

Saturday, January 26, 2013, 8pm
Hertz Hall

Eco Ensemble
David Milnes, *conductor*

PROGRAM

Harrison Birtwistle (b. 1934) Secret Theatre (1984)

<i>flute, piccolo</i>	Tod Brody	<i>percussion</i>	Loren Mach
<i>oboe</i>	Kyle Bruckmann	<i>piano</i>	Ann Yi
<i>clarinet</i>	Bill Kalinkos	<i>violin 1</i>	Antoine van Dongen
<i>bassoon, contrabassoon</i>	David Granger	<i>violin 2</i>	Dan Flanagan
<i>trumpet</i>	Brad Hogarth	<i>viola</i>	Ellen Ruth Rose
<i>horn</i>	Alicia Telford	<i>cello</i>	Felix Fan
<i>trombone</i>	Hall Goff	<i>double bass</i>	Richard Worn

INTERMISSION

Ivan Fedele (b. 1953) La Chute de la Maison Usher (1995)
Music for the film of the same name by
Jean Epstein (1928)

<i>soprano</i>	Ann Moss	<i>harp</i>	Naomi Hoffmeyer
<i>flute, alto flute, piccolo</i>	Stacey Pelinka	<i>piano</i>	Ann Yi
<i>oboe</i>	Kyle Bruckmann	<i>violin 1</i>	Antoine van Dongen
<i>clarinet 1</i>	Bill Kalinkos	<i>violin 2</i>	Dan Flanagan
<i>clarinet 2, bass clarinet</i>	Peter Josheff	<i>viola</i>	Ellen Ruth Rose
<i>bassoon</i>	David Granger	<i>cello</i>	Felix Fan
<i>horn</i>	Alicia Telford	<i>double bass</i>	Richard Worn
<i>percussion</i>	Loren Mach		

Cal Performances' 2012–2013 season is sponsored by Wells Fargo.

Harrison Birtwistle (b. 1934)
Secret Theatre (1984)

Shortly before his 75th birthday, composer Harrison Birtwistle (Sir Harrison to his fans, Harry to his friends) explained to his interlocutor Andrew Clark of the *Financial Times*: “Writing music is the only thing I do.... I get ill if I don’t work. I’ve always felt there was a music in my head that didn’t exist, and it’s still there. Thank God for that—it seems to be a permanent thing.” As Britain’s preeminent exponent of the modernist traditions exemplified by the likes of Arnold Schoenberg, Igor Stravinsky, Edgard Varèse, and Olivier Messiaen, Birtwistle can reckon his musical gift as both lasting and continually in progress. Summing up his achievements, biographer Jonathan Cross observes: “Like Stravinsky, like Cézanne, Birtwistle’s art is generally concerned with the universal rather than the particular, with the collective rather than the individual, with landscape rather than portrait. Hence his preoccupation with myth and ritual, with formal theater and stylized drama.... And hence his obsession with simple musical structures—such as verse-refrain forms—and with the very basics of musical language—pulse, melody, repetition, variation.”

On the one hand, Birtwistle has produced a corpus of works remarkably unified by a few trademark preoccupations: layered or stratified textures, an idiosyncratic approach to melodic writing often featuring angular melodies, a preference for mechanical or ostinato patterning, and a highly intuitive approach to form. On the other hand, Birtwistle’s work has evolved through what Cross calls “distinct periods concentrating (in very general terms) on violent, formalist oppositions in the 1960s, lyrical processions in the 1970s, and an exploration of the basics of rhythm, melody and gesture in the 1980s.” In fact all three of these key features leave their traces on the music we will hear tonight: *Secret Theatre* (1984).

