

KING'S  
College  
LONDON  
*Founded 1829*

Opening of the  
Eric Mottram  
Archive

Monday 19 January 1998

# Programme Notes

17.45 Lecture:

*Identifying Praise: in moments of Henry James & Fred Astaire*

by *Stanley Cavell*

Professor of Philosophy, Harvard University

Interval

19.00 Performances:

*Songs from A Book of Herne*

music by *John Kenny*, text by *Eric Mottram*

*Poetry Reading*

by *Roy Fisher*

*Free Improvisation*

by *John Kenny* and *John Whiting*

# The contributors

## **Stanley Cavell**

Stanley Cavell (1926- ), Professor of Philosophy at Harvard University, is among the most distinguished contemporary American philosophers and cultural critics. Born in Atlanta, Georgia and early influenced by his teacher JL Austin and the work of Wittgenstein, Professor Cavell has produced an exceptional body of work exploring the nature and limits of philosophy, the pursuit of self-knowledge and the meanings of scepticism from many perspectives. A concern with assessing and mapping the contribution of an American philosophic tradition, from Thoreau and Emerson to the present, and the construction of a dialogue between Anglo-American and Continental philosophy is also a key preoccupation. Professor Cavell is as much at home examining Shakespeare or Hollywood comedies and melodrama as he is discussing the works of Heidegger, Wittgenstein and other major philosophers.

Professor Cavell's books include the following: *Philosophical Passages: Wittgenstein, Emerson, Austin, Derrida* (1995), *A Pitch of Philosophy: Autobiographical Exercises* (1994), *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (1990), *The New Yet Unapproachable America:*

*Lectures after Emerson after Wittgenstein* (1989), *The Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (1988), *Disowning Knowledge: In Six Plays of Shakespeare* (1987), *Themes Out of School: Effects and Causes* (1980), *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (1981), *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality and Tragedy* (1979), *The Senses of Walden* (1972), *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (1971), *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays* (1969), and *The Cavell Reader*, ed. Stephen Mulhall (1996).

## **John Kenny**

Born in 1957 in Birmingham, John Kenny is a multi-faceted performer. As a trombonist his interests include contemporary solo repertoire, modern jazz and early music. He also works as an actor and is active as a composer, having received commissions from the London Contemporary Dance Theatre, Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, and in 1989 was Strathclyde Composer in Residence to the Scottish Chamber Orchestra.

He is professor at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, lecturer at Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart, and in 1993 was elected Associate of the Royal Academy of Music. He lives in Edinburgh with his wife and two children.

## **John Whiting**

From 1960, Jon Whiting worked for KPFA in Berkeley, California, America's first listener-supported non-commercial radio station. His monograph on the first ten years of its history was published by the University of Aarhus in Denmark. His subsequent career has been devoted to both words and music. As an international sound designer based in London, he has worked with many music ensembles, opera houses and symphony orchestras, also performing and teaching at music schools and festivals including those of Darmstadt, Stuttgart, Stockholm and Huddersfield. His frequent work with John Kenny over many years has been one of his most satisfying associations.

As a writer, John Whiting was joint recipient of a Composer-Librettist Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts in the United States. He regularly contributes what he himself refers to as "diatribes on the state of the arts and society" to European and American publications and has just published a journal of his gastronomic travels around France. His recently-established Diatribal Press is devoted to "information and entertainment for intelligent readers."

## Roy Fisher

Roy Fisher was born in Birmingham in 1930 and lived there for forty years before moving North, first to teach American Literature at Keele University and then to work as a freelance writer, jazz pianist and broadcaster: he now lives in the Peak District of Derbyshire. Since the mid-1960s he has given many readings and tutorial sessions and has held a variety of residencies. He has collaborated with the artists Tom Phillips, Ian Tyson, Ronald King and Derrick Greaves; his translations of Schubert songs have been recorded by Shura Gehrman. In 1991 he provided the script and music for a documentary film, *Birmingham's What I Think With*, directed by Tom Pickard. His *Poems 1955-1987*, and his long poem *A Furnace* were published by Oxford University Press; his most recent publications are *Birmingham River* (Oxford 1994) and *The Dow Low Drop: New and Selected Poems* (Bloodaxe 1996). He recently received one of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation's five £15,000 Poetry Awards.

# The Exhibition

The Eric Mottram Collection includes a variety of different media: written and printed matter, tape recordings and gramophone records, photograph albums, art works and posters. Primarily, cataloguing has concentrated on written matter, that is letters, essays, poems, diaries, notes, academic papers, plus little press booklets and little magazines, newspaper cuttings, reviews and biographical material. The main themes are American Studies, modern American and British writers, and of course Mottram's own poetry. Even this archive of written material comprises some 400 boxes, of which approximately 300 are now available for study.

The small exhibition or display may serve as a sample of the variety and high standard of material available in the archive. It features well-known American writers like William Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg, along with little press items from Jerome Rothenberg, Robert Duncan and DA Levy, with, from England, material from Basil Bunting, Bill Butler and Jeff Nuttall. Examples of some of Eric Mottram's less well-known projects will also be included: his collage-like poetry notebooks reflect a lifelong interest in collecting and arranging visual material,

while his work on early aviation for The Polytechnic of Central London reflects the emphasis he placed on technology in general cultural studies.

## The Catalogue

A printed version and a computer version of the Eric Mottram Archive Catalogue, as of January 1998, will be on display. The computer display is there for you to try out for yourself if you like.

## The Archive

The Eric Mottram Archive comprises 10 sections so far:

**1** Mottram's personal papers; **2** Mottram's poems; **3** Mottram's publications; **4** Mottram as editor; **5** Authors: 20th Century creative writers in prose, poetry, drama, irrespective of country, organised by alphabetical order of surnames; **6** Promotional material; **7** magazines; **8** College material; **9** Mottram's essays; **10** Notes and newspaper cuttings

# Songs from *A Book of Herne*

Notes by John Kenny

- 1: "*antlers broken*"
- 2: *Herne Oak*
- 3: *From the Exeter Book*
- 4: *Herne Oak*
- 5: *Epilogue*: Song without words

These settings of four poems from Eric Mottram's *A Book of Herne* originated with a commission from the Chamber Group of Scotland for the choreographer Rosina Bonsu and me to make a dance-theatre piece. I wanted to work with a poet to develop ideas of my own as a text, and a mutual friend, the sound designer John Whiting, suggested Mottram was my man; so we met to make plans; sadly, Eric died a few days later, a complete surprise to all his friends. At our only meeting, Eric gave me a signed copy of *A Book of Herne*, and I was bowled over by the power of his language and kaleidoscopic imagery; I immediately decided to use several of these poems as the generating material for my music.

I have to emphasise that my reaction to the words is very instinctive – my first impressions remain the strongest, based purely on the sound quality of language, and strong emotional suggestiveness of the imagery. I do not presume to fully *understand* the multi-layered references – but I know that Eric believed in honest gut reaction as a criterion for appraisal of art, so I have gone with my instinct, rather than agonising about literal meaning. I have discovered a mass of references to the work of other poets, mythology of many people, social history, Anglo Saxon riddles – all too complex to delve into here. But it does seem to me that there are themes which recur in all 40 of the poems in the anthology, and which appear particularly strongly in the four I have chosen: 1) Herne – ancient horned god of the forest, he appears throughout the northern hemisphere from Neolithic times on. Mottram uses Herne as a symbol both of primitive power and beauty, or a driving force in human existence which is amoral, to be harnessed for creativity or

