

David Felberg conductor

V.B. Price columnist/philosopher

Viola

Christine Rancier
Cherokee Randolph
Elzbieta Weyman
Justin Pollak

Oboe

Melissa Sassaman
Elizabeth Strong
MaryAnn Shore*
Dana Boyd *
* doubles English Horn

Trumpet

John Marchiando †
Mark Hyams †
Brynn Marchiando
Tony Sadlon

Horn

Nate Ukens †
Josh Wagner
Rachael Brown †
Robert Buss

Trombone

Carson Keeble †
Debra Taylor
Byron Herrington †
Dave Tall

Electric Guitar

Michael Anthony
Dan Dowling

Bass Guitar

Mark Tatum

Harp

Anne Eisfeller
Lynn DeVelder

Piano

Jose Luis Hurtado ‡
Juilng Tsu

Voices

Kelli Dahlke-Fuentes
Hannah Stephens
Sarah Ihlefeld
Sarah Weiler

† *Fog Tropes*

‡ *Tombeau de Messiaen*

CHATTER 20-21

MUSIC WORTH TALKING ABOUT

Chatter presents live classical music concerts that are unusual and compelling – challenging professional musicians with juxtapositions of music in the classical idiom from all eras. Chatter 20-21 presents compositions from the 20th and 21st centuries that are powerful expressions of contemporary music and thought.

1 TOMBEAU DE MESSIAEN

Jonathan Harvey 9 minutes

This piece for piano and tape dates from the same year as *Advaya* for solo cello and electronics. The title of the latter work, the composer explains, translates as “not two.” These few syllables stand for a crucial concept in much of Harvey’s music: two things entwine in such a way that their boundaries are blurred and one is no longer sure whether two separate things overlap, or rather one thing enlarges itself into different voices. This is certainly the concern of *Tombeau*, written in homage to the French composer, Olivier Messiaen.

There are several obvious musical “debts” to Messiaen here. But what Harvey honors most is Messiaen’s role as a forerunner of French spectralism. *Tombeau* presents a dual-voiced music in which the live piano often plays in “unison” with an electronically generated piano, but the match is never precise because the latter is tuned utilizing a “natural” harmonic series, while the live piano is in equal temperament (a “compromised” tuning system invented in the early 18th century to facilitate Western tonal motions). This blend can be disconcerting at first—the tape piano seems “out of tune”—but gradually what emerges is a subtle play between two voices seeking unison and “in tuneness” with one another, while nevertheless preserving the tensions of their distance. Only at the end, in a grand Messiaen-like affirmation, is there a sense of arrival.

2 FOG TROPES

Ingram Marshall ≈ 10.5 minutes

Ingram Marshall lived and worked in the San Francisco Bay Area from 1973 to 1985; his current base is Connecticut. He has been a student of Indonesian gamelan music, the influence of which may be heard in the slowed-down sense of time and use of melodic repetition found in many of his pieces. His music has been performed by ensembles and orchestras such as the Kronos Quartet, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the San Francisco Symphony, and the St. Louis Symphony.

Ingram Marshall on *Fog Tropes*: *Fog Tropes* was composed in San Francisco in 1981 at the behest of John Adams, who was then organizing a concert series for the San Francisco Symphony called “New and Unusual Music.” A few years earlier I had put together a tape piece called simply *Fog* which used ambient sounds from around the San Francisco Bay. That ten-minute piece became the underlying “bed” for the live instrumental parts (six brass instruments, amplified and slightly reverberated).

The tape part not only uses maritime sounds for its constructive materials but vocal keenings and the unique sound of the Balinese gambuh, a long bamboo flute. Although the brass parts and tape sounds are distinct from one another there is an attempt to blend them so as to create a harmonious whole.

In the opening minute only the tape sounds are heard and then the horns begin their intertwining eighth notes of ascending twirls, which become more intense as the piece progresses. Trombones arrive underneath and the first cry-like utterances of the trumpets appear on top. The basic sound world of the piece is established.

Many people are reminded of the San Francisco Bay when they hear this music but for me it is a piece about memory and the feeling of being lost.

3 DE STAAT

Louis Andriessen ≈ 35 minutes

Prior to the performance, author, teacher, poet **V.B. Price** and conductor **David Felberg** will discuss Andriessen’s *De Staat* as it relates to Plato, *The Republic* and the politics of music.

Note: The libretto for *De Staat* is on the back

Louis Andriessen was born in Utrecht, Netherlands as the son of Hendrik Andriessen, a Dutch composer and organist. He began his musical studies with his father, and then studied in The Hague with Kees van Baaren, and later in Milan with Luciano Berio. Early Andriessen works were serial, and utilized standard symphonic ensembles and instrumentation. In 1970, Andriessen abandoned writing music for standard symphonic ensembles, a decision which marked a turning point in his career. Over the subsequent years, he experimented with electronic music and theater, but made his most well-known artistic leap with *De Staat*.

