layer of cultural connotations, melted together, in the second movement, to produce an imaginary, synthetic folklore . . . Exoticism? Certainly not; and not any folk music, either . . . though there are allusions to the gypsy music which affected me so strongly as a child. In the march section of the third movement there is a gesture which in contour suggests Beethoven's scherzi, but without a true quotation . . . But all of these layers and elements only camouflage a musical reality of an entirely different nature, which remains undecipherable.

The inner two movements present different dance-like moods. With characteristic humor, the composer describes the second movement as "a very quick polymetric dance inspired by the various folk musics of non-existing peoples. That is to say as if Hungary, Romania and the entire Balkan region were situated somewhere between Africa and the Caribbean." The vigorous "march" movement that follows generates rhythmic complexity by superimposing repeated (ostinato) rhythmic patterns in changing ways. The result is a kaleidoscopic diversity of syncopation, likened by commentator Martin Herman to "watching gears at different calibrations revolving within gears."

More serious and weightier in tone, the first and last movements assert the Trio's peculiar status as both a tribute to and departure from the past. The violin's double stops at the opening of the piece ("Andantino con tenerezza") present a figure that Ligeti has compared to a distorted horn call and also to the motive that begins Beethoven's "Les Adieux" Sonata. Consonant intervals and triads take their place alongside more dissonant harmonies and atonal moments that render any sense of tonal stability only fleeting. Revealing his continued interest in musical spatialization, Ligeti writes, "The image I had while composing was one of a very distant, gentle, melancholic music resounding through atmospheric crystallizations." The final "Lament" movement takes the form of a passacaglia, in which the music unfolds over a repeated harmonic

pattern—in this case, a five-measure descending line derived from the violin's distorted "horn call" in the first movement. The entire closing "Adagio" is suffused with poignantly chromatic descending lines that recall the lament bass common in early opera as a symbol of melancholy. This figure would become a preoccupation for Ligeti, who has since used similarly mournful patterns in the second movement of his Piano Concerto (1985-87) and in the last of his Six Piano Studies, "Automne à Varsovie" (1985). Given his historical stature within an avant garde inclined toward abstraction, Ligeti's open expressivity here signals an important evolution in his aesthetic philosophy: "Now I have the courage to be 'old-fashioned.' I don't want to return to the 19th century, but I'm no longer interested in such categories as avant garde, modernism or atonality."

—*Program notes by Beth Levy*

## *Pre-Concert Speaker*

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**C**harles Boone, composer and lecturer, was born in Cleveland in 1939, and studied music in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Vienna. After arriving in the Bay Area in 1963, he was associated for many years with the Composers' Forum and the Mills Performing Group. In 1971, he founded the BYOP (Bring Your Own Pillow) concert series, which later evolved into the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players. Mr. Boone's own compositions have been performed by the San Francisco Symphony, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Chicago Symphony, the Oakland Symphony, the Mexican National Orchestra, and the Nouvel Orchestre Philharmonique of Paris. His works have been featured at the New Music America, Ojai, Cabrillo, Juilliard, Aspen, Avignon, Berlin and Music Today/Tokyo Festivals, and notable conductors and performers include Seiji Ozawa, Edo de Waart, Michael Tilson Thomas, and Phyllis Bryn-Julson. Mr. Boone has received a number of commissions, including three NEA grants. He has also lived as a composer-in-residence guest of the Deutsche Akademische Austauschdienst (DAAD) in Berlin. He currently teaches at the San Francisco Art Institute.

## *Performers*

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**T**od Brody teaches flute and chamber music at the University of California, Davis, where he also performs with the faculty Wind Quintet and the Emyrean Ensemble. A former soloist and member of the Sacramento Symphony, Mr. Brody appears frequently with Earplay and in such ensembles as the San Francisco Opera and Ballet orchestras. Mr. Brody first performed with the Contemporary Music Players in 1997.

**S**teven D'Amico, double bass, is a graduate of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. In 1975, during his last year at the Conservatory, he became a member of the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra, of which he is currently principal bass player. He has been assistant principal bass with the San Francisco Opera orchestra since 1980. He joined the Contemporary Music Players in 1979.

