

Whistling in the Dark (1999)

Donald Crockett (b. 1951)

...Still Life After Death (1995)

Chinary Ung (b. 1942)

We Speak Etruscan (1992)

Lee Hyla (b. 1952)

A note from Contempo's Artistic Director:

As I write this, Contempo's concert season is already in full swing. It began with "Messiaen: Spheres of Influence"—part of the enormously successful Messiaen Festival staged by University of Chicago Presents under the expert guidance of its executive director, Shauna Quill. The program explored some of the compositional voices most directly touched by the great French master, including a world premiere by a member of Chicago's own composition faculty, Marta Ptaszynska, a former Messiaen student. The season continued with resident ensemble *eighth blackbird*, together with the Hilliard vocal ensemble, in a musical portrait of Stephen Hartke, who is fast becoming one of America's most respected and enjoyed living composers.

The enthusiastic audiences that greeted these and other recent Contempo concerts in venues across our city may answer the question suggested in the title of one of the works featured in our double bill, *We Speak Etruscan* by Lee Hyla. In Hyla's words, "The title's bold claim cannot be challenged; the ancient Etruscans, creators of extraordinary artwork, spoke a language that is now lost..."

Hyla goes on to comment on the obvious connection to the plight of contemporary art music and to leave us wondering... is "art music" becoming an anachronism, on the verge of extinction?

I think not. To know that concert music, in all its richness and diversity, is with us to stay, forever transforming and reinventing itself, it is enough to witness the profound joy of music-making—to experience the excitement that surrounds the unveiling of a new composition, the lure of a performer returning time and again to much loved "repertory works," the intensity of an artist's lifelong, single-minded devotion to his or her art and craft, or the rapt attentiveness of an avid listener.

This season's annual double-bill at the Museum of Contemporary Art brings to Chicago the celebrated Brazilian jazz singer Leny Andrade, whose luscious alto voice and consummate

musicianship is the legendary embodiment of the heart and soul of her homeland. In the richness of her bossa nova, as in the glowing performances of Pacifica Quartet and *eighth blackbird* (our two recent Grammy-Award winning resident ensembles); in our conductor Cliff Colnot, in works by Hyla and Donald Crockett; in the Cambodian-American Chinary Ung's rounding off the double-bill; and in the newly composed music by University of Chicago's own doctoral students on May 15 and 28, you will glimpse a full range of human experience heard through the voice of the music-maker.

You, our audience, are essential participants in this ongoing dialogue. Thank you for being here with us, and for listening.

Shulamit Ran

The Composers...

Donald Crockett (b. 1951) is dedicated to composing music inspired by the musicians who perform it. He has received commissions from the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra (Composer-in-Residence, 1991–97), Pasadena Chamber Orchestra (Composer-in-Residence, 1984–86), Kronos Quartet, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Hilliard Ensemble, Stanford String Quartet, Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble, and Charlotte Symphony, among many others. Recent projects include commissions from the San Francisco-based chamber choir Volti, a work for piano and orchestra commissioned by the University of Southern California, and a chamber opera based on a novella in verse by poet David St. John.

Crockett was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2006 and has also received the Goddard Lieberman Fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, an Artist Fellowship from the California Arts Council, a commission from the Barlow Endowment, and a Kennedy Center Friedheim Award. Recordings of his music are available on the Albany, CRI, ECM, Laurel, Orion, and Pro Arte/Fanfare labels.

In 1981 Crockett joined the faculty of the University of Southern California Thornton School of Music, and he is currently Professor and Chair of the Composition Department and Director of the Contemporary Music Ensemble at Thornton and Senior Composer-in-Residence with the Chamber Music Conference and Composers' Forum of the East. Also active as a conductor of new music, Crockett has presented premieres with Xtet (a new music ensemble based in Los Angeles) and the USC Thornton Contemporary Music Ensemble, and as a guest conductor with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble, Cleveland Chamber Symphony, Hilliard Ensemble, California E.A.R. Unit, and USC Thornton Symphony. He has also been very active over the years as a composer and conductor with the famed Monday Evening Concerts in Los Angeles.

Chinary Ung (b. 1942) gained international recognition with his *Inner Voices*, which earned the prestigious Grawemeyer Award for Music in 1989. Additional honors include the Friedheim Award (1989, for *Spiral*), two awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and grants from the Guggenheim, Koussevitzky, Ford, Rockefeller, and Barlow foundations.

Born in Takeo, Cambodia, Ung was not exposed to Western classical music until his late teens. After graduating from the Ecole de Musique, Phnom Penh, Ung moved to the United States in 1964 to study clarinet at the Manhattan School of Music. He then went on to study composition with Chou Wen-Chung and Mario Davidovsky at Columbia University, earning his doctorate in 1974.

