

San Francisco Contemporary Music Players
David Milnes, Music Director
Saturday, March 20, 2004 * 8 p.m.
Jewish Community Center of San Francisco

Tonight's concert is made possible in part by the generosity of the Bernard Osher Foundation and the Walter and Elise Haas Fund.

This performance of Gérard Grisey's *Vortex Temporum* is made possible in part by a grant from the Consulate General of France.

We thank the Consulate General of Israel for bringing Betty Olivero to San Francisco for this world premiere performance of *Bashrav*.

BETTY OLIVERO
Bashrav (2003, World Premiere, Koussevitzky commission)

GÉRARD GRISEY
Vortex Temporum (1994-96)
Julie Steinberg, piano

BETTY OLIVERO (B. 1954)

As one of Israel's best-known composers, Betty Olivero has explored the meanings of contemporary composition in a region whose musical diversity matches the ethnic diversity that has both troubled and enriched its inhabitants.

Olivero was born in Tel Aviv and studied at that city's Rubin Academy of Music before earning a Master's Degree at Yale University under Jacob Druckman in 1981. The following year, she won a Leonard Bernstein Scholarship, allowing her to attend the Tanglewood Music Festival where she worked with Luciano Berio, whose music and teaching quickly made a lasting impression. Olivero moved to Italy, and for the next four years she studied with Berio, with whom she shares a fondness for folk song settings, dramatic performance techniques, and allusions to past styles.

In her songs and chamber music, as well as her choral and orchestral pieces, Olivero is especially renowned for her creative engagement with Jewish musical traditions, ranging from Sephardic and Middle Eastern folk music to liturgical music and, more recently, klezmer. In such works as *Cantigas Sephardies* (1982), *Makamat* (1988), *Cantes*

Amargos (1984), and *Juego de Siempre* (1991/1994) she sets texts drawn from the Judeo-Spanish (Ladino) and other folk traditions. Two of her large-scale works, *Mizrach* (1987) and *Bakashot* (Supplications)(1996), feature the soulful sounds of klezmer-inspired clarinet against an orchestral backdrop. No matter what the source of inspiration, Olivero makes these varied materials her own through a thoroughly contemporary attention to timbre (tone color) and an avant-garde manipulation of melodic motifs.

From early in her career, some of Olivero's most intriguing compositions unite music with drama and other art forms. In her two "musical acts" *Behind the Wall* (1989, based on a short story by H. N. Bialek) and *Behind the Fence* (1990), she employs a small puppet theater troupe to provide a visual complement to the activities of female vocalist and chamber ensemble. More recently, Olivero provided a much praised live accompaniment for the newly restored print of Paul Wegener's silent film *The Golem* (1920). A landmark of German expressionist film-making, *The Golem* retells the tale of the clay giant created by Rabbi Loew to protect the Jews from persecution in 16th-century Prague. Olivero recalls: "The legend, in all its different versions was well known to me, and I had always wanted to write an opera or ballet music for it. When I saw Wegener's film, I was amazed by its beauty and decided that that would be the right realization of my dream.... The body movement of the actors, the exaggerated expression, the overacting, which was so characteristic of the acting style of those days, especially needed in a silent movie, seemed to me like a ballet that music should be set to. It was like writing music to an existing choreography." Her accompanying music, for string quartet and klezmer clarinet, gained fame on both sides of the Atlantic in performances by Giora Feldman and the Arditti Quartet in Vienna (1997) and at Lincoln Center in New York (2001), and she has extracted two suites from the film score for concert performance.

The Golem illustrates Olivero's interest in klezmer music, a genre known for its border-crossing, history defying power. Thought to have been extinguished by the Holocaust, klezmer has arisen to become a lively genre of popular music in many nations. It is appropriate that such a resilient and hybrid music should resonate with Olivero, a composer who makes her home in many worlds, and who encourages us to do the same.

Olivero's works have been featured at festivals all over Europe, including the Aspen Music Festival, Florence's Il Maggio Musicale, Amsterdam's Gaudeamus Music Week, and the 1994 World Music Days in Stockholm. In concert, her pieces have been performed by such groups as the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the London Sinfonietta, the Munich Philharmonic, the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra, Cologne Radio, and the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra. She has won the Israel Prime Minister's Prize in Composition, the Rozenblum Prize of Tel Aviv, the John Day Jackson Prize, and numerous commissions, including the Koussevitzky Foundation Award that led to tonight's world premiere performance of *Bashrav* by the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players. Since the mid-eighties, Olivero has divided her time between Florence and Tel Aviv, where she serves as lecturer in the composition department at Bar Ilan

University.

***Bashrav* (2004)**

for flute, clarinet, trumpet, string quartet, piano, and percussion

The composer writes: “*Bashrav* is a suite form in Turkish and Arabic classical music. The piece takes its inspiration from various traditional tunes originating in the Arab-Jewish musical heritage. I tried to draw an imaginative-poetic ‘sound-world’ of antique Arab string and percussion instruments. Some of these instruments are rather limited and therefore, to the western ear, their musical material seems melodically and harmonically ‘primitive.’ However, I personally find it incredibly rich in color and expression.

