

Prime Time (1992, rev. 1996)

Anyone familiar with Weinzweig's broader output will recognize many characteristic traits in *Prime Time*: brief "events" as opposed to large-scale movements; short ostinato figures; alternating major and minor thirds (evidence of the influence of blues); and dialogic textures. In *Prime Time*, as in *Triologue* (1971) and *Impromptus* (1973), the performers can decide the order of events, provided that, as Weinzweig explains, "the aim of diversity of mood, tempo and topic [is] maintained." The audience should feel a kind of randomness; to this end, Weinzweig omits the event titles in the program.

Weinzweig wrote the text himself, with text fragments trying to invoke the deluge of media as one clicks the television remote. Many of the lines resemble "Steinese" sentences (e.g., "Nobody looks like anybody nobody nobody"), or repetitive and illogical statements idiomatic to Gertrude Stein's writing. The texts variously reference Canadian political leaders, the then newly inaugurated government sales tax (GST), and cross-border shopping in Buffalo, among others. However, Weinzweig wants the work to remain relevant over time, so he instructs the performers to replace certain names and references with more timely ones.

The two voices and two instruments are used in various combinations, as duets, trios, and quartets. To expand the timbral variety of the four performers, the flutist doubles on piccolo and the bass clarinetist on B-flat clarinet. The instruments punctuate the work with three "Interludes" (Nos. 4, 7, 11); the flute and bass clarinet use extended technique, including multiphonics, singing while playing, and slap tongue.

"Play Bridge" and "Play Ball" are the energetic showpieces of *Prime Time*. In "Play Bridge," the two singers call and respond, insisting "You bid," "No, you bid." Weinzweig makes a sport of Bridge by including the "charge" theme played by hockey and baseball game organists. The polite dialogue disintegrates as the two singers accuse each other of "dirty tricks." "Play Ball" is similar to *Hockey Night in Canada* (1985) with its homorhythmic declarations of relevant phrases (e.g., "fly ball," "one on first," and "foul ball") until finally someone hits a "home run."

To close out the diverse and entertaining events of *Prime Time*, the soprano and baritone bid farewell, the former in Spanish and the latter in French. The four performers disperse towards their respective stage entrances.

Written by Alexa Woloshyn