

Music in Midtown

**THE
GRADUATE
CENTER**
CITY UNIVERSITY
OF NEW YORK

Elebash Recital Hall
The Graduate Center
365 Fifth Avenue (at 34th Street), NYC
Thursdays 1:00–2:00 PM



Thursday, December 1, 2022
1:00 p.m.

CHAMBER MUSIC ON FIFTH II

PROGRAM

Suite Opus 157b for Clarinet, Violin and Piano (1936)

Overture

Divertissement

Jeu

Introduction et Final

Darius Milhaud
(1892–1974)

Emmalie Tello, clarinet
Grace Coolidge, violin
Lora Al-Ahmad, piano

From the Grammar of Dreams (1988)

Text by Sylvia Plath (1932–63)

I. —

II. —

III. —

IV. —

V. —

Kaija Saariaho
(b. 1952)

Amber Evans, soprano
Sophie Delphis, mezzo-soprano

Boris Kerner for Cello and Flowerpots

Caroline Shaw
(b. 1982)

Isabel Fairbanks, cello
Sean Statser, percussion

String Quartet in D Minor, Opus 76, No. 2

Franz Joseph Haydn
(1732–1809)

Allegro

Andante o più tosto allegretto

Menuetto. Allegro ma non-tropo

Vivace assai

Abigail Hong, violin
Sophia Stoyanovich, violin
Martine Thomas, viola
Ethan Brown, cello

Music in Midtown is a series of lunchtime concerts spotlighting the highly regarded musical performance program at the CUNY Graduate Center. Presented in the warm, intimate, acoustically rich Elebash Recital Hall, these performances feature the music program's renowned faculty, alumni, outstanding performers selected from students in the DMA program and noted guest artists. Some concerts are followed by a master class, which the public is invited to observe. Norman Carey is Director and Jacqueline Martelle is Assistant Director.

About the Program

Darius Milhaud was a prolific French composer, conductor, and teacher. As a member of *Les Six*, a group of six composers formed in the 1920's, Milhaud contributed many unique compositions to the world of music, often inspired by jazz, Brazilian music, and other musical influences. As a modernist composer, the use of polytonality (simultaneous use of different keys, for example, C major and D major), is an important characteristic of his music, similarly to the music of Stravinsky.

The Suite for Clarinet, Violin, and Piano is mostly witty and light-hearted in character, deriving from his incidental music for Jean Anouilh's play *Le Voyageur* (Traveler without Luggage). The first movement, *Overture*, immediately establishes a piquant Latin feel, possibly an influence from his time spent in Brazil. The strong, underlying syncopation is punctuated by aggressive articulations such as rolled chords in the piano and strident bowings on the violin.

The second movement, *Divertissement*, utilizes intricate and playful imitative textures, as well as Milhaud's signature polytonal techniques. The violin and clarinet begin with an imitative duet largely based on a single rising and falling motif; after their initial duet, they alternate in gentle duets with the piano.

In the spirit of its title, *Jeu* (French for play), the third movement is a boisterous folk dance based on a hearty and relentless rhythm. Featuring the clarinet and violin, the movement is an exercise in caricature; on the one hand, the violin happily juxtaposes with gritty foreground fiddling (complete with squealing attacks and intonational inflections) against the clarinet's secondary line; on the other, one hears folksy strumming behind the clarinet's lead melody.

The fourth movement, *Introduction et final*, begins with a somber introductory passage held in check by the intermittent tolling of a repeated octave in the lowest register of the piano. However, the witty and jazzy character quickly comes back with a melody based on the tune “For He’s a Jolly Good Fellow” and brings the suite to a close.

