

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

October 14th, 2022 6:00 p.m.

Baisley Powell Elebash Recital Hall



Charlotte Mundy, soprano

Breadmaking

Forrest Pierce
(b.1972)

Wholesome

Yu-Tung Cheng
(b.1994)

My voice is a broken chorus

full moon

waning crescent

first quarter

Christian Quiñones
(b.1996)

The Understanding of All Things

Kate Soper
(b.1981)

The Sea

Francisco del Pino
(b.1980)

This recital is given in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the D.M.A. degree.
Please switch off your cell phones and refrain from taking flash pictures.

Notes on the Program

During my CUNY admission process, the Graduate Center Music Department was described to me as a place for ‘musician-philosophers’. It seems natural, therefore, that the theme of my first recital at CUNY should explore the theme of musical philosophy.

While this program does not hew to traditional rules of classical vocal recital programming—only one language is featured (English), and only one period of time is represented (the contemporary period between 2015-2022)—in other ways it is much more diverse than a typical vocal recital. The composers are male and female, and are citizens of three different continents: North America, South America and Asia. The stylistic range of this recital is huge, beginning with florid classical melismas, moving through speech, staccato hocketing, growls, sustained pure tones, and finally landing in a minimalist, hypnotic sound world of chant and syllabically-set melodies.

The ‘instrumentation’ of voice and electronics is ideal for composers embarking on philosophical projects because of its exceptional powers of representation and narrative; it happens to be the only instrumentation featured on this recital. The meaning carried by the electronics varies vastly across this program, from the sine tones used in Pierce’s ‘Breadmaking’ and the unadorned multitracking in del Pino’s ‘The Sea’ to the use of symbolic field recordings and samples in Cheng’s ‘Wholesome’ and Soper’s ‘The Understanding of All Things’ to Cheng and Quiñones’ dramatic processing of the human voice. The role of the voice changes, too, at times telling a story or proclaiming commandments, at other times spinning out wordless melodies or unspeakable noises.

Breadmaking (2016) - Forrest Pierce

The program opens with a parable by the medieval mystic, Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī, set to music by Forrest Pierce in 2016. Composer Forrest Pierce was raised in Washington State, studied classics at the University of Puget Sound and composition in Minneapolis under Dominick Argento, and is now a professor of composition at the University of Kansas. His catalog includes over 50 works for voices, including operatic, choral, and solo vocal forces.

Pierce’s interweaving of florid passages with more recitative-like text setting, and his creation of a scenario that is conversational and approachable while also being divinely beautiful, is a musical illustration of the point Rumi is making with his story: just as a baker kneads bread, just as lovers entangle one another, the human and the divine are in an eternal, constantly shifting embrace.

Originally set for high voice and improvising drone, the drone part was adapted into a simple electronic accompaniment by the performer. The piece as a whole is by far the ‘clearest’ on this program; telling a straightforward story in a linear fashion, using distinctive but familiar harmonic progressions. The narrator even concludes by entreating us to meditate on steadfastness and clarity. But as we will see, when composers grapple with philosophical concepts, the results are rarely clear, at least on their sonic surface.

Wholesome (2022) - Yu-Tung Cheng

Yu-Tung Cheng’s setting of excerpts from ‘The Gospel of the Flying Spaghetti Monster’ is placed in direct dialogue with Pierce’s setting of Rumi. Born in Taiwan, composer Yu-Tung Cheng is a PhD student in Composition at Brandeis University. Her music has been performed in Taiwan, China

(Musicacoustica- Beijing), France (CNSMDL) and the United States (Tak Ensemble, Lydian String Quartet, Splinter Reeds, Ekmeles, and Yarn/Wire).

'Wholesome' depicts the unification of intellectual and physical knowing. Cheng emphasizes the technologically-based system of belief and knowledge-creation that we currently exist within, and delights in the bizarre and confusing juxtaposition of ideas that is a constant reality in twenty-first-century consciousness.

