

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

December 16, 2022 6:00 p.m.

*Baisley Powell Elebash Recital Hall*



John Popham, cello  
with Pala Garcia, violin

String Study No. 3 for cello and video (2011)

Simon Steen-Andersen  
(b. 1976)

*Ricercar* for Baroque cello (2015)

Linda Catlin Smith  
(b. 1957)

In time of passive voice (2019)

James Diaz  
(b. 1990)

## INTERMISSION

*marionette* for string instrument,  
electro-mechanical devices, and lights (2018)

Johan Svensson  
(b. 1982)

shapes in collective space (2021)

inti figgis-vizueta  
(b. 1993)

Pala Garcia, violin; John Popham, Baroque cello

*Pression* (1969)

Helmut Lachenmann  
(b. 1935)

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

Tonight's program draws repertoire and thematic inspiration from my dissertation research on the foregrounding of the performer's body, physical gestures, and human/instrument interactions in contemporary cello works, a project that has satisfied the nerdiest of my musical impulses over the past two years. I've included works from the project, as well as compositions that engage with frameworks critical to my research: the agency of musical instruments, the multiplicity and instability of our instrumental and physical bodies, and the connection between musical practice and our conception of the body.

As I was beginning this research, the project was interrupted by matters of my own corporeality. An injury to my right shoulder kept my music-making body virtually silent for 18 months – an experience that, while deeply unsettling at times, was ultimately artistically and pedagogically enlightening. Through my injury, the need to both attend to my physical health and center the body as a source of creative inspiration became increasingly important in my performance and teaching. I'm grateful to the many people who offered support during that difficult time, especially my spouse Pala Garcia, my dear friends Leia Wonhee Roh and David Tuttle, and the team of surgeons, physical therapists, and body work practitioners who helped me get back to playing. I'd like to express my thanks to them here, and to you for joining me this evening.

**Simon Steen-Andersen** mines the choreographic potential of string playing in his *Studies for String Instruments*, a series of movement works for one or more string players. Steen-Andersen uses string choreography — gestures of the left and right arms — as his primary compositional language, replacing more traditional sonically-based parameters of organization. Despite his focus on movement, these studies are gesturally minimalist. Establishing strict limitations on the player's gestures, each study “immerses itself in a single idea,” extracting maximum creative potential from a limited set of sonic, visual, and kinesthetic materials. Distilling the compositional language down to this reduced gestural palette, Steen-Andersen highlights polarities within standard string performance (up/down, right/left, loud/soft). The works' form and drama develop from Steen-Andersen's treatment of these various dichotomies as the oppositional elements are organized in unstable permutations and shifting degrees of synchronization, collaboration, and cooperation.

In *Study for String Instrument No. 3*, Steen-Andersen illuminates the cellist's kinesphere by projecting a pre-recorded second cello part on top of the live performer. The projection allows for a mitosis of presence, as two pairs of cellists and cellos emerge from a single performer. Though both live and projected cellists start in visual and sonic synchronicity, the work's multiplicity is soon revealed as the two performers begin moving at different rates, chart different paths of motion, and make use of different instrumental and bodily orientations. Through reorientations of the instrument and the decontextualization and abstraction of sound-making gestures, Steen-Andersen studies the relationship of horizontal and vertical motion to traditional aspects of cellistic sound production. As multiple live and projected hands, arms, bows and scrolls rotate around the cellist's multidimensional kinesphere, a playfully chaotic audiovisual dialogue ensues between the multiples of cellist and cello.

In **Linda Catlin Smith's** *Ricercar for Baroque cello*, the player searches for a rhythmic and harmonic framework to ground unmoored melodies and musical fragments. With ornamentations and rhythmic figurations that reference the historical instrument and echo Baroque repertoire, the music proceeds episodically as the work's main opening material becomes isolated and interrupted by moments of silence, sparse textures of still harmonics, lilting musical fragments, and rich passages of

sonorous chords. With the Baroque cello and bow, the performer traces patterns of movement dictated by both the prescribed notes and motives, as well as the unique kinesthetic affordances of this ancestor of the modern cello and bow. Legato strokes produce gentle swells as the bow's construction dictates the weight and speed of the performer's gestures. The instrument's gut strings and lowered string tension offers the player new modes of tactile experience and expression. Throughout the work, Catlin Smith accentuates the baroque cello's unique sonic profile. Open strings, double stops, and rolled chords highlight the instrument's open resonance; the recurring remnants of a French *gigue* convey the bow's lightness; and suspended pitches in the upper register accentuate those moments' weightlessness through a sweet but precarious timbre.

Catlin Smith's title references both the work's searching quality and, of course, the *ricercari* of the late Renaissance and early Baroque era. Giovanni Gabrieli's *ricercari* of the late 1600s were in fact some of the earliest published solo compositions for violoncello, making the *ricercar* a form of special significance for cellists. Catlin Smith's *Ricercar* hints at these works with its free, episodic structure defined by dramatic changes in instrumental texture, rhythmic stability, and meter. Lush resonant passages give way to barren terrains of isolated pitches suspended in a background of silence. Fragments of musical material appear unannounced, searching for a place within the existing musical landscape. Ideally, the work's searching quality will expand into an exploratory experience in the listener's mind, evoking a long walk that reveals new perspectives and states of being at every turn.

