Garry Eister: **Folk People**


Laura Steenberge: ~ **Hello Stranger** ~ **Michael Row the Boat Ashore** ~
~ **Sugarbaby** ~ **Will You Go Down With Me** ~ (first performance)

Three Thirds (Heather Lockie, Alex Wand, Jacob Rosenzweig, Claire Chenette):


Woody Guthrie: ~ **Pastures of Plenty** (first performance) ~ **Buffalo Skinner** w/ Larry Polansky (2013) ~

~ intermission ~

Larry Polansky:

~ **Piker** ~ **Daughter of Piker** ~ (1998)

Christine Tavolacci

**Will You Miss Me** (1979)

Jacob Rosenzweig, Alex Wand, Christine Tavolacci

**ii-v-i** (1997)

Larry Polansky & Giacomo Fiore

James Tenney: **Harmonium II** (1978)

Larry Polansky & Giacomo Fiore

Three String Quartets performed by Melinda Rice, Mona Tian, Andrew McIntosh, and Ashley Walters:

Terumi Narushima: **Little Lullabies** (first performance)

Kraig Grady: **Chippewayan Echoes** (first performance)

Melinda Rice: **All Other Ground** (first performance)

~ Friday, March 28th, 2013 ~
Program Notes

Garry Eister

I spent about 20 years teaching American folk music to children, so I've seen more than one printed anthology of American folk songs. One of the things that most of these anthologies have in common is that they are organized according to subject matter. There are sections devoted to Colonial Songs, Revolutionary War Songs, Pioneer Songs, Cowboy Songs, Sailor Songs, etc. At some point it occurred to me that it would be fun to write a song cycle of pieces that are hybrids between folk songs and art songs. The cycle, when it's finished will be called "Folk People." The subject matters of the songs and some of the harmonies and other technical things come from the world of folk music. Much of the form is more like that found in art songs. The songs are more theatrical in character than are most folk songs, and all of them need a concert presentation. Unlike most authentic folk music, these songs would be terrible candidates for a sing-along. Tonight, I'm offering three pieces from "Folk People," a lullaby, a prisoner song, and a sailor song. They were all composed to be accompanied by a just intonation resonator guitar, whose sweet and sour sound world is, in my opinion, a very good fit with this folkish sensibility.

Laura Steenberge

The viola da gamba is the ideal instrument for those with dispositions suited for compromise. The gut frets are sturdy enough to facilitate discrete pitches, which makes chords quite possible and glissandi rather impossible. But the frets aren't as sturdy as the metal frets of a guitar, so one must place the finger precisely when playing chords because the pitch can deviate by a few cents, depending on whether the finger is directly on the fret, just past it, or just before it. Additionally, tuning the open strings requires a patient and forgiving heart, as the major third between the two middle strings throws a wrench into machinations that might yield a perfect tuning. Moreover, the tuning of the open strings get tangled up with the frets, such that a fret may yield a tuned pitch on one string, a low pitch on another, and a high pitch on a third. The frets are movable, so some adjustments can be made, but typically an adjustment that favors one string will disfavor another. To further compromise the tuning of the instrument, for the special occasion of this concert, some additional frets have been added to the gamba to allow for pairs of pitches that are about a comma apart, roughly 20-30 cents.

Three Thirds

Last month, we released our first EP: 'Buffalo Skinner: A Tribute to Woody Guthrie.' Tonight's Three Thirds set will feature the title track from that record, a cowboy song that tells the story of workers who hunted buffalo for hides on the Great Plains. The carcasses were skinned by thousands and left on the open prairies. 'Buffalo Skinner' tells the tale of a group of these workers who are mistreated by their boss and how, in the last verse, they take their revenge. Before 'Buffalo Skinner' you will hear two original songs. 'Dreams of Fishes' was inspired by oil drilling operations in the Santa Barbara Channel. Its simple pentatonic melody and open harmonies belie an underlying clash in intonation and meter. 'The Five' salutes everyone's favorite California freeway in a song structure built around the number 5. We are also premiering our arrangement of 'Pastures of Plenty'. Woody Guthrie wrote this song as part of his Columbia River Collection, a set of twenty-six songs commissioned by the US Federal Government in an effort to promote the hydroelectric dams on the Columbia River.

In our arrangements of these tunes, we use the just intonation intervals of Alex's guitar, which is an adaptation of the 11-limit Lou Harrison National Guitar.
Larry Polansky

**ii-v-i:**

Larry Polansky's ii-v-i (1997) encapsulates the composer's interest in tuning processes and the resulting perceptual and musical phenomena that occur as intonations "morph" from one into another. Unlike earlier works (e.g. the Psaltery series, dating back to 1979) ii-v-i uses only acoustic instrument; in this case a pair of retuned electric guitars. The two musicians start in different yet related tunings, combining to form a 17-limit harmonic series on D. They then begin to retune their respective instruments towards a new sonority—this time a 13-limit otonality on G. This process is improvised, independent, and gradual, resulting in a constantly changing harmonic "soup" of intermediate intonations; the guitarist mark their arrival to the "target" tuning through the re-establishment of a common pulse, peppered with hemiola patterns. After another retuning sequence both guitarist arrive to a C otonality (11th limit), thus completing the harmonic progression implied in the title. ii-v-i was composed and premiered by Polansky (with Nick Didkovsky) in occasion of an event celebrating the late pianist Wladziu Liberace at La Mama Gallery (NYC) on August 30, 1997.

