Slee Sinfonietta
April 9, 2003  ·  8pm
Slee Concert Hall

There will be an intermission after Solo Observed.
The movements for Mozart’s
Symphony No. 21 in A Major are:

I. Allegro
II. Andante
III. Menuetto
IV. Allegro

PROGRAM NOTES

Annotated by Edward Yadowski

_Time Cycle_ … Lukas Foss

Commissioned by the Humanities and Arts Program of the Ford Foundation, _Time Cycle_ was completed in 1960. The work is dedicated to soprano Adel Addison. During the premiere of the piece by the New York Philharmonic, conductor Leonard Bernstein turned and addressed the audience: “My colleagues on the stage and I think so highly of _Time Cycle_ that, if you wish, we will repeat the whole piece for you. And if there are only twelve people who want to hear it again, we will play it just for them.”

About the genesis of the work, Foss relates his inspiration derived from one of Kafka’s cryptic lines:

“Die Uhren stimmen nicht berein die innere jagt in einer teufüchen oder daemischen oder jedenfalls unmenschlichen Art, die æussere geht stockend ihren gewaehnlichen Gang.” (The clocks do not synchronize; the inner one chases in a devilish or demonic, or at any rate inhumane manner; the outer one goes haltingly at its usual pace.)

The composer notes – “It was when I read this sentence that the idea of a song-cycle came to me.” Foss then assembled four literary episodes, each in turn having to do with time, bells, clocks and the symbolic stroke of midnight. The only unifying musical element common to each setting is a chord, C#-A-B-D#, intoned subtly along the way in various permutations and fragments.

Knowing this score dates from 1960, a listener begins to understand why it was so appropriate that Foss had been selected to succeed Arnold Schonberg on the composition faculty at UCLA. But this is not to say _Time Cycle_ derives directly from the Schonberg gestalt. Rather, it glides on the atonal and 12-tone inertia straight to the leading edge of what was known in the 60s as the musical avant-garde, with Foss as escort.

To the point, Foss’ musical language is even more adventurous, more chance-taking than the atonal masters would have anticipated. Some might say that _Time Cycle_ has an improvised feel – a kind of “we’ll know where we’re going when we get there” reality. In fact, _Time Cycle_ was first performed with improvised interludes between each movement – played by Foss and his California-based Improvisation Ensemble (piano, cello, clarinet and percussion). In any case, we may be certain that Foss’ very serious work with the improvised avant-garde had a lot to do with how _Time Cycle_ was conceived and crafted. Moreover, another of the composer’s remarks made three decades later rings doubly true here: “Surprise is what I’m looking for when I compose, not arbitrary surprises that make sense.”

In performance, _Time Cycle_ requires keen virtuosity from the soprano soloist, set off by an eloquent mix of subtle orchestral timbres, including elegant playing from the percussion. Finally, for all of modernity of the setting of text and timbres, the work conveys a poignant musical allure that is altogether lyrical at the core.
Solo Observed ... Lukas Foss

Solo Observed is a work of reflection as much as observation. The piece saw first light as an issue for piano alone, titled Solo and scored in 1981 for Yvar Mikhashoff, who premiered the work in Paris in early 1982. Then, via a commission from the New World Festival of the Arts in Miami, Foss added an extended coda for additional chamber players, i.e. for a trio or larger ensemble, variously including woodwinds, brass, strings, electronic organ, and vibraphone. The newly added players “observe” the full extended piano solo before making a sound. The upscaled version was premiered by the composer and the Lincoln Center Chamber Players in Miami in the late spring of 1982.

Using a germinial 12-tone fragment, the music of Solo Observed begins a continuous, ever-more-intricate development that soon becomes ever-more-relentless. The feel is light and deflecting with a spright rhythmic sparkle in every bar. But an intriguing curiosity seems to prevail: to be sure, the 12-tone evolutions are, but they are somehow never quite atonal – listeners might readily suspect that a lyrical souvenir is trying to escape from the changing 12-tone mosaic. And when the additional players enter it seems as though to escort the piano line to the close via a coda in the neighborhood of D Major something.

About the genesis of the formative work composer Foss has noted:

“It was the summer of 1981 that I composed Solo, my first piano piece in 28 years. An initial 12-tone motive reigns. Yet this is not 12-tone music. The motive is like a theme that undergoes constant development. Nor is this minimal music, in spite of an insistent, repetitive element, because each repetition is also a change implying development, growth and forward movement. Solo is a long development section ‘senza sonata’ – lumbering, struggling eighth-notes, circling, spiraling, forging ahead, always on the way, never pausing, never giving up, forever closing in upon...”

