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Crossing 32nd Street Continues with A 20th Century Retrospective: The American Review

Phoenix – Drumming Pt. 1, composer Steve Reich's mesmerizing quartet for four bongo players and Mario Davidovsky's acclaimed tape and acoustic music in his Synchronism No. 1 are two of the featured pieces being presented by Crossing 32nd Street, Phoenix's premier contemporary music ensemble. This concert represents the third in a five concert series A 20th Century Retrospective: The American Review. The third installment showcasing American chamber music from 1960-1980 will be presented February 26th, at 7:30p.m. in the Sessions Theater on the campus of Phoenix College.

The music of Concert III: 1960's – 1970's finds American chamber music in a mature state. The earlier brashness of the experimentalists has receded, replaced by compositions that seek new ground by small steps rather than large swipes. Influenced by the work of other artists such as Mark Rothko and his color blocks and Samuel Beckett's minimalist prose, statements were made by juxtaposition of ideas and subtly of shades.

As both an outgrowth of earlier influences of world music and as a reaction to the rigidity of serialism, the strongest musical movement represented in this concert is that of minimalism. Of the four most important figures that define minimalist techniques only La Monte Young is not being played here. Terry Riley, Phillip Glass, and Steve Reich are represented with *In C* (1965), *Piece in the Shape of a Square* (1967), and *Drumming* (1970-1971). As ensemble member Brett Reed states, "Although the composers are bound by the general idea of minimalism, the notion of using minimal pitch and rhythmic materials, they each offer very distinct varieties of music. Riley is organic, Reich the technician, and Glass happily in between."



Percussionist Terry Longshore

Long a staple of Crossing 32nd Street's repertoire *In C* utilizes nine players in this version, the core ensemble being supplemented with guest percussionists J.B. Smith, faculty at ASU, and Terry Longshore from the faculty of Southern Oregon University. The Glass work is a duo for flutes, and the Reich for percussion quartet.

Further reaction to the bonds of serialism can be found in Morton Feldman's, *Straits of Magellan* from 1961. His use of indeterminacy stems from his longtime relationship with John Cage. Scored for seven instruments he makes use of chance operations to build his score. The result, like much of his music from the 60's is a work with an acute sense of color and vertical sonorities that drift in and out of coherence.

The collection of songs and vocalises in George Crumb's *Apparition* (1979), a work for solo voice and piano, are based on texts from Walt Whitman's *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*. Whitman's work is an elegy written in the weeks immediately following President Lincoln's assassination. As Crossing 32nd Street's musical director Christopher Scinto says, "Whitman deals most specifically with his response to Lincoln's death, Crumb expands the idea to reflections on death in a more global sense and derives his emotional content from that point of view".



Crossing 32nd Street

The last music explored in this concert is that based on experiments with electronic sounds and the many means of manipulating them. Mario Davidovsky's *Synchronisms No. 1* was written in 1963, and was the first of ten *Synchronisms* that Davidovsky wrote for electronic tape and an acoustic instrument.

crossing 32nd street
contemporary
experimental
music

Written well in advance of the relative ease of today's digital technology, Davidovsky relied on reel-to-reel tape, analog mutations, and a razor blade for tape editing to construct the electronic sound sources.

The 2004-05 season will continue with Concert IV: 1980's-1990's on April 2nd, 2005. Featuring the work of composers David Lang, Philip Glass, Joseph Schwantner, and Joan Tower the fourth concert of the series examines the influence of pop/rock styles, post-modernist theories, and the search for new sounds on American chamber music.

The ensemble will present their work Saturday, February 26th, 2005 at 7:30p.m. in the Sessions Theater on the campus of Phoenix College, located at 1202 W. Thomas Road. Admission to all the concerts of this series is free of charge.

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The Ensemble

Crossing 32nd Street, Phoenix's premiere contemporary and experimental music ensemble, is dedicated to the performance of chamber music from the 20th and 21st centuries. Now in its fourth year as ensemble-in-residence at Paradise Valley Community College, the ensemble boasts a repertoire that ranges from the music of Bela Bartok and John Cage to that of Edgar Varese and Iannis Xenakis. In addition to presenting music by some of the 20th century's most noted composers, Crossing 32nd Street strives to perform the music of local and emerging composers including original material written by its members. The ensemble's core instrumentation, comprised of new music specialists with degrees from Arizona State University, the University of New Mexico, and the University of California-San Diego, consists of flute, clarinet, saxophone, voice, violin, cello, piano, percussion and electronics. The ensemble regularly performs concerts in alternative art spaces in Downtown Phoenix and on the campuses of Glendale Community College & Paradise Valley Community College. Crossing 32nd Street has also enjoyed collaborations with dance and theatre ensembles, most recently with Scorpius Dance Theatre and Theater in My Basement.