This seven minute piece moves through three main scenes. In the first scene, synthesized percussive sounds emerge and dissolve into glitchy clouds, transporting the audience from the concert hall into a Pastafarian universe, where a scribe records and intones the first chapter of the gospel. In the second scene, the soundscape morphs into a surreal landscape of reversed vocalizations, emphasizing physical, embodied knowledge (symbolized by textless vocalization) over intellect (symbolized by verbal language). We swing back to the first scene briefly to absorb more scriptural knowledge from the Flying Spaghetti Monster before swinging to the second scene to sing a slowed-down, transposed quote from the 'High School Musical' song 'Breaking Free,' sandwiched between samples from the Nirvana song 'Endless, Nameless.' The blending of these two songs, one hopeful and the other pessimistic, compliments the main theme of combining intellectual and physical knowledge. Perhaps all dualities are destined to be erased in the Pastafarian hereafter.

In the final scene of this piece, the vocalist is revealed to be a patient lying in a beeping, buzzing hospital room, experiencing morphine for the first time; the previous chapters of the work having been a drug-induced dream.

My voice is a broken chorus (2022) - Christian Quinones

After Cheng pokes fun at the unreliability of internal narrative and perception, Christian Quinones takes that philosophical issue up as the main theme of his composition. Composer Christian Quinones grew up in Puerto Rico and is currently a PhD student in composition at Princeton University. His music has been performed by the St. Louis Symphony, Dal Niente, Hub New Music, Loadbang, Dither Quartet, Bergamot Quartet, icarus Quartet, the American Composers Orchestra, and Cuban virtuoso René Izquierdo.

Rather than focusing on an external god or measure of truth, in this work, Christian Quinones focuses on the individual, internal understanding of existence and identity. This individual experience is not seamless or coherent. Rather, humans tend to compartmentalize parts of themselves as we move through different environments and situations. The fracturing of identity that happens as a result of this compartmentalization is illustrated in this piece by rapidly changing electronic and vocal sounds, which weave into almost delirious hockets, separated by a yearning, lyrical interlude.

The titles of the movements allude to the moon's constantly changing appearance from our perspective on earth. Moon phases are an example of how identity and truth can change according to wider environment.

The Understanding of All Things (2015) - Kate Soper

Fragmentation, hocketing, and the unreliability of personal narratives are all important features of Kate Soper's 'The Understanding of All Things.' Composer and vocalist Kate Soper is a Professor of

Music Smith College, A Pulitzer Prize finalist, Guggenheim fellow, Radcliffe alum and member of new music ensemble Wet Ink.

Like in many of Soper's vocal works, here speaking is intricately intertwined with more obviously musical content, and deft timing and clarity of expression is required of the vocalist. The piece sets Soper's adaptation of a story by Franz Kafka about a philosopher who would pounce on childrens' spinning tops, expecting that his true knowledge of this one small thing will provide him with true knowledge of all things.

Just as the text evolves from fragmented and barely intelligible sentence fragments to fully intelligible paragraphs, the sonic landscape of the piece also progresses from complex unpitched sounds to clear pitches. The riotous, sparkling electronic part at the opening of the piece seems to communicate the emotional register of playing children, while the non-vibrato sung notes, echoed by the electronics, could be interpreted as gleams of some kind of absolute truth. When Kafka's philosopher finally catches a top, he feels disgust rather than enlightenment, suggesting that it may be a mistake to assume that true knowledge can ever be separate from play.

The Sea (2022) - Francisco del Pino

In many of the works on this program, our human condition of confusion, uncertainty, yearning for knowledge is depicted as a source of emotional unrest. In contrast, the final and longest piece on the program, 'The Sea' by Francisco del Pino, accepts this uncertainty, reveals its inherent beauty, and invites the listener to meditate on it (not unlike the invitation extended by Rumi and Pierce in the first work of the program). Francisco del Pino is a composer and guitarist born and raised in Buenos Aires, and currently a PhD candidate at Princeton University. His debut album '[Decir](#),' a song cycle on texts by Argentinian poet Victoria Cocco described as "stunning" (Bandcamp Daily), was released on New Amsterdam Records in May 2021.

