



Advance Program Notes

Sirius Quartet

New World

Thursday, October 3, 2019, 7:30 PM

These Advance Program Notes are provided online for our patrons who like to read about performances ahead of time. Printed programs will be provided to patrons at the performances. Programs are subject to change.

Sirius Quartet

New World

Fung Chern Hwei, violin

Gregor Huebner, violin

Ron Lawrence, viola

Jeremy Harman, cello

More Than We Are Jeremy Harman

Ceili Fung Chern Hwei

Heal Harman

Beside the Point Fung

Duda Gregor Huebner

#STILL Huebner

Paths Become Lines Harman

Knives Out Radiohead, arr. Huebner

New World, Nov. 9, 2016 Huebner

Eleanor Rigby Lennon-McCartney, arr. Huebner

Program Notes

More Than We Are **Jeremy Harman**

The raw material of *More Than We Are* was written several years ago, but wasn't finished until the spring of 2015. I completed this piece during the first few months of fatherhood, after my son Silas was born, and as I was reflecting about many things related to moving into new phases of life and personal evolution. The piece is based on rhythmic patterns of uneven lengths that create hypnotic cycles that rise and fall, beginning with a few incomplete melodic fragments and going through an intense process of transformation, eventually ending with a lush melodic whisper.

Ceili **Fung Chern Hwei**

People with an Irish background might be familiar with this title, which is a kind of party that features dance, music, poetry, storytelling, and, of course, a lot of drinking. However, this piece is not about the party, but a mood-painting of the atmosphere that comes after the fact—solitary and nostalgic—which is represented by the pulsing quarter notes throughout the piece.

Heal **Jeremy Harman**

Heal is a piece that was born out of my love for downtempo grooves and trip-hop bands, such as Massive Attack, Portishead, and Zero Seven. After an opening of cascading pizzicato lines murmuring beneath an improvised cello solo, a polyrhythmic groove is established using only the open strings of the cello. The first violin enters with an angular but serene melody that winds its way through the hypnotic odd-metered grooves that slowly build into a climactic breakdown with a soaring improvised violin solo overhead. Boston has been my home for the last 10 years, and the first performance of this piece happened to be in New York City during the week of the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013. As such, this piece is dedicated to those who lost their lives and were injured in the horrific tragedy.

Beside the Point **Fung Chern Hwei**

Beside the Point begins sweetly and quickly evolves with tart, scale-like passages. The continual lines are an example of persistence: "This piece is my declaration of struggle against discrimination," says Fung, the composer. He cut his finger in September 2017 and saw the crimson gushing from his finger. He suddenly remembered that all humans bleed with the same color; this is a necessary reminder considering the politics of division and race-baiting that have ascended to power.

Duda **Gregor Huebner**

Gregor Huebner's *Duda* was originally composed for Sirius Quartet. It's based on the tango clave and inspired by the Argentinian tango nuevo. Each instrument changes between rhythmical sounds and melodic lines until the cello plays a kind of milonga bass line, which is used as a base for improvisations by the two violins. *Duda* is always a fun piece to play; its exciting energy gets to the audience right away.

Program Notes, continued

#STILL

Gregor Huebner

Huebner based #STILL on the song *Strange Fruit*, which was composed by Abel Meeropol and made more well known by Billie Holiday. We're well into the 21st century, yet our society is still plagued by the scourge of institutionalized racism, stoked by politicians so that they can get elected. The interplay between the melodic lines represents the interaction between societal voices with a capstone of lament, manifested by a melancholic coda.

Paths Become Lines

Jeremy Harman

I grew up splitting my time between cello/classical music and playing guitar in metal and hardcore bands, so *Paths Become Lines* is an attempt to bridge the gap. The title of the piece came into my head as I was finishing the music, and I decided not to question it. I think of a path as something that is not clearly defined and may or may not have a clear beginning and ending, and a line as something very well defined, straight, certain. Everyone struggles with the idea of purpose and meaning at some point in their lives, and this piece is a reflection of that struggle. It's also an excuse for me to play power chords on cello.

Knives Out

Radiohead, arr. Gregor Huebner

Knives Out is a song by Radiohead, the famous English rock band, from their fifth album, *Amnesiac*, from 2001. "I feel like the knives are out again," said Huebner, explaining why he was drawn to arrange the tune. That he culls music from other genres speaks to his ability to look to other areas for musical inspiration.

New World, Nov. 9, 2016

Gregor Huebner

New World, Nov. 9, 2016 is a composition based on themes of Dvořák's second movement of the *New World* Symphony spiced up with a note from Shostakovich. Huebner started composing this quartet the day after the presidential election in November 2016, and the influence of this historic moment is definitely reflected in his composition. It's quite a different musical view of the new world for an immigrant in Dvořák's time and an immigrant like Huebner today. References from Dvořák and Shostakovich are embedded in a musical journey throughout the rich and international cultural world of New York.

Eleanor Rigby

Lennon/McCartney, arr. Gregor Huebner

Eleanor Rigby is of course the famous John Lennon/Paul McCartney tune from the Beatles' iconic 1966 *Revolver* LP. It's arranged exquisitely by Huebner. The song's lyric refrain, "All the lonely people. Where do they all come from? All the lonely people. Where do they all belong?" fits with this album's theme of migration and with the time in which we're living. With a heavy groove, this arrangement pushes forward with propulsive energy.

