

Notes for Preconcert Talk for Christopher Kaufman's 'HUDSON VALLEY'

"...I wish to thank you for being here tonight and to invite you to join (**me** - if soloist/**us** - if ensemble) on a journey. This journey will be expressed by the musicians, the surrounding sounds on tape from the speakers and the projected visual images. On the tape are hundreds of natural sounds which Kaufman composed with to create backdrops and soundscapes with which (I - or 'the musicians) perform with. It's like a movie, where the performer(s) are the main actors. The techniques for creating the Tape Part are from the tradition of Sound Design in Film and Kaufman also used sounds from his sound effects libraries..."

"...The video accompanies the music and greatly enhances the story. Not only will you see many natural images, but also the Art of Alice Cotton and Ken-Cro-Ken - who both have graciously lent their work to this project. Ken in particular is a major collaborator in this work - he is an environmental painter and everyone is invited to explore his art further by visiting his website below..."

"...Chris Kaufman's Hudson Valley Music begins in the Long Island Sound as you paddle your dugout canoe, heading outwards to sea. You'll hear the sounds of Ocean Surf on your right and the sounds of your oars. Then a Humpbacked Whale emerges to your right and his song begins. That is when (I/the french horn) begins playing. The music starts with the music imitating the sounds of the ocean and then a soaring melody emerges and recedes into the ocean once again. - [the solo Tuba version includes some time spent joining in the whalesong] - During the solo [or the next phase in the ensemble versions] you'll hear a trio of Beluga. They are recorded under water and the sound is refracted, creating an eerie soundscape against which the musicians perform. Also during this time you'll hear the Surf and Whale sounds change sides as you turn your boat and head towards shore. Then, as you approach the shore you'll hear the sounds of shorebirds... the curlew, loon and osprey... and the water sounds shift from ocean to river as you near the rivermouth. A flock of Geese fly overhead as this first movement comes to a close...."

"...Also during this time you'll hear a rhythmic pulse in the background intimating the presence of Native Americans. Kaufman wanted to have this as an element of the transition to the next phase of the piece and to remind us of a time when humans lived much more in harmony with nature. The Lenape (native americans who lived at the mouth of the river) had 'water drums' - so Kaufman created a sample instrument out of a fish sound! - the Oyster Toadfish. The Toadfish lives in the mud of the river and when he swim to the surface, the top of his head looks like a toad peeking above the water. The sound it emits underwater sounds like a 'thrum' or plucked string. Kaufman keyboardized the sound and here combined it with the sound of a soft eastern drum and created the 'oyster toadfish drum'. The toadfish sound is later combined with string bass to create the oyster toadfish 'running bass'."

"...A symphony of Birds ensues...a dense tapestry woven of songbirds with a bass-line of Bullfrogs... this signals the transition into the next movement - 'Forest Binaries'. Here you'll hear backdrops built of the sounds of frogs, birds like wild turkey, woodpecker and songbirds, toadtrills, rattle-snake and instrumental sounds like piano and metallic percussion. You'll hear what Kaufman calls 'nature fugues' which express the 'madness of unfettered invention'. There are huge wild climaxes featuring the sounds of bears and gongs - an infusion of positive energy before a gradual fall off leading to the next movement: 'Transition to NIGHT'..."

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"...In the NIGHT movement you'll hear music built from the sounds of nocturnal creatures and extinct species of the area. You'll hear Tree Crickets, Toad Trills, incisive Coyote Barks which initiate a chorus of Wolves, the sounds of Bats which Kaufman also turned into a keyboard instrument, Bear 'Huffs' and the call of a Moose. Together they make a 'Call of the Wild' atmosphere and sound a theme of 'Warning'..."

"... the instrumentalists begin with music that imitates flying bats and moves into a chamber setting of 'nightmusic'... ending with a high note in the Clarinet which signals the next phase..."

"... the next Phase is 'Industrial Storm'... there are two main parts to the Sound Design... you'll hear music creating from the sounds of Pile Drivers, Metallic Plates, the sounds of swords clashing against armor and orchestral sounds. Also you'll hear a ROAR created from the sounds of Extinct species... Actually they combine to design the sound of the ultimate extinct species of the Hudson Valley - the Mastadon. Mastadon bones were discovered all over the Hudson Valley - they are a part of Native American mythology - the bones were collected avidly by founding fathers Washington and Jefferson and put into museums - to them they symbolized both the violence of nature and Empire..."

"... The purpose of this movement is to create a feeling of immediacy and urgency to the issue of Climate Change. To most people it seems so far away... but it is encroaching rapidly on our lives... This music expresses the immediacy of the 'fight or flight' reflex... and brings the issue to the forefront.... but you are not being preached to... Chris Kaufman's Hudson Valley Music has a healthy sense of humor throughout... combined with the overt passion of the music you have a winning combination... he certainly had a lot of fun creating the wild rhythmic percussion music in this movement..."

"...Kaufman chose 'pile-drivers' for a reason... Natural Gas drilling is a major issue in the Hudson Valley Environment... irresponsible drilling turns Earthly paradise into sickening sludge... and to quote Bobby Kennedy Jr. - "All for a Quick Buck". We can do this right - we have to. Please visit Kaufman's project page for Hudson Valley Music (link below) - there you can link to the Catskill Mountainkeepers and others to join in the fight to save our planet from senseless ravaging by business interests..."

"The initial tour for this work was organized in concert with the Wildlife Conservation Society and Dr. Eric Sanderson's 'Mannahatta Project'. In this project Dr. Sanderson deals extensively with the Hudson Valley Environment - how it was hundreds of years ago, how it is now and how it can be in the future - including specific ideas on how we can more effectively grow our civilization in harmony with nature to the betterment of both. He spoke at performances and links to this project are also found on the Project Page link for Hudson Valley Music below.

"...The last movement is peaceful and beautiful and is titled ".....and the Earth is our Spiritual House..." -- This music expresses the majestic awe that one feels when in nature - like what someone like John Muir put into his writings... The main animal characters return in a final chorus... and you are left with a feeling of 'unresolved hope'..."

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Additional Notes:

- Often when one sees 'Instrument and Tape' some think immediately of the tradition of 'University-Based Electronic Music' - Moog, Davidovsky, etc. This piece has little to do with that. The tape music is from the tradition of Sound Design in Film - where Kaufman has taken it into the world of concert music. He prefers the term 'Stravinsky on Steroids'. The term Sound Design is used often to express this and this distinction is more or less needed depending on where the performance occurs and who the audience is - i.e. more so when performed in a University setting, less so or not at all when performed elsewhere. The talk above asserts that the tape music comes from the tradition of film music sound design. This should be enough - but the performer may find that it is necessary to make this clearer during after concert conversation.
- Here is a quote from John Muir, should you have use for it: "Bathed in such beauty, watching the expressions ever varying on the faces of the mountains, watching the stars...π the circling seasons, listening to the songs of the waters and winds and birds, would be endless pleasure.... No other place has ever so overwhelmingly attracted me as this hospitable, Godful wilderness."