

UC San Diego | Division of Arts and Humanities | Music

WEDS@7:PALIMPSEST

HANS ABRAHAMSEN'S **SCHNEE** (2008)

Conducted by Steven Schick
With premiere work, *ESCHEN*
by Ph.D. Candidate Felipe Rossi



Wednesday, April 24th, 2019 | 7 p.m.
Conrad Prebys Concert Hall

Palimpsest

Wednesday, April 24, 2019 – 7:00 p.m.

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Eschen: Five Canons for Nine Instruments (2019)

Felipe Rossi

I. Mambo-Jumbo

Contrapunctus Primus: canone per augmentationem

II. Tendrills

Contrapunctus Secundus: canone perpetuus cancrizans

III. Whitten

Contrapunctus Tertius: canone al rovescio et cancrizans

IV. Iota Cell Cry

Contrapunctus Quartus: canone anagrammatico all'unisono in memoriam Cecil Taylor

V. Aetherna

Contrapunctus Quintus: canone a 2 per tonus—quaerendo invenietis

Short intermission

Schnee: Ten Canons for Nine Instruments (2008)

Hans Abrahamsen

Canon 1a Ruhig aber beweglich (Three Strings and Piano)

Canon 1b Fast, immer zart und still (Tutti)

Canon 2a Lustig spielen, aber nicht zu lustig, immer ein Bißchen melancholisch (Three winds and Piano)

Intermezzo 1 Three Strings and Three Winds

Canon 2b Lustig spielen, aber nicht zu lustig, immer ein Bißchen melancholisch (Tutti)

Canon 3a Sehr langsam, schleppend und mit Trübsinn (im Tempo des “T'ai Chi”)
(Three Strings and Three Winds)

Canon 3b Sehr langsam, schleppend und mit Trübsinn (im Tempo des “T'ai Chi”)
(Two Pianos and Percussion)

Intermezzo 2 Three Strings

Canon 4a Minore: Stürmisch, unruhig und nervös (Hommage à WAM) (Tutti)

Canon 4b Maggiore: Sehr stürmisch, unruhig und nervös (Tutti)



Intermezzo 3 Cello, Piccolo, Clarinet

Canon 5a Rectus: Einfach und kindlich (Violin, Viola, Two Pianos, Piccolo, Clarinet)

Canon 5b Inversus: Einfach und kindlich (Violin, Viola, Two Pianos, Piccolo, Clarinet)

Ensemble

Ilana Waniuk, violin

Adam Neeley, viola

Alex Greenbaum, cello

Alexander Ishov, flutes

Madison Greenstone, clarinets

Juliana Gaona-Villamizar, oboe and english horn

Mari Kawamura, Piano

Shaoai Zhang, Piano

Christopher Clarino, Percussion

Steven Schick, conductor

Schnee: Ten Canons for Nine Instruments

In the 1990's, during a prolonged period of writer's block, the Danish composer Hans Abrahamsen occupied his creative life by arranging the work of other composers. Perhaps the seed for his masterful work *Schnee* (Snow from the German), finished in 2008, was planted during that time. The precision of Abrahamsen's musical language in *Schnee*—an hour-long work in canonic structures, some of which are only 1/72 of a bar apart—creates a structure rooted in logic. At the same time, a sense of poetry, established from the very beginning by the high, cold, airy sound of the violin and the falling motives of the piano, shapes the ephemeral beauty of this music.

~Steven Schick

Here is *Schnee* in Hans Abrahamsen's words:

“I arranged some of J.S. Bach's canons for ensemble—in total seven single standing works from his entire life span. I became totally absorbed into this music and arranged them with the intention of the music being repeated many, many times, as a kind of minimal music. Obviously, I didn't know which durations Bach had in mind, but by listening to his canons in this way, a profound new moving world of circular time was opened to me. Depending on the perspective on these canons, the music and its time can stand still or move either backwards or forwards. In my own work, an ongoing idea has persisted, of at some point writing a work consisting of a number of canonical movements that would explore this universe of time.”

“There is a pulse in the strings that is very high and very airy....like air. And the melody is almost like snow falling down.”

