Narrator 1
When promised to Tereus by a father grateful for the rescue of his beloved city, Procne journeyed to Thrace content to fulfill her duty of uniting their kingdoms. But after five years away, Athens called to her yearningly; and Procne responded, pleading with her husband to bring her most cherished treasure: The gift of a glimpse of her dear sister, Philomel.

Tereus
Most content was I to satisfy my wife’s request. But when I caught sight of radiant, young Philomel… Words struggle to describe that moment, this creature, her effect.

Even Athena’s finest robes were mere supplicants Lapping her exquisite limbs greedily. The splendor of this unsullied grace set me aflame, And my thoughts raced. Most content was I to repeat Procne’s request, And of how she wept uncontrollably for her dearer little sister. I also shed tears, adding poignancy. So effective was my performance, That innocent young Philomel began to plead for her delivery. The way he stared at me, even in Athens
Philomel 1
Words struggle to describe that moment, this creature, her effect.

Philomel 1
The way he stared at me, even in Athens
Then as we sailed, he kept a steady gaze. After we docked in Thrace, Tereus spirited me through foreign terrain, Riding through a densely shrouded forest, hidden at a stone dwelling. As we entered, I asked for my dear sister, Procne. As he locked us in, his intent became clear. I cried out for help to my sister, my father, And the gods, but alas, all was in vain. Trembling, bruised, I summon from the depths all my rage I swear, justice will be mine. He shall be punished for his barbarity. And the all world will know of Tereus’ crimes And if rooted forever to this spot in the woods
Philomel 2
With Tereus at our heels, we race nimbly towards the woods. The pitter-patter of our flutter-flighty hearts Fluttering and fluttering in fits and starts The air takes us suddenly, puffing-ruffling our skirts and tresses Unfurling and hurling us upwards, swiftly lifting, insistently the breeze and eddies of gusting blowing flow
Whirling in the blustery atmosphere we hover, then sail
Buoyant, breeze, sprightly, ethereal Our gossamer flight takes us whirring, twirling Rejoicing our supernatural heights, Ecstatic cries fill the skies, ringing the stars and heavens.

Speech is rung, swung tossed It slips, writhing slick studding on the ground straining, slithering, throbbing inflamed, torn. Stained, pilled, Grief spils out in torrents and floods. Though no justice could satiate this wrath Vengeance shall be thrust upon the Thracian beast. I promised this to him and will honor that oath.

Narrator 2
After a year of mourning, Procne is shown the unspeakable truth of Philomel’s absence and Tereus’ crimes against her family. This woken testimony gifts Procne the will to rescue her dear sister and contemplate a fitting response to Tereus’ humiliating violations. At the palace, the sisters prepare a smugmptuous feast for Tereus. Enjoying his meal in blissful ignorance, ‘Tereus calls for his child. ‘Fry! Where is that son of ours? Go fetch him, my love.’ Procne smiles, as she tells him that his dear son’s already within. Confused, Tereus searches the room, underneath table and chair. In comes Philomel, bloodied and triumphant… Thrusting the head of Itys into the face ‘Tereus, Philomel opens her mouth with gloeeful ferocity as Tereus shrieks in terror, agony. His only child! Wretched, sickened, Tereus claves at his breast, too late to save poor Itys. Unable to contain his anguish, Tereus grabs his sword and, calling upon the Furies, Rages after the sisters.

Philomel 2
With Tereus at our heels, we race nimbly towards the woods. The pitter-patter of our flutter-flighty hearts Fluttering and fluttering in fits and starts The air takes us suddenly, puffing-ruffling our skirts and tresses Unfurling and hurling us upwards, swiftly lifting, insistently the breeze and eddies of gusting blowing flow Whirling in the blustery atmosphere we hover, then sail
Buoyant, breeze, sprightly, ethereal Our gossamer flight takes us whirring, twirling Rejoicing our supernatural heights, Ecstatic cries fill the skies, ringing the stars and heavens.

PART I
In America, the earliest electronic studios at Bell Labs and at Princeton and Columbia were the proving grounds of technology, allowing for finer and finer articulation of compositional ideas derived from serialization. The master of the tools of serialist technique, Milton Babbitt (born 1916), gravitated to the Mark II RCA Synthesizer, a machine developed in the mid-1950s and turned over to the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center in New York. This allowed him to realize with total precision his continuing goal of extending and deepening the mathematical relationships inherent in serial structures, and transforming those discoveries into significant musical works.

The intellectual density of Babbitt’s musical language has been a challenge for a number of musicians, but Philomel is one of those masterpieces that has earned respect, even love, from composers across the stylistic spectrum: it is at once formidably complex and infinitely humane. Commissioned by the Ford Foundation, it was premiered in 1964 by the soprano Bethany Beardslee, one of Babbitt’s most skilled and devoted interpreters.

