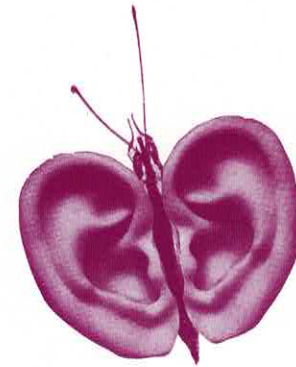




new music concerts

98/99




Robert Aitken artistic director

New Music Concerts presents



# GYÖRGY LIGETI AT 76



Featuring the Canadian Première of his famed violin concerto and a recent work by his former student, Denys Bouliane

## Programme

**György Ligeti** a film by

Michel Folin

FRA

**Études pour piano** (1985 - 98)

György Ligeti

(from Books I & II)

HUN

Christina Petrowska, piano

**Du Fouet et du Plaisir** (1996 - 97)

Denys Bouliane

for 15 instruments

CAN

Denys Bouliane, guest conductor

**Concerto for Violin and Orchestra** (1992)

György Ligeti

for solo violin & 21 instruments

HUN

Fujiko Imajishi, violin

Robert Aitken, conductor

***This evening's concert is being recorded for later broadcast on  
CBC's Two New Hours, Radio 94.1 FM***



## PROGRAMME NOTES

**GYÖRGY LIGETI** was born to Hungarian Jewish parents in 1923 in the Transylvanian town of Timaveni. He began his music studies with Farkas at the Kolozsvár Conservatory of Music in 1941 and studied privately in Budapest with Kadosa in the summers of 1942 and 43. Following the end of the Second World War he settled in Budapest, graduating from the Academy of Music in 1949. He was appointed to the music faculty of the Budapest Academy in 1950.

Like most of his colleagues behind the so-called Iron Curtain that fell over Eastern Europe in 1947, Ligeti's prospects as a composer were limited to what might be expected to meet the standards of Soviet cultural policy. Consequently one finds among his earliest works quite a few folk-song arrangements. Though the contributions of Schoenberg, Varèse and Stravinsky earlier in the century had not been forgotten, their music was no longer being heard in Hungary, neither was it possible to stay abreast of the latest musical developments in the West, as all media were strictly monitored.

All this was to change when Ligeti escaped to Vienna amidst the chaos of the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian pro-democracy movement in 1956. He was invited to lecture at Darmstadt that summer, establishing a close association with that city's new music seminars that continued until 1972. In 1957-8 he worked alongside Stockhausen in the electronic music studio in Cologne.

Ligeti first came to international attention following the premiere of his **Apparitions** for orchestra during the annual festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music at Cologne in 1960. In contrast to the highly structured, pointillistic music to be heard elsewhere in the festival, Ligeti's work presented a new concept of shifting masses of densely detailed "clouds" of orchestral sound.

Ligeti has explained how the trademark "micro polyphony" of his music is constructed through the extensive use of sustained, tightly packed clusters of buzzing, dissonant intervals that evolve over time: "The complex polyphony of the individual parts is embodied in a harmonic-musical flow, in which the harmonies do not change suddenly, but merge into one another, one clearly discernible interval combination is gradually blurred, and from this cloudiness it is possible to discern a new interval combination taking shape."

The distinct textures of serial music were further eroded by his subsequent orchestral work, **Atmospheres** (1961). Here the density of the orchestration becomes so great that the perception of distinct pitches and rhythms is completely annihilated. He went on to compose two influential vocal works to texts of his own devising, **Aventures** (1962) and **Nouvelles Aventures** (1962-65) and, in 1965, a choral **Requiem** which brought him the prestigious Bonn

Beethoven Prize in 1967. Other works from this period include a **Cello Concerto** (1966), **Lontano** (1967) for orchestra, the **Chamber Concerto** (1969-70) for thirteen instruments, and the choral work, **Lux Aeterna** (1966).

Perhaps the most notorious example of Ligeti's interest in shifting densities of sound is his **Poème Symphonique** (1962), which is scored for an orchestra of 100 metronomes. Ove Nordwall has observed how this work "proved fruitful in a later stylistic development: the superposition of different metres to produce sound of perpetual change in rhythm and colour, related to a scheme of interval changes. This was the formal principle in **Continuum** (1968) for harpsichord, in the second organ study, **Coulée** (1969), and also in several movements from larger works. The obsession with time-counting is evident in **Clocks and Clouds** (1972-73), where metronome sounds are gradually transformed into misty images."

