

***Concerto for Harp and Chamber Orchestra* (1967)**

First performance: 30 April 1967, Toronto

When harpist Judy Loman premiered the Harp Concerto on April 30, 1967, the work was received with critical acclaim. Weinzwieg credits the success of this Canadian Centennial Commission on the collaboration with Loman, who explained the fundamentals of harp playing and consulted with him throughout the process.

The soloist demonstrates both virtuosity and a sensitivity to the varied tonal qualities of the harp throughout the six sections of this single-movement work. When Weinzwieg began to compose it, he confessed “it was a challenge to bring one of man’s oldest instruments into the 20th century. Its long history had produced few concertos; its reputation for charm and graceful embellishment relegated its position more to fashion than art. And its transcriptions and arrangements made it dependent on keyboard media for its repertoire.” One step towards modernizing the harp repertoire includes Weinzwieg’s serialist compositional approach. The first statement of the row demonstrates the expressive unity of serialism and the harp as each note in the row uses a different method of tone production. The harp is supported by strings and wind quintet.

Weinzwieg describes the six sections as follows:

“1. Introduction — a cushion of sustained muted strings whose stillness is broken by the harp’s pointillistic 12 tones in 12 colors — the five woodwinds join the harp in dialogue — strings re-enter to join in a quiet ostinato pattern while the harp intensifies its gestures —
2. now released in a fast 5/4 temp that staggers its rhythmic groupings of 2 and 3, based on a 6-note series, with antiphonal response from blocks of woodwinds and strings — eschewing the mounting climax, the section gradually diminishes energy through solo woodwind fragmentation — a brief coda for harp concludes the section and sets the tempo for —
3. the interlude for string quartet which anticipates the intensity level of the later harp cadenzas — beginning with cello, each of the four players is assigned a 3-note segment from the 12-tone series which is developed into a highly charged texture of an improvised character - abruptly terminated by the harp who engages in
4. series of seven wave-like glissandi episodes over a background of softly colored strings — the harp gradually unfolding its full range sonority —
5. arriving at the climax of the work — a set of 5 harp cadenzas reflecting short introductory solos by flute, oboe, clarinet, horn and bassoon —
6. and finally a coda of three concluding statements — a recall of characteristic motives from the five woodwinds that activate the string group — the only lyric expression by the solo harp — a reprise of the muted string introduction broken by the 12 harp colors, now in reverse — melting into a silent bar.”

Written by Alexa Woloshyn