Program note by Lora Al-Ahmad

What are the implications of setting Sylvia Plath? What does it mean for a female composer to set Plath for two unaccompanied treble voices? The score for **Kaija Saariaho**’s *From the Grammar of Dreams* (1988) calls for a soprano and mezzo-soprano; the singers don’t necessarily have to be women, but these voice types are statistically likely to belong to performers assigned female at birth. Moreover, they will realistically be heard as female by an audience. All told, this can be read as a particularly “female” work, in a musical realm in which an all-male or predominantly male composer-poet-performer combinations are traditionally far more common. And so, what does it mean to set a writer whose legacy is often elided and diminished to the “sad lady poetry” – or “sad ladies’ poetry” – of a woman who famously died by suicide, whose depression and death loom so heavily over her work both in its actual content and in the public imagination? Saariaho sets two different texts: “Paralytic,” a poem not included in the original manuscript of *Ariel* but added by Plath’s husband Ted Hughes when the collection was published after her death in 1965, and three short excerpts from her novel *The Bell Jar* (1963), also published posthumously. Both larger works from which these texts are taken and the extracts themselves are rife with death, mental illness, and suicidal ideation, in ways that cannot be untangled from femininity.

To some extent, it’s possible to read Saariaho’s setting as falling into a certain trap of feminine hysteria, highlighting the “woman on the verge” specter in the texts themselves and in the closely imbricated meta-textual narrative of Plath’s life. In the first two pieces, the soprano and mezzo sing two different texts simultaneously, from each work respectively. Individual syllables are blown up and scrutinized to the point of illegibility. A *vocalise* of [a], [e] and [i] occurs for the entire first page of the mezzo-soprano’s music in the first piece, ultimately turning into either the first sounds of “a bad dream” or “I remembered” – or perhaps both. The soprano text, meanwhile, is also taken apart, albeit on a shorter scale, and mainly through its consonants: “it happens” over the course of mm. 2-4, for instance, broken down to extended [t→ð] and [s], and stammering [h].

The ranges throughout the work are extensive and incorporate several vocal techniques beyond a lot of typical classical singing: unpitched speech and quasi-*Sprechstimme*, breath sounds, glissandi, specific phoneme notation, as well as a great deal of interplay between straight tone, vibrato, tremolo, trills and notated turns, grace notes or appoggiaturas. The resulting composition is thorny, dramatic, complicated. But it’s also, ultimately, more clear-headed than hysterical. This effect largely relies on the two performers allowing their parts to slot into one another meticulously but also organically, which becomes more apparent as the movements go on. The third piece serves as a keystone of the work. For the first time, the two singers perform the same text in a slow, melismatic polyphony whose setting is far simpler and more overtly beautiful (albeit still full of dissonances) than the aurally busy first two movements. The convoluted layering of different texts and their component breakdowns seem to mirror the mental process of creation and composition within one person. The repetitions, fragmentations, sound dissections and concurrent texts aren’t hysterical or obsessive but rather generative. Different streams occur at once ultimately to coalesce to a common, streamlined entity.

Classical musical notation – and its extensions – does some disservice to the work and makes its soundscape more illegible. The fourth and fifth pieces return to a heightened state that’s again, at first glance of the score, potentially cacophonous and chaotic. The fourth song plays on hocketing rhythms in quick succession between the two singers, at first as breath sounds and then around a limited set of repeating pitches. The effect from each individual voice is a potentially alarming series of gasps and fragments, but taken as an ensemble, it turns into the ebb and flow of breathing and the “old brag of my heart” referenced in the text that beats out an obstinate “I am, I am, I am.” The fifth, and final, song, serves as a sort of coda. It too, looks like an obtuse and overwhelming mass of high and dissonant trills, tremolos, and chromatic melismas on the page, but it’s ultimately a series of interlacing overtones through an extensive *vocalise* for both singers on the vocalic components of the diphthong [a:i]. It’s only at the end of the piece that [a] turns into the “I.” The lines converge, in an echo of the third movement’s incremental and responding polyphony, to a shared and intelligible sentence: “I smile.”

The two achingly simple statements that close out the last two movements provide a key to the work, and a reading of Sylvia Plath’s work. It’s not a piece about disintegration but about creation, in all its rough edges and jagged starts. It’s not about dying but about living.

Program note by Sophie Delphis

Boris Kerner was born in Moscow, emigrated to Stuttgart, and dedicated his life to the study of traffic. He is recognized internationally for his Three Phase Traffic Theory, which centered on traffic flow, traffic breakdown, and resulting congestion. Pulitzer Prize winner **Caroline Shaw** has become one of the most recognized and influential composers of the 21st century. Her music spans genres can be complex or unabashedly simple and is always exploring new and unique sounds. This piece brings their two disparate worlds together.

