

CU ★ PRESENTS

2022-23 Season



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UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

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SoundWorks

In Still Life

Egemen Kesikli, artistic director

Annika Socolofsky, faculty coach

7:30 p.m., Wednesday, March 22, 2023

Grusin Music Hall

Program

Vessels (8:00)

Grace Leslie

Grace Leslie, flute, brain, electronics

Sophia Mehdizadeh and Thiago Roque, electronics

So Shimmer the Distant Stars (6:00)

Blake Clawson

Angelique Scully and David Reid, pianos

Moss Piece (12:00)

Veda Hingert-McDonald

Jordan Grantonic, violin

12 Little Preludes, Book II (13:00)

James Morris

Jennifer Hayghe, piano

Sea Longing (10:00)

Blake Clawson

Renova New Music Ensemble

Jessie Flasschoen, conductor

Aric Vyhmeister, piano

— Intermission —

Rhythmic Conversations (9:00)

Torin Hopkins

Torin Hopkins and Che Chuan “Suibi” Weng, performers

Pictures (15:00)

Keenan Powell

Art by Ivan Seal

- I. Saturnine
- II. The Lovebirds' Waltz
- III. Anecdote
- IV. Nodus Tollens
- V. Altschmerz
- VI. Ambedo

Keenan Powell, piano

All the Shades of Pomegranate (7:00)

Holly McMahon

Indigo Farmer, piano

Fresh Produce (12:00)

Luka Vezmar

- I. Lemon
- II. Grape
- III. Watermelon
- IV. Peach
- V. Pineapple

Sam Nixon, flute

Luka Vezmar, oboe

Nikhila Narayana, clarinet

Josiah Smith, horn

Clarrisse Bosman, bassoon

Declaration (7:00)

Carolyn Chen

Program notes

Text that is bold and underlined is a hyperlink and can be clicked or tapped for more information.

Vessels (8:00)

Grace Leslie

Vessels is a brain-body performance practice that combines flute and electronics improvisation with EEG (electroencephalogram brainwave data) sonification. In this piece, I record raw electroencephalogram (EEG), electrodermal activity (EDA) and electrocardiogram (ECG) signals and use them to actuate sound samples recorded from my flute and voice. Slow impulse trains generated by my physiology become a series of finger snaps that reveal this static virtual space over time, while faster ones become a wet finger running along the rim of a glass, activating a virtual resonant enclosure.

My natural inclination was to improvise on the flute while using this sonification system, and I quickly learned to pare down my playing, and limit any overt physical expression or gross musical gestures, as the muscle artifacts produced would flood the “vessels” with unwanted noise. The music that emerged from this practice, enabled by interactive electronics, allows slow breathing and long tones to bloom into massive sound structures. Through a daily practice of improvising with this system I have developed a paradoxical form of “introspective expression” that was enabled by training my body and perceptual mechanism with custom-engineered, musical biofeedback. In *Vessels*, the sonic material is an almost static, digital and virtual space, and the musical narrative slowly emerges through an unfolding of cognitive and affective states.

So Shimmer the Distant Stars (6:00)

Blake Clawson

The immensity of the universe is simply baffling, yet we don't often give thought to what majesty lies suspended in space beyond the view of our unaided eyes. Amid the sliver of the universe that we can perceive, we exist on a humble and miniscule dot, yet have the capability to marvel at distant beauties. Unlike any of my other pieces to date, I realized what this music means to me only after I finished writing it. The textures, harmonies and melodies evoke imagery of deep space, of bright and intricate celestial formations, and of incomprehensible vastness. It is not my aim to condense this sense of wonder and smallness into a six-minute piano duo. Rather, I hope that this piece serves as a musical reflection on the mysterious beauty of the abyss and its twinkling giants. Where my words fall short, I lean on those of Carl Sagan to provide some perspective. Regarding the photo of Earth taken by the Voyager 1 spacecraft at a distance of 3.7 billion miles, Sagan writes:

“Look again at that dot. That’s here. That’s home. That’s us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every ‘superstar,’ every ‘supreme leader,’ every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there—on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.” (*Carl Sagan, Pale Blue Dot*)

Moss Piece (12:00)

Veda Hingert-McDonald

I.

this is

the tiny-ness of fibres woven precisely like a shaggy rug
or rather we have learned to weave rugs in a style the forest floor has always
known

this is

the way that an organism is simultaneously approximately eight billion tiny little
guys and one large communion that struggles to understand itself

this is

both the forest and the trees (and the mosses that adorn them)

II.

use only the D string

remove your shoes and socks and wriggle your toes into the moss, whether it
is there or not.

stir the air and move it so gently as to carpet yourself in your cool curly sound.

consider that in the ancient life of your violin it may have been covered in moss.
consider that in your ancient life you may have been covered in moss.