Birtwistle’s quip that composing was his “only” occupation must be taken with a grain of salt. First, he was a clarinetist, and a fine one at that, earning a scholarship to the Royal

Manchester College of Music in the early 1950s where he joined with composers Alexander Goehr and Peter Maxwell Davies to found the New Music Manchester Group—a seminal ensemble for the performance of new music outside of London. Only later did Birtwistle’s compositional talent gain the upper hand, with the *Refrains and Choruses* (1957) for wind quintet. It is apparently apocryphal that he sold his clarinets immediately after this work was chosen for inclusion at the 1959 Cheltenham Festival, but by the early 1960s, he was identifying himself primarily as a composer. Even today, however, the impact of his years as a clarinetist can be heard in his preference for woodwind and brass timbres and his predominantly melodic or contrapuntal writing; instead of gravitating toward chords or keyboard figurations, Birtwistle’s muse typically sings in long-breathed lines. His melodies gain some of their expansive quality from his frequent reliance on a wedge-shaped pattern of intervals (widening symmetrically outward from a focal pitch)—though this basic shape is often subjected to systematic alterations, such that the original contour of the wedge is sometimes inaudible.

Although Birtwistle made a relatively clean break between his performing career and his composing career, his years as a musical dramatist have been thoroughly intertwined with the development of his compositional aesthetic. From 1975 to 1982, he wrote a great deal of incidental music, serving as music director and then associate director of London’s National Theatre, an appointment that resulted from his already established dramatic credentials, including participation in the Pierrot Players, which premiered his *Monodrama* in 1967. Another of his early successes bears the title *Tragoedia* (1965) and, in the composer’s words, it concerns itself with “the ritual and formal aspects of Greek tragedy rather than with the content of a specific play.” This interest in archetypal or folk drama, rather than in the psychological development of a particular dramatic situation, carries over into Birtwistle’s stage works, including *Punch and Judy*. Completed at Princeton University with the support of a Harkness Fellowship and

premiered at the 1968 Aldeburgh Festival, it incorporates all the music of *Tragoedia*, setting it in a kaleidoscopic array of more than one hundred short numbers (arias, chorales, dances, scenic music, and so forth).

While his later operatic works—*Yan Tan Tethera* (1986), *Gawain* (1991), and *The Second Mrs Kong* (1994)—are more conventionally narrative in structure, the episodic and stylized manner of *Punch and Judy* laid the ground work for what is widely considered Birtwistle’s masterpiece, *The Mask of Orpheus*, commissioned by Covent Garden in 1970 but produced instead (after a long hiatus) by English National Opera in 1986. Together with six interludes of electronic music realized at IRCAM (the Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique in Paris), *The Mask of Orpheus* is presented in 126 vignettes, grouped in threes, reflecting or refracting the Orpheus myth through a triple perspective: Man/Woman (performed by a singer), Hero/Heroine (performed by a mime), and Myth itself (performed by a giant singing puppet).

Given Birtwistle’s interest in drama and ritual, it is not surprising that his instrumental works, too, partake of the theater—often assigning to an instrument or group of players a particular function in the “narrative” of a piece and sometimes choreographing the movement of the performers. In *Secret Theatre*, the players form two distinct groups—the “cantus” and the “continuum.” The cantus group stands and sings out a lyrical melody, spun like spider’s silk and usually in unison or near unison; by contrast the seated continuum is devoted to various interlocking repeated patterns or ostinatos. Though individual instruments may move from cantus to continuum and back, the primary cantus instruments are the predictably melodic ones: flute, oboe, clarinet, and two violins, with horn and trumpet occasionally chiming in. By contrast, the continuum group works like an intricately clogged clock, fully worthy of attention in its own right.

While Birtwistle’s actual stage works are characterized by their atomization into tiny scenes, his orchestra and large ensembles works,

tend to unfold, as biographer Michael Hall has pointed out, “in one long continuous movement...structured so as to gradually bring into the foreground something that had originally been in the background.” In the case of *Secret Theatre*, this general principle holds, but there is also a loosely episodic element of exchange at play, according to which no single melodic utterance or ostinato figure holds sway for very long. Occasionally an ostinato pattern will blossom into tunefulness; more often a melodic line will disintegrate into a stuttering shadow of its former self. In this shifting of roles lies the “secret” of the score.

Before he began composing, Birtwistle set down on paper some 66 pages representing his thoughts about *Secret Theatre*. Unusually—in fact, uniquely—excerpts from these “jottings” were included in the program notes at the premiere: “divide the ensemble maybe in performance...*important*. Maybe the instruments that make up the horizontal element could change during the performance (beware, not too much coming and going)...maybe they could *stand?* Perhaps?” The composer mused: “If the instruments of the CANTUS are going to change during the course of the piece, and there are to be solos in the CONTINUUM then some sort of instrumental role playing is implied—this is interesting... *important* do not precompose the idea of ROLE PLAYING, let any logic in that direction come out of the composed context—it should make a sort of hidden drama on an independent level.... Like a secret theater....”

