

UC Santa Cruz
Music Center Recital Hall
Wednesday, 1 May 2013, 7:30 p.m.
Free and open to the public

HAVE FAITH!
The Music of Johanna Magdalena Beyer

Beyer concert introduction
Amy C. Beal

Welcome.

My name is Amy Beal, I am the Chair of the Music Department, and the organizer of tonight's concert. In lieu of a pre-concert lecture, I would like to make a few brief remarks.

Thank you so much for being here for what, for me, is a very special occasion. It is not the first concert devoted solely to the work of this remarkable composer, but it is a rare enough occurrence for it to be historically significant.

I am grateful to all of the performers on this program. They include undergraduate music majors, doctoral students in composition, recent graduates from our program, instrumental instructors on our faculty, professional musicians in our community, and one out-of-town guest, Rory Cowal, who you just heard play Beyer's wonderfully concise "Bees." Thanks also, as always, to Dave Morrison. And a special thanks goes to Zachary Ragent for graciously making parts for the string quartet.

Beyer was born in Leipzig, Germany, a city closely associated with another composer, namely Johann Sebastian Bach. We don't know much about her life before the 1930s. She spent three years in the United States from 1911-1914, returning to Germany just in time for World War One. In 1923, she emigrated permanently to the U.S., and spent the next 21 years in and around New York City. She became an American citizen in 1930. Though she moved in circles that included nearly every composer, conductor, or performer active in the contemporary music network of New York during the 1930s, she died alone, in total obscurity, in a place called The House of the Holy Comforter, in the Bronx. She is buried in Kensico County, NY. I recently discovered that her name is spelled wrong on her gravestone. Much of her life is a mystery, and doing research on her is both challenging and rewarding. The picture on the program is the only known photograph of her. The little triangle lady is a doodle found in a pedagogical collection she called The Piano Book.

Charles Amirkhonian, who unfortunately couldn't be here tonight, is largely responsible for Beyer's rediscovery. He stumbled upon several boxes of her manuscripts at a place called the American Music Center in New York in the late 1960s. That discovery began a slow wave of deep interest in her music on the part of a number of composers and performers worldwide.

Between approximately 1932 and 1942, Beyer composed 54 works, at least that is the count of the existing manuscripts held by the New York Public Library. This concert presents a cross section of chamber works, from her earliest known pieces, the suites for solo clarinet, to some of her best known works, including her percussion ensemble music.

Beyer was a fearless explorer in new methods of composition including dissonant counterpoint, tempo melodies, serial techniques, clusters, sliding tones, polyrhythm, and metric modulation, and she was one of the earliest composers of percussion ensemble music, a body of work from which you will be treated to four pieces tonight. Her music as a whole offers a highly original expression of ultramoderism, a compositional voice that hasn't been paid proper attention, either analytically, or in the world of performance.

To keep the program short, I neglected to include information about the movements for the different pieces. The songs, the percussion pieces, and the "movements" for bass and two pianos are all one movement works. The clarinet suites, the string quartet, and the solo piano suites are all in four movements. The violin suite is in three movements. The piece called Clusters is in four movements, but each movement is preceeded and followed by the reiteration of a cluster motive, which is reproduced on the cover of your program. I wanted to point out that all the pieces in Clusters were individually titled as Waltzes, and the third one is actually called The New York Waltz. Rory will also play another of Beyer's piano waltzes as the last piece in his second set. You'll notice that one of the percussion pieces is titled Waltz as well.

Finally, I gave this concert the title Have Faith! not out of religious conviction but in the spirit of Beyer's beautifully humanitarian song lyrics:

Essential is that you and I and all the others
Have faith, have faith, in things to come,
In things that passed, and are,
And we must try to understand and love and help each other.
Have faith, have faith in things to come.
Have faith!

Enjoy the concert.