Like his Darmstadt colleagues, Boulez and Stockhausen, Ligeti helped formulate the sound of post-war contemporary European music. A large part of this re-assessment involved an explosion of polemical writings, of which Boulez's **Notes of an Apprenticeship** is perhaps the most celebrated. (John Cage published a series of quite different meditations on music at this time as well.) The bibliography devoted to Ligeti's music is a massive one, and the composer himself is an eloquent spokesman for new music, comparable only to Elliott Carter on this continent. The penetrating analyses of works by Boulez and Stockhausen Ligeti wrote in the 1950s (published in "Die Reihe" and elsewhere) have attracted many international students to him over the years. He has taught composition in Stockholm, Madrid, Essen and Hamburg and has presented master classes throughout Germany, Austria, Holland, Hungary, Scandinavia and the United States.

### Études for piano (selections)

**Étude 5: Arc-en-ciel**

**Étude 4: Fanfares**

**Étude 2: Cordes à vide**

**Étude 8: Fém**

**Étude 11: En Suspens**

**Étude 10: Der Zauberlehrling**

Ligeti's first book of six **Études** for the piano appeared in 1985, he completed a second book of eight **Études** in 1993 and a third book has appeared since then. The composer has explained the origin of these pieces as having derived from two quite disparate sources:

"One often arrives at something qualitatively new by unifying two already known but separate domains. In this case, I have combined two distinct

musical ideas: the hemiola of Schumann and Chopin, which depends on meter, and the additive pulsation principle of African music... [The] hemiola arises from the metric ambiguity posed by a measure of six beats, which can either be divided in three groups of two or in two groups of three... The shimmering effect of dividing the bar simultaneously into two and three produces the metric tension which is one of the most seductive attractions of the music of Chopin, Schumann, Brahms, and Liszt."

Ligeti's specific interest in African rhythmic procedures is centered on the music of the BaMbuti pygmies, who are renowned in Africa for their use of a highly sophisticated counterpoint of circular canons. Comparing European and African approaches to rhythm, the composer writes: "A completely different metric ambiguity occurs in African music. Here there are no measures in the European sense, but instead two rhythmic levels: a ground layer of fast, even pulsations which are not counted as such but rather felt, and a superimposed, upper layer of occasionally symmetrical, but more often asymmetrical, patterns of varying length."

The *Études* were also deeply influenced by Ligeti's discovery of the American composer Conlon Nancarrow's series of studies for the player piano. In these astonishing works, "tempo fugues" of a super-human complexity are achieved by punching into the paper rolls of the instrument's mechanism a dense network of counterpoint conceived in completely independent tempos. Ligeti's intention is to approximate an "illusion" of Nancarrow's exhilarating polyrhythmic effects that might still lie within the capabilities of a single, human interpreter.

A simple example of Ligeti's use of hemiola is demonstrated in the first of this evening's selections. The fifth etude, *Arc-en-ciel ('Rainbow')* is notated in three-four time and each measure contains twelve sixteenth notes. The right hand divides the pulse of these twelve units into a pattern of 4+4+4, while the left hand follows a pattern of 6+6 sixteenths.

Many of the *Études* that follow rely on simple scalar passages or patterns of repetition to establish their polyrhythmic identities. The fourth *étude*, *Fanfares*, is a particularly clear example of the use of simple, rising scales; while the second, *Cordes à vides* (dedicated to Pierre Boulez) features repeating patterns (both falling and rising) based on the interval of the perfect fifth (the "empty" chord of the title) which gradually become more animated.

The melodic material and rhythmic profile of these *Études* are unusually forthright compared to Ligeti's earlier works. As Stephen A. Taylor has suggested, "From a compositional standpoint, Ligeti's different tempo levels probably would not work with any melodic material other than simple scales. Without timbral differences to help the listener parse the various lines, a more complicated melody in different simultaneous tempi would sound like a succession of irregular arpeggios."

## **Concerto for Violin and Orchestra (1990-92)**

- 1. Praeludium: Vivacissimo luminoso – attacca**
- 2. Aria, Hoquetus, Choral: Andante con moto – attacca**
- 3. Intermezzo: Presto fluido**
- 4. Passacaglia: Lento intenso**
- 5. Appassionato: Agitato molto**

Ligeti's previous concertos include his *Chamber Concerto* (1969-70), *Concertos for the cello* (1966) and *piano* (1985-88) and a *Double Concerto* (1972) for flute, oboe and orchestra. *The Violin Concerto* (1990-92) was written for Saschko Gawriloff, who gave the first performance of the work with the Ensemble Modern under the direction of Peter Eötvös on October 8, 1992 in Cologne.

