

## PROGRAM NOTES

### *Poème symphonique for 100 Metronomes*

GYÖRGY LIGETI

b. May 23, 1923, Dicsőszentmárton, Hungary

d. June 12, 2006, Vienna

György Ligeti began his career as a composer in Hungary in the years after World War II, when musical life in that country was rigidly controlled by a repressive communist bureaucracy intent on enforcing the doctrine of “Socialist Realism”: music (and all art) must be acceptable to the masses and must serve the ends of the state. Under these restrictions, Ligeti found himself limited to composing patriotic choruses and music for school musicians. Desperate for wider horizons, Ligeti found them when he escaped from Hungary in December 1956, just after the revolution there had been crushed.

Suddenly in Western Europe — Ligeti found the musical possibilities almost limitless, and he began to explore them. He studied with Karlheinz Stockhausen in Cologne and for a time became interested in electronic music and music constructed out of non-instrumental sounds. In 1961 Ligeti produced what might be called his first classic score, *Atmosphères*, an orchestral work that does without themes, rhythm, or harmony and instead offers slowly-shifting textures (listeners may know that work best not from the concert hall but from the movie theater: Stanley Kubrick used it — without permission — in his movie *2001*).

But Ligeti was also aware in these years of the many competing “ideologies” in the world of music, and in 1962 he composed a score that he hoped would be understood — at least partially — as criticism of those ideologies. This was his *Poème symphonique*, composed for one hundred metronomes. This piece called into question not only all the competing ideologies, with their various manifestos, but the very nature of music itself. The *Poème symphonique* requires one hundred metronomes, each set at a different tempo. These metronomes are wound tight, and — at a signal from the “conductor” — they are all set in motion (these metronomes must be the old-fashioned wind-up type, not the more recent electric version). At first, the sound produced is simply a inchoate mass of ticking sounds, but as the springs in the metronomes wind down, it becomes possible for listeners to pick out the strands of individual rhythms until finally only one metronome is left in motion, and gradually it ticks its way into exhaustion and silence.

It has been pointed out that Ligeti’s *Poème symphonique* is not a “poem,” nor is it “symphonic,” and that is part of his ironic take on the artistic battles of the day. This piece created something of a scandal in that day, for it called into question the whole meaning of music (one radio station in Europe refused to broadcast a performance of it, much to Ligeti’s delight). Today, half a century after its creation, the *Poème*

*symphonique* reminds us of the artistic battles in the years after World War II, and more specifically it reminds us of Ligeti’s probing questions about what constitutes music in a world where complete artistic freedom seemed to open the door to anything.

— Eric Bromberger

### *Continuum*

GYÖRGY LIGETI

#### Performance Time

approximately 4 minutes

#### Premiere

1968

*Continuum*, which Ligeti completed in Vienna in January 1968, is conceived specifically for two-manual harpsichord, an instrument with a very distinctive sound but one that is unable to make dynamic gradations. Ligeti wrote music that plays to and incorporates these characteristics: *Continuum* is a *Prestissimo* throughout, and the music is essentially a study in extreme speed and the texture that arises from it. In a note in the score, Ligeti instructs the performer to play “extremely fast, so that the individual tones can hardly be perceived, but rather merge into a continuum. Play very evenly, without articulation of any sort. The correct tempo has been reached when the piece lasts less than 4 minutes . . . “

There are no true chords in *Continuum* — the music is entirely linear — but the effect of playing arpeggiated patterns very fast is that chords seem to emerge from the rush of the sound of the harpsichord. One might almost say from the “noise” of the harpsichord, for the quite audible sound of the instrument’s action is an essential part of what Ligeti has called the “ghostly rustle and buzz” of *Continuum*. Audiences might best follow this music by listening for this distinctive sonority and also for the changing patterns of sound across its brief span as the (apparent) chords gradually evolve. The blistering pace does not slacken at any point, and *Continuum* concludes on the piercing sound of repeated high F-flats, which Ligeti instructs the performer to “stop suddenly, as though torn off.”

— Eric Bromberger

***Síppal, dobbal, nádihegedüvel***  
**(With Pipes, Drums, Fiddles)**  
GYÖRGY LIGETI

**Performance Time**

approximately 14 minutes

**Premiere**

November 10, 2000

*Síppal, dobbal, nádihegedüvel* (With Pipes, Drums, Fiddles) is one of Ligeti's final works, completed in 2000. It is a cycle of seven songs for mezzo-soprano and percussion quartet, dedicated to the Hungarian percussion ensemble Amadinda. The texts are taken from short poems in Hungarian by Sándor Weöres, and the title of this cycle comes from a Hungarian children's rhyme, dating from the Turkish occupation of Hungary.

The seven songs deal with a variety of subjects; from notes by the composer:

*Fabula* (Fable) — A pack of wolves shudder with fear as two mountains approach each other, crushing them without pity in their wake.

*Táncdal* (Dance Song) — The text may sound meaningful, but actually the words are imaginary, having only rhythm and no meaning.

*Kínai templom* (Chinese Temple — conveys the contentment of the Buddhist view of life by using only monosyllabic Hungarian words.

*Kuli* (Coolie) — a poetic portrayal of an Asian pariah's monotonous hopelessness and pent-up aggressiveness.

*Alma álma* (Dream) — embedded into the sound of four harmonicas, the voice describes how the branches of an apple tree gently sway in the wind and an apple dreams of journeys in distant, enchanted lands.

*Keserédes* (Bitter-sweet) — Ligeti calls this a "fake" Hungarian folk song, combining artificial folk music with a pop-like melody and an artificially sweetened accompaniment.

*Szajkó* (Parakeet) — the poem is in effect a nonsensical play on words, but one which produces a rhythmic swing. The percussion instrumentation is also bordering on absurd, with one of the musicians playing a different instrument for every note.

— Robert Dillon

### **Sippal, dobbal, nadihegedűvel**

Text by Sándor Weöres (1913-1989)

#### I. Fabula

Egy  
hegy  
megy.  
Szembjön a másik hegy.  
Orditanak ordasok:  
Ossze ne morzsoljatok!  
En is hegy,  
te is hegy,  
nekünk ugyan egyremegy.

#### II. Tancdal

#### III. Kinai Templom

Szent	fonn	Negy	majd
kert	lenn	fem	mely
bő	tag	cseng:	csond
lomb:	ej	Szep,	leng,
tart	jo,	Jő,	mint
zold	kek	Hir,	hult
szarny,	arny.	Rang,	hang.

#### IV. Kuli

Kuli bot vag  
Kuli megy  
megy  
csak guri-guri  
Riksa  
Auto  
Sarkanyszeker  
Kuli huz riksa.  
Kuli huz auto.  
Kuli huz sarkanyszeker.  
Csak guri-guri  
Kuli gyalog megy  
Kuli szakall feher.  
Kuli almos.  
Kuli ehés.  
Kuli oreg.  
Kuli babszem makszem kis gyerek  
ver kis Kuli nagy rossz emberek.  
Csak guri-guri  
Riksa  
Auto  
Sarkanyszeker  
Ki huz riksa?  
Ki huz auto?  
Ki huz sarkanyszeker?  
Ha Kuli meghal?

### **With Pipes, Drums, Fiddles**

Translation by Sharon Krebs

#### I. Fable

A  
mountain  
walks.  
The others mountain comes toward it.  
The wolves howl:  
Do not crush us!  
I, am mountain,  
you, too, a mountain,  
we are indifferent to that.

#### II. Dance Song

[This text cannot be translated]

#### III. Chinese Temple

Saint	high	Four	hence
field	down	bronze	deep
broad	far	ring:	Still
leaves:	fair	Night,	swings
full	comes,	Good,	like
green	blue	News,	cool
wings	shade.	Rank,	sound.

#### IV. Coolie

Coolie stick cut.  
Coolie walk  
walk  
just rolling and rolling  
Rickshaw  
Car  
Dragon-coach  
Coolie pull rickshaw.  
Coolie pull car.  
Coolie pull dragon-coach.  
just rolling and rolling  
Coolie go on foot  
Coolie beard white.  
Coolie sleepy.  
Coolie hungry.  
Coolie old.  
Coolie bean-sized poppy-seed-crumbs-sized little child  
Little coolie beat big bad people, and rolling and rolling  
Rickshaw  
Car  
Dragon-coach  
Who pull rickshaw?  
Who pull car?  
Who pull dragon-coach?  
If coolie die?

Kuli meghal.  
Kuli neeem tud meghal!  
Kuli orok  
csak guri-guri

V. Alma Alma (Tizenkettedik Szimfonia)

alma agon  
alma ring az agon  
alma ring a  
lombos agon  
ring a ring a  
barna agon  
ringva  
ringa-ringatozva  
inga  
hinta  
palinta  
alma alma  
elme alma alma  
almodj alszol?  
mozdulatlan lengedezve  
hús szelben arnyban  
alom agon  
agak alma  
ringva  
ringa-ringatozva  
ingadozva  
imbolyogva  
itt egyhelyben elhajozik  
indiaba afrikaba holdvilagba  
almodj  
alma alszol?

VI. Keseredes (67. Magyar Etude)

Szantottam, szantottam het tuzes sarkannyal,  
hej, vegig bevetettem csupa gyongviraggal.  
Szantottam, szantottam szep gyemant ekevel,  
hej, vegig bevetettem hullo konnyeimmal.  
Szaz nyilo rozsarol az erdon almodtam,  
hej, tobbet nem aludtam, felig ebren voltam.  
Hajnalban folkeltem, kakukszot számoltam,  
hej, visznek esküvőre kedves galambommal.

VII. Szajko

Coolie die.  
Coolie can noooooooot die!  
Coolie forever  
just rolling and rolling

V. Dream (Twelfth Symphony)

An apple on the branch  
an apple swings on the branch  
an apple swings  
on the leafy branch  
swings-swings  
on the brown branch  
swinging  
rocking  
pendulum  
swing (hinta)  
palinta  
a dream of an apple  
the mind's dream an apple  
dream dream?  
motionlessly swinging  
in the cool wind in the shadows  
dream  
on the branch  
dream of the branches  
swinging  
rocking  
swaying  
staying in this spot it casts off  
to India to Africa to the moonlight  
dream  
–apple, are you sleeping?

VI. Bitter-Sweet (67th Hungarian Etude)

I plowed, I plowed with seven fiery dragons,  
Heigh-ho, I sowed nothing but lilies of the valley.  
I plowed, I plowed with a beautiful diamond plow,  
Heigh-ho, everywhere I sowed my tears.  
In the forest, I dreamed of a hundred blossoming roses,  
Heigh-ho, I slept no longer, was half awake,  
In the early morning I got up, counted the cuckoo calls,  
Heigh-ho, they are taking me to be wed to my sweetheart.

VII. Parakeet

[This text cannot be translated.]



### ***Goldbeater's Skin***

CHRISTOPHER CERRONE

b. 1984, Huntington, New York

### **Performance Time**

approximately 25 minutes

### **Premiere**

February 4, 2017, University of Notre Dame

Winner of a 2015 Rome Prize and a finalist for the 2014 Pulitzer Prize, the Brooklyn-based composer Christopher Cerrone is internationally acclaimed for compositions characterized by a subtle handling of timbre and resonance, a deep literary fluency, and a flair for multimedia collaborations.

This season Cerrone has world premieres with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra (for Jeffrey Kahane's final concert as LACO Music Director), the Calder Quartet at the Broad Stage; Third Coast Percussion and Rachel Calloway for the DeBartolo Performing Arts Center; and an electroacoustic work for Tim Munro at Miller Theatre.

He curates an evening for New York Festival of Song and enjoys featured performances by Tito Muñoz and the Phoenix Symphony, Eighth Blackbird, Jennifer Koh, and Vicky Chow. Cerrone's works are also performed at Caramoor, the Festival Nuova Consonanza in Rome, the Balliet im Revier in Germany, and at the Kennedy Center, and featured on new releases from New Amsterdam Records, VIA Records, and an album from Christopher Rountree and wild Up.

A co-founder of Red Light New Music, and one-sixth of the Sleeping Giant composer collective, Christopher Cerrone holds degrees from the Yale School of Music and the Manhattan School of Music, and is published by Schott NY and Project Schott New York.

### ***Goldbeater's Skin***

texts by G. C. Waldrep (b. 1968)

"I met the poet G. C. Waldrep at the MacDowell Colony in 2015 and was immediately drawn to him as both a poet and person — friendly, unique, and for a poet, deeply musical. In addition to his study of poetry, he was trained as a countertenor and professed his love for composers like Meredith Monk and David Lang. In turn, we bonded over our shared love for the books of Italo Calvino and the poetry of James Wright. So naturally I was curious about his work.

"I tore through his many published volumes, and was drawn in particular to his first collection of poems, *Goldbeater's Skin*, written 20 years ago, when he was about my age. I found it to be particularly pregnant with musical possibilities (actual musical allusions abound). So I decided to craft a new work for voice and percussion quartet around these poems. They are often deeply imagistic; the source of each reference would be impossible to trace; yet each poem leads inexorably to a potent and dramatic conclusion. I constructed music that functioned similarly — music that is billowing yet always headed towards some kind of denouement. As I sifted through the whole collection, I chose poems whose references overlapped to create connective tissue; some references are more specific than others, but almost all of them are concerned with companionship — whether deep friendship, or love.

"The challenge of writing a work for voice and percussion quartet is obvious: four drummers are much louder than one voice, and I wanted the musicians in the quartet to have moments to shine as well. So in turn I constructed a series of interludes (two proper, and one faux interlude), each focused on a single kind of idiophone — wood; metal; then, appropriately enough, skin."

— Christopher Cerrone

*Goldbeater's Skin* was commissioned by Elizabeth and Justus Schlichting and the University of Notre Dame's DeBartolo Performing Arts Center