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# ALEA III: The Exotics, November 9, 1989

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# ALEA III

Theodore Antoniou, Music Director

## THE EXOTICS

*Guest Artists*

Martin Amlin, *piano*

Randolph Bowman, *flute*

Paul Houghtaling, *baritone*

Judy Saiki, *harp*

Thursday, November 9, 1989

The Tsai Performance Center

685 Commonwealth Avenue

ALEA III is the contemporary music ensemble in residence at Boston  
University

**ALEA Personnel**

Randolph Bowman, flute  
Susan Downey, flute  
Ellen Sherman, oboe  
Elad Halperin, clarinet  
Emil Badea, bassoon  
Jay Reid, horn  
Judy Saiki, harp  
Geoffrey Burleson, piano  
James Boznos, percussion  
Richard Flanagan, percussion  
Mark Simcox, violoncello  
Nick Aparo, doublebass  
John Muratore, guitar

**Guest Artists:**

Paul Houghtaling, baritone  
Martin Amlin, piano

This series is funded in part by the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities, a states agency whose funds are recommended by the governor and appropriated by the State Legislature. The National Endowment for the Arts. The Greek Ministry of Culture and Boston University.

**Next Concert:**

Soloists of ALEA III  
8:00pm Tuesday, December 12, 1989  
Tsai Performance Center  
Admission \$10

A l e a III

Theodore Antoniou, music director

**The Exotics**

Thursday November 9, 1989

Music for an imaginary ballet (1946)

Henry Brant  
(b.1913)

- I. My mental marionettes
- II. The theme (that tango)
- III. Ten years later (can-can)



The Banshee (1925)

Henry Cowell  
(1897-1965)

Martin Amlin, piano

First Concerto (1964)  
for flute and percussion

Lou Harrison  
(b.1917)

- I. Earnest, fresh, and fastish in 
- II. Slow and poignant
- III. Strong, swinging and fastish in 

Randolph Bowman, flute

Suite (1951)  
for harp and wind quintet

Chou Wen-Chung  
(b.1923)

Judy Saiki, harp

**Intermission**

Bacchanale (1938)

John Cage  
(b.1912)

Martin Amlin, piano

Songs, Drones, and Refrains of Death (1968)

George Crumb  
(b.1929)

- I. The Guitar
- II. Casida of the Dark Doves
- III. Song of the Rider, 1860
- IV. Casida of the Boy Wounded by the Water

Paul Houghtaling, baritone

**Henry Brant**(b.1913) one of the pioneer explorers and practitioners of 20th century spatial music, was born in Montreal in 1913 and began to compose at the age of eighteen. In 1929 he moved to New York and for the next twenty years he composed and conducted for radio, film, ballet and jazz groups, at the same time composing experimentally for the concert hall. From 1947 to 1955 he taught orchestration and conducted ensembles at the Juilliard School and Columbia University. Brant now makes his home in California.

In 1950 Brant began to write spatial music of a particular kind, in which the planned positioning of the performers throughout the hall as well as on the stage, is an essential element in the composing design. This procedure, which limits and defines the contrasted music assigned to each performing group, takes as its point of departure the ideas of Charles Ives. Brant's compositions since 1950 are all spatial; Imaginary Ballet however is a non-spatial work.

Imaginary Ballet was put together in 1946 out of assorted odds & ends composed during the depression years. Some of these are from an unperformed opera, others from ballet and film scores which somehow did manage to get heard and circulated during those lean and stingy times. The 1930's for the most part discouraged all experimental and avant-garde efforts, but discreet suggestions of satire and nostalgia were tolerated. Ingridences such as these could brighten the life of a composer from time to time and it is from such material that Imaginary Ballet was designed.

**Henry Cowell** (1897-1965) was one of America's greatest innovators of "new sounds". His unorthodox playing techniques for the piano influenced even the great Bela Bartok. Cowell was raised in California, and it is this removal from the East Coast that did not goad him into imitating European compositional practices. Rather than being near the cultural centers of New York and Boston, Cowell was, instead, influenced mostly by his Irish heritage and by the music of China, Japan and East India. Even though John Cage is credited for "inventing the prepared piano", it was Cowell who developed the extra-conventional performance practice of the piano. In his work *Banshee*, the pianist leans into the piano to stroke, strum and scratch the strings. The title evokes the imagery of an Irish spirit that wails at the time of a death.

**Lou Harrison**(b.1917) studied composition with Henry Cowell and Arnold Schoenberg. During the war, he joined Cage in organizing recitals of percussion music. He was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1952 and 1954. In the early 1960's he travelled to the far east. A Rockefeller Grant enabled him to study first in Tokyo and Taiwan, and then in Korea where he became familiar with Korean court music and Chinese classical music. His music is specifically melodic; it is at times monodic and some pices are oddly melismatic against an ostination drone.

It was Henry Cowell who first pointed out to me the fact that an enormous amount of the worlds music consists of a melody with some sort of rhythmic support. In this concerto the percussion plays short ostinati while the flute, often crossing the rhythms of the accompaniment, makes tune like music for which only three intervals are used. The outer movements share the same set of intervals while the middle movement explores another set.