Intonation plays a crucial role in the Violin Concerto. At the outset of the work both the violin and viola are tuned in accord with the natural seventh and major third harmonics of the open strings of the double bass. The two horn parts in the orchestra also exploit the intonation of the natural harmonic series of their instruments, while the ocarinas and recorders that appear later in the score contribute an intentionally unpredictable plethora of "mistuned," degraded pitches.

The texture of natural harmonics that opens the composition gives way to a longer, meditative second movement that opens with an *Aria* for solo violin. The entry of the horns and ocarinas herald the presence of the *Hoquetus* elements in this movement, the hocket being a peculiar Medieval contrapuntal technique in which two voices interact with each other in a rapid dialogue, one part having rests where the other has notes. The *Intermezzo* at the heart of the composition is formed of a plaintive, almost directionless melody for the violin (later joined by the horns and woodwinds) against a backdrop of cascading sheets of chromatic scales. The *Passacaglia* is traditionally a composition that features a decisive, recurring theme in the bass; here, however, there is little recurrence to be found, and the bass struggles to rise up through the orchestra as if entrapped in a bog. Concerning the finale of the work, Paul Griffiths notes, "As if all these movements were not strange and complicated enough, the finale multiplies them all on top of each other. Near its end it includes a cadenza that the work's dedicatee and first performer, Saschko Gawriloff, made out of passages from the abandoned opening movement of the original three-movement version, whose second movement was the *Passacaglia*, followed by what remains the third movement."

**DENYS BOULIANE** was born in the small Québec town of Grand-Mère in 1955. Though he had played rock guitar in an amateur band while a student at the Petit Séminaire de Québec in his teens, his first formal music lessons took place at the École de Musique de l'Université Laval in 1972. He followed courses in piano and violin there with the completion of a Masters degree in composition in 1979.

In 1980 he moved to Cologne to undertake five years of studies with Ligeti at the Hamburg Conservatory. Bouliane continues to maintain a home in Cologne, though he spends much of the year teaching composition at the Faculty of Music at McGill University in Montréal. Bouliane discussed his trans-Atlantic existence in a recent interview with Dominique Olivier: "In the Germanic world the topic of music often leads to moral discussions. For Germans, music has a meaning, in fact it has too much meaning. Here, it's exactly the other way around... What I get from the Germans is intellectual stimulation, and the overdose of meaning they attach to music nourishes me."

Bouliane is regularly called upon as lecturer and guest speaker in Canadian universities. He has also made several radio broadcasts for Canadian and German radio stations and has written for specialized journals in North America and Europe. He has received grants from both the Québec and Canadian governments, and many of his works have been awarded prizes in national and international competitions (from the CBC, the Performing Rights Organization of Canada, the Gaudeamus Foundation (Holland) and others). He was selected "Composer of the year" in 1983 by the Canadian Music Council, received the "Förderpreis" from the city of Cologne in 1985, and was awarded the Jules Léger Prize in 1987.

Bouliane is fond of describing his music as an extension of "Magic Realism," a literary form practiced by the Latin-American authors Alejo Carpentier, Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Bouliane's own musical distortion of reality is accomplished by the use of musical "filters" or "mirrors": "I take cultural clichés, preferably threadbare, just the way they are, but I don't actually use them. Instead, I try to use formulas that refer to these clichés, which may come from jazz, pop music, hard rock, the European classical tradition—anything that makes up the musical milieu around me. Then I pass them through my grinder, my music machine, and help them take on another dimension."

**Du fouet et du plaisir** ('Of the whip and pleasure') was commissioned by Montréal's Nouvel Ensemble Moderne with the assistance of the Canada Council and was first performed by them in May of 1997. This fifteen minute work for chamber orchestra features a prominent part for the piano. The score is described by the composer as expressing "A pleasure approaching illness... An illness approaching pleasure...". It carries the following inscription:

*Un plaisir qui fait presque mal... Un mal qui fait presque plaisir... Des poussées d'énergie qui s'épuiseront, qui se saperont bientôt elle-mêmes. Un chant qui se boursoufle. Une voix qui se ramifie et s'étiole. Ritournelles folles et tape-culs. Tant va la cruche à l'eau qu'à la fin elle se...*

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