Having already set down these ideas in his notebook, Birtwistle then encountered Robert Graves’s poem “Secret Theater” with its pregnant lines about music as a herald of dreams. It was a perfect fit. Indeed, as Hall points out, the “essentially rhythmic” nature of the ostinato patterns yields a music that is “dance-like and intensely alive”: “Listeners may find it hard to believe that Robert Graves’s injunction to ‘boldly ring down the curtain, then dance out our love’ was not in Birtwistle’s mind from the beginning.”

Secret Theatre was commissioned by the London Sinfonietta for a concert commemorating Birtwistle’s 50th birthday, and it is

widely regarded as a milestone in his career. It was featured at the commemorative concert that marked his winning of the Siemens Prize in 1995, and the following year it inspired the title (“Secret Theatres”) of a three-week festival in England devoted to the composer. In addition to being awarded the Siemens Prize, Birtwistle has received the Grawemeyer Award in 1968, was made a Chevalier de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 1986, gained British knighthood in 1988, and was named a British Companion of Honour in 2001. He has won two Gramophone Awards (in 2002 and 2011), for recordings of *Pulse Shadows* (on the poetry of Paul Celan) and *Night’s Black Bird*, and his piece for alto saxophone and wind ensemble *Panic* received a high-profile premiere at the Last Night of the 1995 BBC Proms, where it reached an estimated worldwide audience of 100 million. Among those who have commissioned or premiered his music are Pierre Boulez, Oliver Knussen, Daniel Barenboim, Christoph von Dohnányi, the Deutsche Staatsoper in Berlin, the Glyndebourne Festival, Wien Modern, Stockholm New Music, and the Salzburg, Holland, and Lucerne festivals. His opera *The Minotaur* received its premiere at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, in 2008, and the following year his musical theater work *The Corridor* opened the Aldeburgh Festival. *Angel-Fighter* for voices and ensemble was premiered at the Leipzig BachFest in 2010, and Christian Tetzlaff premiered his Violin Concerto with the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 2011.

Ivan Fedele (b. 1953)

La Chute de la Maison Usher (1995)

New soundtrack for Jean Epstein’s film of the same name (1928), based on Edgar Allan Poe’s short story “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839).

Enter the mysterious stranger. Ivan Fedele is no longer an unfamiliar figure for American audiences. Indeed, listeners are embracing the music of Ivan Fedele, hearing in it the scintillating instrumentation and dramatic intensity that have

made him a favorite composer in his native Italy and in France and that are fully on display in his new soundtrack for Jean Epstein’s 1928 film treatment of Edgar Allan Poe’s gothic thriller “The Fall of the House of Usher.”

Born in Lecce in southeastern Italy, Fedele studied piano at the Giuseppe Verdi Conservatory, composition with Franco Donatoni at the Accademia di Santa Cecilia in Rome, and philosophy at the State University in Milan. During the 1990s, Fedele gained recognition in Paris, completing commissions for some of its most prestigious ensembles: *Duo en résonance* for the Ensemble Intercontemporain in 1991, a Piano Concerto for Radio France in 1993, and *Richiamo* (“Signal”) (for brass, percussion, and electronics) for IRCAM in 1993–1994.

While one might think that Fedele discovered his love of instrumental tone colors while in France—a land known for the shimmering timbres of Debussy and the latter-day experiments in resonance of the “spectral” school—in fact, his first major orchestral score *Chiari* (“Lights”) (1981) already exhibits a lush and lovely surface and specifies the stage placement of particular instruments to focus attention on the drama of performance and the spatialization of sound. These two features are even more apparent in works like *Richiamo* (1994), which arrays its performers symmetrically around the stage and in *Duo en résonance* (1991), which approximates the echoing antiphonal choirs characteristic of Giovanni Gabrieli and other composers of the Venetian Renaissance.

