

Bennington College Carriage Barn Series
Wednesday, October 15, 2014 at 8:00 PM
Presents

**A Conversation:
Keyboard Music by Domenico Scarlatti, John Cage, and
David Macbride (after Cage and Scarlatti)**

David Macbride; (digital) harpsichord, piano, and prepared piano

Program content and order chosen from the following pieces using (weighted) chance operations:

Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757):

Sonatas K. 159, 377, 380, 420, 426, 430, 431, 460, 481, 487, 519, 525, 531
written for harpsichord (1715-1757?) to be performed on harpsichord and piano

John Cage (1912-1992):

Sonatas (all 16 excluding IX) from *Sonatas and Interludes* for prepared piano (1946-48)
In a Landscape for piano or harp solo (1948) to be performed on piano
Solo #2 'Mozart Dice Game' (excerpt) from *HPSCHD* (co-composed with Lejaren
Hiller) for solo harpsichord (1967-69)

David Macbride (1951):

Three Sonatas (after Scarlatti) for piano (1999, 2000, 2014)
Two Sonatas (after Cage) for prepared piano (2014)
Sonata (after Cage and Scarlatti) for piano (2014)
realizations of Scarlatti K. 426, 430 (*after Cage*) for harpsichord (2014)
Mandala 2014 (for Suzanne) for piano (2014)

There will be one intermission. You are respectfully asked not to applaud until the end of each half of the program.

(Program Notes Attached)

The Dutch composer Louis Andriessen said; 'All good music is about other music.' Let's delete the word 'good' from that sentence and start from there. There is a natural and inevitable dialogue between any (particular) music and all music that exists and will exist, in the same way that ideas, events, beings, don't exist in a vacuum.

Why Cage and Scarlatti? On the surface, both composers wrote pieces called 'Sonatas' (which in its purest usage means 'a piece to be played' (by an instrument as opposed to 'a piece to be sung'). Both primarily used, as the structure for each sonata, binary form (AABB). Scarlatti's sonatas pre-date the advent of the Classical Sonata form, and are rich with ingenious and surprising thematic and harmonic relationships that 'defy' any preset formal concerns. As Ralph Kirkpatrick, the eminent Scarlatti interpreter and scholar points out, "It must be understood...that Scarlatti was never aiming at the classical sonata form.....He chose a different way....Scarlatti's inventiveness is such that he would have been perfectly capable of discovering the classical sonata form and then throwing it away." RK: *Domenico Scarlatti*, p. 266. Cage's sonatas, on the other hand, use a 'familiar field' in which to 'plant his unique crops.' By focusing on rhythm, using numerical relationships to create both rhythmic structures and individual rhythms alike, Cage was able to create his own freedom of invention outside of any invariant 'form'.

Pierre Boulez, the French composer and conductor, said in his introduction to a 1949 performance of *Sonatas and Interludes* in Paris, "...the structure of these sonatas brings together a pre-classical structure and a rhythmic structure which belong to two entirely different worlds...a breeding-ground for dangerous ambiguities." *The Boulez-Cage Correspondence*, p.31. We now know that such 'diametric opposition' is not only possible, but commonplace, as the mixture of traditions and genres is 'de rigueur'. Cage himself said '...We live in a time I think, not of mainstream, but of many streams or even, if you insist upon a river of time, that we have come to (a) delta, maybe even beyond (the) delta to an ocean which is going back to the skies.' radio interview with Charles Amirkhanian, KPFA, Berkeley, 1/14/92.

Cage and Scarlatti were then both, in a manner of speaking, 'free spirits' Both were born in sunny climes, Scarlatti in Naples, Italy; Cage in Los Angeles, California. The "Mediterranean" disposition pervades their work and personalities; in Scarlatti's case, dance rhythms expressing joy, even unbridled excitement; for Cage, his eternal optimism, delicious sense of humor. Both ended up living and working in a different place, Scarlatti in Spain, Cage in New York City. In Scarlatti's Spanish sonatas we hear invocations of royal pageantry (even cannons!) and imitations of other instruments, castanets, brass bands, especially the guitar. Cage's 'noise' music would not have been without the racuous urban soundscape of the City. Both composers were firmly rooted in Western compositional practice, yet found inspiration from other cultures (most especially Cage, whose study of Asian philosophy profoundly influenced his work).

