

Classical Arkansas



Program #4

GWYNETH WALKER, "NEW WORLD DANCES"

Gwyneth Walker (1947-) has composed over 130 works, mostly for orchestra, chorus, and **chamber groups** (see below). She studied composition at Brown University in Rhode Island and at the Hartt College of Music in Connecticut, then taught composition at Oberlin College in Ohio. (All of these are among the top music schools or departments in the U.S.) In 1982 she moved to Vermont to be a freelance composer, supporting herself exclusively from the fees she receives from the ensembles that perform her compositions. Up until recently, this has been highly unusual among 20th—21st century composers of classical music; in the U.S., most teach at universities, and in Europe, many receive government funding. The work heard here, New World Dances, written in 1992, is a four-**movement** piece for piano trio. (A **movement** is a self-contained piece of music within a larger work; a piano trio consists of a piano, violin, and cello. Concert audiences clap only after the piece as a whole, not after the individual movements.)

A **piano trio** is a genre of **chamber music** that dates back to the **Classic period** of classical music history (1750-1820). Chamber music at that time was designed to be performed in the chamber (a sort of living room) of an aristocrat or of a wealthy institution, not usually in a big concert hall. (Nowadays, however, chamber music is usually performed in concert halls.) **Chamber music**, thus, is for a small number of musicians, perhaps three to twelve, as opposed to an orchestra. Other genres of chamber music include the **string quartet**, a work usually in four movements for two violins, viola, and cello; **string trio**, for violin, viola, and cello; and **woodwind quintet**, for flute, oboe, bassoon, clarinet, and French horn. Although the heyday of chamber music was the Classic era, much music in this genre has been composed in the past two centuries as well. Important chamber music composers, in addition to the Classic period titans Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, include Corelli, Schubert, Brahms, Mendelssohn, Debussy, Ravel, Bartok, Poulenc, and Barber, among others.

Gwyneth Walker's music belongs to an extremely late stage of the **Modern period** of classical music (1900-present). **Modern classical music** is very different from Modern popular music genres such as rock, jazz, blues, Broadway musicals, rap, country, and gospel. Much Modern classical music has some or all of the following traits: new sound sources, like electronics, increased percussion, and environmental sounds; unconventional means of getting sounds from conventional instruments, such as hitting the strings of a violin with the wooden part of the bow; use of scales other than the major and minor scales that had been used in most classical music between 1600 and 1900; and use of irregular meters (those other than duple and triple). Important Modern composers include Igor Stravinsky, Arnold Schoenberg, Bela Bartok, and Aaron Copland.

However, many composers active within the last twenty-five years have tempered their use of the above traits with **influences from rock and/or jazz**, and an attempt at a **more audience-friendly style** generally. The title of this piece--**New World Dances**--refers to the influences upon it of these American musics ("New World" refers to the Americas). Listen especially for the influence of rock on the rhythms and harmonies of the first movement (each of the piece's four movements is about four minutes long; the last movement is followed by applause), and the rhythmic influence of jazz on the third movement.

Classical Arkansas



This piece also epitomizes two trends in later twentieth century music: the geographical shift in the centers of classical music from Europe to **America**, and the increased importance of **women composers**. As regards the first, the centers of classical music had long been European cities such as London, Paris, Vienna, and Berlin, through the middle of the twentieth century. However, since about 1960, more and more styles in classical music composition have started in New York, San Francisco, and other American cities. Regarding the second trend above, the last forty or so years has seen the rise of a plethora of women composers, such as Pauline Oliveros, Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, Joan Tower, Libby Larsen, Sofia Gubaidulina, and Tania Leon. Whereas in former times women were often prevented from studying music composition or from performing in symphony orchestras (the Berlin Philharmonic orchestra, for instance, did not permit women to be members until recently), opportunities for women in the world of classical music have recently expanded.

QUESTIONS

Again, this piece consists of four **movements**: a rock-influenced movement entitled "Up Tempo", about four minutes long; a slow movement entitled "Slow Dance"; a jazz-influenced movement called "Soft Shoe"; and a fast closing movement called "Rapid Fire". All four are about the same length.