Shaw describes *Boris Kerner* as a “fun, instinctive, intuitive little dive into this idea of a musical line as kind of a traffic pattern, something that gets stuck and then releases.” It begins with a continuo line in the cello that one might more readily expect to encounter in Baroque repertoire - gracefully traveling note to note, mindful in its resolutions, and careful not to disturb the musical flow. Shaw describes this continuo line as something that “leans and tilts, sensitive to gravity and the magnetism of certain tendency tones, before getting stuck in a repeated pattern. The flowerpots enter quietly, distantly, in noticeable contrast, creating, what Shaw calls, an “otherworldly counterpoint.” There are moments the flowerpots support the cello and others in which they are in complete opposition. Either way, the two instruments navigate this musical highway together with their destination often unclear, though ultimately returning to exactly where they began. *Boris Kerner* continues to expand upon Shaw’s fascination with the T.S. Eliot stanza, “The detail of the pattern is movement.”

Program note by Sean Statser

Franz Joseph Haydn’s String Quartet Opus 76, No. 2 in D minor explores the darkest sonority of Opus 76, the final complete set of quartets published in Haydn’s lifetime. Nicknamed the “Quinten” for its characteristic motif of two sets of descending fifths in the opening *Allegro* movement, Haydn often interrupts the rhythmic flow of the music with a mysterious syncopated rhythm played in unison, purposely throwing a sense of steady tempo and rhythm into humorous question. The second movement, titled *Andante o più tosto allegretto*, features a theme and variation led by a prodigious first violin part in an ever so slight tongue-and-cheek with accents and suspended moments in time playing off one another. The third movement, *Menuetto. Allegro ma non troppo*,

famously nicknamed the “Witches’ Minuet,” is Haydn’s tribute to Mozart's D minor quartet with severity overtaking the traditional aspects of formality, a crazed canon divided between upper and lower voices of strings seeming to chase one another in circles. Only the light-hearted trio section seems to offer any sense of reprieve from the hypnotic swirl of this cannon. The quartet concludes with a final movement marked *Vivace assai*, sending us into a rollicking Gypsy-inflected movement with slides and syncopations abound. Eventually however, Haydn takes us to D major with a capricious laugh that seems to say goodbye to the darker sentiments that open the quartet.

Program note by Sophia Stoyanovich

About the Artists

Lora Al-Ahmad is a pianist and a composer from Sofia, Bulgaria. She graduated from Mannes College with honors and holds a BM degree in Piano Performance, a Double Major Master’s degree in Piano Performance and Composition, and a Professional Studies Diploma degree in Composition. She studied piano with Pavlina Dokovska and Vladimir Valjarevic and composition with Lowell Liebermann. In May 2019, the last concert of the series “Musical Treasures from Bulgaria,” was dedicated to Lora as a composer and pianist. The performance took place at Carnegie’s Weill Recital Hall. In May 2020, her “Two Skazkas”, published by Theodore Presser Company, won the First Prize in the solo flute category of the 2020 Newly Published Music Competition by the National Flute Association in the United States. Festival appearances include The Conservatoire Américain de Fontainebleau in France, Festetics Palace, Keszthely Zala in Hungary, The Bowdoin International Music Festival in Maine, and The Mannes Sounds Festival in New York City. As a committed soloist and chamber musician, Lora has performed in prestigious venues in New York such as Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie, The Bohemian National Hall at the Czech Center, Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, The Di-Menna Center, The German House at the United Nations Plaza and others. Her music has been performed by internationally distinguished musicians such as Stefan Ragnar Hoskuldsson, the principal flute of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Billy Hunter, principal trumpet of the Metropolitan Opera in New York, Wolfram Koessel, cellist of the American String Quartet and many others. Lora is an active advocate for new music, often exclusively focusing on works by women composers. In November 2021, Lora was the Guest Composer and Lecturer at SIUE (Southern Illinois University Edwardsville), where the premiere of her piano trio “Irminden” took place. The commissioned work was just featured in a new CD release (2022), titled “One hundred years of Bulgarian Piano Trios,” with performance by Miroslav Hristov, violin, Marta Simitdchieva, cello, and Ilia Radoslavov, piano. Lora has given numerous radio and TV interviews in Bulgaria, including her appearances at the Bulgarian National Radio “BNR,” “Darik” Radio and “En-face” on TV1 Bulgaria. She is also an executive board member of the well-established organization “BCENY.” Lora is currently pursuing doctoral studies in piano performance at the CUNY Graduate Center and is faculty member in the piano department at Bard College Preparatory Division. Her works are published and printed on demand by Theodore Presser Company.

