

Nicolee Kuester, horn
MA Recital

21 January 2012
8 p.m.
Conrad Prebys Music Center
Concert Hall

An Idyll for the Misbegotten (1985)

George Crumb
arr. Robert Patterson

*Louise Devenish,
Stephen Solook,
Bonnie Whiting Smith,
percussion*

Kaspar (2011)

Kurt Isaacson
text by Nicolee Kuester

*Kelly Dancer, puppetry;
Curt Miller, clarinets;
Dustin Donahue,
Bonnie Whiting Smith,
percussion*

George Crabbe on *An Idyll for the Misbegotten*

Nicolee Kuester, horn
MA Recital

I feel that "misbegotten" species at the present moment in the world of the plants and animals. The ancient sense of brotherhood with all life-forms (so poignantly expressed in the poetry of St. Francis of Assisi) has gradually and violently eroded, and consequently we find ourselves in a dying world. We share the fervent hope that a new nature's "moral imperative."

When Mr Robert Patterson (one of my former composition students and a virtuoso horn player) mentioned to me that he had been considering the feasibility of a French horn adaptation for the solo flute part of my *Idyll for the Misbegotten*, I was initially somewhat skeptical. My music, like so much contemporary music, implies such specificity in regard to timbre and idiomatic expression that the idea of transcription would seem unthinkable. And

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Patterson had laid it out for me, I had to admire the way he had solved the various problems of transcription. His enormous educative power creates an effect that is more intense and primitive than the flute. The French horn coloration does indeed make the horn part in *Idyll* a somewhat different experience. I feel I should like to see a new version of or notation for this alternate form for the horn. I would be especially pleased if it might help to fill out the horn repertoire of contemporary solo music for the horn.

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George Crumb on *An Idyll for the Misbegotten*

I feel that "misbegotten" well describes the fateful and melancholy predicament of the species homo sapiens at the present moment in time. Mankind has become ever more "illegitimate" in the natural world of the plants and animals. The ancient sense of brotherhood with all life-forms (so poignantly expressed in the poetry of St. Francis of Assisi) has gradually and relentlessly eroded, and consequently we find ourselves monarchs of a dying world. We share the fervent hope that humankind will embrace anew nature's "moral imperative."

When Mr Robert Patterson (one of my former composition students and a virtuoso horn player) mentioned to me that he had been considering the feasibility of a French horn adaptation for the solo flute part of my 'Idyll for the Misbegotten' I was initially somewhat skeptical. My music, like so much contemporary music, implies such specificity in regard to timbre and idiomatic expression that the idea of transcription would seem unthinkable. And yet, after Mr Patterson had played through the horn part for me, I had to admire the sensitivity and ingenuity with which he had solved the various problems of transliteration. The horn, with its enormous evocative power, creates an effect at the same time more intense and primitive than the flute is capable of. The horn coloration does indeed invoke a 'mystical sense of nature'. Although the horn part in 'Idyll' demands a considerable degree of virtuosity, I feel this new version to be eminently practical and effective. I fully endorse this alternate form for the work and would be especially pleased if it might help to fill out the rather limited repertory of contemporary solo music for the horn.

Kaspar Notes

Kaspar Hauser stumbled into Nuremburg in May 1828, carrying a letter addressed to the local cavalry captain. The letter's unnamed author claimed that he had been given custody of the infant Kaspar in October 1812 and had raised him since then, but that the boy now wanted to be "a cavalryman like his father was." The letter ended by inviting the captain to either take the boy into his regiment or hang him. When questioned, Kaspar could neither understand what was said to him nor say anything beyond variations of "I want to be a horseman like my father," and couldn't walk without significant pain. He was taken into the care of the local jailer, where he stayed for a couple of months.

As he learned to speak, he revealed in interviews with the mayor of Nuremburg that since before he could remember he had been kept by himself in a dark cellar. He would find bread and water at his side upon waking. He sat continually on a bed of straw because he didn't know he could stand or walk. He passed the time by decorating a toy horse with ribbons. His only human contact was with the man (presumably the author of the letter) who had taught Kaspar to write his name before carrying the boy out of his cell and depositing him at the fringes of Nuremburg, speechless and barely able to walk.

Kaspar was shuffled between a few middle-class households in the following years as the investigation of his case continued. He received his education from a schoolmaster and speculative philosopher, who also subjected Kaspar to some of his pet homeopathic "cures" and magnetic "treatments".

In 1831 a British nobleman with connections to the local Duke of Baden developed a keen interest in Kaspar and took over his custody, sending him to live in Ansbach later that year. Kaspar was stabbed to death there in December 1833 by an unknown assailant when he was out for a walk. His death fed widespread

rumors of his link to the Duke of Baden, whose only son had purportedly died as an infant in 1812, thereby securing the succession of the Duke's uncle to the throne. The controversy about Kaspar's parentage continues today among German historians and DNA specialists.

I commissioned my friend and colleague Kurt Isaacson to compose music for texts I compiled from Kaspar Hauser's self-written (and grammatically charming) autobiography as well as first-hand accounts by contemporaries involved with his life in the "outside world." My interest in Kaspar's story lies not with the conspiracy theories or the succession gambits, but rather with the more basic and pressing circumstance of a child who is abused and manipulated for the entirety of his short life. Kaspar, who grew up alone and in the dark, is powerless to shape his own fate even after he has been "released" from his dungeon. This piece examines the strange gentleness and extreme sensitivity that are born out of his suffering.

KASPAR HAUSER SONG

by Georg Trakl, trans. Will Stone

Truly he loved the sun, as crimson it sank behind the hill,
The woodland paths, the blackbird's song,
The joy of the green.

Solemn was his dwelling in the tree's shadow
And pure his countenance.

Into his hand God spoke a gentle flame:
O Man!

Silent found his footfall the city at evening;
The dark lament of his mouth:
I want to be a horseman.

But bush and beast shadowed him,
House and darkened garden of white men
And his murderer stalked him.

Spring, summer and beautiful the autumn
Of the righteous one, his soft step
Outside the dark rooms of dreamers.
At night he remained alone with his star;

Saw snow falling through bare branches
And the murderer's shadow in the gloomy passage.

Silver sank the the head of one unknown.