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Plays *Corner*

CELEBRATING 90 YEARS IN THE LIFEWORK OF PHILIP CORNER

CONCERT ONE OF FIVE • JANUARY 21, 2023

Leaven Community, PDX

2-Part Monologues No. 1

Lee Elderton (clarinet), Collin Oldham (cello)

gamelan LYRA

Collin Oldham (cello), Lee Elderton (clarinet),
Matt Hannafin (prepared piano)

In Intimacy—Pulsation

Loren Chasse (percussion), Patrick McCulley (bass sax), Jacob Mitas (viola),
Collin Oldham (cello), Caspar Sonnet (dobro), Reed Wallsmith (alto sax),
Shao Way Wu (bass), Matt Hannafin (percussion), Lee Elderton (tenor sax)

Punkt

Shao Way Wu (bass), Matt Carlson (piano),
Caspar Sonnet (dobro), Jacob Mitas (viola), Robert Blatt (guitar),
Loren Chasse, Matt Hannafin, Tim DuRoche (percussion)

Lovely Music

Stephanie Lavon Trotter (voice), Reed Wallsmith (alto sax),
Lee Elderton (soprano sax), Collin Oldham (cello),
Shao Way Wu (bass), Matt Hannafin (percussion)

Extradition offers a standing ovation to Philip Corner & Phoebe Neville for their decades of creativity, their absolute dedication to a life of art, and their unflagging help and encouragement as we prepared for these concerts.

THE MUSIC

2-Part Monologues No. 1 (1957). Corner wrote the three “2-Part Monologues” soon after his stint at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris studying with Olivier Messiaen, while he was simultaneously teaching at City College of New York and finishing his masters at Columbia University. Written for melody and drone instrument (originally violin and cello), it is the oldest piece in the festival, indicative of the first phase of Corner’s work as he began sculpting his own compositional voice.

gamelan LYRA (1979). “Gamelan LYRA” is one of over 500 pieces in Corner’s *gamelan* series, which are influenced by Indonesian gamelan music but open to interpretation by other instruments. This piece was written for Chinese ehru, clarinet, and either gamelan instruments or prepared piano, with the clarinet maintaining a steady drone over which the ehru (or, tonight, cello) plays a heavily ornamented melody. Complexity comes in the shifting time signatures, which move from 6/8 to 7/8 and so on up to 11/8. At this apex, the clarinet pauses to allow a brief cello solo, then reenters in tandem with the prepared piano. The trio then works back down the time signatures every five measures, ending with a series of freely repeated measures in 6/8.

In Intimacy—Pulsation (1963). By 1963, Corner had begun his lifelong project of breaking music down to its most basic elements and exploring the simplicity found there. In his emerging distillation, a single held tone represents the ultimate limit of melody, gongs and other metals with broad pitch-spectrum complexities represent the ultimate limit of harmony, and a steadily beating pulse represents the ultimate limit of rhythm. “All the major themes set out. Their basis in nature . . . [t]he immutable dimensions of the world. I gave myself the task to test this: What are the limits of what is ‘interesting.’ And I found this, once and for all proved: There are none. Thus the distillation to an unending meditation on the ultimate simplicities of music: melody & rhythm & harmony. Here is truly a theory in *practice*.” In “In Intimacy—Pulsation,” Corner asks musicians to concentrate on the rhythmic aspect of that trinity while the piece itself generates melodic and textural interest almost as a by-product. Performers play only pulsations,

often at the pitch and speed of their choice, and mostly independent of one another. As the piece progresses, players are shuffled and reshuffled into new groupings: first by unified timbre, then by register, by register *and* timbre, etc. Sometimes pulses are governed by independent choice, sometimes by a lead player, sometimes by a conductor. Players fight continually to maintain the individuality of their pulses while also putting them in service to the ensemble sound.

Punkt (1962). “Since critics were calling us the ‘plink plunk’ school, I contributed a composition favoring only those ‘punktæ’ for centuries having defined and inhibited Western music. Note heads on paper here made into, and held consistently to, their sound equivalents—hence ubiquitous pizzicato and the dull thuds struck on various idiophones, each one of them playing through the full range of notated ‘points.’” The score to “Punkt” is modular, made up of pages that are to be cut into strips, each strip containing a simple graphic or text describing a system of staccato sounds to be played in the space of a single slowly exhaled breath. These strips can be arranged in any order by each musician, independently, and players may repeat or skip strips at their discretion. The piece persists until all musicians finish playing their chosen material.

Lovely Music (1962). “Lovely Music” is the obverse of “Punkt.” In his memoir *In and About and Round-About in the ‘60s*, Corner writes, “In 1962 I write ‘Lovely Music,’ which, in response to a ubiquitous pointillism, I write as an avant-garde ‘long line’ piece, a little as if John Cage were Wagner. I recognize that that word, ‘lovely,’ is loaded—emotional—prey to smugness and irony . . . *but, it really was.* Does this all not sound (too) ‘romantic’? Let it be so. No fear of feelings. . . . There is such a thing as an avant-garde conformity. In New York, at that time, there was a prejudice against anything that so much as hinted at the subjective or personal. . . . I know that, for instance, La Monte Young dismissed my music, because (as I heard) it ‘still had crescendos.’ Yes, as an aspect of the full range of sonic possibilities, tones were allowed to swell, and to vibrate—even ecstatically! . . . A curious and significant thing happened during rehearsals of this piece. There is, toward the end, the entrance of a gong. . . . It indeed made a crescendo, a long most-lovely crescendo . . . [b]ut what happened was: In spite of my instructions, then in spite of insistences at further repeatings, it was literally impossible for the musicians to play this passage without ‘going with it’ themselves also making a crescendo, together. So help us! That would affect a climax—taboo. But I could hear that it was so good, so (god help us) Beautiful. Lovely.”

EXTRADITION PLAYS CORNER: NEXT CONCERTS

JAN 28 @ LEAVEN COMMUNITY • 5431 NE 20th Ave, PDX

Lecture from Sunday Performance (1962), Heraclitus 2 (2007), Lesson from the East: Perfection Is Not Exactness (1960), Just Another 12-Tone Piece (1975), Sang-Teh (1960–61)

FEB 4 @ PORTLAND OPEN SPACE SEQUENCE

A sound-walk based on Corner’s *I Can Walk Through the World as Music*. Participants meet at the *Trio* sculpture on SW Lincoln St. just east of SW 4th Ave, across from the MAX Orange Line station

FEB 11 @ PERFORMANCE WORKS NW • 4625 SE 67th Ave, PDX

An evening of music and dance: Presence (1995), La Bella Infinita (2001), Sounds, Austere, for Elegant Rooms (1960s), 3 for Phyllis for Some Things (1967), A Day in the Life (or a Moment) (or More) (2008)

FEB 18 @ LEAVEN COMMUNITY • 5431 NE 20th Ave, PDX

When They Pull the Plug (2002), Electro-Acoustics (2009), Homage to Revere (1962), Attempting Whitenesses (1964), The Art of No-Art (2019–22), Through the Mysterious Barricade (2003)



LEARN MORE: Our EXTRADITION PLAYS CORNER page includes quotes, biographical information, articles exploring Corner’s main themes and compositional approach, and links to additional resources. Scan here or go to: www.extraditionpdx.com/extradition-plays-corner

See www.extraditionpdx.com for performance calendar, ensemble info, sound archive, and more.

Extradition is directed by **Matt Hannafin**. Recording services by **Branic Howard / openfieldrecording.com**

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