About Sirius Quartet

Internationally acclaimed veterans of contemporary music, Sirius Quartet (Fung Chern Hwei, Jeremy Harman, Gregor Huebner, and Ron Lawrence) champions a forward-thinking, genre-defying approach to performing that makes labels like “new music” sound tame. *Time Out New York* calls them “four-string virtuosos boast[ing] an outlandishly diverse repertoire,” while the *New York City Jazz Record* describes them as “a stellar ensemble that transforms standard chamber music frameworks with exceptional playing, writing, and arranging.”

Having premiered works by significant living composers, Sirius continues its long-running commitment to musical innovation with bold, original works by its own members, pushing beyond the conventional vocabulary of string instruments by incorporating popular song forms, gripping improvisations, extended techniques, and undeniable contemporary grooves.

Since its inception at the original Knitting Factory in New York City, the quartet has played many important U.S. venues, including Lincoln Center’s Alice Tully Hall, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Miller Theatre at Columbia University, the Whitney Museum of American Art, Princeton University, Detroit Institute of the Arts, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), the Andy Warhol Museum (co-presented by Music on the Edge), Merkin Concert Hall, the American Composers Alliance Festival, the Chelsea Music Festival, Tribeca New Music, Issue Project Room, The Kitchen, and CBGB.

International appearances have included the Beijing Music Festival, the Cologne Music Triennale, the Stuttgart Jazz Fest, the Tianjin International Jazz Fest, Musique Actuelle in Canada, the Soundbridge Festival at University Putra Malaysia, Bern University of the Arts, and repeat visits to the Taichung Jazz Fest—Taiwan’s biggest jazz event.

Sirius has shared studio and stage with the likes of Tracy Silverman, Rufus Reid, Marin Alsop, Billy Martin, John Zorn, Jeremy Pelt, Frank Almond, Dianne Reeves, Uri Caine, John Patitucci, Theo Bleckmann, Ivo Perelman, Matthew Shipp, Elliott Sharp, Nick Didkovsky, Linda Oh, John Escreet, and many others.

Both a charged reaction to recent political events and a celebration of the perseverance of hope and spirit, *New World*, the latest album from Sirius, features nine new compositions and arrangements from members of the quartet. The politically-charged and topical album explores themes of immigration, discrimination, and being an agent of change. Sirius’ album *Paths Become Lines* (Autentico Music/Naxos 2016), exclusively features music composed by quartet members, while their previous album, the critically-acclaimed *Colors of the East* (Autentico Music/Naxos 2015), spotlights the music of Sirius violinist Huebner. The group can also be heard on Rufus Reid’s *Terrestrial Dance*; Billy Martin’s *Wandering*; Elliott Sharp’s *String Quartets 2002-2007*; Nick Didkovsky’s *Tube, Mouth, Bow, String*; Jin Hi Kim’s *Living Tones*; Jeremy Pelt’s *Close To My Heart*; Dianne Reeves’s *Christmas Time Is Here*; and William Thomas McKinley’s *Crazy Rags* with the Concordia Chamber Ensemble and conductor Marin Alsop; among many other commercial recordings.

Sirius has conducted workshops and master classes on improvisation, composition, and performance with students around the world. For the last several years they have partnered with the American Composers Orchestra to bring ACO’s Music Factory and Rhythm Factory educational programs to the public schools of New York City. Since 2016 Sirius has been presenting the Progressive Chamber Music Festival in New York City and added a Munich chapter of the festival in 2018. Curated by the quartet, the festival presents artists and ensembles that break down the walls and assumptions of what chamber music can be and how it should be presented.

Engagement Events

Thursday, October 3, 2019

WORKSHOP: MUSIC IMPROVISATION

String students in the School of Performing Arts participated in a music improvisation workshop, conducted by members of Sirius Quartet.

Special thanks to John Irrera, Alan Weinstein, and Molly Wilkens-Reed

Go Deeper

Numerous pieces in tonight's program explore the paradox of solitude and community-building that often emerges in periods of social tumult. Where did you hear loneliness and unity in the program's works? What's the significance of experiencing these pieces in the present political moment and in the company of fellow audience members?

In the Galleries

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT: YORGO ALEXOPOULOS

In Yorgo Alexopoulos' art, synchronized vistas, color fields, and shifting geometric shapes evolve, unfold, and intersect in continuous motion across high definition LCD screens mounted in steel and aluminum casings. In *Conjugated Gradients: Split* (2018), the 14-foot-long work on view in this exhibition, Alexopoulos takes video data—landscape footage of land, sea, and sky panoramas—then edits and recombines it with digitally-composed and animated sequences of geometric form and swaths of rich color. The results are sweeping visual narratives that speak to archetypal and transcendental themes—nature, its symbolism, and significance.

Conjugated Gradients: Split (2018) by Yorgo Alexopoulos is currently on view in the Sherwood P. Quillen '71 Reception Gallery located on the second floor.

DATAFORM

Yorgo Alexopoulos, Jim Campbell, and Daniel Canogar

Through Saturday, November 9, 2019

All galleries

In this suite of one-person exhibitions, three nationally and internationally acclaimed artists use technology-based media—electronics, video, computer generated algorithms, light emitting diodes (LEDs)—to transform real-time data into sculptural form. Drawing from a variety of sources ranging from the environment to pedestrian traffic, data in their works become three dimensional manifestations of light, color, and movement resulting in visible and especially arresting perceptual experiences.

GALLERY HOURS

Monday-Friday, 10 AM-5:30 PM

Saturday, 10 AM-4 PM

To arrange a group tour or class visit, please contact Meggin Hicklin, exhibitions program manager, at megh79@vt.edu.