“I was inspired by snow—the snow as the element falling, but also the snowy landscape. The stillness of the snow and the transition before the spring. It represents feelings of cold, warm, movement, growing, decay.”

“In the '70s. my music was somehow more pluralistic. In *Schnee* this pluralism disappears. Somehow this music comes down to its essence.”

“When are writing, you are writing the small things about your life.”

“For me the musical language is the most precise.”

“But I am sure that this will be my last about ‘Schnee’ and ice, and winter. Winter is, in a way, what can you say? We have this kind of fermata.”

“Everything has been frozen.”

“Before the spring.”

“Es ist Schnee; es ist Schnee!”

Eschen - Five Canons for Nine Instruments

Eschen (German for “ashes”) arose out of my longstanding interest in bare and tightly constrained formulas of expression. With the explicit intention to establish connections with the other piece in this program, *Eschen* is not only an anagram of *Schnee* but is also a study on canons that uses the same instrumentation and spatial disposition as its companion piece.

Despite their multiple correlations, the canonical strategies in *Eschen* are designed in a different way from those of *Schnee*. Abrahamsen tends to work with carefully assembled algorithmic procedures, creating allusive collages and lattices of quotation. *Eschen*, by contrast, works by erasure, operating in the realm of the vestigial and the leftover. If *Schnee* is a delicate white-on-white watercolor, *Eschen* is charcoal hatching or an Etch-a-Sketch drawing.

I. Mambo-Jumbo [contrapunctus primus: canone per augmentationem]

A snippet of a *danzón* from Pérez Prado is reflected in a sequin through a fractured prism. Instruments start to interrogate one another with patience and poise. The music then tips over into a more nuanced development, forming a Grisey-en-grisaille, rather slavishly.

II. Tendrills [contrapunctus secundus: canone perpetuus cancrizans]

Three palindromic musical gestures are submitted to recurrent rhythmic transformations while a spiral form stretches out and twines around an ostinato-like host. Bending movements generate two counter-twisted helices finally leading to an ephemeral divertimento-hommage to musicians like Nancarrow, Ligeti and Lennie Tristano, who, by perforating time, sought to recompose the prestissimo with maelstroms of particles crashing up against the limits of the possible.

III. Whitten [contrapunctus tertius: canone al rovescio et cancrizans]

A brief series of slenderly contrasted re-imaginings (all loosely based on a monophonic conductus by Perotinus) are invisibly linked together. A musical garden of misleading images, all made of shades fading to white in which the only thing apparent is repetition. A continuous largo with barely perceptual colors creates feeble scarifications on time, in a movement both cyclical and inexorable. It is a slow process that appears to be working on the timbre from within.

IV. Iota Cell Cry [contrapunctus quartus: canone annagramatico all’unisono in memoriam Cecil Taylor]

Frenzied lament-like figurations on two pianos obsessively pervade the whole piece while jittery and stumbling rhythmic motifs bounce among all other instrumentalists’ hummingbird hands. Each of the “88 tuned drums” has its own unit structure, often doubled with various cabinets of echos and multiple resonance chambers. At the same time the rest of the band surges forward or halts without any clear warning, conjuring nearly the same physical affect I felt the last time I listened to Cecil Taylor, through the front window of his apartment, down the street from the Brooklyn DMV.

V. Aetherna [contrapunctus quintus: canone a 2 per tonos – quaerendo invenietis]

A sublimated sarabande made of obscured solos ascends languidly. Yet it remains constrained until a quasi-Mahlerian low note is sledgehammered, bringing forth multiple grains of raw material. Almost as if shavings were falling from a workbench or a rite was taking place under a broken electron microscope. Finally, a short twist happens in the spirit of a kōan.

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I would like to thank maestro Steven Schick for his unrelenting support, integrity and curiosity, Jessica Flores (and all her production team) for their generous assistance and professionalism, the wonderful musicians of Palimpsest Ensemble for making this program possible, the Sink House Crew (Tobin Chodos, Sam Wohl, Grace Grothaus and Carlos Bear) for their tireless support. My deepest gratitude to you all.

~Felipe Rossi

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