“I did not seek these materials out of any scientific-musicological point of view. They served purely as a dramatic stimulus and as a point of reference. These traditional melodies and texts undergo in the piece thorough transformation, so profound as to make their original form, at times, unrecognizable, yet their spirit and highly-charged dramatic potential remain untouched.”

— Beth Levy

GÉRARD GRISEY (1946-1998)

“Cut to pieces by the media, drowned in over-information, measured in this age of zapping and clips..., the time of Art, Love, and Creativity, the instant when something unprecedented happens, can only be preserved by the artist if he completely resists this late 20th-century environment. Paradoxically, however, these are precisely the rhythms which feed and inspire him.... And so the response to this discontinuous flood of information will be a music finding its unity and continuity. Its wintry slowness will be the reversed echo of a stress-ridden world rushing towards its end.”

—Gérard Grisey, 1993

During his tragically shortened career, French composer Gérard Grisey was one of the 20th century’s most innovative composers in his approach to the fundamental aspect of music’s existence: the nature of sound in time.

Born in Belfort, near the French border with Switzerland, in 1946, Grisey began his musical studies as an accordion player and as a child of nine produced his first pieces for that instrument. From 1968 to 1972 he was a student of Olivier Messiaen at the Paris Conservatory and had significant encounters with composers such as Dutilleux, Ligeti, Stockhausen, and Xenakis. Another formative experience was his study of acoustics at the University of Paris in 1974 and 1975. On completing his education, Grisey was awarded the Prix de Rome and it was while at the Villa Medici in the early 1970s that he produced his first mature pieces.

Along with several composers with similar interests, including Tristan Murail, Grisey founded the group L’Itinéraire in 1973, which marked the beginning of the most important development in French music since the works of Pierre Boulez in the early 1950s. Like many of their colleagues in Europe and the United States, what these composers were looking for was a way out of what they saw as the impasse of serialism. Their particular solution was to explore the physical nature of sound itself as a model, or metaphor, for music. “Spectralism,” a word coined by composer and philosopher Hugues Dufourt in 1979 to characterize the shared approaches to composition of L’Itinéraire’s members, is commonly used today as a label for their music and that of their followers. Yet this term is somewhat misleading, as it suggests only their approach to harmony, which involves re-creating or composing out the spectrum of frequencies above a fundamental pitch that determines the timbre of a sound. In fact, the more representative general aspects of this music are an interest in the development of a sound over time (for example, using the attacks and decays of a sound as models for shaping musical material), gradual continuous transformations from one type of music to another, and the various processes based on both natural and electronic models used to transform these ideas into music.

For Grisey, composing from these minute details of sound meant slowing down the sound to make every event perceptible, which coincided with his interest in time. In his later works, he proposed three basic models of time: human (the time of our respiration), whale (time slowed down and stretched out), and bird (time accelerated and compressed). To enhance the audibility of his musical processes, Grisey often worked with clearly identifiable materials, such as obvious contrasts of extremes (regular, periodic rhythms vs. irregular, aperiodic ones, “harmonic” sounds vs. distorted, noise-based sounds, or high vs. low registers). Many of his gestures and formal shapes have clear, recognizable trajectories, such as ascents or descents. These ideas were developed during the central part of Grisey’s career in what is probably his most famous work, *Les Espaces Acoustiques* (1974-1985), a ninety-minute cycle of six related pieces for increasingly larger forces that moves from a solo viola prologue to a piece for large orchestra.

With *Talea* (1986), Grisey began to move away from a musical model based on slow transformations and linear continuity by introducing stronger contrasts, interruptions, rapidity, and recollections of previous material. Building on his interest in our perception of time, his concern here was to involve the listener’s memory as a piece progresses. In many ways, tonight’s piece, *Vortex Temporum* (1994-1996), was the culmination of these developments.

From 1982 to 1986, Grisey was a professor of music at UC Berkeley. During this time, several of his works were performed by the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, including *Talea* and parts of *Les Espaces Acoustiques*. Until his death in 1998, he taught composition at the Paris Conservatory and at international workshops, mentoring and inspiring many younger composers. *Quatre chants pour franchir le seuil* (“Four Songs for Crossing the Threshold”), his final piece, was written in memory of his mother and pointed to potential new lyrical and dramatic directions in his music.