Guest artist, violinist **Grace Coolidge**, is a freelancer, teacher, and writer active in Connecticut, where she currently resides, and in New York, where she attended the Mannes School of Music and earned a Bachelor of Music with distinction. She has played with the Hartford Symphony Orchestra, Eastern Connecticut Symphony, and with the Martha Graham Dance Company for their hundredth anniversary season, working with conductors including Jo-Ann Falletta, Carolyn Kuan, and Joseph Colaneri. An avid chamber musician as well, Grace has

performed at Music Mountain's Gordon Hall, the Taconic Chamber Music Festival, and the New York Public Library, among others. She has worked with coaches such as Colin Carr, Todd and Daniel Phillips, Mischa Amory, Rebecca Fischer, and Kikuei Ikeda. She has also premiered new works at the Consulate General of Bulgaria in New York and in Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall with Trio ARAM, of which she is a founding member. Grace has an interest in many musical genres, and in addition to both contemporary and traditional classical music, has performed on jazz concerts and recorded with the indie band The Living Strange for their single "Ur So Beautiful." She discovered her love of teaching while serving as the teaching assistant to Sally Thomas at the Meadowmount School of Music. There, she learned to use her knowledge of both music and fiction writing to engage her students and help them approach music with a fresh perspective. In keeping with this teaching philosophy, she has contributed to Art Beyond the Ink's "Hearing and Seeing Musical Stories," which helps children engage with music by means of narrative.

Franco-American mezzo-soprano **Sophie Delphis** has performed for Beth Morrison Projects, Opera Parallèle, National Sawdust, SongFest as a Stern Fellow, American Opera Projects, the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra, the Tianjin Symphony Orchestra, UMS (University Musical Society), Bronx Opera, Opera on the James, Bare Opera, City Lyric Opera and the iSING Festival, among others. Her operatic roles include: Félicie/Adélaïde (*La Belle et la Bête*, Glass), Cherubino (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Giunone (*La Calisto*), Carmen and Mercédès (*Carmen*), Flora (*La Traviata*), Rosina (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*), Cenerentola and Tisbe (*La Cenerentola*), Concepción (*L'heure espagnole*), Hansel, (*Hansel and Gretel*) and Elle (*La voix humaine*). An avid recitalist, Sophie regularly produces recital programs and fundraiser concerts for musical and cultural organizations in the United States and China. Recent and upcoming works include Ravel's *Chansons madécasses* and *Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*, Bolcom's *Cabaret Songs*, Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* and *Das Buch der Hängenden Gärten* and Messiaen's *Harawi*. Along with classical repertoire, she enjoys collaborating with composers, improvisers, and theater artists on new works. Sophie can be heard as the Mother/Witch in the original English cast recording of Matti Kovler's *Ami and Tami* and as a soloist on the Grammy Award-nominated Naxos recording of Milhaud's *Oresteia* trilogy, produced by UMS in association with the University of Michigan's School of Music, Theatre & Dance. In addition to performing, Sophie is passionate about writing, linguistics, and non-musical art forms. She teaches French language and poetics, as well as interpretation of *mélodies* repertoire. She has served as the house translator for the Paris-based classical and jazz label NoMadMusic. She currently resides in New York City, where she is pursuing a doctoral degree in voice performance at the Graduate Center CUNY as a student of Amy Burton.

