

The French have a wonderful expression: *entre chien et loup* – literally, between dog and wolf. It means something that is neither one thing nor another (neither fish nor fowl as English-speakers might say). Virko Baley's **Symphony #1: Sacred Monuments** is *entre chien et loup*. Written for a chamber orchestra but with a huge arsenal of percussion and keyboards, it is neither a conventional large-scale symphony nor a more neo-Classical chamber symphony.

The phrase also refers specifically to that time of evening when the daylight hasn't completely gone and it's not yet fully dark – when familiar objects take on an almost unreal cast. It's a time when you can almost sense what the Australian aborigines call the Dreamtime, the ancient but ongoing process of creation, where the physical world is shadowed by a close metaphysical one.

It is this netherworld that Virko Baley's music inhabits. Yes, it could reasonably be argued that *all* art exists at this juncture of the “real world” and the Dreamtime. But few composers revel in the contradictions and ambiguities of this place like Virko Baley. His most important work prior to this **Symphony #1: Sacred Monuments** is in fact called *Dreamtime* (Cambria CD-1090), a wildly colorful piece written for the California E.A.R. Unit which moves freely between the earthy and the phantasmagoric.

“I believe very strongly in the concept of dreamtime,” Baley explains, “in the multiplicity of experiences that reside and act out their fantasies in the so-called – but real – arrow of time.” But his approach to music also acknowledges an opposite, largely Eastern philosophy – namely, the cycle of time. As a result, Baley's most substantial works, which would include not only *Dreamtime* but also the recent series of laments called *Treny* and this symphony, weave together different layers of musical activity, and offer different possible levels of perception. There is nothing artificial about this; it is a reflection of Baley's own life. “In my mind, in dreamtime, I'm often with Ukraine,” he says. “But physically, in experiential time, I feel most at home in the U.S.”

Born in Ukraine but a longtime resident of Las Vegas, Baley describes himself as “by temperament a Slav, but intellectually a lover of Western formalism.” The otherworldly, timeless quality that has made the music of Eastern European composers like Arvo Pärt and Henryk Gorecki so successful in recent years is evident here too, but so is a rhythmic foundation as subtle and intricate as anything in Western jazz or more modernist classical styles.

“One has to be careful,” he says, “when populating one's vision with gargoyles (and my music does have them), that the architecture be solid.” Thus Baley, like Brahms long before him, approached the form of the symphony cautiously, developing the architecture of the piece over a period of fourteen years. Beginning in 1985 with the original version of *Duma, a soliloquy*, now the symphony's second movement, Virko Baley set out to build an aural monument of sorts, a symphony that offered a personal view, through the filter of time and one man's memory, of a distant homeland. (In the process, *Duma* underwent some major revisions, and now shares some important melodic and rhythmic elements with the other, later parts of the piece.)

Baley realized that the grand scope of a symphony required ideas on a similar scale. Since *Duma* was written as a tribute to the Ukrainian composer Artem Vedel (c. 1770 – 1808), Baley decided to use as his starting point a set of four movements, each commemorating the life and death of a Ukrainian composer: Maxym Berezovsky (1745 – 1777), Artem Vedel (1772-1808?), Dmitri Bortniansky (1751 – 1825), and Boris Lyatoshynsky (1895 – 1968). In the process, his monument became a musical Mount Rushmore, or as the composer himself puts it, “a ziggurat, a kind of pyramidal edifice consisting of successive structures, topped with a shrine.”

When it was finally completed, in 1999, Baley gave his first symphony a telling subtitle. “Sacred Monuments” suggests both the spiritual and the structural elements of the work. There are gargoyles here – evocative textures, dense yet transparent layers of sound, but they are reached in a much more intuitive way. Each sound, Baley says, “must come from the pit of one's stomach and not from formal demands.” Nevertheless the meaning of those sounds depends on their context - how they fit within the formal structure of the piece. Recurring rhythmic figures, melodic rows, sonic textures and instrumental signals tie together the symphony's four movements; Baley refers to them as the work's “stylistic fingerprints (a kind of musical DNA).” And they allow him to play with the formal aspects of the piece. One of Baley's favorite devices is to set up a rhythmic pattern, only to immediately layer over it all sorts of intricate syncopations, hockets, counter-rhythms, and triplet and quintuplet figures. These multiple layers of percussion might be reminiscent of Indonesian gamelan or West African drum ensembles if they weren't so carefully, at times subliminally, painted into the backdrop of this sonic landscape.