***Vortex Temporum* (1994-96)**

for flute, clarinet, violin, viola, cello, and piano

“The title *Vortex Temporum* (“Vortex of Time”) defines the birth of a system of swirling, repeated arpeggios and its metamorphosis in different time fields,” noted the composer. The arpeggio whose journey we will follow for forty minutes is actually little more than a simple undulating contour borrowed from Ravel’s *Daphnis et Chloé*, although we never hear it as a literal citation. This gesture functions on several levels, some audible, such as the opening, and others inaudible but perhaps still felt, such as the slowly moving waves of sound in the second movement. While the piece is one of Grisey’s longest, his skill in guiding the ear through his gradual transformations of sound over long spans of time and his dramatic instinct in introducing sudden and striking contrasts are evidence of his concern for making the structure and narrative progression of his music clearly audible. Realizing Grisey’s score makes many unusual technical demands on the performers. The microtonal harmony involves quarter- and eighth-tones, subtle inflections of pitch which require different fingerings and highly attuned ears from the string and wind players. For the clarinetist, this is facilitated by using a second instrument tuned a quarter-tone lower. Integrating the piano, the equal-tempered instrument par excellence, requires tuning four notes down a quarter-tone as well. The use of noise-based sounds also requires non-standard playing techniques, such as extremes of bow pressure in the strings and multiphonics (complex combinations of sounds rather than single pitches) and breathy sounds in the winds.

The first movement, described by Grisey as “jubilatory,” and modeled on his idea of “human” time, falls into three distinct sections. Fluid contractions and expansions of the sparkling opening arpeggio lead into the tauter, more jagged rhythms of the middle section. The climax of the movement is a brilliant (and very difficult) cadenza for the pianist, which seems to explode with wild energy out of the tension of the preceding music. An interlude comes between each of the main movements. Its soft noises are intended, the composer wrote, “discretely to color the awkward silence,” and to dramatize our perception of time as we wait. The extreme continuity and lower register of the second movement create a clear contrast. This is “whale” time, where the same material from the first movement is stretched out so far that its identity is no longer perceptible to us. The final movement refers back to the opening, but now the material is subjected to a dizzying succession of temporal dilations (where melody, harmony, and rhythm seem to dissolve into washes of sheer sound) and contractions (sudden flashes of very high and noise-based music). The composer commented that, “*Vortex Temporum* is perhaps only the story of an arpeggio in time and space....” It is an unforgettable voyage for the listener as well.

— Reynold Tharp

THE PERFORMERS

Pianist **Julie Steinberg** performs regularly as a soloist and chamber musician. Since 1980, she has appeared many times with the San Francisco Symphony in such world premiere performances as John Adams’s *Grand Pianola Music*, as a soloist in Arvo Part’s *Tabula Rasa*, and in Michael Tilson Thomas’s Mavericks concerts. Steinberg has appeared at New Music America, the Ravinia Festival, Japan Interlink, and Lincoln Center Outdoors. Other performances include *Le Sacre du printemps* with the Paul Taylor Dance Company in San Francisco, Seattle, and Paris. As an assisting artist, she has performed in master classes with Jean-Pierre Rampal and Mstislav Rostropovich. She holds a Doctor of Musical Arts from Stanford University and is on the faculty of Mills College. She has been a member of the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players since 1989.

David Milnes is a conductor of extraordinary breadth and long-standing commitment to contemporary music. In his early years, he studied not only piano and organ, but also clarinet, cello, and voice. Milnes received his undergraduate education in music at SUNY Stony Brook. In 1984, at age 27, he won the prestigious Exxon Conductor position with the San Francisco Symphony. He remained as the Symphony’s Assistant Conductor and Music Director of the San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra until 1986, working closely with Edo de Waart and Herbert Blomstedt. Following study and collaboration with such renowned conductors as Leonard Bernstein, Erich Leinsdorf, Otto-Werner Müller, and Michael Tilson Thomas, he earned his doctorate in conducting from Yale University in 1989.

From 1994-2002, Milnes was Principal Guest Conductor of the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra and also guest conducted numerous orchestras across the United States. He has conducted at the Tanglewood, Aspen, and Monadnock Music Festivals, and has led operatic repertoire ranging from Mozart to Weill. He maintains a keen interest in jazz, which has led to appearances on jazz saxophone with Gene Krupa, Chuck Mangione, John Pizzarelli, and Billy Taylor. Milnes’s recording of John Anthony Lennon’s Zingari for Bridge Records was nominated for a Grammy Award in 1994.

In 1996, Milnes joined the music faculty at the University of California, Berkeley, where he directs its symphony orchestra and the Berkeley Contemporary Chamber Players. He first conducted the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players in 1997, and joined the ensemble as Music Director in June 2002.

The **San Francisco Contemporary Music Players** (SFCMP), now in its 33rd year, is a leader among America’s most distinguished and successful chamber music organizations, performing, commissioning, and recording the music of today’s composers. The group presents works written for both large and small chamber ensembles. SFCMP is an eight-time winner of the prestigious national ASCAP/Chamber Music America Award for

Adventurous Programming of Contemporary Music, having commissioned 66 pieces and performed over 1,000 new works, including 46 U.S. and 126 world premieres.

Each season the ensemble performs a subscription series at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. It 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, the Ojai Festival, and the Festival of New American Music in Sacramento. SFCMP made its European debut at the Cheltenham Festival of Music in 1986 and its East Coast debut at the Library of Congress in 2001. The ensemble has recorded eight albums of its own and contributed to eight others. Its musical outreach programs have involved masterclasses, performance demonstrations, and an evening course for adults.

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

Adam Frey, Executive Director
Elaine Ng, Associate Director
Steven Heimerle, Development Associate