Setting a poem by Victoria Cocco translated from Spanish by Rebekah Smith, 'The Sea' emphasizes the ever-shifting, evaporating, and emerging nature of reality and perception. The six layers of voices, laying words over top of one another, obscure and generate new meaning from the lines of the original poem. The 20 minute long work can be divided formally into two halves. In the first half of the work, the live vocalist chants the text of the poem while five pre-recorded voices (all recorded by myself in my home studio) provide a shifting, cyclical backdrop of accelerating and decelerating tremolos and a phasing, repetitive refrain: "the sea shifts like thought / like thought when you think underwater." In the second half, having completed the recitation of the poem, the live voice joins the phasing refrain with a slightly altered melody, for a meditative and ever-slightly-changing period of contemplation.

About the Artist

Soprano **Charlotte Mundy** has been called a "daredevil with an unbreakable spine" (SF Classical Voice). Recent performances include George Benjamin's one-act opera *Into the Little Hill* at the 92nd Street Y, George Crumb's *Night of the Four Moons* with Emerald City Music, the world premiere recording of *Unisono II* by Agata Zubel with cellist Inbal Segev, and a set of music for voice and electronics presented by New York Festival of Song, described as "an oasis of radiant beauty" by the New York Times. She is a member of TAK ensemble and Ekmeles vocal ensemble, and a passionate educator, having worked with composition and students as a visiting artist at institutions including Columbia University, Harvard, Stanford, Cornell, NYU, University of Pennsylvania and Princeton. Learn more at charlottesmundy.com.

Texts and Translations

Breadmaking

Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī (1207-1273), translated by Coleman Barks

There was a feast. The King
was heartily in his cups.

He saw a learned scholar walking by.
“Bring him in and give him
Some of this fine wine.”

Servants rushed out and brought the man
to the king’s table, but he was not
receptive. “I had rather drink poison!
I never tasted wine and never will!
take it away from me!”

He kept on with these loud refusals,
disturbing the atmosphere of the feast.

This is how it sometimes is
at God’s table.

Someone who has heard about ecstatic love,
but never tasted it, disrupts the banquet.

If there were a secret passage
from his ear to his throat, everything
in him would change. Initiation would occur.

As it is, he’s all fire and no light,
all husk and no kernel.

The king gave orders. “Cupbearer,
do what you must!”

This is how your invisible guide acts,
the chess champion across from you
that always wins. He cuffed
the scholar’s head and said,

“Taste!”

And, “Again”

The cup was drained
and the intellectual started singing
and telling ridiculous jokes.

He joined the garden, snapping his fingers

and swaying. Soon, of course,
he had to pee.

He went out, and there, near the latrine,
was a beautiful woman, one of the king's harem.

His mouth hung open. He wanted her!
right then, he wanted her!
and she was not unwilling.

They fell to, on the ground.
you've seen a baker rolling dough.
he kneads it gently at first,
then more roughly.

He pounds it on the board.
it softly groans under his palms.
Now he spreads it out
and rolls it flat.

Then he bunches it,
and rolls it all the way out again,
thin. Now he adds water,
and mixes it well.

Now salt,
and a little more salt.

Now he shapes it delicately
to its final shape
and slides it into the oven,
which is already hot.

You remember breadmaking!
this is how your desire
tangles with a desired one.

And it's not just a metaphor
for a man and woman making love.

Warriors in battle do this too.
a great mutual embrace is always happening
between the eternal and what dies,
between essence and accident.

The sport has different rules
in every case, but it's basically
the same, and remember:

the way you make love is the way
God will be with you.