Symphony No. 21 in A Major, K. 134 ... Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(born 1756 in Salzburg, died 1791, Vienna)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was all of just 16 years old when he scored his twenty-first symphony in August of 1772. In fact, K. 134 was the last of at least twelve the wunderkind had written since the spring of 1771. We don’t wonder why his father, Leopold, once wrote that “Wolfgang is a miracle.” And by then the young composer had already developed a work style of composing music without sketchbooks or worksheets – the notes went straight from the mind to paper. And by the way – in ink, no corrections.

But at least most of Mozart’s symphonies from that time were relatively short, on average from about 12 to 15 minutes. In general the mode and manner of the works had a decidedly lighter feel, very much like the various divertimentos and serenades which poured from his pen through most of his life.

In the customary four movements, Symphony No. 21 begins in sprightly ¾ time, with an Allegro crafted in modified sonata form based on a single, primary theme. In D Major, the Andante is also marked cantabile. Featuring lyrical phrases in a remarkably poetic setting, with coy modulations adding touches of serenity along the way.

For contrast, the Menuetto, in E Major, has a bright, almost regal or heralding demeanor, very much in the manner of Haydn. In turn follows the blithe, A Major Allegro of the last movement, beginning with a classic bourée. But while Mozart was fond to use a rondo format in this context, here the dance-like themes are set off in a fleet and svelte sonata form, with developments on the fly. Delightful.
I

We're Late
W. H. Auden

Clocks cannot tell our time of day
For what event to pray
Because we have no time, because
We have no time until
We know what time to fill,
Why time is other than time was.
Nor can our question satisfy
The answer in the statue's eye:
Only the living ask whose brow
May wear the Roman laurel now;
The dead say only how.
What happens to the living when we die?
Death is not understood by death; nor you, nor I.

II

When the Bells Justle
A.E. Houseman

When the bells justle in the tower
The hollow night amid
Then on the tongue the taste is sour
of all I ever did.

III

Sechzehnter Januar
From Franz Kafka's Diaries
(Translation from the German by the composer)

January 16. This last week was like a total breakdown —
Impossible to sleep, impossible to wake. Impossible to bear life, or
more accurately, to bear the continuity of life. The clocks do not
synchronize; the inner one chases in a devilish or demoniac, or at
any rate inhuman manner; the outer one goes haltingly at its
usual pace. What else can happen than that the two different
worlds separate, and they separate, or at least tear at one another
in a terrifying manner. The solitude, forced upon me to the greater
extent, sought by me to some extent (but what else is this than
being forced?) is taking an unmistakable course toward the
extreme limit. Where will it lead? It can (this seems most
plausible) lead toward madness. Nothing further can be said
about this, the chase goes through me and tears me apart. — But
then again I may, I may, be it only the smallest degree, hold myself
up, let the chase “carry” me. Then where does this bring me?
“Chase” is but an image — one might say instead: onslaught
against the last frontier...

IV

O Mensch, gib Acht
From Frederich Nietzsche's Thus Spake Zarathustra
(Translation from the German by the composer)

One! —O Man! Take heed!
Two! —What speaks the deep midnight?
Three! —“I slept, I slept—
Four! —“From deep dream I awoke:
Five! —“The world is deep,
Six! —“And deeper than the day.
Seven! —“Deep is its woe—
Eight! —“Joy* deeper than heartache.
Nine! —“Woe speaks: begone!
Ten! —“But joy* desires eternity.
Eleven! —“Desires deep, deep, eternity.”
Twelve! —

*The German word Lust is a composite of lust, pleasure, joy, ecstasy.
Slee Sinfonietta
Magnus Mårtensson, conductor
David Felder, Artistic Director

Violin I
Movses Pogossian, 
Concert Master
Amy Glidden
Richard Kay
Jenny Zhen
Yuki Numata

Violin II
Donald McCrorey, 
Principal
Nadejda Nigrin
Sally Martin
William Knuth
Paul Goodman

Viola
Adrienne Elisha, Principal
Kate Holzemer
Leslie Bahler

Cello
Mary Artmann, Principal
Jonathan Golove
Amelie Fradette

Bass
Edmond Gnekow, Principal
Peter Bahler

Flute
Cheryl Gobbetti Hoffman, 
Principal
Sabatino Scirri

Clarinet
John Fullam, Principal
Robert DiLutis

Bassoon
Glenn Einschlag

Trumpet
Wade Weast, Principal
Akemi Oda

French Horn
Heidi Lucas, Principal
Julie Fagan

Trombone
Scott Parkinson

Harp
Mario Falcao

Piano/Celeste
Evan Johnson

Timpani
Anthony Miranda

Percussion
Matthew Felski
Jeremiah Fox
Keith Szczepanski
Satoshi Takag