American composer John Adams wrote the following about *De Staat*: “Composed between 1972-76, it is a fabulously high energy meeting

of Stravinskian primitivism, funky American bebop and ritualistic Indonesian modalities. It is a masterpiece, emphatically one of the best works of the early era of Minimalism. **The gist of it all** is that Plato saw music as a potentially virulent threat to a smoothly functioning society. In one of the passages from *The Republic* that Andriessen sets to music, Plato warns that music that ‘suddenly changes mode’ is not recommended for his ideal society, because it is too emotionally manipulative. In the end *De Staat* is so overwhelming you just forget about Plato standing in the back of the hall shaking his head, wagging his finger and rolling his eyes. Maybe it’s a bad thing to let the music sweep you away. Maybe not. Maybe the uncertainty is exactly what Louis Andriessen had in mind.”

Andriessen wrote: “I have used passages from Plato to illustrate that [music composition is not above social conditioning and is] largely determined by your own social circumstances and listening experience. His text is politically controversial, if not downright negative:

everyone can see the absurdity of Plato’s statement that the [natural musical scale G–G] should be banned as it would have a damaging influence on the development of character! My second reason for writing *De Staat* is a direct contradiction of the first: I deplore the fact that Plato was wrong. If only it were true that musical innovation could change the laws of the State!”

David Felberg on *De Staat*: I find it interesting that while Andriessen is striking a blow at Plato’s absurd notion that some music, especially that which changes mode, is unhealthy and destabilizing to a perfect society, the composer is also taking a jab at the distinct hierarchy within traditional orchestras, in which certain sections or players are given more importance than others. In *De Staat*, with Andriessen’s unusual ensemble of 31, everyone is of equal importance. The composer is turning Plato on his head and is inviting layers of debate about equality versus hierarchy — in politics and in music and therefore in life. He’s saying “you want destabilizing? I’ve got it for you in this piece!”



A sonic portrait of *De Staat*

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The Republic (selections)

Plato (427? – 347BCE)

In the Republic, arguably Plato's most famous and controversial philosophic work, Socrates creates a theory of justice, uses the Allegory of the Cave to explore the nature of reality, and builds a case for a highly stratified state, ruled by selfless guardians, protected by selfless warriors, and provided for by worker castes with no social mobility.

– V.B. Price

Sung in Greek

III 397 b 7 – c 2

'If it be given a musical mode and rhythm in accord with the diction, it may be performed correctly in almost the same mode throughout; that is, since character is so uniform, in one musical mode, and also in a similarly unchanging rhythm?'

'Yes,' he said, 'that is certainly the case.'

III 398 d 1 – 399 a 3

'A song is composed of three elements: words, musical mode, and rhythm.'

'Yes,' he said, 'that is so.'

'Well, as for the words, will they in any way differ from words that are not to go with music so far as concerns their conformity to those canons of subject and manner which we announced a little while ago?'

'No, they will not.'

'And should not the musical mode and the rhythm accord with the words?'

'Of course.'

'But we said that in our poems we want no weepings and lamentations.'

'No, certainly not.'

'What are the wailful modes? Tell me. You are musical.'

'Mixed Lydian and Hyperlydian, and some other similar ones.'

'Then these we must dismiss, must we not?' I said. 'For even in the training of virtuous women they are useless, much more so in the training of men.'

'Certainly.'

'Then are not drunkenness, effeminacy, and idleness most unseemly in guardians?'

'Surely.'

'Which are the soft and convivial modes?'

'There are Ionian and Lydian modes which are called slack.'

'Then, my friend, shall we use those for men who are warriors?'

'By no means,' he said, 'You seem to have Dorian and Phrygian left.'

III 399 c 7 – e 7

'Then,' I said, 'we shall not require for our songs and melodies a variety of strings or sudden changes of modulation?'

'I think not,' he said.

'Then we shall not maintain the makers of harps and dulcimers, and of all instruments which are many-stringed and many-keyed?'

'I think not,' he said.

'Then will you allow flute makers and flute players into the city? Has not the flute more notes than any other instrument, and are not those many-keyed instruments really imitations of the flute?'

'Obviously,' he said.

'You have left,' I said, 'the lyre and the zither, which will be useful in town, and in the fields the herdsmen may have a pipe.'

'So the argument tells us,' he said.

'We are making no innovation,' I said, 'when we prefer Apollo and Apollo's instruments to Marsyas and his instruments.'

'No, by Zeus,' he said, 'I think we are not.'

'Now, by the dog,' I said, 'here have we been purging the city which we said before was too luxurious, and we never noticed it.'

'Well, it was very wise of us,' he said.

IV 424 c 3 – 6

'He must beware of changing to a new kind of music, for the change always involves far-reaching danger. Any alteration in the modes of music is always followed by the alteration in the most fundamental laws of the state.'