- 1) In general, one can figure out the **meter** of a given piece of music by tapping one's foot to the beat. If you end up tapping your foot in cycles of two, it is in duple meter. If you end up tapping your foot in cycles of three, it is triple meter. There are other meters as well, such as quintuple (5), septuple (7), and so forth. Some pieces do not have any meter, and in some pieces, the meter changes from measure to measure. (A measure is one cycle of beats.) What was the meter of the first movement (if any)? What was the meter of the second movement (if any)? What about the third and fourth? Was it easy or difficult to tell?
- 2) Was this piece **consonant** or **dissonant**? Were some movements more **consonant** or **dissonant** than others? These terms refer to the quality of the intervals and chords you hear in the piece. (An interval is the distance between two pitches; a chord is three or more pitches played at once.) A consonant interval or chord has a pure, open, relaxed sound, and gives one the feeling of resolution; a dissonant interval or chord is tense and harsh. Almost all music uses both consonances and dissonances, but most music tends to emphasize either one or the other. Most **Modern music** is extremely dissonant, but recent Modern composers have tempered their use of dissonance with an attempt at a more audience-friendly style.
- 3) Another musical element is **syncopation**, which means accenting the offbeat, or off of the main beat. In other words, imagine that a song or an instrumental piece is in quadruple meter, which means that it would have four beats to the measure. In much music, one or more of the performers emphasizes this meter by emphasizing the first and third beats of each measure. (Military marches are a great example; in these, the tuba and bass drum typically play on beats 1 and 3.) But in **syncopated** music, some performers may emphasize beats 2 and 4, or else play in between the beats, or else they might emphasize beats in an unexpected way. For instance, in gospel music, performers typically clap their hands on the **backbeats**, or beats 2 and 4, which is a type of syncopation. Rock and jazz are far more syncopated than most classical music; thus, syncopation in classical music is sometimes an index of rock and/or jazz influence.

Classical Arkansas



- Were these movements syncopated or not? Were some syncopated more than others?
- 4) As noted above, chamber music is intended nowadays to be performed in **concert halls**. Yet Walker's focus on rock and jazz influences seems to suggest that one might try playing parts of this piece in a rock or jazz club. For which environment do you think this piece would be most suitable? Or is there another environment in which you would rather hear or play it? Why? How would the piece's emotions or meanings change if it were played in different environments, or would they not change at all? Did you like this music more or less than other types of classical music? More or less than other types of music generally? Why?
 - 5) Finally, as noted, Gwyneth Walker makes her living completely by composing, and lives on a dairy farm with her cows in Vermont. (See her website, www.gwynethwalker.com, for more on her lifestyle, including photographs of her with her cows.) Is this a lifestyle you would enjoy for yourself, or not? Why?

MICHAEL CARENBAUER, "SEXTET FOR GUITAR, ZHENG, AND STRING QUARTET"

Michael Carenbauer (1951-) is professor of guitar at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, and has distinguished himself as a classical and jazz guitarist. He studied with the legendary jazz guitarist Pat Metheny at the Berklee College of Music, and also at the University of South Florida. He has also composed several works for guitar ensemble, jazz ensemble, solo guitar, and guitar with other instruments. The best known of these latter works is his Sextet for Guitar, Zheng, and String Quartet (2000). Part of the novelty of this piece lies in its combination of acoustic guitar, which as a classical instrument is normally performed solo, with string quartet (two violins, viola, and a cello). As noted earlier, the **string quartet** has thrived since the **Classic period**, and famous composers of string quartets include Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms, Debussy, Ravel, Bartok, and Shostakovich. Here, however, Carenbauer takes advantage of the guitar's presence in American popular music to infuse influences from country music and jazz into the piece's first two movements.