**N**ancy Ellis, viola, is a member of the San Francisco Symphony. She received her M.A. in music at Mills College, where she studied with Nathan Rubin. She has performed at the Telluride, Cheltenham, Ojai, and Marlboro music Festivals, the Ima Concerts in Los Angeles, and with the Chamber Soloists of San Francisco. She joined the Contemporary Music Players in 1975.

**S**tephen Harrison is cellist of the Ives Quartet and a member of the faculty at Stanford University. Former principal cellist of the Opera Company of Boston, the New England Chamber Orchestra and the Chamber Symphony of San Francisco, he has been on the faculty of the Pacific Music Festival and has appeared in the Telluride chamber music festival. He has performed in Music of the Sacred and Profane and the New and Unusual Music series presented by the San Francisco Symphony, and has toured with the Symphony throughout Europe. Mr. Harrison has been a member of the Contemporary Music Players since 1982.

**R**oy Malan, violin, was educated in London with Yehudi Menuhin, and at Juilliard and the Curtis Institute, where he was a student of Ivan Galamian and Efram Zimbalist. Mr. Malan is concertmaster and solo violinist for the San Francisco Ballet. He has appeared as a soloist at Washington's Kennedy Center and Lincoln Center in New York. He is also founder and co-director of the Telluride Chamber Music Festival in Colorado, and serves on the faculty of the University of California, Santa Cruz. Mr. Malan joined the Contemporary Music Players in 1976.

**L**awrence Ragent, French horn, is a member of the San Francisco Opera Orchestra. An honors graduate of the New England Conservatory, he taught at Brown University and performed with the New England Ragtime Ensemble and the Boston Symphony before returning to his native California. He has performed with the San Francisco Symphony and the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra, and is a member of the Stanford Wind Quintet. He serves on the faculty of Stanford University, and first joined the Contemporary Music Players in 1981.

**T**homas Schultz, piano, has championed new music in his many solo recitals, in recordings, and in performances with Robert Craft's 20th Century Classics Ensemble. His recording with Mark Wait of Stravinsky's *Concerto for Two Solo Pianos* has recently been released on the MusicMasters label. Mr. Schultz was director of the 1990-01 Capp Street New Music Series in San Francisco, and now serves on the faculty of Stanford University. He has played with the Contemporary Music Players since 1994.

**E**llen Wassermann, piano, studied at Juilliard with Eduard Steuermann, at Oberlin College with John Perry, and with Leon Fleisher at Peabody Conservatory, where she received her Master of Music degree and served as staff accompanist and vocal coach. She has won numerous competitions including first prizes in the Mason-Hamlin Competition and in the William Kapell International Piano Competition. Very active as a solo and chamber recitalist in the Bay Area, Ms. Wassermann has been a member of the music faculty at California State University, Hayward since 1972.

**W**illiam Wohlmacher is principal clarinetist with the Cabrillo Music Festival Orchestra and is Professor and Chair of the Music Department at California State University, Hayward. He received his masters degree from the Eastman School of Music. He has performed with the Arch Ensemble for Experimental Music, and has served as principal clarinetist for the Festival Lirico Internazionale in Italy, and for the Tacoma Symphony. He joined the Contemporary Music Players in 1995.

### *The Ensemble*

**T**he San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, now in its thirty-first year, is a leader among ensembles in the United States dedicated to contemporary chamber music. A six-time winner of the prestigious national ASCAP/Chamber Music America Award for Adventurous Programming of Contemporary Music, SFCMP has performed over 900 new works, including 36 U.S. and 97 world premieres, and has brought sixty-one new pieces into the

repertoire through its active commissioning efforts. The instrumentalists who make up the Players are recognized virtuosi in new music performance. Each season the Players performs a six-concert series at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. SFCMP has also toured widely throughout California, with performances on such concert series as San Francisco Performances, Cal Performances, the Stern Grove Festival, the Other Minds Festival, Los Angeles' Monday Evening Concerts, and the Festival of New American Music in Sacramento. SFCMP made its European debut at the Cheltenham Festival of Music in 1986 and was featured in 1990 at the Ojai Festival. The ensemble has recorded seven albums of its own and contributed recordings to eight others. Its innovative education programs for students at San Francisco's public high School of the Arts and Lowell High School include performance/presentations, master classes and coaching of student ensembles in contemporary music.

