

The Ph.D./D.M.A. Programs in Music

April 30, 2021 1:00 p.m.

Baisley Powell Elebash Recital Hall



Austin Lewellen, double bass
Eric Sedgwick, piano

The WRECKoning (2020)

Mason Byne
(b. 1997)

Sonata in A Minor, D. 821 (1824)

Allegro moderato

Adagio

Allegretto

Franz Schubert
(1797–1828)

INTERMISSION

Occam XVII (2017)*

Éliane Radigue
(b. 1932)

Suite No. 4 in E-flat Major, BWV 1010

Prélude

Allemande

Courante

Bourrée I & II

Gigue

J. S. Bach
(1685–1750)

* denotes US premiere performance

This recital is given in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the D.M.A. degree.

Notes on the Program

Mason Bynes

Mason Bynes is a composer and vocalist born and raised in Sugar Land, Texas, some forty-five minutes from where I live in Houston. She earned a bachelor's degree in composition from the University of North Texas, and is set to graduate with a master's in composition from the Boston Conservatory later this year. Her recent solo bass piece, *The WRECKoning*, which was commissioned in 2020 by Bass Players for Black Composers, is a richly idiomatic work, organized in a verse-chorus form.

Through that lens, the verse is a laid-back syncopation which appears first in *pizzicato*. All of its subsequent statements are in *arco*, and each of those builds its intensity with a faster rhythm in fifths in order to prepare the chorus. The chorus, often marked "militant," takes those fifths and expands upon them in mixed meters, with frequent alternations of *arco*, *pizzicato*, and *Bartók pizzicato*.

In the composer's own words, "I wrote this piece as an exploration of black expression through the intersections of jazz, blues, and rock idioms - including interjections of classical lyricism. Black is beautifully intersectional, and I wanted to present the different ways in which I express myself as a black composer and musician. This piece is written to encourage others to acknowledge their own reckonings - be it a reckoning of the body, the mind, the soul, the heart or the spirit. We must settle the reckonings within ourselves in order to avoid wrecking the paths of others. Black Lives Matter."

Franz Schubert

This sonata, written for an instrument which was forgotten nearly as quickly as it rose to popularity, carries a confounding delicacy. Much of the music is written in *piano*, even *pianissimo*, and thus poses a challenge to the balance between instruments, especially when the keyboard is the modern piano. Even on a fortepiano, this was always an inherent challenge to the arpeggione: with its six strings, it necessarily has a larger radius to the fretboard. As a result, there is a much narrower range of bow weight that the player can employ without accidentally striking multiple strings.

This necessary delicacy guides the principal themes of all three movements, which in many cases, work best at barely above a whisper. Each movement shares articulative and motivic qualities, for instance: the two-slurred, two-separate figure which appears in the secondary themes of both of the outer movements. Another overlap is in the long, slow descent to E-natural, the lowest pitch of the work, which appears just before both the recapitulation of the first movement and the attacca onset of the rondo finale.

Éliane Radigue

The development of French electronic musician Éliane Radigue's aesthetic pursuits traces, with one notable exception, a continuous and homogeneous arc that can be generalized as concerning a single sonic element. That element is, broadly speaking, feedback. Whether placing a microphone at the perfect distance from a connected speaker to build a sustained feedback, or finding the use of a bow which overpowers a string's fundamental, her music seeks out, and nurtures, the delicate space in between normative function and mechanical breakdown.

Radigue worked for many years under Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry at the Studio d'Essai de la Radiodiffusion Nationale in Paris, which was once the center of radio broadcasts for the French resistance movement during the second world war. This position gave her access to technologies

that would have otherwise been prohibitively expensive: tape processing and analog synthesizers, among others.

As time passed, and as the field shifted more and more into the realm of digital synthesis, Radigue found that those sounds which interested her most were not attainable in the same way, nor to the same degree, that they were in an analog format. Thus, and after years of insistence from close friends, she chose to continue her analog work by composing for acoustic instruments in the same way she had for her ARP 2500 synthesizer. The result has been the ever-growing *Occam Ocean*, a modular series of solo works, all developed from a shared image of water. In keeping with the principle of Occam's Razor, each work has a simply defined architecture. In her own words, "an interpretation is successful if after three minutes one completely forgets the fundamental and is taken up with something else, when one is captivated by the subtle and delicate interplay of partials, harmonics, and sub-harmonics, playing between themselves in their immaterial, aerial, elusive way."

These works are not written out. "It's a question of priorities, but it doesn't seem to me that oral transmission would be any less faithful than a score: in both cases there is the necessity of mental projection. Each favors the musical parameters proper to it. Naturally, there is always a margin of imprecision and I am interested precisely in what happens within this margin, this little space that remains open to interpretation. Moreover, oral transmission permits a more direct exchange of ideas. It encourages their contemplation and generates a fluctuating submersion, a ripening over time." Of course, each interpreter keeps their own notes, so as to remain true to the intent of the work. But, like the image from which each work is derived, those notes are personal, not to be shared except in the process of oral transmission.