But even more singular is the insertion of the zheng, a **Chinese** instrument. A **zheng** is a wooden half-tube, over which a set of 21 to 25 steel or nylon strings is stretched. Each string has its own movable bridge, so the right hand plucks the string while the left hand presses the string on the other side of the bridge to achieve different variations in the sound of the zheng. This instrument dates back over 4000 years, and was long used as a solo instrument in Chinese court and folk music. (For more on the zheng, including a photograph, see <http://www.asza.com/izheng.shtml>.) It is part of a family of instruments called **zithers**, in all of which a set of strings is stretched over a solid surface. (American zithers include country and folk music instruments like the dulcimer and the autoharp. The soundboard of a piano is a type of zither.) The zheng's inclusion in Michael Carenbauer's ensemble thus leads to a creative fusion of Chinese traditional, European classical, and American popular musics.

This piece consists of three **movements**. The first, about eight and a half minutes long, has three sections: Mountain Meditation, Rain Dance, and Cabin Creek. Mountain Meditation begins with the zheng alone, before the other instruments join in. Rain Dance starts to introduce jazz influences, and Cabin Creek joins these with a theme reminiscent of American country fiddling.

Classical Arkansas



The second movement, Kam Tin Song, about three minutes long, is slow and romantic, recalling both certain types of Chinese sentimental music and the **Tin Pan Alley** style of American popular music, a romantic style that thrived roughly in the second quarter of the 20th century. (Examples of Tin Pan Alley-style singers include Frank Sinatra, Harry Connick Jr., and Ella Fitzgerald.) The last movement, Finale, lasts about four minutes and is followed by applause; although loosely based on a Chinese folksong, the impact of **Modern classical music** upon its rhythms and **dissonances** (see the discussions of **Modern music** and **dissonance** above) predominates more here. In his desire to inject American popular influences into a classical piece, Carenbauer recalls the Walker piece discussed above; he goes beyond it in his embrace of Asian music.

QUESTIONS

- 1) As with the previous piece, what did you notice about the musical elements of each of the three movements of this piece (and each of the three sections of the first movement), using the descriptions given above? Specifically, what **meter/s** did they use? Did they all use the same meters, or were they different? In the first two movements as well as the third, when did you hear **consonance** and when did you hear **dissonance**? When did you hear **syncopation**?
- 2) Chinese instrumental music often is **programmatic**, which means that it tells a story or paints a visual image without words. These stories can be about youthful love, battle, an image from nature, or a depiction of an ethnic group. What images do you imagine as you listen to the zheng in this piece? (A hint: the zheng and the guitar are usually the only plucked instruments in the ensemble; string quartet musicians play their instruments with a bow.) Do you think the fusion of Chinese music, jazz, country, and classical works in this piece? Why or why not? Which aspects of this piece do you like the best? Do you prefer music like this that fuses influences from varied sources, or do you prefer it when musical genres are kept separate? Specifically, using the Walker and Carenbauer pieces as examples, is it appropriate for composers to combine popular and classical influences in their works?

LEO BROUWER, "QUINTETO FOR GUITAR AND STRING QUARTET"

Leo Brouwer (1939-) is one of the leading 20th century composers for the classical guitar. A native of Havana, Cuba (where he still lives), he studied composition in the U.S., at the famed Juilliard School in New York and at the Hartt College of Music (the place where Gwyneth Walker also studied). In addition to pieces like this **Quinteto** for guitar and **chamber music ensemble** (composed in 1957), he has also composed for solo guitar, orchestra, chorus, and solo cello. The **Quinteto** (Spanish for "Quintet", or piece for five musicians) heard here was originally for flute, oboe, clarinet, cello, and guitar; in this recording the first four instruments have been replaced by the traditional **string quartet** (two violins, viola, and cello). The first violin plays the flute's part, the second the oboe's part, and so on. The **string quartet** was discussed above, in the first paragraph of the notes on the Carenbauer piece; **chamber music** was discussed above in the section on Gwyneth Walker.

