Music and Poetry’s Great Leap Forward?

or

Searching for the Easter Egg

Samuel Jay Keyser

MIT

This talk explores the notion of “private codes” in music and poetry, and what happened to them at the turn of the 20th-century. It focuses on musical compositions and poems because these art forms rely on two reasonably well understood systems of rules. These rules formed the basis of a natural aesthetic shared by artist and audience in the way that the rules of one’s natural language are shared. At the turn of the 20th century poets and composers (and painters) abandoned the shared rule component and turned instead to “private codes.” As a result, appreciation of these art forms now came, if at all, after specialized study of the sort demanded by calculus or computer programming. This is, in part, why the 20th century has seen the extraordinary rise of exegesis in the arts as an independent field of study.

Samuel Jay Keyser is the Peter de Florez Professor Emeritus in the Department of Linguistics and Philosophy at MIT. Aside from seven books and close to 100 articles in the field of theoretical linguistics, he has published two books of poems, *Raising the Dead* and *The Pond God and Other Stories*. The latter earned the 2003 Lee Bennett Hopkins Honor Award for children's poetry. He is also a jazz trombonist with the Aardvark Jazz Orchestra and the New Liberty Jazz Band and has appeared on more than a dozen CDs.

WED. OCT. 5
5:45pm
SBS S-207