If one wishes to play a preëxisting *Occam*, one must seek permission from Radigue and then work directly with the commissioner. In my case, I wrote her a letter expressing my interest, at which point she put me in touch with Dominic Lash, the bassist and cinema studies professor who developed *Occam XVII* with her. Dominic is British, and this all took place during the early months of the pandemic, so this collaboration took place virtually. After sitting with the work for a period of months, in keeping with Radigue's concept of "ripening over time," Lash deemed my interpretation ready. So far, oral transmission has been slow: the first member of this second generation of performers, those who learned the work from their original performer, is violinist Irvine Arditti: I am the second.

J. S. Bach

Prélude

The opening interval, and the first two eighth notes of each successive chord, set the tensions that ebb and flow through the continuously-unfolding first half of this movement. Whether a stabilizing two-octave leap, a driving, dominant seventh, or a diminished sonority which erases our sense of position; each of these dyads contains the sum of their entire arpeggiation. By comparison to this wash of sound, the second half is rather fragmented. Both the rhythms and the harmonies move at a quicker pace, sounding diminished runs which eventually bring us to a grand, if weakly-voiced, Neapolitan, before returning to the opening music in conclusion.

Allemande

Taking its cue from the *prélude*, this movement also anchors its harmonic material on defining eighth note pairs. By contrast to the continual arpeggiations of the previous movement, the *allemande* fills in the gaps with largely stepwise streams of sixteenth notes. The result is not, however, incessant: this is a very textured and conversational music.

Courante

This movement plays with three primary rhythms as a means of moving from place to place: eighths, triplets, sixteenths. As the movement progresses, each of these rhythms stakes a greater claim, expanding temporally by way of sequences of unexpected length. These gestures feel circular, though never overlong, and they soon return to familiar ground.

Bourrées

This pair of dances contains a notable rhythmic opposition: both feature a partnership of a long and two short notes, but they take differing metric alignments. The first Bourrée almost exclusively treats the short notes as pickups, and thereby stresses beats one and three. This characteristic remains consistent until the very end, when it sounds two measures of the reverse alignment: measures 42 and 43 place the shortest notes on the strongest beats, which looks ahead to the metric alignment of the second Bourrée. This brief, paired movement walks along patiently, though insistently, and only contains a few characteristic moments of short and long notes, all of which display a reverse alignment, with the short notes on the strong beats.

Gigue

The gigue recalls the wash of sound first introduced in the *prélude*, though with a higher level of energy. Near-continuous, triple-meter eighth notes, with a characteristic neighbor motion throughout, drive the work to its inevitable conclusion.

About the Artists

A frequent performer and collaborator in the New York City area, **Eric Sedgwick** is a vocal coach at the Manhattan School of Music and the faculty collaborative pianist for the Tanglewood Music Center. He has served as rehearsal pianist for the Boston Symphony Orchestra, under the batons of Michael Tilson Thomas, Bramwell Tovey, John Williams and Andris Nelsons. He is a regular pianist for events with the Metropolitan Opera Guild, and has worked for Carnegie Hall's Music Education Workshops with Joyce DiDonato. He is a graduate of both the Manhattan School of Music and Brown University.

What makes “classical” music? The cleanest delineation I can find is in the act of composition: the explicit writing-out of all the parts to be played. At its core, this act is a careful consideration of each element of one's creation, a winnowing-down of the unnecessary and inefficient in the pursuit of plain language. This quality instills within my technical practice a desire to transcend the idiosyncrasies inherent to the structure of the double bass. The closer I can get to a sound that is fundamentally clear, simple, and free of artifice, the more versatile a collaborator I become.

This viewpoint shapes my tastes as well. If our practice aims for clarity of expression, then we as interpreters must closely examine the sentiment we are tasked with conveying. Does it tangle with our lived experiences, or does it seek to ignore them, to provide an escape? The works of art I find most arresting are those which don't shy away from reality, no matter what complications it may impose. It is through such confrontation that one may discover a truth both simple and earnest.

My interests lie primarily in the creation of living music, through active collaboration with composers. I am most at home in small ensembles, though my technique has a firm grounding in the orchestral tradition of the Common Practice Era. I take these skills both as a basis of communal understanding and as a point of departure.

– Austin Lewellen

Spring 2021 Online Events

March

- 8 Ari Livne, piano
- 12 Han Chen, piano

April

- 7 Kirsten Jermé, cello
- 16 Audrey Chen, cello
- 23 Carrie Frey, viola
- 26 Federico Diaz, guitar
- 28 Antonio Valentin, piano
- 30 Austin Lewellen, double bass

May

- 3 Thapelo Masita, cello
- 5 Clare Monfredo, cello
- 12 Julia Danitz, violin
- 14 GC Composers
- 17 Isabel Fairbanks, cello
- 19 Jeremy Kienbaum, viola
- 21 Fifi Zhang, piano

All events begin at 1:00pm and will be live-streamed free of charge at this link:

<https://gc-cuny.zoom.us/j/95813229159>

For detailed concert information, please visit our website at: <http://gcmusic.commonsgc.cuny.edu>