III.

lay down your being on me

I am made soft for a reason.

I am made soft of centuries of nourishment.

I am made soft.

I am made soft.

Sea Longing (10:00)

Blake Clawson

Sara Teasdale's "Sea Longing", the sonnet on which this piece was written, describes a complex longing for the ocean. The poet's words express a strong desire to be enveloped by the sea; it is perhaps intentionally ambiguous whether she intends for the imagery to convey a deep serenity or, quite differently, drowning oneself. This juxtaposition of death and beauty, loneliness and desire, is a common feature of Teasdale's poetry. Many of her poems portray an awestruck wonder at the beauty of the natural world—a beauty that is as heartbreakingly overwhelming as it is life-giving.

Having been raised on a Pacific Northwest island, I resonate with Teasdale's longing for the steady and immutable sea. This choral setting of Sea Longing reflects a variety of characters found in the ocean, from a still and peaceful opening to a brooding piano interlude and the rolling wave-like phrases of the climax, which gradually drift into stillness again. The character of the music evokes Teasdale's mingling of dark undertones and a surface of light, much like the shimmering sea.

Text by Sara Teasdale

A thousand miles beyond this sun-steeped wall
Somewhere the waves creep cool along the sand,
The ebbing tide forsakes the listless land
With the old murmur, long and musical;
The windy waves mount up and curve and fall,
And round the rocks the foam blows up like snow,—
Tho' I am inland far, I hear and know,
For I was born the sea's eternal thrall.
I would that I were there and over me
The cold insistence of the tide would roll,
Quenching this burning thing men call the soul,—
Then with the ebbing I should drift and be
Less than the smallest shell along the shoal,
Less than the sea-gulls calling to the sea.

Rhythmic Conversations (9:00)

Torin Hopkins

Rhythmic Conversations is an audience-interactive performance with AI-driven virtual drummers and a solo guitar player. This performance ties the ancient art of communal music making with today's cutting-edge technology, offering a reconceptualization of modern performance, performer, and audience dynamics. By leveraging AI generated rhythms as a mechanism of promoting audience participation and engagement, we encourage members of the community to participate musically in the performance.

The aim of this project is to challenge the paradigm of music performer-audience dynamics. Fundamentally asking, how do we bridge the gap between a musical audience and performer to create a more inclusive, engaging, and community-driven experience? Some audience members will have traditional percussion instruments available to them, and by leveraging AI-generated drum beats several audience members will be empowered to influence the resultant music created by the virtual robots projected on-screen.

Pictures (15:00)

Keenan Powell

Art by Ivan Seal

Picture I: Saturnine adjective

(of a person or their manner) slow and gloomy.

-Oxford Languages

Picture III: Anecdote noun

“a conversation in which everyone is talking but nobody is listening, simply overlaying disconnected words like a game of Scrabble, with each player borrowing bits of other anecdotes as a way to increase their own score, until we all run out of things to say.”

—The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows

Picture IV: Nodus Tollens noun

“the realization that the plot of your life doesn’t make sense to you anymore—that although you thought you were following the arc of the story, you keep finding yourself immersed in passages you don’t understand, that don’t even seem to belong in the same genre—which requires you to go back and reread the chapters you had originally skimmed to get to the good parts, only to learn that all along you were supposed to choose your own adventure”

—The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows

Picture V: Altschmerz noun

“weariness with the same old issues that you’ve always had—the same boring flaws and anxieties you’ve been gnawing on for years, which leaves them soggy and tasteless and inert, with nothing interesting left to think about, nothing left to do but spit them out and wander off to the backyard, ready to dig up some fresher pain you might have buried long ago.”

—The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows

Picture VI: Ambedo noun

“a kind of melancholic trance in which you become completely absorbed in vivid sensory details—raindrops skittering down a window, tall trees leaning in the wind, clouds of cream swirling in your coffee—which leads to a dawning awareness of the haunting fragility of life...”

—The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows

All the Shades of Pomegranate (7:00)

Holly McMahan

All the Shades of Pomegranate is a musical representation of caring deeply about the people around oneself. The structure of this piece was imagined as a story about a sunset, during which, once the sky begins to darken, a forest comes to life until everything is finally dark. It is meant to be surprising and exciting, while still feeling delicate and precious at its core. It is simply be a very authentic representation of some of the most precious emotions that one can feel while living on this Earth.