In response to the horror of the Khmer Rouge genocide, in which much of his family perished, Ung devoted nearly a decade to the study and performance of Cambodian cultural and musical traditions. During this compositional hiatus (1974–85), Ung learned to play the *roneat-ek* (a Cambodian xylophone), compiled and annotated two volumes of Cambodian traditional music for the Folkways label, and founded the Khmer Studies Institute.

As he resumed composition in the mid-1980s, Ung's musical language became known for its artful synthesis of Asian aesthetics and contemporary Western techniques. He has received commissions from the Long Beach Symphony Orchestra, Koussevitzky Music Foundation, Meet the Composer/Reader's Digest Commissioning Program, Aeolian Chamber Ensemble, Barlow Endowment Foundation, Vermeer Quartet, and Philadelphia Orchestra. Ung has held teaching positions at the University of Pennsylvania and Arizona State University, and is currently Professor of Composition at the University of California at San Diego. His music has been recorded on C.R.I., New World, Sony, and London Records.

Lee Hyla (b. 1952) has written for numerous ensembles including the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, Kronos Quartet (with Allen Ginsberg), The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Speculum Musicae, Boston Modern Orchestra Project, Lydian String Quartet, and Boston Musica Viva. He has received commissions from the Koussevitzky, Fromm, Barlow, and Naumburg Foundations, as well as three commissions from Chamber Music America and two Meet the Composer/Reader's Digest Consortium commissions. He has also been awarded the Stoeger Prize from the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, a Guggenheim fellowship, two National Endowment for the Arts fellowships, the Goddard Lieberson Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the St. Botolph Club Award, and the Rome Prize.

In the Fall of 2004 Hyla was Resident Composer at the American Academy in Rome, and in the Winter and Spring of 2005 he was a composition fellow at the Camargo Foundation in Cassis, France. In 2007 he moved to Chicago, where he holds an appointment as the Wyatt Chair in Music Composition at Northwestern University. In 2007–08 Hyla was also Composer-in-Residence with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra.

Current commissions include a solo violin piece for Midori and Vadim Repin, a Concerto for Orchestra for the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, and a piece based on Polish folk songs, commissioned by Boston Musica Viva. Hyla's music has been recorded on Nonesuch, New World, Avant, Tzadik, and C.R.I., and is published exclusively by Carl Fischer.

The Program...

Whistling in the Dark is a single-movement work for flute, bass clarinet, percussion, piano, violin, and cello. It was written for the California E.A.R. Unit, and according to the composer, it is an homage to their virtuosity and internal sense of time. Crockett writes:

There is boppy, cheerful music in the piece that is suddenly transformed into much more aggressive, dissonant stuff. It is as if you were looking at two-faced mask with a smile on one side and a grimace on the other. (Now, I know that not all of you will agree which music represents the smile and which the grimace). The slow dance is melancholy rather than romantic. There is also fast music to which I imagined people dressed in 10's garb doing 'aerobics in hell.' The boppy music reappears as if nothing happened; it remains doggedly optimistic. Yet there is something lurking just around the corner, just beneath the surface. There we were at the tail end of the 1990's; weren't most of us just whistling in the dark?

...*Still Life After Death* grew out of collaboration between the composer and The New Performance Group, a Seattle-based ensemble. The piece was supported by Music In Motion, and received its first public reading in 1995 at The Painted Bride in Philadelphia. According to the composer:

...*Still Life* is a small theater work and was inspired by an ancient Cambodian ritual that traditionally takes place at an individual's deathbed. A Buddhist monk would be invited to a home to preside at this ritual, which assists a dying person in his or her transit from life to death. The monk chants short phrases in the ancient language of Pali, and the dying person would repeat each phrase after the monk, until the very last breath. In ...*Still Life*, the female vocalist represents the dying person and the male vocalist represents the Buddhist monk. The text is:

Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhassa! Homage to Him, the Exalted, the Worthy, the Fully Enlightened One!

The creation of *We Speak Etruscan* was initiated by saxophonist Tim Berne over a beer with the composer at the Great Jones Café in New York City. The work is dedicated to Berne, bass clarinetist Tim Smith, and Norm Roberson, portiere and Etruscan enthusiast, as well as tour guide at the American Academy in Rome. The piece was written in 1992 in New York in the year following Hyla's Rome Prize residency at the Academy, and was premiered by Smith and Berne in 1993 at Jordan Hall in Boston.

The title's bold claim cannot be challenged; the ancient Etruscans, creators of extraordinary artwork, spoke a language that is now lost (only the alphabet is decipherable). The obvious connection to the plight of contemporary art music is contradicted by the engaging surface of the piece, which bubbles with jazz-like riffs. An eerie beginning leads quickly to a bebop-like head and ensuing hyperactivity. A more serene

interlude, capped by a passage marked *sustained, intimate, molto legato* for the two instruments playing pianissimo in their highest registers, gives way to a compressed and raucous recapitulation.

—Adapted from Eric Moe, from the liner notes to *We Speak Etruscan* (New World Records 80491-2)