



# Benjamin Boretz

postlude  
downtime  
the memory of all that

quartet dafo  
ian pace  
megan bertl  
zuzanna szewczyk kwon

open space 31

## OPEN SPACE 31

Benjamin Boretz

- [1] Postlude (2004) 23:20  
Quarter DAFO  
Justyna Duda, violin  
Danura Augustyn, violin  
Aneta Dumanowska, viola  
Anna Armatus, cello  
Recorded in Warsaw 2007 by Malgorzata Polanska/DUX
- [2] Downtime (2005) 19:53  
piano and electronic percussion  
Ian Pace, piano  
Recorded in London 2012 by Newtron Armstrong
- [3] The Memory of All That (2011) 12:38  
a Holy Sonnet of John Donne for Milton Babbitt (1916-2011)  
Megan Berti, mezzo-soprano  
Zuzanna Szewczyk Kwon, piano  
Recorded at Eastman School of Music 2011 by Paul Coleman

produced 2014 for Open Space by Dorota Czerner

Imagine Beethoven and *Yiddishkeit* coupled, an odd coupling for sure, that summer of 1949 at camp Boiberik in Rhinebeck, New York, not far from Red Hook-Barrytown where Ben had his house built in 1974 and has lived ever since, and yet that was the way it was way back then, that odd pairing the context in which I heard Ben for the first time, heard him playing the second movement of Beethoven's *Patbetique* Sonata, heard him on the piano as I passed by the camp's dining hall having peeked in the doorway and made him out, Boiberik small enough for most of us to recognize one another — besides which Ben's cousin Joyce was in my bunk —, Ben perhaps unaware of being overheard playing a piece with which I'd struggled a year or so earlier, that movement opening with those sundrily positioned E-flat *et alia* 7<sup>th</sup> chords, all fingers favorably poised for onset, ready for release, that movement that I'd heard even earlier on and adored ever since in the film *The Seventh Veil*, yet who knew then, at camp that summer in 1949, and with uncanny certainty, that "... whether it was written in the stars ... or told in chains of invisible links" Ben and I would soon enough be "audibly moved" by and truly get to know one another, as it came to pass a few years later on, at the home of piano teacher Rebecca Davidson, and on and on "... among the filtering echoes and softening shadows of advancing ages".



Flash forward, 64 years. How to begin these notes, what opening words to choose, thinking about wanting to recapture "First time", "First sound", but why? insofar as that past is irrelevant for this occasion, and yet that past is inexorably relevant, insofar as: "Dialogue with the past is inescapable...it defines identity."

— Nancy MacLean

*Dear Reader:* please listen to the CD before reading the notes.

“There is in me an anarchy and frightful disorder.  
Creating makes me die a thousand deaths,  
because it means making order,  
and my entire being is against order.  
But without it I would die,  
scattered to the winds.”

— Albert Camus

After numerous listenings to *Postlude*, I find it difficult to express where I am with the work. Of course, I can, and I will, find a way in, but I acknowledge both a resistance and an unwillingness to so doing. Not a response that Ben would welcome; I raise my own barriers, I obstruct access, yet *Postlude* engages me totally. The difficulty arises from my gut response to *Postlude* as a work that instantiates *music as music*, not a work that translates with ease, a work, you might say, *an sich, elemental*. But, like Camus, I will try to avoid being “scattered to the winds”.

*Postlude* has been there all along, waiting for you and for me.

*in medias res* *Odysseyan* *medias in res*

Words won't do ... out of silent sentient sound ... out of the air ...

*Postlude* breaking into and entering me; me eavesdropping into *Postlude*.

Timefilled. Subjectless. PitchConscious. unFormless. Timeless.

Formfilled. Assembled. Subversive. All-Discursive.

All-Specied. All-Harmonied. Elusive. Unbounded.

Listening to *Postlude* is listening to Ben thinking music, hearing music,  
composing music, becoming at one with music.

Successive, distinctive, asymmetrical, unpredictable segments of unequal lengths, varyingly contoured or textured or arrayed or characterizable, separated all through by short or long pauses; their very essence is “string quartet”; they happen when they happen; they think about themselves happening, forming; at times they approach the limits of audibility.

