

Music for the End of Time

“**Music for the End of Time**” is a 50-minute work for trombone and quadraphonic electronics based on the *Book of Revelation*. We used our experience with music theater to attempt a kind of dramatic tone poem for trombone and computer. We explore all aspects of the trombone, ranging from symphonic expressions of “divine wrath,” to wild rhythmic unisons with the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, to the gentlest, meditative lyricism. These are the movements and the verses they are based upon:

I. A Door Was Opened in Heaven,

After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter. (Rev. 4:1.)

II. The Sea of Glass

And before the throne was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. (Rev. 4.6)

III. The Four Horsemen

And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone: and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone. (Rev. 9:17)

IV. As It Were A Trumpet Talking

After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter. (Rev. 4:1.)

V. The White Beast

And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth. (Rev. 6:8)

VI. A Woman Clothed With the Sun

And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars. (Rev. 12:1)

We were drawn to the *Book of Revelation* more by its rich imagery and symbolism than any sort of doctrinaire religious belief. At times, St. John’s writing is quite transcendental, but at others, its imbittered visions are almost insanely horrific. In this sense, parts of “Music for the End of Time” follow in the traditions of “crazy” composers as exemplified by Moussorsgky’s “Night On Bald Mountain,” Berlioz’s “Symphony Fantastique,” and some of the deeply bi-polar melancholy/exhuberance of Schumann and Mahler. In some

Abbie Conant

received her Bachelor’s Degree (cum Laude) from Temple University in 1977. In 1976 she studied at Yale University, and in 1979 she received her Master’s Degree from the Juilliard School, followed by a Meister diploma from the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik in Cologne, Germany in 1984. From 1979 to 1980 she was solo trombonist of the Royal Opera of Turin, Italy. From 1980 to 1993 she was solo trombonist of the Munich Philharmonic. The International Trombone Association Journal has featured Abbie Conant in a cover article and described her as “in the first rank of world class trombonists”. She has recorded a highly acclaimed CD of trombone and organ music and performs internationally as a concerto soloist, recitalist, improviser and performance artist. In recent years she has performed as a soloist in over 115 European and American cities. In 1992 the Baden-Württemberg State Ministry for Education, in recognition of her international reputation as a trombonist, named her Professor of Trombone at the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik in Trossingen, Germany – the first woman Prof. of trombone in Germany. In 1996 International Trombone Association elected her as their President elect. In August of 1998 she was the first woman to serve as a judicator for the International Trombone Competition in Geneva, Switzerland. She has appeared in the role of Camilla in Edgar Reitz’s epic film, *Zweite Heimat*, and was the subject of a 90 minute documentary film broadcast on German National Television entitled *Abbie Conant – Alone Among Men*. For her most recent project, entitled “The Wired Goddess and her Trombone,” she is working with composers to create works for computer and trombone based on the theme of the Goddess. To date twenty-eight works have been written or are in progress, of which she has already premiered fourteen.



William Osborne

studied with George Crumb in Philadelphia and with Franco Donatoni at the National Academy of Italy. Among his awards are two from the American Society of Authors, Composers, and Publishers, a Doctoral Fellowship to Columbia University, and a prize from the Munich Theater Commission. Since 1993 his works have been performed in over 115 cities in North America and Europe. Mr. Osborne has written numerous articles about the social and political influences of symphony orchestras including “Symphony Orchestras and Artist-Prophets” published by the M.I.T. Press. He has appeared on “Good Morning America” and NPR as well as having been the subject of a feature article by MSNBC.



Our Spring Tour Itinerary 2006

March 2, Ithaca College
March 4, University of Maryland Baltimore County
March 7, Drew University
March 9, University of New Hampshire
March 13, University of Hartford
March 20, SUNY Postdam
March 23, Edinboro University of Pennsylvania
March 28, Kenyon College
March, Miami University
April 3, Western Michigan University
April 5, Central Michigan University
April 9, Illinois State University
April 12, Southern Illinois University

Spring Tour 2006

Abbie Conant and William Osborne

Music for the End of Time

(For trombone and computer generated quadraphonic tape.)

- I. A Door Was Opened In HeavenThe Sea of Glass
- II. The Sea of Glass
- III. The Four Horsemen
- IV. As It Were of a Trumpet Talking
- V. The White Beast
- VI. A Woman Clothed With the Sun

(movements performed without pauses)

Abbie Conant, trombone
William Osborne, composer

-Intermission-

Cybeline

*(A music theater work for performance-artist,
video, and quadraphonic sound.)*

Abbie Conant : text, cartoons, performance
William Osborne : music, video, direction

*This tour is made possible, in part, through the support of
C.G. Conn - the maker of Conn trombones.*

cases, it is exactly this form of “folly” that allows for transcendental experience. We often found that the cinematic bias of MIDI technology was more useful for creating the large dramatic arch of "Music for the End of Time" than more advanced instruments like MAX/MSP and C-Sound.