Amber Evans is an Australian vocalist, conductor and composer currently based in the US. She regularly performs as an early music soloist, chamber ensemble vocalist, and contemporary opera/vocal specialist, with consistent touring engagements in Australia, the US and the UK. Winner of the inaugural US Dwight and Ursula Mamlok Advancement Award for the interpretation of contemporary music, she is committed to the vital artistic collaboration with composers to thoughtfully contribute to the musical canon of the present day. An exponent of the "extra-normal" voice, Amber has premiered over seventy specialized solo vocal chamber works, engaging audiences with ever-changing insights into the paramount role of the voice in the evolution of art-making. She is also a featured soloist and chorusmaster on the CD of Poul Ruders' new opera *The Thirteenth Child* under the Bridge Records label, which was released in conjunction with the Santa Fe Opera premiere in the summer of 2019. In 2022 for Opera Queensland (OQ), Amber joined their Young Artist Program. Most recently, she sang as a featured soloist in the QPAC Concert Hall season of OQ's *The Sopranos* with Queensland

Symphony Orchestra, and toured regionally throughout Queensland with the production in May. During her time back in Brisbane, Amber became the inaugural lecturer for aural studies at the Young Conservatorium, stepped in as assistant conductor for The Australian Voices, established the vocal sextet Formant, and directed the music for All Saints Anglican Church. Upon her return to the US, Amber has begun her doctoral studies at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. She has returned to many of her musical endeavors prior to the pandemic, including work with medieval ensemble Concordian Dawn, concerts and services with the Choir of St. Luke in the Fields, and a permanent extra member of the Ekmeles new music vocal sextet.

www.amberevansmusic.com

Cellist and educator, **Isabel Fairbanks** has performed as a chamber and orchestral musician throughout the United States, Canada, and Asia. Based in New York City, her most recent appearances have been at the 92nd Street Y, Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, Merkin Hall, Boston's Jordan Hall, Le Poisson Rouge, as well as at the United Nations Friendship Summit. Festival appearances include the Banff Centre Music Festival, Roundtop Music Festival, Tanglewood, Bowdoin International Music Festival, and the Orpheus Institute. Ms. Fairbanks is currently a doctoral student studying with Marcy Rosen at the CUNY Graduate Center and other primary teachers have included David Geber, David Soyer, George Neikrug, Mary Lou Rylands, and Andres Diaz. Ms. Fairbanks has performed as a chamber and orchestral musician with many New York and Boston-based ensembles, including the Circe Ensemble, Philharmonic Orchestra of the Americas, the Salome Chamber Orchestra, Distinguished Concert Artists Orchestra, the Atlantic Symphony Orchestra, the Tertulia Chamber Music Series, and with members of the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. She has been a finalist and prizewinner at the Montpelier Arts Center Competition as part of the Circe Ensemble, the New England Chamber Music Competition, and the Fischhoff Chamber Music Competition. A passionate educator, Ms. Fairbanks teaches at the 92nd Street Y, the Point Counterpoint Chamber Music Camp, and the Artists' Program Chamber Music Festival. Ms. Fairbanks received her B.M. from Boston University as a student of David Soyer and George Neikrug, and her M.M. from the Manhattan School of Music as a student of David Geber. She plays an Italian cello made in 1910 by Carlo Carletti.

Born in Cherry Hill, NJ, violinist **Abigail Hong** is in her first year of doctoral studies at the CUNY Grad Center with Mark Steinberg. She graduated with her master's degree at The Juilliard School and was awarded the Benzaquen Career Grant and graduated as the Presser Foundation Scholar of her undergraduate class at The New England Conservatory. A dedicated chamber musician, Abigail won top prizes at the Fischhoff and Plowman Chamber Music Competitions and studied with members of the Cleveland, Emerson, Brentano, and Guarneri Quartets. As an educator, Abigail taught at City College Academy of the Arts, Harvard University Quad Program, the Music Advancement Program at Juilliard, and Juilliard Pre-College. Abigail's recent performances include world premieres by Thomas Ades, Tyshawn Sorey, and Rebecca Saunders as Concertmaster of the Verbier, Lucerne, and Spoleto Festival Orchestras. Most of Abigail's summer season is spent in Europe where she has performed in the Berlin Philharmonie, Musikverein, Concertgebouw, Konzerthaus Berlin, KKL Luzern, Rudolfinum, Kölner Philharmonie, and many others. Abigail has performed at numerous festivals including Norfolk, Yellow Barn, Taos, Music@Menlo, and Pablo Casals, and will perform this 2022–23 season with the San Francisco Opera and Ballet Orchestras, Sarasota Opera Orchestra, and Baltimore Symphony. Her earliest teachers include Amy J. Lee and Soovin Kim, and most recent studies are with Catherine Cho. Abigail plays a Mario Miralles violin and Benoit Rolland bow on generous loan through the Maestro Foundation.

