

the
continuum

news and views from continuum contemporary music

May, 2010

Celebrating 25 Years The Big Bash is Nigh!

Continuum's first public presentation was June 21, 1985 - which means that this is really our 26th season, the 25th anniversary being a brief period last June. But then fluidity in determining year zero (the Little Bang) has always been something of a tradition: I've argued at times that the first few years didn't really count, that it took us a couple of seasons, at least, to expand and get going, and latterly that we couldn't really be *that* old. Besides, last year we were too busy with SHIFT to notice such things. So this year is it - the 25th anniversary celebration of Continuum, whose first concert, advertised though colour Xerox posters (an arrangement of magnetic refrigerator letters, tissue paper and raw eggs broken on the copier glass) was June 21, 1985.

In the beginning were musicians and composers who, according to long tradition, put their own works on the stage. Gradually their repertoire was leavened by the works of other composers. Eventually, those of the collective who remained - who had got wise to the passage of time and the fact that they were no longer the latest generation - decided to embed in Continuum's operations a policy of support for succeeding generations and the latest expressions in music. This, I think, signaled Continuum's real beginning. From that point it became an organization with accumulated

experience which at the same time maintained a commitment to exploration and experimentation.

Continuum's accomplishments over 25 years: approximately 622 musicians on the stage in 100 concerts premiering 139 commissions and performing 567 existing works. Continuum's admirable ensemble has toured parts of Canada and made two trips to Europe. We've recorded two CDs on our own label, were the recording ensemble of a Centrediscs Chris Paul Harman CD and are soon to release a recording of chamber works by James Rolfe, also with Centrediscs. There have been interdisciplinary projects such SHE! (with choreography by Conrad Alexandrowicz), Distillation (with video installation by Ramona Ramlochand), l'Oreille fine (with symposium of speakers led by Mark Kingwell), and finally SHIFT, the festival of Canadian and Dutch music, film and literature that happened last season in Amsterdam and Toronto, with activity in Montreal, Ottawa Kitchener and Vancouver. All this activity took place during a period of musical efflorescence as post-war modernist practices began to loosen, allowing for new perspectives, but also during a period of fluctuating fortunes for public support of the arts - the promise and challenge of our times.

"Wisdom of the Elders" May 21, 8 pm, Music Gallery With a Big Bash to follow

This culminating anniversary concert provides various takes on the human

experience in the world, and perhaps the world's experience of humans. In *Narayana's Cons*, Tom Johnson creates a musical interpretation of 14th century Indian mathematician Narayana's investigation into population growth while in *La Tortue de Mer* he transcribes for bass saxophone a game of sand drawing and story telling as practiced by the people of the Pacific island of Vanuatu; in a new piece by Juliet Palmer, a setting of work by Native author Thomas King, the creation myth is reexamined; British composer Geoff Hannan underscores inequity in *Where I live is shite/Where I live is posh*; and Continuum reprises *Jackhammer Lullaby*, a work by Aaron Gervais first performed by Continuum in 2008. The concert brings together old and new Continuum friends and features soprano Carla Huhtanen and acclaimed actor RH Thomson.

How It Happened, the piece
Juliet Palmer and Thomas King provide the central work on the programme. Funded jointly by the Toronto Arts Council and the Ontario Arts Council *How it Happened* is a setting of text taken from *Green Grass, Running Water* in which Coyote explains how it all happened. But don't expect clarity or simple answers. The cosmos is complicated and tricky and will bite your toes if you're not careful. New Zealand native Juliet Palmer has had works performed throughout North America, the Pacific Rim and Europe, was nominated for a Dora Award for *Stitch*, an interdisciplinary

work for three women and three sewing machines, and is currently working on *Shelter*, a full-length work for Tapestry New Opera, and *Voice Box*, for boxing women singers. She was also guest co-curator of Continuum for 18 months several years ago. Thomas King is an award-winning Native novelist, children's author, professor, editor, radio host, lecturer and politician. The work is narrated by the renowned actor RH Thomson, who, true to the theme of the concert, is almost as well-known for his environmental and social activism as his work on stage and screen.

From the composers

Of her new work **Juliet Palmer** writes, "In selecting an extremely abridged text from the novel I've allowed space for the music to create its own world, to offer another explanation of "how it happened". My music often juggles multiple ideas along loopy trajectories - King's text holds enormous appeal with its own divergent narratives and endlessly varied recurrences of familiar images. In *How it Happened* I've woven together illustrative and playful music, music which goes beyond words, and music which becomes a character in the drama. In my collaboration with actor RH Thomson we've extended the role of the narrator beyond simple recitation into the realm of sound effects and vocal play. By the end of the piece, you'll be wondering where all that water came from..."

American seminal minimalist composer **Tom Johnson** (in fact he coined the term "minimalism" in his writings for the *Village Voice*) describes the way in which he represents the multiplying herd of cows: "It begins with the original cow and her first calf: long-short.

The second year she has another calf: long-short-short. The third year: long-short-short-short. Then in the fourth year, the first calf also becomes a mother and the herd grows from four to six: long-short-short-short-long-short. The music continues like this, though it doesn't go all the way to the 20th year, because by the 17th year there are already 872 cows and calves and 15 minutes of music."

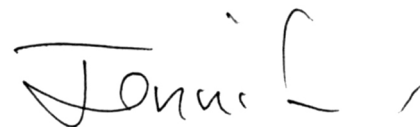
British composer **Geoff Hannan** has said, "I'm interested by what goes on in the world. If my music is absurd, sublime, irritating or inspiring it's because the world is too. There are conflicting ideas, beliefs and values everywhere and I find this mess both attractive and challenging. It's attractive because there really is no right and wrong (at least in music!) and challenging because of the energy required to preserve a sense of self when previously cherished certainties are toppling like dominoes."

Jackhammer Lullaby is a stand-alone movement from *Community-Normed*. Of that work **Aaron Gervais** has written, "Only a small part of music is actually about sound. The majority of music-making has to do with social interactions more than anything else. Music fulfills certain functions (usually pre-determined) within certain social situations, or serves as a replacement for various social functions when we use it in private. Therefore, music can be said to be a community-normed phenomenon: what makes music *music* are the people who find a use for it, usually by listening."

In addition to the May 21st concert, Continuum performs on May 20th at noon as part of the free concert series in the Four Seasons Centre's Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre.

The May 20th performance features Carla Huhtanen, soprano and Alex Eddington, narrator, and includes some works from the May 21st concert as well as *Summertime for Sex in Woolly Sweaters* for cello and piano by William Peltier.

We look forward to seeing you on May 21st!



Jennifer Waring, Artistic Director
Continuum Contemporary Music

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Our note sale continues!

Continuum Contemporary Music relies on donations to support our ongoing programming. Through-out our 2009-2010 season we are selling notes for a mere penny each. To make a donation – and buy your notes – please call us at (416) 924-4945 or donate now online now via Canada Helps and get your tax receipt right away. Just go to continuummusic.org and click on the Canada Helps logo. And stay tuned for new ways to help - soon you can pre-order your copy of Continuum's new CD, featuring the music of James Rolfe; and we'll be having another wine tasting event in June. Details to follow!

Thanks for your support - we look forward to seeing you soon.