When approaching apocalyptic visions, which are often very violent, it is important to carefully consider their implications. On one hand, these visions have helped humans appreciate the extreme limitation of our existential condition in relation to the boundless majesty of the universe.

But apocalyptic visions can also lead to misappropriated notions of divine justice, or even divine wrath that are anything but transcendental. Such visions are often not divine at all, but rather very human expressions of contempt and hatred for those we ourselves deem unworthy. In a world that seems to increasingly reflect imperialistic hubris, and in a world with increasing beliefs about the divinity of murdering others, the dangers of misappropriated apocalyptic visions should not be underestimated.

Patriarchal transcendentalism tends toward recurrent cycles of ecstasy, revolution, destruction and lament. These polarities inform the arrangement of the movements in *Music for the End of Time*, and shape their cycles of light/darkness, drama/reflection, ecstasy/remorse. This is especially notable in “The Four Horsemen,” where a sort of symphonic intensity and lamentive reflection alternate like repeated charges of horsemen.

Ultimately, the most meaningful understandings of the apocalyptic have little to do with destruction, but with vanquishing our own human limitations. Through the apocalyptic, we transcend not so much the universe, as our own self. We learn that in the infinite expanse of this world, our human passions are often the sheerest folly, and that the truest path to justice is through forgiveness, compassion and love.

Perhaps that understanding is what St. John hoped to symbolize in his vision of "The Woman Clothed with the Sun." The ultimate value of transcendental experience might be that it shows us that nothing is more precious or transcendent than the simple beauty of life itself.

Program Notes for Cybeline

For close to thirty years, the focus of our work has been chamber music theater. Most of our productions are large, one-woman shows for Abbie. Many of our works portray alienated, creative individuals in society.

Cybeline is a music theater work about a cyborg trying to be a talk show host to prove she is human. It is about nature, virtual reality, biotechnology, and the mass media – and about finding the heart and poetry in technology as it also

contemplates its horrors. We explore our notion that the creation of a cyborg does not depend on the metalization of the body, but on the

programmability of the mind. We live in a wired together, prosthetic world of global “cyberbia“ where our minds are programmed by the mass media. Since our minds are programmed, we are all cyborgs.

Cybeline can project her thoughts, both conscious and unconscious, directly onto a screen that is an extension of her body. She uses this ability to create her show. A loud buzzer switches her on and off the air.

Cybeline was influenced by our interest in Jungian psychology. Jung felt that humans are by nature image-makers, and that those images shape our dream-like identity and perception of the world. Humanity creates art, and art creates humanity. The mass media shapes Cybeline’s world, but she in turn, creates her own media universe.

When off the air, Cybeline's music is created through computer operations that randomly select and mix whispered phrases of words and soft music. She adds sounds with her cyborgian hand -- in this case a glove controller which uses a small program to convert its movements to MIDI signals. The strong contrast between Cybeline’s consciously created show-biz routines and the unconscious, random, dream-like world that evolves when she is off-air gradually merge as the work progresses. Her subconscious mind and cultural conditioning unify to create her dream-like reality.

To use the words of Samuel Beckett, Cybeline is something like an “enigma wrapped in a mystery.” Even though we create our music theater works, many of their symbolic meanings only reveal themselves to us over long periods of time. In a similar way, we feel it is important for the audience to contemplate and discover their own interpretations of our work.

Cybeline addresses three historical characters, however, that it might be helpful to identify. Hildegard von Bingen was a 12th century nun, wise-woman, composer, and healer. Hypatia was a renowned 5th century Alexandrian mathematician who was murdered by Christians who thought she was a witch. Maat, seen only in images at the end of the work, is an Egyptian goddess. Upon death, Maat places a person’s heart in a balance. If it is as light as a feather, he or she will go to heaven. The “True Crimes” scene is about a dismembered woman who has been reassembled as a cyborg and who questions how the masculinist nature of technology has affected her feminine and cultural identity.

For an essay about Cybeline that addresses some of its historical, social, and political themes, see: <http://www.osborne-conant.org/cybeline-info.htm>

Instructions for assembling the program.

The program is copied on two letter sized sheets of paper we will call A and B

For sheet A: Copy pages [1 & 6] and [2 & 5] on the front and back of one sheet of paper.

For sheet B: Copy pages [3 & 4] on BOTH sides of one sheet of paper.

Fold sheet A in the middle.

Cut sheet B down the middle and insert it inside the folded sheet A.

Make a couple trial copies to experiment with and everything will become clear.