### Where to Find It

*Contrasts* by **Béla Bartók** is readily available on dozens of excellent recordings. Of particular interest are the Hungaroton recordings featuring Bartók, Goodman, and Szigeti themselves; lucky collectors may find a digital remastering which also includes Bartók performing selections from his *Mikrokosmos*. CBS Masterworks includes a monoaural recording with other selections as part of its *Benny Goodman Collector's Edition: Compositions and Collaborations*. More recent *Contrasts* performances of note include those by Krysia Osostowicz, Susan Tomes and Michael Collins (Hyperion); members of the aptly named Ensemble Kontraste (Thorofon); and György Pauk, Jenő Jando and Berkes Kalman (Naxos). Somewhat closer to home, members of Chamber Music Northwest David Shifrin, Ik-Hwan Bae, and William Doppmann have issued a fine recording of the work for Delos.

A readable introduction to Bartók's life can be found in Kenneth Chalmers's biography (Phaidon Twentieth-Century Composers series). For slightly greater detail, I would recommend the recent *Cambridge Companion to Bartók* (edited by Amanda Bailey), the older *Bartók Companion* (edited by Malcolm Gillies), or the highly acclaimed *Bartók and His World* (edited by Peter Laki), all of which bring together essays by prominent Bartók scholars from around the world treating almost every facet of the composer's life and works.

A fine selection of **Sándor Veress's** chamber works, including the String Trio, the Sonata for Solo Violin, and the Solo Sonata for cello, is available on a CD from ECM. Heinz Holliger, András Schiff, and the Budapest Festival Orchestra have compiled a representative sampling of larger works, including the Concerto for Piano, Strings and Percussion, *Hommage à Paul Klee*, and the early folk-based *Six Csárdás* (Teldec). Janos Meszaros and the North Hungarian Symphony Orchestra have recorded many of Veress's large-scale compositions for Musiques Suisses. Of special interest for tonight's program is the Aulos Wind Quintet's recording of Veress's *Dyptich*, along with Kurtág's Quintet, op. 2 and Ligeti's *Six Bagatelles* and *Ten Pieces for Wind Quintet* (Koch).

### Where to Find It (cont.)

**György Kurtág's** solo piano cycle *Játékok* (Games), from which some of the *Bagatelles* are adapted, is available on an ECM recording with the composer and his wife Márta at the piano. Selections from this performance also form part of an especially valuable two-disc collection of Kurtág's works compiled after a concert at the 1993 Salzburg Festival (Col Legno). My favorites among other discs include Kim Kashkashian's stunning performance of the solo cycle *Jelek* and *Hommage à Robert Schumann* (with Robert Levin and Eduard Brunner) paired with a selection of Schumann's own chamber miniatures (BMG/ECM); the Arditti Quartet's rendering of Kurtág's *Hommage à Milhaly András: 12 Microludes, Officium breve in memoriam Andreae Szervánszky*, and String Quartet, op. 1 (Disques Montaigne/WDR); and the Keller Quartet's performances of his chamber music for strings (ECM/BMG). Many of Kurtág's vocal works, including *The Sayings of Péter Bornemisza* and the *Kafka-Fragments*, can be found on Hungaroton recordings featuring sopranos Adrienne Csengery and Erika Sziklay.

**György Ligeti's** *Horn Trio* has been issued in several fine recordings. One by Saschko Gawriloff, Hermann Baumann, and Eckart Besch also includes Ligeti's harpsichord music and his *Monument–Selbstportrait–Bewegung* (Wergo). The impressive György Ligeti Edition (Sony) has reached volume seven in its quest to compile stellar performances of all the composer's major works. One of these features Gawriloff, Pierre-Laurent Aimard and Marie-Luise Nuenecker in a performance of the Horn Trio, along with other works for wind quintet and solo viola. For those interested in reading about Ligeti's life and music, I would suggest either the second edition of Paul Griffiths's biography for the Contemporary Composers series or Richard Toop's recent monograph for Phaidon's Twentieth-Century Composers series.

—Beth Levy

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