Performer, composer, and educator **Sean Statser** has been called “Lithe, muscular, and mesmerizing” by the New York Times. As an advocate for new music, Mr. Statser actively collaborates with several New York City artists and ensembles including: the Grammy-nominated Metropolis Ensemble, Argento New Music, Ensemble LPR, and Iktus Percussion. He has premiered over 200 works to date by composers Jason Treuting, Timothy Andres, Caleb Burhans, Kati Agocs, Vivian Fung, Angelica Negron, John Luther Adams, Elliot Carter, and more. He regularly performs with the American Symphony Orchestra, American Composers Orchestra, and New York Pops as a section percussionist, and appeared at several venues around New York City including: Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, Merkin Concert Hall, Symphony Space, Fisher Center at Bard College, Galapagos Art Space, (Le) Poisson Rouge, and Roulette. Sean has also appeared at the Alba Music Festival, In Tune Music Festival, Ecstatic Festival, three appearances at the Percussive Arts Society International Convention, and Lincoln Center’s Out of Doors Festival, under the baton of Maestro Tan Dun. Sean has recorded with a variety of artists, such as: jazz pianist Kenny Werner (No Beginning, No End - Winner of the 2010 Guggenheim Award), Argento New Music, Metropolis Ensemble, Harmonie Ensemble New York, Harold Farberman, and Cadillac Moon Ensemble. He has appeared on Naxos, Nonesuch, Orange Mountain Music, Innova Records, Half Note Records, Albany Records and New Dynamic Records. He received his MM in Instrumental Performance from NYU and holds a BA in Music Performance from Fort Lewis College, where he graduated *Summa Cum Laude*. Upon graduating in 2010, Sean joined the Percussion Studies faculty at New York University. He is currently pursuing his DMA at the CUNY Graduate Center, studying percussion with Jonathan Haas and chamber music with Alan Feinberg.

Guest artist, **Emmalie Tello** is a clarinetist and teaching artist committed to encouraging imaginative and conversational experiences within and around music. An ardent fan of contemporary music, she has performed with ensembles including the International Contemporary Ensemble, Talea Ensemble, Wet Ink Ensemble, among others. Forthcoming recordings include Bob Becker’s “Clearer Things May Not Be Seen” with ETHEL. As a soloist, Emmalie was featured in Brian Ferneyhough’s “La Chute d'Icare” with the Mannes American Composers Ensemble, under David Fulmer. She has premiered chamber music at Carnegie Hall, National Sawdust for the MATA festival, and the Banff Centre, among others. She has also worked as a guest artist to perform student composers’ pieces from Wildflower Composers, Luna Composition Lab, and Walden Creative Musician’s Retreat. Emmalie is co-founder/co-director of Art Beyond the Ink (ABI), an organization which supports young audiences and early-career artists through musical storytelling and interdisciplinary collaboration, along with Rebecca Schifilliti. The award-winning business is a part of both in- and after-school programs across New York City and is an active partner to the New York Public Library. Along with educational programs, Emmalie writes and produces short films for ABI and has had work screened at The Backyard at Hudson Yards and international film festivals. Emmalie is co-author of “Hearing and Seeing Musical Stories,” a children’s workbook that teaches music through short stories, artistic prompts, and kinesthetic exercises. Emmalie’s other teaching experience spans various work with Manhattan School of Music’s Community Partnerships program, MUSES program, the Youth Orchestra of St. Luke’s, Sphinx Organization, Gesellschaftshaus Magdeburg in Germany, and Hunter College Symphony. As an arts administrator, she has worked at Concert Artists Guild, American Ballet Theatre, and AlpenKammerMusik Chamber Festival, among others. Emmalie obtained degrees in Entrepreneurship and Clarinet from The New School, and in Contemporary Clarinet from the Manhattan School of Music.