Shortly after all has begun, 'Late-Quarteted' resonances, reformed successions, evoked, grabbed hold of, recollected, rethought, restlessly upwardly repositioned, recolored sixths, thirds, sixths, tenths, overtaken and thickened by remaining components of the interval gang that, in fact, initiated this segment. Phrases of all lengths are distinctively contoured, chromatically or diatonically filled in, up, down, close or super step-wised, converging, diverging, recurring, vanishing, throughout Postlude, the most painterly of Ben's compositions, with its abstractly expressive splashy sound streaks, blurs & smears, single- & multi-hued calligraphic strokes, subtly suffused shifting tonal change against sustained miniclust, that 1/3rd' of the way in 8+ minute SuperPatch TimeSwath that creeps up on and envelops you and, as with Claude Monet's *Water-Lily Pond* triptych in New York's MoMA that hangs on slightly curved walls, you are observer/auditor-participant, outsider insider. Ben's stunning voicing during that stretch, known to me by looking at the score, is violoncello on high, which shifts irregularly, violin 2 above violin 1, tightfisted and immobile, viola beneath all, shifting with cello and gradually role-exchanging into a great silence. After which, release, *tête-à-tête*, small talk. As earlier on, what follows is neither expected nor unprecedented — nor totally unfamiliar. Toward Postlude's end, a short reminiscence, more like a lick, of the prior enveloping Patch catches my ears, as if I'm listening through a mesh curtain, everything different — voicing, harmony, low cello pizzicato here —, yet conveying a fleeting reflection of past moments. Postlude's contradictories and entirety made whole, brought to life, by members of Quartet DAFO, magically and bodily, each one of them comfortable, confident and authoritative in every position, register, with every kind of musical gesture or expressive mode, or with the equally demanding ability to sustain, the imperfections of liveness not a distraction but an add-on to the listening experience — I sense their breathing, the movement and sway of their arms, fingers, and torsos. (Justyna Duda, violin 1; Danuta Augustyn, violin 2; Aneta Dumanowska, viola; Anna Armatys, violoncello.) Postlude, in no way "open form", repeatedly reforming, has an affinity with Jackson Pollock's "all-over paintings", Ben outpouring, refining his revealed intuition, hierarchy absent, each part or patch equal to each. Postlude, in every respect non-traditional, in every respect having evolved out of classical String Quartet tradition. Ben's gently elegant violin-ending solo takes its measured time, recalling one of Marc Chagall's *sbittell* fiddlers, here genderbent, for whom Time goes on, never ends.

Erupting out of somewhere, overpowering, persuasive, seductive, which, after all is, and in mutually consensual circumstances, what it's all about, isn't it? Desire, libido, interplay; Dionysian frenzy at the outset, Apollonian serenity at the close, everything in between in between. Invented percussion instruments, created from midi-scratch ... few other temple/woodblocks sound like Ben's, rich warm deep as if made of wood from an Equatorial forest tree that's been sun and rain drenched ... *Crayola's Burnt Sienna* ... eccentric echoic drums and bells poke and sizzle through my speakers ... Solo piano and percussion do not partner equally, yet they're like a power couple, clingily together, distantly apart, often at the outermost edges of pitch and unpitch, distinguishable most of the way through until they ultimately and tranquilly coalesce. *Downtime*, not quite a mini-concerto but for sure conceived for virtuoso pianist who must not only keep in and to his own scrupulously notated time, especially the ubiquitous tripletted 32nds, but must also merge and unmerge with midi-percussion, whose entrances and exits are of course trouble-free. Ian Pace seems to have "eaten all these problems for breakfast", as Zita Carno once remarked of her own ability to sight read the piano music of Pierre Boulez. Ian Pace does far more than sight read: within predetermined bounds, he re-creates the out-of-the-blue deep down Givens and makes all sound like a wondrous bona fide Chosen.

A few minutes after the zingy explosive opening, you are transported onto almost flabby fidgety, wiggling fingers, up against the keys, soliloquizing ... squished fifths-cycle motif, as at the start and recurring later on (so maybe it's a Rondo), no fuss, no muss, *semplice*, heart stopping, spine shivery, conveyed and nailed right on by Ian Pace who manages to sound as if he's making all up, with extraordinary brilliance and authority, his pedaling enabling just the right tones to sustain, not performing, *Downtime*, the most paradoxical title Ben might have chosen in the conventional sense, schmoozing at the water cooler ... but allso commonsensical, in the sense in which systems are unavailable, have gone, spontaneity takes over, moment to moment your sense of being unprepared is forthwith overturned, each partner near-silently egging the other on. At about halfway in, a string of slow, single midrange piano tones, harmonically akin to the earlier piano solo, grabs your attention, in which — as in Ben's other music on this CD — these singletons have a weightiness, as if you could hold, feel, touch them, Ian Pace imbuing them with multi-dimensional tangibility;

after which follow whispery gong-chime tones, out of which springs an intricate, bouncy Babbitty passage, once again precisely spun by Ian Pace, after which all is recovered and you're switched onto another track but "*We'll meet again, we'll part once more. The spot I'll seek if the hour you'll find. My chart shines high where the blue milk's upset. Forgive me quick, I'm going! Bubyee! And you, pluck your watch, forgetmenot.*"