Although the **guitar** is best known today as a central instrument in jazz, blues, country, and rock, it has long had a presence in **classical** music as well. In the **Medieval era** (roughly 450-1450 AD), it

Classical Arkansas



was associated with troubadours, who were traveling musicians who accompanied love songs at French courts. A notated literature for the guitar starts to flourish in the **Renaissance** (1450-1600), by composers such as Luis Milan; composers have written for the instrument continuously ever since. Leading creators of guitar music in the last two centuries have included Mauro Giuliani, Fernando Sor, Francisco Tarrega, and Joaquin Rodrigo.

Cuba, an island located 90 miles south of Florida, is known in the music world primarily for its 20th century popular genres, such as son, rumba, mambo, and chachacha. These have exerted a considerable influence on mid- and late 20th century North American popular styles, especially salsa, which is deeply indebted to the mambo. However, **classical music** has had a limited presence in Cuba since the arrival of the Spanish, and their conquest of the island, in the 16th century. They had Spanish Catholic choral music performed in the Cuban churches for several centuries afterwards. (Spain was one of several countries that contributed to the Catholic church music of the **Renaissance** (1450-1600); Victoria was an important composer.) Symphonies, operas, and piano music were performed in Cuba in the 19th century. The 20th century has seen a few native Cuban classical composers of note, such as Jose Ardevol, Aurelio de la Vega, and Brouwer. Another famous 20th century composer, Tania Leon, is a Cuban-American living now in New York.

The **Quinteto** has three movements. The first, **Allegro**, lasts about five minutes. The second, **Andante**, is also about five minutes long, and features some sudden shifts in **tempo**, **meter**, **dynamics**, and other musical elements. (See below for definitions of these terms.) The last, **Vivace**, is the longest at seven minutes; its beginning and end are similar in terms of musical elements, whereas the middle contrasts greatly.

QUESTIONS

- 1) As with the previous pieces, what did you notice about the musical elements of each of the three movements of this piece, and each of the sections of the second and third movements, using the descriptions given above? Specifically, what **meter/s** did they use? How did the meters change within the second and third movements? In which movements and sections did you hear **consonance** and when did you hear **dissonance**?
- 2) Another musical element is key, specifically **major** or **minor** key. Key refers to the quality of chords. Major key music tends to feel happy and minor key music feels sad. For instance, "Happy Birthday to You", "The Stars and Stripes Forever", "Jingle Bells", and "Joy to the World" are all in major; funeral marches are in minor. However, as noted earlier, much **Modern music** (like this piece) uses scales other than the major and minor scales that had been used in most classical music between 1600 and 1900, and sometimes there is no key center at all. (Music without a key center is called **atonal** music.) Which of these movements and sections used major, which used minor, and which seemed to use other scales or atonality?
- 3) Another musical element is **articulation**. There are two types of articulation: **staccato** and **legato**. (These words are Italian; classical musicians use Italian words for this element.) **Staccato** means that the notes are short and quick; **legato** means that they are smooth and connected. Which of these movements and sections (of the second and third movements) are staccato and which are legato?
- 4) The title of each movement is an Italian term describing a type of **tempo**. (As with articulation, classical musicians use Italian words for this element.) **Tempo** refers to how

Classical Arkansas



fast or slow a piece is. Thus, **Presto** means very fast and **Largo** means very slow. Based on what you heard in the first movement (**Allegro**), what kind of tempo is **Allegro**? Based on what you heard in the beginning and end of the second movement (**Andante**), what does **Andante** mean? And based on what you heard in the beginning and end of the third movement (**Vivace**), what does **Vivace** mean?

- 5) Yet another musical element is **dynamics**—the degree of loudness or softness in the music. Again, as with tempo and articulation, Italian terms are used to describe dynamics—**forte** meaning loud, and **piano** meaning soft. (There are many other such terms.) How do the dynamics change during the course of this piece? In which movements and sections is it most soft, and when is it loud?
- 6) Although the styles and moods of this piece change throughout (especially in the last two movements), most of it is still typical of the **Modern classical era**. (Review the third paragraph in the section on the Walker piece.) Based on your reaction to this piece, how do you experience Modern music as different from other types of classical music, and from Modern popular music? Do you like it more or less than other types of music? Why?