Virko Baley's Symphony #1 describes a great arch. Berezovsky and Vedel met untimely ends, while Bortniansky and Lyatoshynsky died after long and successful careers; so the music builds from a troubled, dramatic first movement, through a lamenting second, to a jubilant scherzo in the third, and concludes with a Postludium that comments on the previous movements, weaving some of their thematic elements into new patterns. The finale also alludes to living Ukrainian composers associated with Lyatoshynsky, suggesting the continuation of a rich (and in the West, largely unexplored) musical tradition.

For all that, the symphony is not programmatic. In fact, Baley maintains, it's not even a Ukrainian piece, coming as it does from a longtime expatriate. So what, then, does the **Symphony #1: Sacred Monuments** mean? After all, no form of artistic expression is purely abstract. We parody the stereotypical reaction to abstract art – “what does it mean?” – but it is at least a genuine attempt to respond to a work of art on a level that doesn't obtain when looking at a freshly painted wall. One of Mark Rothko's enormous, almost monochrome canvasses reveals a micro-universe of incredible subtlety and power. It might be about balance, proportion, weight – it is certainly not about paint. A symphony too, must mean something, at least internally, to the person who creates it. “A work of art,” Virko Baley declares, “must be about something other than itself. If it is purely self-referential, then it ultimately starves itself into oblivion.”

Baley's *Symphony #1, Sacred Monuments* is clearly "about" something. Listen to its elusive, multi-layered rhythms, often just at the edge of audibility; the dramatic, at times almost cinematic sweep; the obvious references to Baroque or traditional Slavic music; the chorales for strings. They all suggest there is something more than just a grand spinning of notes at work here. This symphony does not just give its secrets away at first hearing, but a look at the score offers some clues to Baley's unstated theme: A rhythmic motive or "signal" first appears toward the end of the first movement; this figure will reappear in various guises throughout the work.

Figure 1a [ms 156-157, 1st movement, perc. 2 only]

Bass Drum

sub. *p* (eco) *pp*

The first movement is called *The Hour of the Wolf* (the allusion to the French *entre chien et loup* seems to be a happy coincidence), and was inspired by Maxym Berezovsky, who committed suicide at age 32. In its first appearance, after a lengthy period of brooding and catharsis, this rhythmic signal seems to strike Berezovsky's death blow: it heralds an almost brutal blast from the orchestra, which then - well, dies away. Given the inspiration for the movement, this makes perfect sense: the whole movement is a prelude to a death.

With each subsequent appearance of this rhythmic motive, the hint is given more clearly: this symphony is about death. Not as a gloomy paean to a quartet of dead Ukrainians, but instead a meditation on a much bigger issue. "It *is* about death," Baley agrees, "but a kind of dance of death. I don't think that I sat down and decided to get gloomy and morose. I just feel that life is essentially tragic - for some more and for some less. And these four composers represented to me different ways of dying - thus different ways that each was permitted to live." This is a peculiarly Slavic point of view. Death is an inevitable part of the arrow of time. The point at the end of the shaft, as it were.

In movement 2, death is presaged early on. Artem Vedel, whose social protests made him the victim of Czarist persecution, died at the age of 41 after spending nine years confined to an insane asylum. The inevitability of his tragic end is suggested by the early intrusion of this "death signal."

Figure 1b

Bsn. 5 Bsn./Low Br.

Timp. Bs. Dr./Cym.

Celeste

Hrpschd.

mf *ff*

sfz *sfz*

pp *pp*

Here the signal serves as a sudden jolt, and leads to a passage of sharp, aggressive stabs of orchestral color. The remainder of the movement is more like an ecstatic meditation on persecution, nobility, martyrdom... rich, Baley says, in emotional complexity, and written in an almost "improvisational fever." The 3rd movement, a scherzo, is obviously celebratory, as Bortniansky's death was neither tragic nor criminal but rather came at the end of a long, productive, and celebrated life. When the "death signal" is finally stated, near the end of the movement, it is greatly elongated and almost unrecognizable.

Figure 1c

Figure 1c shows a musical score for three instruments: Brass/Str., Bass Drum, and Timpani. The score is in 5/4 time and consists of four measures. The Brass/Str. part starts with a *fff* dynamic and features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with triplet markings (3) in the first and fourth measures. The Bass Drum and Timpani parts mirror this rhythmic pattern, with the Timpani part also including a sixteenth-note triplet (6) in the third measure.