Ben as shamanic intermediary, takes you on a metaphysical journey, an overtly, discreetly, covertly, sexual trip, corporeality and incorporeality intertwining: what once was speculative is now transformational; coming and going, entrancing, leave-taking, with confidence and power that seizes yet liberates. All about, if aboutness is what *Downtime* is about, intimacy, its qualities, its attributes, about an intimacy that takes away your breath, your balance, all coming upon you suddenly, switching gears, reassuring, as if listening to you at the same time in which —, and Time is always taken, made and remade by Ben —, in which worldmaking of its own invention continues to beguile, enfold. About an intimacy at times of such intensity as to be overwhelming in its directness, in its grasp, Ben's outer selves and shadow selves gripping us. *Downtime* radiates unbounded vitality, an abundance of guileless assurance, a compelling erotic energy, expressing, conveying *joie de vivre* from piercing thumps at the start to tranquil murmurs at the end.

Death be not proud, though some have called thee  
Mighty and dreadful, for, thou art not so,  
For, those, whom thou think'st, thou dost overthrow,  
Die not poore death, noe yet canst thou kill me.  
From rest and sleepe, which just thy pictures bee,  
Much pleasure, then, from thee much more must flow.  
And soonest our best men with thee doe goe,  
Rest of their bones, and soules deliverie,  
Thou art slave to Fate, Chance, kings, and desperate men.  
And dost with poyson, warre, and sicknesse dwell.  
And popple, or charmes can make us sleepe as well,  
And better than thy stroake; why swell'st thou then;  
One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally.  
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

John Donne (1572-1631): Holy Sonnet 10 (1610)

John Donne remonstrates with Death and declines to kowtow; so too Ben Boretz who eschews platitude, theatricality, everyday prosody, and sentimentality, evoking within this listener, the consciousness, the perception, of loss, of pain, of being left behind, an articulation of sorrow that may have long lain within, rekindled, private and incommunicable with a language and a landscape all their own to which you are not ordinarily privy. Right away, you're taken in to or held captive by Ben's Beckett-like 'unspeak', to the futility of it all, to non-Sing. But, as Beckett said: "I'll go on", a way is found to give voice to, to speak, to sound, intone, to song of the unImaginable that ultimately entraps you, holds you fast — feared, acknowledged unImaginable, that rips you apart, after which you're never as you were, having obliquely sensed what lies ahead for all. Time never does assuage and you are still here, now deprived of presence, more dependent than ever on memory — whetted and reshaped each time you allow yourself to go back in, to animate, so as not to forget to remember, and so, to speak, to sing; to transform loss into gratification.

Mezzo-soprano Megan Berti and pianist Zuzanna Szewczuk Kwon, always aware of, gradually seemingly becoming unaware of, one another, sounding within the same timeframe, above, below, alongside each other, compose, produce soundtimeframes of their own and distinct regions "in the spirit of Franco of Cologne-notated [3-voice polytextual] motets". Megan Berti and Zuzanna Kwon are almost never, hardly ever, sounded simultaneously, at times as if their experience is not shared. Independence and autonomy of voice seem to reign. But that's not really so, ever. Megan's gemtones emerge ever so carefully, each one or few, sheathed in velvet, now and then melodizing, each word given its time and place. Zuzanna now and then soars wildly, improvisationally, and lucidly in each direction, piano's fleshed-out belltone harmonies lingering, you might say 'hanging around', so as to stave off the inevitable onset of silence. Within, all freely moving, creating narrow, tight, touching, or vast, separate, faraway, degrees of separation or of togetherness. Yet you know, Ben does make it clear, that Megan and Zuzanna, as they circle about one another, depend upon one another; how could they not? Where I am may not always be as unequivocal though Ben is everywhere present: careful, energetic, in deep, meticulous, controlled, acutely aware of each finely sculpted, raw to the touch, affect, of each of several transactions that arrests a listener from the opening to the close.

Unlike John Hollander's and Milton Babbitt's innovative, operatic, Voice-seeking *Philomel*, Ben takes you on an *aus der Tiefe* journey whose multi-arc-ing word-by-word, pitch-by-pitch, step-by-step, harmony-by-harmony, timbre-by-timbre, gesture-by-gesture trajectory is both resolute and uncertain; is gradually meanderingly curved yet balanced with each breath, each sweep, at each move of the way; fulfills its own uneven proportions and unspools with a deliberation that refuses to be deterred; at whose completion you will know that you are not where you were at the start; once you began listening, you formed an association with Donne, Ben, Megan and Zuzanna; you might have found it difficult not to listen or at times you might have become aware of your own thoughts while listening; either way, you have been a silent participant and have had, I would opine, a singularly remarkable experience.