Driving Fedele’s instrumental stagecraft is a theatrical understanding of the interaction between performing forces. It is not surprising, then, that he has shown a special fondness for the concerto, including his Viola Concerto of 1990, Violin Concerto (1998–1999), and *Arco de Vento* (“Arch of Wind”) for clarinet and orchestra (2002–2004). In addition to the expected emphasis on virtuosity, Fedele’s concerted works have also suggested strikingly new solo–ensemble relationships. In addition to the more recent *Ruah* (2001–2002), *Profilo in eco* (“Profile in Echo”) (1994–1995) features the flute and treats the orchestra as a sort of “resonating chamber,”

amplifying and diffusing gestures initiated by the soloist; subsequent concertos have further multiplied the possibilities of the genre by adding live electronics—for example, *L’Orizzonte de Elettra* (“Elektra’s Horizon”) for viola, live electronics, and chamber orchestra (1997).

Very few of Fedele’s works are literally “stage works,” among them the early *Dodici figlie di O* (“The Twelve Daughters of O”) with choreography by Mietta Corli (1977) and the secular cantata *Oltre Narciso* (“Behind Narcissus”) on the composer’s own text (1982, for singers, dancers, chorus, and chamber orchestra). Yet so much of Fedele’s music incorporates elements of theater that it is hard not to consider him an inherently “dramatic” composer. In an interview for the 2003 Warsaw Autumn Festival, he described his orchestral work *Scena* (1997–1998), which was written to be performed at La Scala (Italy’s most famous operatic stage), as an attempt to “realize a composition whose individual sections would appear as characters in the so-called theatre of memory...in a fashion similar to the characters in an opera.”

Many of Fedele’s scores rely on the dramatic delivery of texts, especially those by his countryman Giuliano Corti (b. 1948), a philosopher and man of letters who has lent his talents to numerous film and industrial design projects. In addition to his literary criticism, novels, plays, and screenplays, Corti has provided the inspiration for Fedele’s *Coram* (1995–1996) and the subsequent *Coram Requiem* (1996), as well as for the acclaimed septet *Animus anima* (2000), the quasi-dramatic score for soprano and ensemble *Maja* (1999), and Fedele’s works for the Italian Radio: *Barbara Mitica* (1996, for tape) and *Orfeo al cinema Orfeo* (“Orpheus at the Orfeo Theater”) (1994, for two speaking roles and MIDI keyboard).

Fedele’s music has garnered many honors, including a Gaudeamus Award for his first String Quartet, First Prize in Parma’s Goffredo Petrassi competition for his orchestral score *Epos* (“Epic”), the Chévalier de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres from the French Ministry of Culture, and Italy’s “Barocco” and “Diomedé” awards. The Paris-based Ensemble Intercontemporain,

widely regarded as one of Europe’s leading new music groups, have programmed nearly 20 of his pieces. Fedele has also received world premieres from the major orchestras and contemporary music groups of France and Italy, including Nuove Sincronie, Ensemble Varèse, Contrechamps, Gruppo Musica Insieme, Accroche Note, and Octandre, as well as the major orchestras of France and Italy. His works have been programmed by Pierre Boulez, Riccardo Muti, Myung-Whun Chung, Esa-Pekka Salonen, and Leonard Slatkin, and concerts have been dedicated to his music at the Festival Musica in Strasbourg, Festival de Caen, Venice Biennale, Festival de Barcelona, Festival Milano Musica, and Festival of Helsinki. Fedele is a well respected teacher, having served at the major conservatories in Strasbourg, Rome, and Milan, where he is also Artistic Director of the Orchestra I Pomeriggi Musicali. His opera *Antigone* (2006) received the Prix Franco Abbiati in 2007, and La Scala commissioned and premiered his *33 noms* (for two female voices and orchestra) in 2009.