**Piker & Daughter of Piker:**

Piker, the centerpiece and most difficult of the set, uses a composite melody consisting of the rhythmic relationships and pitches of the harmonics 4-17 on E. Pitches enter successively, from the middle of the "measure" (some constant duration), and in from both ends, using some simple rules for replacement of pitches on the same beat. Gradually, a composite melody is formed (17:16:15:....7:6:5:4).

Daughter of Piker is the Shaker tune, "Love, More Love" played four times, each time in a different tuning. The last tuning is the same as the first. The three tunings are derived from approximate cognates in the harmonic series on G, B and F#, where those pitches themselves are related as 4:5:6. For example, a C in the original tune is treated as an 11th harmonic of G, a 17 harmonic of B, and an 11th harmonic of F#, all three with their own tunings.

**Will You Miss Me:**

Will You Miss Me was written in 1979 in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, where I was, for a very short time, a graduate student in composition and Ben Johnston's research assistant. I wrote it as a class presentation in Ben's tuning seminar. I performed it for the class (which had just a few students). The original version, which I performed once or twice in those days, was written for my voice and the Harrison-Colvig transfer harp. That instrument has movable bridges, which sit on the soundboard (like a koto), 17 metal strings, tuning beads (behind the nut), and autoharp-style tuning pegs. There are three different methods for tuning each string: moving the bridge, sliding the bead, or turning the pegs. It was not intended primarily for performance.

Some combination of the mystical Carter family tune, my friendship with Ben, and the relative safety of performing in front of just a couple of my fellow students emboldened me to arrange and sing the song. I tried to use the idiosyncrasies of the instrument: the ability to bow only the top or bottom string; using the movable bridges for vibrati; and the quiet sounds of simply “touching" the strings. There are two explicit acknowledgements to Ben's work in the piece: the 13-limit tuning, and the short quote from “Amazing Grace.”

After I left Illinois, I rearranged the piece for the New Kanon New Music Ensemble (myself, Gary Schmidt, Andrew Newell, Pat Mundy and Dan Thomas). We performed that version many times on tour around the U.S. Other ensembles have since performed the piece as well, often substituting other types of zithers, autoharps and the like for the transfer harp.
James Tenney's *Harmonium II*:

*Harmonium II* (1977–2005) is James Tenney's first work for guitar, and one with a complicated genesis and performance history. Originally the work was composed for two guitars in equal temperament, and developed as a series of modulations between chords of increasing harmonic complexity (from a B major triad to a Gb17), played as hocketing arpeggios by the two guitarist. The premiere was given by Larry Polansky and Caludio Valentini in Toronto in March 1978; however, after a few additional performances Tenney decided to withdraw the piece, reworking it into a version for three harps (this time tuned ~14¢ apart for increased intonational accuracy), which he called *Harmonium III*. More than twenty-five years later Tenney, who had since returned to the United States to teach at CalArts, offered a further revised version of the piece to guitarist John Schneider for consideration; *Harmonium II* was thus revived at a Microfest concert in March 2003. This latest incarnation maintains the same harmonic trajectory and hocketing textures of the original, while also incorporating a tuning difference of ~33¢ between the guitars. This finer harmonic fabric highlights the small-step motions of the individual pitches in each of the modulation, and creates a beguiling sonority. From a historical and critical standpoint, it serves as further evidence of Tenney's refined and flexible approach to the intonation of fretted instruments—as exemplified in *Septet* (1981), *Water on the mountain...Fire in heaven* (1985), and *Spectrum 4* (1995).

Terumi Narushima’s *Little Lullabies*:

This piece is based on the melodies of four traditional Japanese lullabies. Many Japanese lullabies were songs originally sung by poor peasant girls who were forced to leave home to work as nursemaids for wealthier families. These girls - who were only children themselves (usually between five to twelve years old) - had to look after the babies of their masters and mistresses, as well as help with household chores such as cleaning and cooking. The young nursemaids often carried the babies all day on their backs, and so their lullabies were sung not only to soothe the babies to sleep but to express feelings of hardship, loneliness and yearning for their own families back home, as well as to alleviate their sadness.

Kraig Grady’s *Chippewayan Echoes*:

These are melodies exiled from the Chippewa tribe. There is no attempt to produce an authentic historical rendition. Such thing is not even possible. What is sought here instead is an emphasis on their melodic qualities that a translation to string quartet brings forth. Hopefully it will dispel some of the stereotypes of this music. It is uncanny how well these melodies work in echoing forms, and at different time frames that wonders if such use of songs might have occurred. There are no records of such yet when singers are spread over large areas such delays happen due to slowness of sound, not to mention as the outcome of the environment. Many work quite well with each other and for the most part the songs first appear in the lower instruments as if coming out of the subconscious of the community up into the surface. Regardless of the over-speculation here hopefully it will offer some possibilities for even a tradition exiled from its own home might be a living one.

Melinda Rice’s *All Other Ground*:

This string quartet would not exist without the people who are playing it tonight – Andrew McIntosh, Mona Tian, and Ashley Walters. It is a string quartet written with their voices in mind. In this piece, I work out the details of living in someone else’s world. The Christian hymn, “My Hope is Built on Nothing Less,” written by Edward Mote, was turning over and over in my head, and I started to wonder if I could express it using just the pitches found from one fundamental, if this hymn could stand up to living in the sound world of one fundamental. The opening of the string quartet explores this idea, and then, as I feel the frustration of being confined entirely from a four chord, I reach out for another fundamental, and all the pitches that go along with that. The other influence on this string quartet is a piece by Pauline Oliveros titled “David Tudor: For Singers and/or Instrumentalists.” This text piece made me think of the sounds that I like, particularly non-musical sounds, and I tried to express these sounds in music.

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