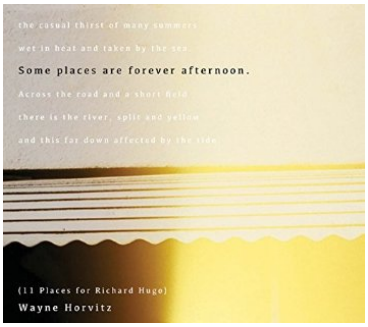
Straight No Chaser - A Jazz Show

Fri, 10 July 2015

Podcast 487: A Conversation with Wayne Horvitz



The release of Some Places Are Forever Afternoon (11 Places for Richard Hugo) by composer-keyboardist-arranger Wayne Horvitz gives us another opportunity to appreciate the length and breadth with which jazz composition continues to grow and mature. Commissioned with funding from the Shifting Foundation, the CD is a suite of 11 pieces based on a different poem by Richard Hugo.

The instrumentation combines two of Horvitz's working ensembles, The Gravitas Quartet and Sweeter Than the Day to great effect (Wayne Horvitz-Piano, Ron Miles-Trumpet, Peggy Lee-Cello, Sara Schoenbeck-Bassoon, Timothy Young-Guitar, Keith Lowe-Bass and Eric Eagle-Drums.) The CD packaging is glorious, and includes a 26-page booklet with the poems, photos and an essay by the composer. As the suite travels in the Northwest, predominantly this fall, local readers will read each poem following the performance of the corresponding piece. Many of these readers knew Hugo, and all of them maintain deep connections to the places that inspired the poet, further grounding the composition with a sense of place.

Richard Hugo was born in White Center, and lived throughout the Northwest before settling in Missoula, Montana. He taught poetry at the University of Montana, and is the inspiration for a plethora of writers of the west, including James and Lois Welch, William Kittredge, Frances McCue and countless others. Hugo loved to visit the small towns and odd places all through this part of the world, from West Marginal Way to La Push to the Union Bar Grill in rural Montana. He was a great lover of music, and jazz in particular. It is Hugo's enduring love of music, rambling, and the places of the Northwest that inspired Horvitz's interpretation of his work, which honors and celebrates the poet's legacy. Hugo passed away in 1982.

Some Places Are Forever Afternoon compares favorably with recent work by the likes

of Maria Schneider (The Thompson Fields) as both move effortlessly from the conventions of art music to swinging jazz. Both Horvitz and Ms. Schneider are topnotch arrangers, but they also know where to leave room for their favorite soloists to stretch out. In particular, check out Ron Miles' memorable trumpet solos.

Horvitz has grown from one of the young founding members of the New York Downtown Avant-Jazz Scene (his work with John Zorn, Naked City and other projects on Tzadik, Avanat and Nonesuch label help define an era) to a mature artist who helps the music scene in his adopted home of Seattle, Four years ago, with partners Steve Freeborn and Tia Mathies (of OK Hotel etc.), opened “The Royal Room” in Seattle’s Columbia City neighborhood. The Royal Room’s mission is to create a venue that serves the local community, honors and fosters the diversity and historical culture of Seattle’s south end, while supporting local musicians and encouraging artists to develop new projects. He continues to create pieces of symphony, installations and yes, even gets behind his beloved Hammond B-3 from time to time as well.

Podcast 486 is my conversation with Wayne, discussing the genesis of Some Places Are Forever Afternoon (11 Places for Richard Hugo), his writing techniques and his plans for future projects (hint- Bill Frisell is involved!). Music from Some Places Are Forever Afternoon (11 Places for Richard Hugo) is featured "All Weather Is Yours No Matter How Vulgar? (Fairfield)", "Those Who Remain Are the Worst (Three Stops to Ten Sleep)" and "The Beautiful Wives (Missoula Softball Tournament)", along with "Waltz from Woman of Tokyo", a Horvitz composition from The Westerlies, who were featured here last year when they released Wish The Children Would Come On Home: The Music of Wayne Horvitz.