But the movement's buoyant, dancing theme is infected, virus-like, by the rhythmic motive. It interrupts and breaks into the jubilant dance, and ultimately, silences it. A somewhat more obvious reference to death, as a natural, almost comforting part of the cycle of life, comes shortly before the rhythmic pattern appears, when the strings play a reworking of the Lutheran hymn *Christ lag in Todes Banden* (Christ lay in the bonds of death).

The fourth movement, another meditative piece, was inspired by Boris Lyatoshynsky, who lived through the Russian Revolution and its subsequent spasms of violence, the second World War, and perhaps most daunting of all, the Soviet bureaucracy that drove Shostakovich to distraction and Prokofiev to the West. By the time of his death, he had left a deep impression on a generation of Ukrainian musicians, including the country's leading contemporary composers, Valentin Silvestrov and Leonid Hrabovsky.

Baley says the movement's form "is expressed by a continual shift between states of partial wakefulness and dreams, often fretful." He introduces the rhythmic signal again at a particularly contemplative moment, towards the end of the piece.

Figure 1d

Figure 1d shows a musical score for three instruments: WW/Horn Strings, Harp/Brass, and Timpani. The score is in 3/4 time and consists of four measures. The WW/Horn Strings part starts with a *fff* dynamic and features a melodic line with triplet markings (3) in the second, third, and fourth measures. The Harp/Brass part provides a harmonic accompaniment with a *fff* dynamic. The Timpani part mirrors the rhythmic pattern of the other instruments, with a *fffz* dynamic marking at the end.

Here the rhythmic pattern serves a remarkable function, as the main body of the orchestra offers a tender passage which Baley describes as "the moment when one is descending into sleep and merging with silence." But it is an unquiet sleep. By the end of the piece, the reflective calm is ruffled by the eerie sounds of a waterphone (making a rare symphonic appearance), and the rhythmic motive is still there, almost unheard but somehow felt, adding to the sense of unease beneath the apparently pastoral surface.

Figure 1e

Figure 1e shows a musical score for five instruments: Flute, Strings/Hp., Waterphone, Bass Dr., and Timpani. The score is in 4/4 time and consists of four measures. The Flute part starts with a *mp* dynamic and features a melodic line with a triplet marking (3) in the second measure. The Strings/Hp. part provides a harmonic accompaniment. The Waterphone part features a continuous, wavy sound that is interrupted by a short melodic phrase in the third measure. The Bass Dr. and Timpani parts mirror the rhythmic pattern of the other instruments.

These musical signals are woven into the fabric of the orchestral lament. The strings take on an almost choral quality, and in a typical example of Baley's ear for tone color, they play *forte* with practice mutes. The result is a curiously distant sound – “as far away as eternity,” the composer explains. “This contemplation on suicide,” he continues, “at first slow and ponderous, increases in activity (a sort of musical hyperventilation) and becomes a frenzied dance.” That initial increase in activity begins with an extension of the *Treny* theme:

Figure 2b

In addition to the important oboe role, especially at the beginning of the movement, a solo cello (the instrument Baley says he most often hears in his dreams) plays a leading role, first in a trio setting with harp and oboe, then leading the orchestra in a more rhythmic passage that features the unconduted string passage mentioned above. The rhythmic passage begins with an unexpected quote of a Western Ukrainian folk song. (Berezovsky, Baley points out, came from Eastern Ukraine and wouldn't have heard this song). It appears here as yet another intrusion of dreamtime, “something which comes into the head, unrequested from outside – a memory.” Played on flute, muted trumpet, clarinet, vibraphone and celesta, the ensemble echoes the sounds of an Eastern European folk group. This too is typical of Baley: even within the large forces of this alleged chamber orchestra piece, one finds the colorful combinations of instruments that characterize his chamber works.

The uneasy string chorale and the lamenting cello solo eventually fade into silence. “Death,” Baley says, “comes almost as an afterthought.” A single *fortissimo* blow from the winds, percussion, and keyboards peters out, leaving a sense of something unfinished – perhaps the composer allowing himself a single, wistful commentary of Berezovsky's final act.

Movement 2, Duma, a soliloquy

The second movement immediately announces its almost surreal intentions, as the percussionists scurry from bowed vibes and chimes to glockenspiel, marimba, struck vibes, and timpani, all in the first eight bars and all played pianissimo behind muted brass, unsettled strings, and an oboe's plangent solo. The oboe quotes from Artem Vedel's Choral Concerto #3, the first of a series of dream-like effects – or gargoyles, to use Baley's word – that populate this movement.

