

Works by Spencer Holst and Tui St. George Tucker at the Pleiades
Gallery

(reviewed by Jackson Mac Low)

On 22 February 1980 at the Pleiades Gallery, 152 Wooster St., a program of prose works by Spencer Holst and related musical works by Tui St. George Tucker were presented by Mr. Holst and the recorderists Pete Rose and David Carp. Mr. Holst began the program by reading his early (ca. 1950) story "Bullfinch and Goblin,"* which tells how a bullfinch took singing lessons from a goblin, becoming a superb singer-- but also turning into a goblin in the process. At the end the bullfinch-in-goblin-form is singing wonderfully on the windowsill of the children he had wanted to impress, but he's frightening them away instead. His song is reflected in Tui St. George Tucker's "Sonata for Solo Recorder," subtitled "The Bullfinch" (Brooklyn: Anfor Music Publishing, 1970), which Mr. Rose played on the alto recorder after Mr. Holst read the story.

The Sonata is a virtuoso work employing several kinds of musical materials including baroque-like and romantic passages, a very short waltz passage in homage to Schoenberg, quotes from Strauss's "Til Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks," rapid changes from diatonicism to chromaticism, multiphonics, and notably a number of passages including quarter tones, for which the composer gives special fingerings in the Anfor edition. (Indeed, in this dual publication, comprising both the Sonata and her "Romanza for Solo Recorder," which also includes quarter tones, she published an "Alto Recorder Fingering Chart Showing Quarter Tones" that gives fingerings for all 63 tones approximately a quarter tone apart, from the ~~F4~~ F4 above Middle C through the C4 three octaves above Middle C.)

Mr. Rose, who is no stranger to the Sonata, surmounted its technical difficulties with seeming effortlessness, subordinating his

great virtuosity to the task of clearly expressing the many nuances of feeling and changes of mood that rapidly succeed each other in this short but complex romantic work.

Mr. Rose's virtuosity was taxed even further by the rest of the program: two sections from "There Are Different Kinds of Writing": Part One, Second Half and Part Two, First Half. TADKW comprises many short "movements" alternately for reader and recorderist(s).

The work stemmed from the fact that Mr. Holst accumulated over about 20 years (1959-79) more than 101 story beginnings which he never expanded into full-length stories. These beginnings, seldom more than two or three sentences long--possibly just because they are unexpanded kernels that might have grown into longer works--are in themselves highly evocative prose poems. Most of them contain striking images, phrases, and situation ideas. Some phrases I noted down during the concert are: "preserved Neanderthals," "snow leopards escape on the way to the Cincinnati zoo," "key--lighthousekeeper," "falling cucumbers--French peasant revolt," "lake belongs to the fox," "avalanche," "archeologists--jewels--how different were the smiles of the ancient kings," "the fish tried to imagine how the devil he could climb the string," "plants flying," and "the fur flag of the Alaskan nationalists."

Sixty-four of these beginnings were published in Mr. Holst's book Spencer Holst Stories (New York, Horizon Press, 1976) under the general title "The Pleasures of the Imagination," and previously 23 had been published in the magazine Some/Thing. In addition, several slightly different groups of 55 had been read as part of the dance-prose event "Small Visions," choreographed and danced ~~by~~ at a number of ~~sixty~~ places by Sally Gross. In the course of the two decades some beginnings were added and some dropped from the collection.