Given his gravitation toward dramatic works that lie pointedly outside the operatic stage, it is hardly surprising that Fedele has joined the ranks of recent composers who have written new soundtracks for silent film, in this case, a landmark of the French cinema, Jean Epstein’s *La Chute de la Maison Usher*. With help from the famous surrealist Luis Buñuel, who parted somewhat acrimoniously from Epstein during work on the film, it builds on Poe’s Gothic account of a hypersensitive man (Roderick) observed by his friend Allan and obsessed by the portrait he is painting of Lady Usher (his sister in Poe’s story, but his wife in Epstein’s film—most likely to avoid attaching any overtones of incest to their peculiarly intense relationship). Prefiguring Oscar Wilde’s *Picture of Dorian Grey* by decades, Poe’s narrative suggests that as the painting of Lady Usher becomes ever more lifelike, she herself fades away, despite the bespectacled ministrations of the local doctor, into death and a spectral afterlife, ended only by the collapse of the eponymous house through fire, wind, and water. The typically stormy backdrop of psychological and meteorological agitation

mirrors Roderick's own obsessions and the story's macabre conclusion.

Except for the trudging footsteps of the funeral march and the use of the female singer to give voice to Lady Usher's shadow-of-her-former-self resurrection, Fedele's soundtrack tends to underscore more abstract relationships between sound and story. For example, Roderick's beloved guitar evokes no literal strumming sounds (though perhaps the prominent role of the harp in Fedele's score pays it some oblique homage). Even more than the image track, which returns fleetingly to particular objects in the fashion of symbolist poetry, the soundtrack spirals through its material, recurring to particular melodies and gestures in the manner of Roderick's multifarious obsessions: the booming gong, the sound of tolling bells, the plangent melody of the oboe, the fluttering breath of the flute. The score is absorbingly atmospheric, preferring melodic lines of falling contour (in keeping with the decadent mood of the house itself), sharp punctuations, and occasional passages of anxious activity. At the same time, many of Fedele's musical gestures play on the idea of false synchronicity—stuttering figures, displaced echoes, irregular repetitions—in ways that resonate with the more philosophical overtones Epstein's film. Contrasting Roderick's destructive, supernatural vision with the bemused and all-too-human impairment of his friend Allan (who moves through the world with magnifying glass and ear trumpet), one must wonder: Who has the keener insight, the one who sees and replicates the disjointedness of the world around him, or the one who exerts every effort, however feeble, to shape those disjunctures into a coherent narrative? Like the film itself, Fedele's score is a meditation on the power of perception—and apperception—in both life and art.

Notes by Beth E. Levy; portions of the note on Ivan Fedele are modified from materials written for the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players.

The **Eco Ensemble**, under the direction of David Milnes, is a new group of leading Bay Area musicians dedicated to exploring and sharing the work of adventurous composers. Its mission is to bring exciting, contemporary music to both experienced audiences and new listeners.



David Milnes serves as Music Director of the Eco Ensemble, Berkeley's professional new music ensemble in residence, as well as Music Director

of the UC Berkeley University Symphony Orchestra since 1996. In his early years, he studied piano, organ, clarinet, cello and voice, and briefly entertained a career as a jazz pianist, appearing with Chuck Mangione, Gene Krupa, Billy Taylor and John Pizzarelli. After receiving advanced degrees in conducting from SUNY Stony Brook and the Yale School of Music, and studying with Otto-Werner Müller, Herbert Blomstedt, Erich Leinsdorf and Leonard Bernstein, he won the prestigious Exxon Assistant Conductor position with the San Francisco Symphony, where he also served as Music Director of the highly acclaimed San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra, which he led on its first European tour in 1986.

Mr. Milnes has conducted frequently in Russia and the Baltics, serving as Music Director of the Riga Independent Opera Company and as a principal guest conductor of the Latvian

National Symphony. Recent engagements have included appearances at the MANCA Festival in Nice, France, with the Philharmonic Orchestra of Nice; in Mexico, at the International Festival "El Callejón del Ruido" with the Guanajuato Symphony Orchestra; and in Russia, with the Novosibirsk Symphony Orchestra. He has collaborated in performances with Frederica von Stade, Dawn Upshaw, Bill T. Jones, Paul Hillier, James Newton, David Starobin and Chanticleer, and has appeared at the Santa Fe, Tanglewood, Aspen and Monadnock music festivals.

A dedicated proponent of new music, from 2002 to 2009 Mr. Milnes was Music Director of the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, with whom he commissioned and premiered many new works from around the world. He has made recordings of music by John Anthony Lennon, James Newton, Edmund Campion, Jorge Liderman and Pablo Ortiz.

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