Of enduring love and dangerous liaisons, "The Memory of All That" was composed for Milton Babbitt (1916-2011).

Elaine R. Barkin  
August/November 2013  
Valley Village, CA



Ask            for            a lake

Ask the lake            Listen

Looking toward the inland waters

Of vertical dreams

Poured in

Single syllables dropped into the night

The night            a single   resonant sound   afloat on the surface

The rapids of the broken syllables.

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Sound, touch, smell, vibrancy:

Night birds.

splashing and stirring.

*“As I was thinking of you tonight while I was out dreaming; letting rest in the sepia behind my eyes one image at a time, a fluid petal touching another petal, (all attached to the center), painfully, deeply, I looked down folding myself around the ambiguity of the bed and found a little effigy of a man made from nothing but my own sensations, a little man mad with feelings, my feelings.”*

I hold what the dream blows my way

— like an hourglass try to winnow time from one chamber to another —

opening with its movement, inside the listening.

The quiet I can't achieve at first comes to me as the piano sounds slowly turn out all my pedestrian lights, as they respond and relate to what other sensations are doing, slowly moving over the dream, distinctly individual, scattered drops plain unsealed, buckets of crystals, linked, impregnated with both the privacy and the resonance of passing through the emerging time.

The architecture of the internalexanding, in loops, builds an alembic of sound.

In the eye of this pellucid dome lies a fragility, which allows an access to the music: to hear and to be it, and to lock in the mind the elapsing events so they can form a spiral window — a sudden vertigo of being laced with the continuum, on a flickering edge:

*asphalt*

*throat*

*warm with night*

*the voices*

*of galloping tree-frogs*

*under a blanket of dust*

*my presence still clutching onto the effigy*

I look for this space like a girl child who needs music to sleep.

The ear has heard, has collected — Imagination generates fresh integrity and holds a new sense of balance. The lemon hourglass is perfect, so are the images it rushes through. The eyes in the dark are watching me from the elevator of time.

From a trusting leap, an inward dive into the flow of the beat-skipping heart decisions in bending, refracting, reflecting time.

Bonds. Same. Or other. Bonds. I was. I Am.

The *Dreamman's* figure buried somewhere in un-mown grass, *Vinculum quippe vinculorum (amor) est* — an alchemy of depth rippled through the wild surfaces    busy green

I am myself each thing speaking, each separate, lost into one another ready  
with infinite ease    in flight

Dorota Czerner  
from *Downtime Spaces*

The DAFO Quartet was formed in 1993 by graduates of the Music Academy in Cracow. Two CD albums entitled Polish Quartets of the 20th Century were recorded for DUX/PWM for which they were awarded the Fryderyk Music Award. They have also toured in Europe with the American band The Lambchop and have performed live at The Kitchen in New York City.

Ian Pace is a pianist of long-established reputation, specialising in the farthest reaches of musical modernism and transcendental virtuosity, as well as a writer and musicologist focusing on issues of performance, music and society and the avant-garde. He was born in Hartlepool, England in 1968, and studied at Chetham's School of Music, The Queen's College, Oxford and, as a Fulbright Scholar, at the Juilliard School in New York. His main teacher, and a major influence upon his work, was the Hungarian pianist György Sándor, a student of Bartók.

He is Lecturer in Music and Head of Performance at City University, London, having previously held positions at the University of Southampton and Dartington College of Arts. His areas of academic expertise include 19<sup>th</sup> century performance practice (especially the work of Liszt and Brahms), issues of music and society (with particular reference to the work of Theodor Adorno, the Frankfurt School, and their followers), contemporary performance practice and issues, music and culture under fascism, and the post-1945 avant-garde, in particular in West Germany, upon which he is currently completing a large-scale research project.

Megan Berti is a mezzo-soprano in the studio of Melanie Sonnenberg and a recent graduate of the University of Houston, Moores School of Music's Performance Certificate program. She is currently playing the title role in *Strega Nona* with Houston Grand Opera's Opera to Go! throughout the Houston area and just finished singing Flora in *La Traviata* for her debut with Opera in the Heights.

Zuzanna A. Szewcyk Kwon holds a Doctorate of Music Degree in Piano Performance from the Eastman School of Music. She studied with Natalya Antonova at Eastman, and has premiered countless pieces by living composers. She is currently free-lancing and lives in Bushnell's Basin with her husband Ik-Sung, 2 year old daughter Cassandra, and 10 month old son Augustyn.



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