Fresh Produce (12:00)

Luka Vezmar

Fresh Produce is a five movement work for wind quintet. Each of the movements are titled as different fruits and the character of the music embodies that fruit. We start off with *Lemon*, a tangy sour taste to it, but, when used in the right ways, can be a delicious addition to a dessert. *Grape* is the second movement, which has a more melancholy feel, it goes with the color purple. The third is *Watermelon*, which has a bigger, richer, more fun character to it. In the middle of the movement we have a moment of reflection, like when you were a kid and swallowed a seed, and your parents told you a watermelon would grow in your belly. Then we are right back to the fun afterwards. The penultimate movement is *Peach*, this movement has quite a nostalgic feeling, like a peach tree flowing in the wind, while sun rays glow through the branches. The final movement is *Pineapple* which is raunchy, prickly and all over the place. Together they make *Fresh Produce* for Wind Quintet.

Personnel

Text that is bold and underlined is a hyperlink and can be clicked or tapped for more information.

Egemen Kesikli, artistic director

Blake Clawson

Blake Clawson is a composer, pianist and vocalist based in Boulder, Colorado. Clawson's music spans many genres, but he specializes in contemporary classical and jazz. He has collaborated with both filmmakers and choreographers, and his award-winning pieces *Matara* and *Fantasy Arabesque* have received performances around the state of Washington, including a performance and award by Seattle-based Opus 7 Vocal Ensemble. In 2020, Clawson received a Bachelor of Arts in music composition from Whitworth University, where he studied with Brent Edstrom. Clawson is currently pursuing a master's in music composition at the University of Colorado Boulder, where he teaches aural skills and studies with Carter Pann.

Torin Hopkins

Torin Hopkins (he/him/his) is a musician and triple PhD candidate in neuroscience, cognitive science and creative technology and design (ATLAS). Hopkins' musical practice specializes in pushing the boundaries of audience-participation and improvisation in musical performance—using technologies such as neuroimaging, artificial intelligence and virtual worlds to bridge the gap between audience and performer. Hopkins, a music teacher of 13 years and lifelong performer, is passionate about music collaboration, music education and new forms of interaction in music using computers. He believes in the power of collaborative music making as a mechanism for bringing communities together and utilizes technologies that promote participation and creative expression for all community members.

Grace Leslie

Grace Leslie is a flutist, electronic musician and scientist; assistant professor of music at CU Boulder; and director of the Brain Music Lab at the ATLAS Institute. She develops brain-music interfaces and other physiological sensor systems that reveal aspects of her internal cognitive and affective state, those left unexpressed by sound or gesture, to an audience. As an electronic music composer and improviser, she maintains a brain-body performance practice. Leslie strives to integrate the manners of conventional emotional and musical expression that she learned as a flutist with the new forms available to her as an electronic musician, using the brain-computer interface to reveal aspects of her internal mental state, those left unexpressed by sound or gesture, to an audience. In recent years she has performed this music in academic and popular music venues, conferences and residencies in the United States, UK, Australia, Germany, Singapore, South Korea, China and Japan, and released three records of this mind-body music.

Holly McMahan

Holly McMahan is a first-year student at the University of Colorado Boulder, studying composition. This year, she is studying composition with Annika Socolofsky and piano with Andrew Cooperstock. She won third place in the 2021 National Federation of Music Clubs Junior Composer Contest in 2021, and participated in the National Federation of Music Clubs American Composers festival in 2018, 2019 and 2022 (on the piano). She has also studied with Stephanie Cheng of the University of Denver, as well as jazz and classical piano and composition with various other instructors. Her music is inspired largely by the repertoire she studies on the piano, as well as other music she listens to. She is excited to be a part of the CU Boulder College of Music.

Luka Vezmar

Luka Vezmar is a composer, oboist, accordionist and all around music lover. Since he was 9 months old, he has gone to many concerts with his family and friends which always inspires him to write more music. He grew up playing the piano and various other instruments throughout schooling like the trumpet,

saxophone and oboe. He decided to continue with the oboe and is pursuing a BM in oboe performance as well as in composition. While Luka's music encompasses many different fields, he specializes in classical music, with the hopes of getting accordion into the main stream classical music world. Luka always has a very distinct character in his music, which to him makes the music seem alive. He hopes that the audience can connect with his music and hopefully leave feeling just a little better than when they came in. In his free time, Luka loves watching films and building puzzles.

Che Chuan “Suibi” Weng

Che Chuan “Suibi” Weng (he/him/his) is an ATLAS PhD student and an experienced interactive media engineer and digital artist. He specializes in developing interactive installations, especially AR/VR and Arduino components. He has taught technical courses such as unity development and Arduino basics at three universities. Furthermore, as a digital artist, his works were accepted to the Digital Arts Festival in Taipei and 404 International Festival of Art and Technology in Argentina, as well as several others.

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