So these two were lost in their sexual trance.

They did not care anymore about feasting
or wine. Their eyes were closed like
perfectly matching calligraphy lines.

The king went looking for the scholar,
and when he saw them there coupled, commented

“Well, as it I said, ‘A good king
must serve his subjects from his own table!’”

There is joy, a winelike freedom
that dissolves the mind and restores
the spirit, and there is manly fortitude
like the king’s, a reasonableness
that accepts the bewildered lostness.

But meditate now on steadfastness
and clarity, and let those be the wings
that lift and soar through the celestial spheres.

Wholesome

Bobby Henderson

"Let there be light," he said, and there was light. And the FSM adjusted his willowy eyestalks and saw that the light was good; and the FSM divided the light from the darkness. He called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night or "Prime Time." So the evening and the morning were the first day.

You didn't use my existance as a means to oppress, subjugate, punish, eviscerate, and be mean to others... didn't you act like a sanctimonious, holier-than-thou ass when describing my noodly goodness... To my noodly goodness when the money could be better spent on ending poverty, curing diseases, living in peace...

The Understanding of All Things

Franz Kafka, translated/adapted by Kate Soper

Once there was a philosopher who hung about where children played. And whenever he saw a child with a spinning top, he would lie in wait. As soon as the top began to spin, the philosopher would pounce. Though the children shrieked and tried to shield their toy, he paid no attention. As long as he managed to catch the top while it still spun, he was happy, but only for that moment, and then he would fling it down and walk away.

For it was his belief that the understanding of any small thing, such as a spinning top, was sufficient for the understanding of all things. It seemed, therefore, inefficient to him to study complex problems. Once the smallest detail is truly known, are all things known, and so he focused only on the top. And whenever a top was readied to be spun, he hoped that this time he would succeed, and while he was breathlessly chasing after it, his hope would turn to certainty. But as soon as he held the dumb wooden thing in his hand, he felt disgusted, and all at once the howling of the children burst into his ears, battering him away, and he staggered like a top under a clumsy spin.

The Sea

Victoria Cocco, translated by Rebekah Smith

one life
sleeps
slowly
falling further behind the scene that arises
now that I'm writing
to write is to try to arrive on time for the rising
to write is to enter the scene
a scene seen as if from under water
to write is to be under water
the contour shares lines
with lines of sound waves
to write has a sound
the sound of a typewriter is different
than the scratching of a pen
on the weight of the paper
to write is to shear the mass of white sponge into layers
sponges on the bottom of the sea
the sea shifts like
 thought
like thoughts
 when you think under water
to read is to listen to
the sea
convince some waves
and then some other waves
are erased and
to write is to erase
the smooth script across the sand
 in the shape of the air for the clams
buried in the beach
 like white neon lights
and what matters is the movement
 that some
come
after
others
this is what seems to matter
the tides of years are inscribed
 on the rocks
in a geological archive
with a lateral dialect
 all the waves are there
to write, too, is to carve stones
 the weight of the moon at night
white pine on a pillow of glass
pushes the tide
presses the sponges into the sand
to read is to seize those sponges
to bring from the bottom of the sea
some bones too

to read the bones
still we couldn't
explain some things
about the moment when the sea
became a cemetery
that speaks from the bottom
in all things there is water
all the time the sea
that is always beginning
the waves transparent tiles
of a roof that fish file down
and the dust falls
inward like a sponge
and outward like foam
one life sleeps
and the experience of pain
is not from that life
that sleeps
because that life doesn't yet have a name for itself
for some it's
a beat
suspended
in limbo
it is and it isn't in the backlit celluloid images
it is not in the trees rising from the bottom
that the phone shot
when we wanted to send that record
to someone who could interpret it
life was there
a way of seeing
images in celluloid
and
life was going on into
the future if we could learn
how to see those images or if
someone could interpret those
backlit images
with
more
or
fewer
trees
if you start to think
the likeness between a brain and a tree
or between a brain and the bottom of the sea
but it's not there in the images
nor in the results of the analysis on Mondays
not even in the long faces of the doctors
nor in the transparent compassion of the bartenders
no it's not in the others
who are in the waiting room awaiting a nameless hope
waiting for nothing
nothing is what happens in a brain

