DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Old-Growth Music in the Northwest

The important thing is to see the world as a single place.

—John Cage

What we are witnessing in the world today is an unparalleled waterfall of destruction of a diversity of human cultures; plant species; animal species; of the richness of the biosphere and the millions of years of organic evolution that have gone into it.

—Gary Snyder

In his program notes for the premiere of *Meeting* in the November 1991 concert in Seattle, Washington [1], A. W. Sutrisna describes his piece as a "meeting between the old and new". He further states that "the piece was created while meeting and working together with the American musicians. This meeting has given me a certain inner spiritual experience which goes deep within me." In these words is a recognition that his piece belongs to the past as well as to the present, that its creation is not a solitary act, but an act of communion with the past, that it is, in fact, built upon or made out of the musical intelligence of the past. In addition, he recognizes that the creation and performance of this music is a communal and contextual act, the result of interaction with this particular group of American performers at this particular time and place.

Sutrisna's words remind us that music is not the creation of newness, it is the process of renewal. Ultimately, the composer can claim little for herself or himself. If one writes a piece for piano, what of that piece can one claim? The piano? Hardly. Suppose one decides to use a scale or a chord. Are these things that one can claim for one's own? No. Most scales that one would use or even invent today could be found to have some historical precedent. Likewise, chords are found throughout the Baroque, Classical, and Romantic eras, and of course the unrestricted use of dissonant chords was well established in the first half of the twentieth century. In other words, the piano itself, its mechanical and sonic complexity and richness, and the language of its tunings, scales, arpeggios, and chords represents the manifestation of a musical intelligence that is probably far greater than that of any individual composer. When the composer writes for the piano, it is a renewal of the life of the instrument and this musical intelligence. At the same time, it is an homage to the past and to the ways of the instrument that have been revealed by the past. One should be careful about how much newness one claims for the piece or how much attention one draws to oneself for its creation. In many ways, it is an old piece, not a solitary act of newness, but a communal act of renewal. Nowhere is this connection with the past more apparent than with the gamelan. In gamelan music, the most powerful presence is the gamelan itself. It has a physical, sculptural, and sacred presence, the power of which derives, not from its newness, but from its oldness. It is the "vision of the ancient chime and bell" that Roscoe Mitchell talks about, which "reminds us of the lyrical power that remains at the heart of mankind's quest for fulfillment" [2].

In speaking of gamelan we often use the word 'traditional'. For many, this so-called tradition is the main thing of importance. There is a desire to study it and document it before it is lost. But we must be careful of this word 'tradition'. Consider what Trinh T. Minh-ha says: "Tradition remains the sacred weapon oppressors repeatedly hold up whenever they need to maintain their privileges" [3]. At the same time, we must be careful of the word *new*. It is worn out by the capitalistic cultural obsession with growth and consumption. It is worn out by the modernist artistic imperative of signature style and renunciation of the past. Somehow this word sounds hollow when we speak of gamelan music. Perhaps we need to resurrect the word *old*. New forests are managed forests—orderly, symmetrical, commodified for the board-feet lumber market and the pollution-spilling paper mills. Old-growth forests are remarkable self-sustaining ecosystems, dark and deep, mysterious, soul-healing. New forests are hot-house seedlings planted in barren land that has been ravaged by machines. Old forests ooze continuously, almost imperceptibly, out of the detritus of the past.

So Sutrisna's music is old-growth music, rich with the remains of the past, yet renewed by the creativity and context of the present. In his work, we discover that, as Suzi Gablik says in *The Reenchantment of Art,* "there is another kind of art, which speaks to the power of connectedness and establishes bonds, art that calls us into relationship". We can see art not as "the solitary process it has been since the Renaissance, but as something we do with others" [4]. Art not so much as a revolution of style, but as a revolution of context. Ultimately, in art, as in nature, we must honor the ecological principle of unity through diversity: unity achieved, not by sameness and uniformity, but by the interdependence, the interpenetration of the world's cultures, species and things. The composer Toru Takemitsu likes to say that we are in the process of hatching the universal egg (a term he borrowed from R. Buckminster Fuller). To do so we must incubate it slowly. He sees his own work as a contribution to this process. Antonius W. Sutrisna is another composer who is incubating this universal egg.

—Jarrad Powell

Notes

1. *Meeting* premiered in the PONCHO Concert Hall at Cornish College of the Arts on 23 November 1991.

2. Roscoe Mitchell, Liner notes to The Bell Piece, ABSOLUT CD #3, *EAR Magazine.*

3. Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 1989) p. 106.

4. Suzi Gablik, *The Reenchantment of Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1991) p. 106.