The architecture these gargoyles inhabit would seem to be a cavernous, dimly lit Orthodox cathedral. Some early thematic material, quite Slavic in character, leads to several clear religious references: after some sharp orchestral attacks subside, a Hallelujah figure appears in the violins, for example.

Figure 4

This placid and contemplative surface hides a maelstrom of quiet activity: the keyboardists each play two instruments simultaneously (celesta and piano for keyboard I, harpsichord and piano for keyboard II), and the horns, trumpet and trombone begin to move silently toward the pianos. The percussionists provide almost constant, albeit muted, commentary. Another quote from Vedel appears – again, just a wisp, a momentary glimpse – and then is gone again, submerged into the hallucinatory texture. The strings break into “sea gull glissandi,” to quote one of the score's more unusual markings. And then, in a sudden, dramatic moment, the reason for the brass players' journey becomes evident.

Figure 5

Into Piano (Trembita)

Hns. $\overset{\wedge}{\text{gliss.}}$ $\overset{\#}{\text{3}}$

Trbn. $\overset{\wedge}{\text{gliss.}}$ $\overset{\flat}{\text{3}}$

fff *fff* *mf* *sfz* *ff* *ff*

*Horns perform this note one-quarter tone sharp. Trombone performs this note one-quarter tone flat.

"This section," Baley explains, "makes use of the mournful sounds of the *trembita* (an instrument similar to the large alpine horn), well known in the Carpathian Mountains and used by the Hutzuls as a messenger of death." The *trembita* sound, loud and microtonal (see the quartertone markings in the first and last bars of figure 5), is recreated here by having the brass play into the sounding board of the pianos while the keyboardists keep their sustain pedals down. Baley uses this sound as an Eastern analog to the *Tuba Mirum* section of the Latin Requiem Mass. The *trembita* gives a full-throated cry of mourning and lament. And when, after the movement has reached its cataclysmic peak, the brass players return to their chairs, it seems almost inevitable that they should play the *Treny* lament motive.

Figure 2c

Hn. [Treny] $\overset{\wedge}{\text{3}}$ *lontano*

Trpt.: Harmon Mute; stem in

mp *p*

pp

The strings return to their Hallelujahs, and a final surreal touch is added by an obvious snippet of Baroque harpsichord music (Vedel again) that lasts for only a single measure.

Movement 3, Agnus Dei

The third movement serves as a kind of scherzo for the Symphony #1. And it seems to sum up the whole Slavic approach to death: "life is tragic; now shut up and dance." Dancing and singing celebrate life but also express sorrow; there is no contradiction.

The repeating dance theme is marked *Allegro Jubilato*, but is always played in a minor key. Only in this movement does Baley quote extensively: parts of Dmitri Bortniansky's Choral Concerto #15 are woven into the fabric of the *Agnus Dei*. However, the dance refrain is not a quote from Bortniansky, nor a folk song. It is simply one of Baley's most memorable creations.

Figure 6

Strings

fff

A marvelous metamorphosis of the *Treny* motive occurs here (see the falling minor second and fifth, circled, in figure 6). While keeping its lamenting melodic shape, it becomes part of a jubilant affirmation of life – one which is possibly related, rhythmically, to the "death signal" that appears in each movement of this symphony.

The *Agnus Dei* begins with the dance theme, accompanied by pealing bell-like sounds in the keyboards. It alternates with reflective chorale sections, first in the winds, later in the strings, and later still in the brass, which quote from the Bortniansky concerto. For the musicians, it's a case of never a dull moment, as a seething current of sound runs throughout the movement. The percussionists frantically shift from one set of instruments to another; the harpsichord occasionally adds a tiny glimmer of Baroque keyboard music that makes no attempt to blend in; and the choral interludes are increasingly changed, extended, and re-voiced.

Like a conventional Scherzo (which this is certainly not), Baley's movement has a trio section in the middle. Here the dancing becomes more frenzied, almost dervish-like, and although an actual folk song is briefly quoted, the main folk-like material of the trio is again original. As with the main dance refrain, the melody of the trio is built up of complex layers of tied and dotted rhythms, triplets, and the alternating duple and triple meters that practically define the Eastern European dance tradition.