**Chou Wen-Chung** (born 1923) came from China to this country at the end of World War II and studied at the New England Conservatory, Columbia University, and privately with Varese. A founder of the American Society of University Composers, he has had several college posts and is currently on the Columbia University faculty. Chou's

Chinese heritage is clearly reflected in his coloristic music, much of which employs Chinese titles or texts. His pieces tend to be loosely structured, and sometimes a sound or theme may seem almost accidental, but it is the controlled accident of a fine calligrapher, not the type of accident found in aleatoric music. At the same time, he is a master of Western instruments and composition techniques.

The Suite for Harp and Woodwind Quintet uses Chinese themes. The basic principle in this work, as in all the other early works of Mr. Chou, is to recapture the color, mood, and emotion implied in the seemingly simple folk material. In general, these are not subjected to harmonic or contrapuntal elaboration but are simply colored in a basically heterophonic fashion. To avoid any static feeling and to provide contrast, the phrases of the material used are often set in different tonal planes. Motives taken from the original material and presented in changing tonality, may also serve as introduction, bridge, and ending. The five sections of the work are marked Moderato tranquillo, Adagio molto espressivo, Grazioso con moto, Lento quasi lamento, and Poco allegro festivo.

**John Cage** (born 1912) was a true reactionary to the predominant serial school advocating "total musical control" in the late 40's and 50's. The Darmstadt academicians thought his musical ideas absurd at first, but Cage's experimentation in aleatory finally gained certain degree of acceptance in Europe. His expansion and formalization of Eastern improvisatory practice into a Western musical framework is monumental, but his development of the piano as a percussive instrument is equally exceptional. Bacchanale (1938) is the first work to specify a "prepared piano". Searching for new sounds, Cage first used a metal pie plate inside the piano, but found that more stationary objects were necessary to control the change of sound. This experimentation lead him to use wood, screws, bolts and other paraphernalia to doctor the piano. The work Bacchanale was composed for a dance by Syvilla Fort.

**George Crumb** (born 1929) writes:

The important formal elements of the work are identified in the title. These are settings of four of Lorca's most beautiful death-poems: *The Guitar*; *Casida of the Dark Doves*; *Song of the Rider, 1860*; and *Casida of the Boy Wounded by the Water*. Each of these settings is preceded by an instrumental "refrain" (also containing vocal elements projected by the instrumentalists, in most cases purely phonetic sounds) which presents, in various guises, the rhythmic fateful motif heard at the beginning of the work. And finally, three long "Death-Drones" (based on the interval of the fourth, and played by the amplified contrabass) dominate the musical texture in the first and last songs, and in Refrain 3.

García Lorca's poetry, with its fantastically rich expression and evocative power, provides an admirable vehicle for musical re-creation. *The Guitar*, starkly fatalistic, portrays a mood of utter desolation; and yet, there is also a sense of wonder, of profound mystery. The opening lines of the poem—"The lament of the guitar begins. The wine cups of daybreak are broken. The lament of the guitar begins. It is useless to hush it. It is impossible to hush it."—contain the one of Lorca's oft recurrent images: the guitar as the primitive voice of the world's darkness and evil (in another poem, *Malagueña*: "Black horses and villainous people move along the deep paths of the guitar"). My setting of this poem includes cadenzas in quasi-Flamenco style for the more surreal electric guitar.

The *Casida of the Dark Doves*, with its undercurrent of irony (indicated in the score: "gently sardonic; in a bizarre, fantastical style"), provides a necessary moment of relief from the prevailing darkness and intensity of the work. I have sought to enhance the eerie whimsy of the poem by directing the baritone to sing in variously stylized manners

("mock-lyric," "mock-menacing," or "in mock-chant style"). The instrumental parts in the score are laid out in circular notation, which represents, symbolically, "el Sol" and "la Luna" (Sun and Moon).

The *Song of the Rider, 1860* is a poem of violence and terror. In my earlier *Madrigals, Book II*, I had set only the refrain lines ("Little black horse. Whither with your dead rider? Little cold horse. What a scent of the flower of a knife!"), but in this complete setting of the poem I feel that I have more faithfully conveyed the demonic power of Lorca's imagination. The song is headed with the direction: "breathlessly, with relentlessly driving rhythm!" and the image of the galloping little horse is projected by the wild, hammered rhythms of lujon, crotales, drums, mallet instruments, and electric harpsichord. The climax of the song is marked by a thundering passage entitled "Cadenza appassionata for two drummers." The prototype of the genre represented by *Song of the Rider, 1860* is obviously Schubert's *Erlkönig*.

The final *Casida of the Boy Wounded by the Water* is my favorite of the various Lorca poems I have set over the years. The dream-like beginning of this song, with its gentle oscillation between the pitches B-G sharp and the tender lyricism of the baritone melody, is consciously reminiscent of Mahler. The third and final "Death-Drone" announces the dark, impassioned central stanza of the poem.

The drone takes the form of a huge, sustained crescendo; at the point of maximum intensity ("What a fury of love, what a wounding edge, such nocturnal murmurs, such white death!") the screaming voice of a flexitone is heard; the drone seems to "explode," and as the intensity subsides the music takes on an aura of transfiguration. The opening music is heard once again, this time punctuated by the deep bourdon sounds of piano and contrabass. Two gently flowing phrases played on water-tuned crystal glasses conclude the work.

Lorca's haunting, even mystical vision of death—which embodies, and yet transcends, the ancient Spanish tradition—is the seminal force of his dark genius. In composing Songs, Drones, and Refrains of Death, I wanted to find a musical language which might complement this very beautiful poetry.

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ALEA III is in its twelfth year of residency at Boston University.