Thought you might like to see these pieces. Neely Bruce premiered Feb. 6th.
Bill

THE TIME CURVE PRELUDES (1977-78) William Duckworth

Book One: I - XII

Book Two: XIII - XXIV

Program Notes

The Time Curve Preludes were written between June 1977 and June 1978 on a Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. They reflect my continued interest in rhythmic structures as a means of formal organization, modal and synthetic scales, and the establishment of musical "centers of gravity" through drones.

The use of rhythmic devices to control various proportional aspects of musical time is not new to the twentieth century. Medieval theorists saw a direct relationship between proportions that control the universe (1:1, 2:1, 3:2, and 4:3), and the musical harmonies generated by these proportions (the unison, octave, perfect fifth, and perfect fourth). In this century, such composers as John Cage, Olivier Messiaen and Conlon Nancarrow have explored rhythmic proportions as a structural component of their music. This renewed interest in rhythmic structures, along with the serial techniques of Schoenberg and the neoclassicism of Stravinsky, were attempts to give new form and meaning to music at a time when the decaying tonal system made the traditional forms based on this system increasingly invalid. In the first half of this century, serialism appeared to offer the best solutions to the problem of form. But serialism was too concerned with pitch organization and the 1950s and 60s saw the self-limiting aspects of serialism counterbalanced by chance operations. From the perspective of 1979, both approaches appear to have lost considerable ground.

For my own work, I am coming increasingly to believe that rhythmic structures based on duration offer great potential as a means of formal organization. In these preludes I have systematically explored several types of rhythmic organization. First, extensive use is made of the Fibonacci series, a proportional number series in which any number is the sum of the previous two numbers. This series is best expressed in whole numbers as 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89,... I have used these proportions in ten of the preludes to organize such aspects as time lengths, section lengths, and phrase lengths. Second, I have developed additive and reductive rhythmic systems which are used singularly and in combination in fourteen of the preludes. These systems, which constantly add and/or subtract fixed increments of time, provide formal unity and consistency while simultaneously insuring rhythmic variety and asymmetry. I would hasten to add at this point that I do not consider these preludes mathematical pieces. Once the formal rhythmic processes were established for each prelude, I tried to allow my musical intuition to dominate the compositional process. This duality between intellect and emotion, and the

constant striving to keep the two in some kind of artistic balance, seems to me to define the creative process.

Most Western music achieves musical interest by contrast. Themes, key centers, timbres, and harmonies are juxtaposed against each other for maximum effect. In the majority of these preludes, however, I have replaced this type of contrast with a development based on internal unity. Each prelude concentrates on revealing, developing, and sustaining one basic idea. This is, essentially, an Eastern concept of organization.

On another level, the entire set of twenty-four preludes may be considered monothematic. The first prelude is a source prelude from which melodic and rhythmic ideas are constantly drawn and transformed. This prelude is, itself, a transformation of an earlier work of mine The Last Nocturn. The melody of the source prelude appears, in some form, in seven of the preludes, including the sustained pitches of No. 5 and the prolonged chords of No. 23. On yet another level, this source melody is slowly revealed, from prelude to prelude, by the primary and secondary drones, over the space of one hour. These slowly moving centers of gravity produced by holding keys down with rubber wedges or weights, give the source melody, and thus the source prelude, an essentially timeless quality.

I believe these preludes represent a significant point in my work. Not only do they bring together into one work most of the rhythmic concepts that have concerned me for the past ten years, they also indicate for me the probable direction my work will take for the next several years. If it is possible for a composer to identify a major stylistic change in his own music, I would label these preludes as such a pivotal point.

William Duckworth
January 15, 1979