nothing is an electrical storm
when the equation isn't written
to write is not to write a nameless hope
to write, in the end, is to wait
to see a likeness
between a brain and the top of a tree
the movement of a tree
every movement
if one wants
has a name
the name is a possibility
and a form of interpreting
the form in which that image
returns to life
a question could be posed
a question whose response could be
a name
or the name of a question
to write
is a name
and a question
for example Woody
made of wood
his name has a story:
it didn't exist on
the list his name
existed outside
of the law
so was it a name?
and they decided to write Forest
Forest appears on the document
that also means or could mean
made of wood
Forest is the name of an ensemble made of wood
Woody's a name made of wood
names like stones the buildings
like stones the words
are black stones and the signature
appears like a cross
the bridges are of stone
and are supported
by iron crosses
architecture carves a name on the city
Oakland
land of oak
made of wood
someone with a name
has an experience of pain
sometimes it doesn't have a name it
is and it isn't
it isn't a
it isn't a premonition sometimes it
is a diagram in advance of

the day over the day
an x-ray
an ash
a fossil
a luminous horseshoe over the sky
with holes made by nails
in black
we don't have the experience of dying
dying
happens to someone else
and the name of dying is
the sound of cutting dry gelatin
the vapor from dry ice, in shards
at the bottom of a bag
when a body ceases feeling pain
it's because it's going to die
the experience of pain is left
for the others
translucent monuments
in the vigil of the living
can't be read
write and cross out
from the bottom of the morphine pain isn't felt
the pain is a gelatinous layer that separates us
from that body
that sleeps
does it hear?
the bottom of morphine is like the bottom of the sea
if the sea is transparent gelatin
or a glass before being formed
the sea is in the glass and they say
that it is also
in the composition of blood
the blood circulates
slowly
at the bottom of the body
yesterday he talked about war
about if this is like war
one life sleeps until no more
another life sleeps until no more
and then there are names
that keep within the name of another
that sleeps
slowly
and knows and doesn't know
that it is within its opposite
the experience of pain makes us clumsy, a little,
to those who are near
cause there is also an experience but it isn't
this that I'm writing and it isn't this
It's read
yesterday Matías talked about war
I answered that it's not war but instead

the time of techno
what happens
what will happen
exists
not in a way that's
evolutionary
evolving
it's not clear
where it comes from
and we pile ourselves up
it's a way of doing something
that doesn't make sense
with something else that doesn't make
sense
sense
we pile ourselves up in rooms
where the walls are shorter
than the floor
and we remain
we pile ourselves onto patios
like yesterday at Pablo's
and we make a decision
that is firm and considers oppositions
we pile on options
we pile ourselves up
in open places
in summer
around Christmas
a commission
a proposal
but above all a word
unviable
and others talk about something
that must be negotiated
and about the date and about Christmas
although it's not because of Christianity
it's difficult too they say
to put your body on the line
without water
without light
others talk about February
and you can hear the word reopening
and the first
of February
because to leave is to abandon
but above all it is to quit piling ourselves up
the summer can and cannot
be good for this thing with the pile
what lights up the edge that lights up
the ray
of what will come
does the ray write before
what comes after?

the pause between the flash of lightning and the thunder clap
is the time we have for reading
“the thunder of the present”
the lightning lights up the stroke
that is written on the stone with the frayed contour of some cans
and the thunder is the tongue
that speaks from behind the water in all things the water all the time the sea
breaks with the thunder and one sound hits the other
and before dissolving into the sound but without being inscribed as law
an airplane passes
through the sky and is
the skeleton
of a fish