Yet both composers also had expressions of deep reflection and introspection. Scarlatti's 'gaiety is all the more intense for an undertone of melancholy.' (RK: p. 114). Perhaps for Scarlatti, music was his chief solace. *Sonatas and Interludes* were inspired by Cage's study of the eight 'permanent emotions' according to Indian philosophy, of which sorrow is one. In Scarlatti, one can move unexpectedly between calm and excitement; in Cage, there is an overall tendency toward tranquility. It feels right to try and be both excited and calm simultaneously.

A word about the keyboards: while the chronological order of these percussion instruments is harpsichord, piano(forte), and prepared piano (invented by Cage in the late 30's-early 40's), the harpsichord and prepared piano have much to share. Both emphasize 'noise' characteristics more than the piano, both use 'alternative' tunings instead of the piano's equal temperament, and both are more 'intimate', as opposed to the 'big sound' of the concert grand. Like the aesthetic comradery that 'early' and 'new' music share, Scarlatti and Cage have congruities when it comes to actual sound world they created in.

My contribution towards this dialogue is first an appreciation of both composers, and second an attempt to observe Cage and Scarlatti's commonalities, and add 'a line or two of my own'.

While a grad student at Columbia, I remember hearing Cage give a performance, in which he recited a story in which historical figures including James Joyce, Marcel Duchamp, Erik Satie, Mao Tse Tung, Henry David Thoreau, Buckminster Fuller, Brigham Young, and Robert Rauschenberg (and others) all had a conversation together. So perhaps this recital could be thought of as that kind of conversation.

David Macbride has written numerous works, ranging from solo, chamber and orchestral music to music for film, TV, dance and theatre, with particular emphasis on music for percussion, having written over 45 works ranging from solo and chamber music to a recently completed concerto. His works have been performed extensively in the United States and abroad: recent performance include the Hartford Symphony, the Arditti String Quartet, League ISCM, Percussive Arts Society International Convention, World Saxophone Congress, and the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. *Music for a Large Space*, a public gathering in which the audience participates in the creation and performance of the piece, was premiered in March of this year.

Tim Page of Newsday wrote: "In David Macbride's music, one finds technical skills of a high order, a direct lyricism that informs the most complex passages, and a personal aesthetic that combines Western chromaticism with a fascination for the music of China." Awards include the Georges Enesco International Composition Prize, two Leo Snyder Memorial Composition Prizes sponsored by League ISCM Boston, and the Composers Inc. Prize.

Recent commissions include The Roberts Foundation New Works Initiative, Chamber Music America, Concert Artists Guild, and the Hartt School Community Division. Macbride's compositions are recorded on Concora, Hartt/Next Exit, Opus One, Owl, and True Media Recordings. A solo CD of his works is available from Composers Recordings Inc. (CRI). Alex Ross of the New York Times wrote: "...Macbride achieves a remarkable balance of technical rigor and free spirited invention...Composers Recordings has done justice to a distinctive voice in American music." Solo CDs entitled *Conundrum: The Percussion Music of David Macbride* featuring Benjamin Toth and *In Common: Duets by David Macbride* are available on Innova Recordings. *David Macbride: A Composer's Journey with the Poetry of Federico Garcia Lorca* is available on Albany Records, as well as *In Passing: Solo Piano Music* composed and performed by the composer. His latest CD, *A Special Light*, which explores his Chinese heritage, was recently released by Innova.

As a pianist, Macbride was invited to give a recital tour of Peru by the Instituto Cultural Peruano Norteamericano, and has performed recitals in Spain (sponsored by the Centro de la Difusion de la Musica Contemporanea) and in Mexico at the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico in Mexico City. Macbride is Professor of Composition and Music Theory at the Hartt School, University of Hartford.

Special thanks to Professor Allen Shawn, Mandy Pappas, and the Bennington College Music Department for hosting this recital.