With its plant yet virtuoso vocal lines, its carefully segmented form, its dramatic sweep and highly charged text, Philomel resembles nothing so much as a Mozart concert aria in contemporary dress. Written to a specially commissioned text from the distinguished American poet John Hollander, it tells the ancient story of Procne and Philomela, most well known from its treatment in Ovid’s Metamorphoses: King Tereus of Thrace, married to Procne, has raped her sister Philomela and cut out her tongue to enforce her silence. She waves a tapestry to relate this deed to Procne, and together they exact a gruesome revenge on Tereus, offering him the limbs of his son Itys for dinner. When informed of the bill of fare, Tereus pursues the fleeing sisters into the forest, but when he is about to overtake them the gods transform them into birds: Procne the swallow, according to Ovid, and Philomela the nightingale.

Hollander’s poem lays out this story in three parts, a plan Babbitt respects in his music. The first section, gradually finding its voice, makes brilliant wordplay with sounds that form the names of Tereus and Philomel; the second, an “Echo Song” in which the final word of a question is mocked by its own echo. The final section is strophic, with a refrain, its formalized structure representing of Philomel’s quietly power in her new realm of song. At all times Babbitt’s synthesized sounds mix elegantly with the soprano’s tones, complementing their colors; a recorded soprano voice (that of Bethany Beardslee), embedded within the tape part, is used with increasing restraint as Philomel’s transformation becomes complete.

—Russell Platt

PROGRAM NOTES & TEXTS

Philomel (1964), Milton Babbitt (text: John Hollander)

In America, the earliest electronic studios at Bell Labs and at Princeton and Columbia were the proving grounds of technology, allowing for finer and finer articulation of compositional ideas derived from serialization. The master of the tools of serialist technique, Milton Babbitt (born 1916), gravitated to the Mark II RCA Synthesizer, a machine developed in the mid-1950s and turned over to the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center in New York. This allowed him to realize with total precision his continuing goal of extending and deepening the mathematical relationships inherent in serial structures, and transforming those discoveries into significant musical works.

The intellectual density of Babbitt’s musical language has been a challenge for a number of musicians, but Philomel is one of those masterpieces that has earned respect, even love, from composers across the stylistic spectrum: it is at once formidably complex and infinitely humane. Commissioned by the Ford Foundation, it was premiered in 1964 by the soprano Bethany Beardslee, one of Babbitt’s most skilled and devoted interpreters.

With its plant yet virtuoso vocal lines, its carefully segmented form, its dramatic sweep and highly charged text, Philomel resembles nothing so much as a Mozart concert aria in contemporary dress. Written to a specially commissioned text from the distinguished American poet John Hollander, it tells the ancient story of Procne and Philomela, most well known from its treatment in Ovid’s Metamorphoses: King Tereus of Thrace, married to Procne, has raped her sister Philomela and cut out her tongue to enforce her silence. She waves a tapestry to relate this deed to Procne, and together they exact a gruesome revenge on Tereus, offering him the limbs of his son Itys for dinner. When informed of the bill of fare, Tereus pursues the fleeing sisters into the forest, but when he is about to overtake them the gods transform them into birds: Procne the swallow, according to Ovid, and Philomela the nightingale.

Hollander’s poem lays out this story in three parts, a plan Babbitt respects in his music. The first section, gradually finding its voice, makes brilliant wordplay with sounds that form the names of Tereus and Philomel; the second, an “Echo Song” in which the final word of a question is mocked by its own echo. The final section is strophic, with a refrain, its formalized structure representing of Philomel’s quietly power in her new realm of song. At all times Babbitt’s synthesized sounds mix elegantly with the soprano’s tones, complementing their colors; a recorded soprano voice (that of Bethany Beardslee), embedded within the tape part, is used with increasing restraint as Philomel’s transformation becomes complete.

—Russell Platt

(Run text is sung by the recorded voice)

Part I

Is it Tereus I feel?
Not Tereus; not a true Tereus—
Feel a million filaments—
Fool’s tears—
Not true tears—
Not true tears—

Narrator 2
Teresus’s crimes against his family.

Part II

I feel trees in my hair
And on the ground.
Honey melons fouling
My knees and feet
Soundlessly in my Flight through the forest
I founder in quiet.
Here I find only
Miles of felled silence
Unwinding behind
Lost, lost in the wooded night.

Part III

Pillowing melody
Honey unheard

My hooded voice, lost
Lost as my first
Un-honeyed tongue;
Forced, as my last
Un-feathered defense

Floor-tangled in last
Of these woods so dense.
Emptied, unfeeling and unfilled
By trees here where no birds have trilled—
Feeling killed
Philomel stillled
Her honey unfilled.
Feeling killed, unfilled
Thrace, Thrace, Thrace!
Pain is unchained,
There is change
In the woods of Thrace!

