

Program Notes

Music is often referred to as a universal language, and perhaps it is. But it says something about the complexity of music as a cultural phenomenon that it can also be specific to a particular place. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, national styles arose in many countries, as composers used elements of folk music to impart "local color" to their works. But music can evoke geography in many ways. Beethoven's "Pastoral" Symphony imagines a stroll in the Austrian countryside, Smetana's tone poem *Vltava* ("The Moldau") purports to take listeners on a trip down the river of its title.

The works that comprise this evening's program are linked by their evocation of place. Joaquín Rodrigo's *Concierto de Ananjes* belongs to the Romantic tradition of folkloric nationalism. In *El Dorado*, John Adams addresses the idea of a golden land in the New World, both its corruption and its enduring promise. But the principal locus of our concert is Berkeley. Mr. Adams is a longtime resident, and it may even be that

his music embodies, in some subtle and indefinable way, a Berkeley sensibility.

Obviously, the *el dorado* idea of a golden Eden on the western shores of the continent looms large in California's history and collective psyche. Berkeley represents an interesting variation on this theme, with learning and culture replacing mere gold as the coin of the realm. Jean-Pascal Beintus' *Berkeley Images*, which opens our program, celebrates the city and something of its intellectual and artistic heritage. That this encomium comes from a young French composer, whose experience of Berkeley rests largely in the series of photographs by Margareta Mitchell on view here this evening, is one of those intriguing paradoxes that artistic enterprise occasionally allows us to savor.

Berkeley Images

JEAN-PASCAL BEINTUS

(b. Toulouse, 1966; now lives in Lyon)

Berkeley Images is a new work, commissioned by Kent Nagano for the Berkeley Symphony Orchestra and performed for the first time this evening. Its author, Jean-Pascal Beintus, is active as both an instrumentalist and a composer. An alumnus of several conservatories in his native France, Mr. Beintus began his professional career in 1984, when he joined the string bass section of the orchestra of the Lyon Opera. (Only 17 at the time, he was recruited by the respected English conductor John Eliot Gardiner, who was then that ensemble's music director.) Mr. Beintus continued to perform with the Lyon Opera

Orchestra when Kent Nagano assumed its music directorship in 1989. Meanwhile, his interest in composition burgeoned, and he was able to use the orchestra as a laboratory and source of inspiration for exploring diverse musical styles. In 1996 Kent Nagano began to commission works from him and recommended him to other orchestras and ensembles.

Maestro Nagano has conducted the first performances of several Beintus compositions, including a Concerto for Orchestra, commissioned by the Lyon Opera Orchestra; *Couleurs Cuires*, a work for brass quintet and orchestra, commissioned by the Hallé Orchestra while Maestro Nagano was its music director; *He's Got Rhythm* (Homage to George Gershwin), an arrangement of music by the American composer commissioned by the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra and premiered by that ensemble under Maestro Nagano in June, 2000; and *Luna Tree* and *The Brenttown Musicians*, pieces based on tales for children, which were commissioned by the Berkeley Symphony Orchestra and recorded last summer for commercial release in 2001.

Berkeley Images was written specifically in response to "Dance for Life," Margareta



Margareta K. Mitchell's photographs—the inspiration for *Berkeley Images*. Above: *Benediction* (©1977). Below: *Come and Dance with Me* (©1970).

Mitchell's portfolio of photographs featuring dancers in the Temple of Wings. Those images, which are on view in the lobby this evening, evoke a golden era in Berkeley history, nearly a century ago, when Bernard Maybeck, who designed the Temple, and



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a remarkable group of dancers, artists and writers were helping to establish the Bay Area as a center for a new kind of culture. The ideal of California modernism, which is still alive and well, has always involved a fusion of art and nature. Maybeck's use of indigenous materials, particularly local woods, and Isadora Duncan's flowing movement—inspired, as she claimed, by emotion and nature rather than the conventions of European ballet—constituted different expressions of that ideal. The influence of such innovative artists as Duncan and Maybeck, as well as writers like Jaime de Angulo and a university rising to greatness, helped foster the notion in the early twentieth century of Berkeley as an "Athens of the West." That concept was more than a mere abstraction. Isadora Duncan modeled her choreographic style on what she imagined ancient Greek dance to be like, and Maybeck designed the Temple of Wings in a mock-Grecian manner based on a concept by Duncan's childhood friend Florence Treadwell Boynton. (Boynton lived in the building with her family and attempted to recreate a classic Hellenistic life, dressing in togas and observing ancient Greek rituals.)

Just as these California artists imagined ancient Greece from the Berkeley Hills, Jean-Pascal Beintus' composition invokes Berkeley of an earlier era—with help, of course, from

Ms. Mitchell's photographs. In fact, the composer notes that the work's structure is somewhat akin to that of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, with different sections of the single-movement piece corresponding to specific photographs. Still, Mr. Beintus states that he wrote this music to "freely express my personal and very impressionistic vision of 'The New Athens of the West.'" In keeping with the Athenian motif, the work includes references to ancient Greek music, although other stylistic elements are also present.