



Lockwood: striving for music uncorrupted by human society

Cave Mystics

By Kyle Gann

Jin Hi Kim
Annea Lockwood

The *komungo*, a five-foot-long, 1400-year-old Korean zither, has such an idiosyncratic personality that its aesthetic is built in. The New York avant-garde's resident *komungo* pioneer is Jin Hi Kim, who performed December 13 at

St. Peter's Church under the auspices of Essential Music. In a series of improvisations, Kim snapped recalcitrant strings with one hand, and with the other laid a warbling tremolo on each note. The improvs seemed more fierce, less melodic, than what little traditional *komungo* playing I've heard, but it would take a better ethnomusicologist than I to specify the differences. A reiterated drone grounded each piece, and

the melodic rhythms and contours suggested theatrical speech, like the gliding syllables of the Korean *p'ansori* epic. When Kim articulated a long glissando by a series of quick plucks, it sounded as though the wind itself were talking.

All in all, it is a difficult aesthetic for a Westerner to read. But afterward Essential Music performed Annea Lockwood's *Thousand Year Dreaming*, which was, according to the program notes, inspired by Kim's playing. That piece amplified and clarified the *komungo* style, for, like the Korean music, it had no fixed pitch grid, but was forever weaving up and down. For instance, it opened with an arresting effect I'd never heard before: Art Baron and Scott Robinson, blowing through conch shells, played a series of *converging* glissandi in opposite directions, creating wild beat patterns as their pitches neared each other. Next, J. D. Parran set the tone with a fabulous contrabass (!) clarinet solo, growling like a famished jaguar who'd just discovered a trapped gazelle. Libby Van Cleve bleated the following solo on English horn, and when Charles Wood and Eric Kivnick covered between solos by rubbing gongs. I got what I listen to music for: chills up my spine.

Once a piece has me by the back of the neck it can have its way with me, and *Thousand Year Dreaming* did. Lockwood's other inspiration was the 17,000-year-old Paleolithic drawings of the Lascaux caves, slides of which flashed on the wall as we listened. Primitiveness was what she aimed for, and she got it partly through the use of four didgeridoos—the Australian wind instruments that

make a harsh, pulsating drone. That drone was the piece's vibrating floor, and over it glided some of the same effects that Stravinsky used to similarly Fauvist ends in *Le Sacre*: double-reed trills, weird woodwind melodies in unison, a light, regular frame-drum pulse. Very un-Stravinskian, though, was the delight in pure timbre, the time allowed to revel in the noises of rocks, conches, and rubbed metal.

Also un-Strav was the sense of physical as well as temporal space. You didn't notice, at first, how well the music played off St. Peter's resonant acoustics, until at last the didgeridooists—Baron, Jon Gibson, John Snyder, and Peter Zummo—got up and walked around the space, shooting their chilling tones into every corner. Even had you closed your eyes, it was like the piece suddenly emerged from its lair and took over the atmosphere. Breathily, rich drones bounced off every wall, and as each player turned, his apparent tone-source would dart from location to location. It reminded you that we too, like the Lascaux painters, were pursuing mystical experience within our own cave.

Along with *Le Sacre*, the other obvious coordinate with which to place *Thousand Year Dreaming* is Giacinto Scelsi, the late, reclusive Italian nobleman whose music is currently being discovered. Like Scelsi's music, Lockwood's contained no fixed points in pitch, rhythm, or even space: every element writhed in continual dynamism. But Scelsi's glissando-studded works express the tortured mysticism of Sufi chant, filtered through an intense European sensibility. *Dreaming*, by compari-

son, was calm, at ease with itself, flexing its sonic muscles not in agony but in the pure joy of being able to do so. Born in New Zealand, Lockwood got her start in the open-frontier milieu of *Source* magazine in the '60s. *Source* gave a feeling that the history of music was starting anew, and *Thousand Year Dreaming* achieved more charmingly than any piece I've heard the conceit of a music uncorrupted by human society. It was the music cavemen (and women) would have played if they'd been contrabass clarinet virtuosos.

The new music scene turned out en masse for the concert, for Lockwood, the most gracious person I've ever met, is well loved. It saddened me to realize, though, that I recognized about 90 per cent of the audience as musicians and their significant others. *Thousand Year Dreaming* could have appealed to any NY Phil subscriber adventurous enough for *Le Sacre*. But, strike one, the piece is site-specific: do it outside St. Peter's, and it changes shape with the shape of the space. Strike two, the piece is performance-specific, for it contains improvisatory moments, and much depended on the fantastic players Essential Music rounded up. I'd be apprehensive about a performance that didn't include J. D. Parran. Strike three, a recording would flatten the music, and lose its powerful use of space. Here's a great work of art waiting for a different performance tradition, a new social ritual, to emerge. How do you get a piece/performance this evocative, this colorful, this thrilling to the thousands of music-lovers who would enjoy it? That's the real agony of modern music. ■

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