

Paul STEENHUISEN - PROGRAM NOTES

PIECE: Copralite Culture & Analysis #21-33

Coprolites/copralites are fossilized pieces of dung.

Copra is also the dried meat of the coconut, from which oil is extracted.

The premise of this work is introduced by composer Michael Finnissy: “The reality that we, as living composers, are forced to accept - as natural - that the music of the past is unquestionably so much better than anything we might write and is going to be played so much more than ours is just bizarre. ...it began to happen in the nineteenth century, a facet of bourgeois culture, that the good old days are better than the here and now. The past is more secure, more comfortable, you can tell more lies about it.” On occasion, a solution to the scenario described by Finnissy is to examine music of the overarching past, to engage it as a solid object that is analyzed, filtered, and cultured – to determine what it is, where it came from, what grew from it, and construct other fictions of uncertain date and authorship.

From 1963 to 1971, composer Luciano Berio lived in New York City, where he wrote the classic work *Sequenza VII*, for oboe (1969). The aesthetic of his piece, while broad in some ways, successfully ignored the bombarding sounds of the people and commerce in that golden age, focussing instead on a gravitational centre pitch and self-referentially tight harmonic cycles. In this, the second set of Copralite pieces, the point of departure is Berio’s magnificent work, ethnographically re-infused with disparate musics from outside his piece, feeding it with grains stolen from the time and place he lived – conflicting hegemonies. modified composites, hybrids, amalgamations, and recognitions, repainted with the graffitis of the street, and more...

What the experts have to say:

Luciano Berio (1925-2003)

“I’d like to thank X for giving my work new life – or killing it so that we need more new pieces — I’m not quite sure which.” March, 2012.

Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986)

“Before my death we ordered several copies of this new work for the Library at Babel.”

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

“I like the one about the cats.”

Kodak Ad

“Have more fun with your memories.”

Commissioned by the Tonus Vivus Music Society. First performed by Beth Levia and Sylvia Shaddick-Taylor.