Part III
(Philomel’s suffering is “redeemed in song” as her refrain repeats and her song - the nightingale’s - reigns)

Living, growing, changing, being in the hum always
Of pain? The pain of slow change blows in our faces
Like unrest winds that the spinning world makes in its turning;
Life and feeling whirl on, below the threshold of burning.
I burn in change.
Far, far I flew
To this waiting place.
And now I range
Thrashing, through
The woods of Thrace

If pain brush against the rushing wings of frightened change,
Then feeling distills to a burning drop, and transformation
Becomes intolerable. I have been defiled and felt my tongue
Torn out: but more pain reigns in these woods I range among.
I ache in change,
Though once I grew
At a slower pace.
And now I range
Thrashing, through
The woods of Thrace

Pressed into one fell moment, my ghostly transformation
Died like a fading scream: the ravisher and the chased
Turned into one at last: the voice Teresus shattered
Becomes the tiny voices of night that the God has scattered.
I die in change.
Pain tore in two
Love’s secret face.
And now I range
Thrashing, through
The woods of Thrace

Love’s most hidden tongue throbbed in the barbarous daylight:
Then all became pain in one great scream of silence, fading
Finally, as all the voices of feeling died in the west
And pain alone remained with remembering in my breast.
I screamed in change.
Now all I can do
Is bewail that chase
For now I range
Thrashing, through
The woods of Thrace

Suffering is redeemed in song. Feeling takes wing:
High, high above, beyond the forests of horror I sing!
I sing in change
Now my song will range
Till the morning dew
Dampens its face:
Now my song will range
As once it flew
Thrashing, through
The woods of Thrace.

Sequenza III (1966), Luciano Berio

Sequenza III is one of an extended series of solo works com-
piled throughout Berio’s life, each of which exploits the technical and expressive possibilities of a different instru-
ment- flute, harp, female voice, piano, trombone, viola, oboe,
violin, clarinet, trumpet, guitar, bassoon, accordeon, alto sax-
ophone and double bass - to a high degree. Berio composed the vocal Sequenza for Cathy Berberian. For this work, he
asked Markus Kutter for a text “Give me a few words for a woman to sing”. The result is a brief text (beginning with the actual words of Berio’s request) which can be read as a single sentence, but which the composer treats as the raw material of sound for all its phonetic possibilities. Consonants may be isolated into rapidly repeated percussive passages; vowels can be isolated too, with an even wider range of expressive effect when combined with Berio’s precise indications for whispered or spoken, sung or muted tones, and “noises” such as laughter, coughing or sighs. Occasionally individual words can be heard, but at no point is Kutter’s text simply “sung”.

Give me a few words for a woman to sing a truth allowing us to build a house without worrying before night comes.

Berio notates the rhythm spatially (closer elements move quickly, those spread out move slowly). There are fiftytwo “measures” in the piece, with each measure a unit of ten sec-
onds. The pitch notation is on a staff (with no clef) or shown
quickly, those spread out more slowly). There are fiftytwo

7
words for all its phonetic possibilities. Consonants may
be isolated into rapidly repeated percussive passages; vowels can be isolated too, with an even wider range of expressive
effect when combined with Berio’s precise indications for whispered or spoken, sung or muted tones, and “noises” such as laughter, coughing or sighs. Occasionally individual words can be heard, but at no point is Kutter’s text simply “sung”.

Give me a few words for a woman to sing a truth allowing us to build a house without worrying before night comes.

Berio notates the rhythm spatially (closer elements move quickly, those spread out move slowly). There are fiftytwo “measures” in the piece, with each measure a unit of ten sec-
onds. The pitch notation is on a staff (with no clef) or shown
quickly, those spread out more slowly). There are fiftytwo
words for all its phonetic possibilities. Consonants may
be isolated into rapidly repeated percussive passages; vowels can be isolated too, with an even wider range of expressive
effect when combined with Berio’s precise indications for whispered or spoken, sung or muted tones, and “noises” such as laughter, coughing or sighs. Occasionally individual words can be heard, but at no point is Kutter’s text simply “sung”.

Give me a few words for a woman to sing a truth allowing us to build a house without worrying before night comes.

Berio notates the rhythm spatially (closer elements move quickly, those spread out move slowly). There are fiftytwo “measures” in the piece, with each measure a unit of ten sec-
onds. The pitch notation is on a staff (with no clef) or shown
quickly, those spread out more slowly). There are fiftytwo
words for all its phonetic possibilities. Consonants may
be isolated into rapidly repeated percussive passages; vowels can be isolated too, with an even wider range of expressive
effect when combined with Berio’s precise indications for whispered or spoken, sung or muted tones, and “noises” such as laughter, coughing or sighs. Occasionally individual words can be heard, but at no point is Kutter’s text simply “sung”.

Give me a few words for a woman to sing a truth allowing us to build a house without worrying before night comes.

Berio notates the rhythm spatially (closer elements move quickly, those spread out move slowly). There are fiftytwo “measures” in the piece, with each measure a unit of ten sec-
onds. The pitch notation is on a staff (with no clef) or shown
quickly, those spread out more slowly). There are fiftytwo
words for all its phonetic possibilities. Consonants may
be isolated into rapidly repeated percussive passages; vowels can be isolated too, with an even wider range of expressive
effect when combined with Berio’s precise indications for whispered or spoken, sung or muted tones, and “noises” such as laughter, coughing or sighs. Occasionally individual words can be heard, but at no point is Kutter’s text simply “sung”.

Give me a few words for a woman to sing