

CUBE @ Chicago Humanities Festival

Peace and War: Facing Human Conflict

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by Janice Misurell-Mitchell

“Searching for Peace in Time of War” will be CUBE’s contribution to this year’s Chicago Humanities Festival. The ensemble has put together a program that spans a period of almost a hundred years, from Ives’ songs during World War I, to the setting of a poem about wars in Europe and the Middle East by Ilya Levinson, to Patricia Morehead’s work on a text of Margaret Atwood about the Vietnam War, to Janice Misurell-Mitchell’s musical theatre piece about the Iraq wars. Barbara Ann Martin will be CUBE’s guest soprano.

The concert will be Sunday, November 12, from 1-2pm in Ganz Hall, 7th floor of Roosevelt University, 430 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago. Tickets are \$10 and are available at the door or through the Chicago Humanities Festival website, www.chfestival.org

Charles Ives’ *Three Songs of the War* were written from 1917-1919. The first, “He is There”, on a text by the composer for soprano and piano (with optional violin, flute or fife), reflects Ivesian musical imagery: the excitement of the small town marching band playing as young men in uniform leave to fight. Ives used no less than thirteen borrowed tunes, among them “The Battle Cry of Freedom”, “Reveille”, and “The Star Spangled Banner”. The Ives scholar and performer, John Kirkpatrick, in describing Ives’s paradoxical nature, said, “Charlie was a passionate pacifist, but he could get fightin’ mad about his pacifism.” The other two songs are closer to meditations on the ravages of war. “In Flanders Fields” (text by John McCrae) and “Tom Sails Away” (text by Ives) the composer refers to the battlefields in France, again quoting tunes similar to the patriotic ones above, but in a more reflective mood.

“Out of the Depths I Cry” (Psalm 130 is the reference) is for soprano and chamber ensemble by Chicago composer Ilya Levinson on a text by Ruth Gembicki Bragg. The composer says, “In this piece I wanted to give voice to victims of violence. Each act of violence is a personal tragedy; we, as a mass, usually don’t hear these victims, separated by thousands of miles of distance, lack of communication devices, passages of time, language barriers to name a few...” The poet says, “Historically, worldwide, men have controlled governments, economies, arts and sciences, the military and the waging of war, leaving women only their voices to protest the loss of their families, freedoms and peace.” Patricia Morehead’s “It’s Dangerous to Read Newspapers”, for soprano and piano, is based on the poem of the same name by fellow Canadian, Margaret Atwood. Morehead says that the poem “struck a strong chord for me... One is afraid to know the news these days and this setting deals with my own personal dread of coming to terms with our current reality.” The poet and composer contrast the ideas of childhood innocence and adult awareness of the horrors of war; Atwood cites specifically the war in Vietnam, as seen in the daily newspapers.

Janice Misurell-Mitchell’s musical theatre piece for voice/flute and percussion, *After the History*, is based on the poetry of former Chicago poet, John Shreffler. Taking its imagery from Brecht’s “The

Ballad of the Dead Soldier”, the poem is a series of geometric variations on the subject of war without end. Misurell-Mitchell’s piece views war from many different points of view, from the serious to the comic, the sincere to the ironic. The work was inspired by the War in the Persian Gulf (1991), but it continues to resonate during this period of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan