

## **Paul STEENHUISEN - PROGRAM NOTES**

PIECE: ciphering in tongues

Although we are most familiar with the practice of musical cryptography (the ascription of pitches to letters of the alphabet and their subsequent secret use in pieces of music) through the thematic implementation of Bach's name converted to the pitches Bb-A-C-B, as well as the musical love messages sent in Berg's Lyric Suite, the procedure extends deeper into music history. Tracing the genealogy of musical cryptography leads us back as far as the 15th Century Tractatus varii medicinales, developing through the late-16th Century papal cryptographic service and on through related systems used by Michael Haydn, Arthur Honneger, Olivier Messiaen, and many others. The degree to which these codes were employed in the music varied as greatly as the intentions of the composers, and eventually the exploitation of musical cryptography extended beyond the domain of composition-for-performance and into other, more subversive activities. While smitten composers continued to write coded letters with their secret systems, the French Diplomatic service and other military organizations also used the concept for communication in times of war; as well, in 1952 the New York City Police Department infiltrated a gambling ring in which bookies used a note-for-figure encipherment for passing on illegal wager data in their gambling operations. ciphering in tongues uses three superposed systems of encipherment to articulate a hidden literary level in the work. If "hacked", these systems will reveal intolerable, sweet, and strange statements underlying the sonic surface, and will lead one to another important source of inspiration for the piece - the Oracle at Delphi and its mysterious prophecy ceremonies circa 590 BC, where Pythia (the Goddess of the Oracle) ate a laurel leaf, inhaled the altering vapours emitted by the Sacred Stone, and made ecstatic utterances that were interpreted by the priests and a group of sacred slaves.

Commissioned by the Toronto Symphony Orchestra for the Made in Canada New Music Festival. First performed by members of the TSO, with Gary Kulesha, conductor.