Given the celebratory quality of this *Agnus Dei*, the choice of title is a curious one. It's a question Virko Baley has been asked frequently. His usual response is evasive but somehow typically Slavic. "I generally refuse to give a concrete answer, except a variation on 'we are all lambs of god on the way to

the slaughter.' Ah, they say, Slavic angst. We all laugh - I do too, because I do laugh a lot, and I find a lot in life very funny." Humor in music is a dicey thing, but it's easy to imagine the composer chuckling softly to himself as he penned this passage for the long-suffering percussionist:

Figure 7

Figure 7 shows a musical score for a string and drum set ensemble. The top staff is for the strings, marked *ff marcato*. The bottom staff is for the drum set, marked *Drum Set; Ride Cym. cont. groove; quasi jazz-waltz*. The score is in 12/8 time and consists of three measures. The string part features a melodic line with various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes. The drum set part features a steady rhythm on the ride cymbal, with occasional snare and tom patterns.

In the space of three bars, the percussionist, playing a trap set, is asked to maintain a jazz waltz feel over three different time signatures – none of them in the triple time of a waltz. The next few bars bring a tour of 3/4, 4/4, and 15/16 meters. This is part of the return, after the Trio, to the main Scherzo section of the movement. The dance refrain, which had previously raced through such odd meters as 17/16 and 23/16, begins to show the effects of the “death signal” and eventually breaks apart, as if broken pieces of rhythm have spun off. The comforting sounds of the Lutheran hymn tune in the strings suggest that this too is death: not a terrible misfortune or a crime, but a natural conclusion to even the most exhilarating life.

Movement 4, Postludium

The final movement of Baley's first symphony begins with a mysterious trio of chords. Actually, the chords themselves are not so mysterious: F#m, Gm, and Cm, but the way they're played is. Both percussionists play vibraphones with bass bows, and the tempo of the opening is adjusted to the vibrato speed of the instrument motors. Baley points out that the chords come from Boris Lyatoshynsky's Symphony #3, but after the *Treny* motive's numerous previous appearances, it is easy to view this particular progression as a slight inversion of the descending minor second (here ascending instead) and descending fifth of the *Treny* theme.

The *Postludium*'s initial melodic material is almost constantly accompanied by shorter counter-melodies, which seem to echo earlier material without actually quoting from the previous movements. The scurrying strings of *The Hour Of The Wolf* and the stately chorale used in *Agnus Dei* are

evoked as if through a haze of memory. Only the *Duma* movement is clearly referred to, in a passage that features a solo oboe floating over a bed of musing strings. One of the symphony's most striking passages follows: a highly chromatic harpsichord solo set off by deep, Slavic-sounding chords, played on piano, cello, and bass.

Baley describes this as the heart of the movement. “The melodic material is made up of melismas that I particularly love and whose stylistic and emotional content seems to share certain traits with Lyatoshynsky.” The “death signal” reappears, and leads to the third part of the *Postludium* – a dreamy, pastoral meditation that is somehow is not nearly as comforting as one might expect. With its curious chamber music sound (flute, harp, waterphone, drum, and violins), and its soft but restless quality, this passage would be right at home in Baley's *Dreamtime*. There remains only a brief, almost epigrammatic coda, marked “doloroso e stanco.”

The American visionary poet Kenneth Patchen wrote, “there are so many little dyings.” Perhaps this meditation, which Baley describes as a picture of Lyatoshynsky at a moment of reflection between sleep and death, is as much about the “little death” of sleep. “Lyatoshynsky's life was in the end also blessed,” Baley points out. “But the terrors he went through made him face death – and die a little – a number of times. This is a kind of dreamtime meditation on dying. Yes, we die a little when we sleep. But awake refreshed. At the end I think Lyatoshynsky was tired - thus the *stanco* indication near the end.” The short coda recalls the progression of three chords that began the movement and now brings the reverie, and the symphony, to an ambiguous close. This enigmatic ending leaves us where we began – in the half light of the dreamtime, *entre chien et loup*.

John Schaefer, WNYC Radio

Cleveland Chamber Symphony, Edwin London, Music Director

Violin I	Viola	Keyboard
Laura Russell, concertmaster	Heather Walker, principal	Mark George, principal
Pedro Morales	Adrienne Elisha	Eric Ziolk
Norman Ludwig	Diana Packer	Harp
Mary Beth Ions	Carol Ross	Jocelyn Chang, principal
Susan Britton	Cello	Flute
Kia-Hui Tan	Heidi Albert, principal	Sean Gabriel, principal
Violin II	Susie Lee	Oboe
Peter Briedis, principal	Martha Baldwin	Martin Neubert, principal
Timothy Staron	James Myers	Clarinet
Maria Andreini	Bass	Louis Gangale, principal
Bonita Maky	Dianna Richardson, principal	Bassoon
Marion Goodrich	Sue Yelanjian	Mark DeMio, principal
Leah Goor		