**James Diaz's *In times of passive voice*** considers musical forms in which the source of action is ambiguous, drawing its inspiration both from the English grammatical form itself, and what Diaz feels to be its denigration. Diaz creates self-propelling structures where musical motives orbit, overlap, and interrupt one another. To create larger musical blocks, strings of small energetic cells hang together through shared pitch content and playing techniques – vertical bowing, harmonic trills, *jeté*, and *bariolage* – reappearing throughout the work in altered versions. Longer repeated passages are interrupted with sudden gestural “inserts” placed at the performer's discretion, fragmenting a single sonic image into kaleidoscopic variations. Just as the passive voice holds distance between action and actor, Diaz relinquishes some control through the work's open structure as his meticulous construction of musical cells and phrases, the player's planned and improvised choices of repetition and alteration/insertion, and the audience's shifting auditory focus coalesce during the performance event.

Like many of the works in tonight's program, Diaz transforms the instrument's voice through physical interventions such as scordatura, extended playing techniques, and amplification. These ‘preparations’ function as sonic filters, each removing or enhancing an aspect of the cello's sound. While Diaz's detuning of two lower strings by a half-step opens up the cello's resonance (producing a sonority reminiscent of Kodaly's *Sonata for Solo Cello*), a heavy practice mute flattens the complexity and volume of the sound. This transformed voice is then amplified through a PA system, replacing the natural resonance of the instrument with an artificial reverb. In contrast with Catlin Smith's search *into* the sound of the Baroque cello, Diaz works to transform the cello through these material and technological interventions that expand the cello's sonic palette outwards.

In ***marionette for string instrument, electro-mechanical devices and lights***, Johan Svensson constructs a cyborg performance assemblage comprising a string player, the instrument and bow, a set of electro-mechanical devices, and a pair of lights that illuminate the human, instrumental, and machinic performers. In addition to these on-stage actors, various technological components facilitate the assemblage's unique performance network: a laptop, wires, hardware, headphones, the musical

score, Arduino code, and a digital click-track. Working together, these components enable a synchronization between the movements of the human and machinic performers creating the illusion that the electro-mechanical devices and lights are reacting to the player's gestures. Within the assemblage, the player's movements and gestures serve a dual role: to produce particular string sounds and to "trigger" actions and sounds from the electro-mechanical devices.

As the title *marionette* suggests, the work explores control and agency in performance, a player's relationship to their instrumental, technological, and mechanical tools, and the enchantment and uncanniness of inanimate objects responding to human actions, intentions, and movements. Svensson's marionette acts as both a representation of the instrument and human body – specific devices correspond to locations, materials, and appendages – and an index of their actions. Through the synchronization of the performer's gestures with the actions of the mechanical devices, he constructs a chimeric relationship between the cellist and material objects. The work's arc and dramatic tension derive from this imagined coordination and eventual disconnection between the human and machinic performers as the audience witnesses a gradual breakdown of communication and operation. As mechanical glitches erode the facade of human control, the relationships within this cyborg assemblage come into question, asking us to reassess the location of agency within it.

**inti figgis-vizueta's *shapes in collective space*** fosters musical and ontological multiplicity through graphic notation, collective improvisation, and contrasting instrument tunings. Two performers navigate sonic worlds and orientations, enjoying overlapping transformations, moments of separation and realignment, communication and interdependence. The score offers multiple interpretive paths and orientations – shapes and words that hint at the structures and informational streams that guide, enable, and mediate musical activity and communication. Cascading musical staves, waves of resonance, lines and circles suggesting instrumental strings and harmonic nodes hint at traditional symbols, musical instructions, and sonic representations, while leaving space for the collective sound-making to wander to new expressive modalities.

With the direction to "Start anywhere, and end anywhere but explore everywhere," the players move through the graphic text tethered to their respective centers of intonation – one instrument A=440, the other at A=415. Separated by these modern and anachronistic tunings, the performers travel between graphics and words that characterize sounds ("hollow," "pulsing," "lateral," "falling") and encourage transformation ("warp," "drag," "weave," "oscillate"). Each player brings their independent interpretation of these cues into the collective space while attending to the actions and sounds of their partner. For figgis-vizueta, ontological multiplicity is central to achieving a liberatory and experimental practice. Musical participants find new frameworks for expression and revelation through the blurring and mingling of musical practices and identities, and the openness of musical forms and approaches. The "bending and twisting of sound & notation" moves us towards an artistic reality that is "boundless" and "joyful," encouraging a practice characterized by collective listening and reimagining.

Written as a study for cellist Siegfried Palm, *Pression für einen Cellisten* is one of **Helmut Lachenmann's** first works of *musique concrète instrumentale*, a compositional approach meant to elicit new modes of listening through a defamiliarization of instrumental technique. By prescribing unfamiliar techniques, Lachenmann sought to direct attention to the physical act of sound making – the interactions of human and instrumental bodies – and trouble the audience's habits of listening. As the title suggests, Lachenmann's study is one of pressure, the requisite action of string playing. Throughout the work, he explores various manifestations and degrees of pressure on all parts of the

instrument and bow. The bow glides forcefully at the top of the bridge creating a hiss of white noise. The cellist's hand slaps violently against the fingerboard. In a moment of levity, the bow dances below the strings, playfully tapping the body of the instrument, the foot of the bridge, and the underside of the cello strings.

*Pression* is often framed as a fissure in the evolution of cello playing due to the development and incorporation of an entirely new vocabulary of surprising techniques, sounds, and effects with seemingly little connection to the hundreds of years of cello playing that preceded it. However, analyzed in terms of the performer's actions, *Pression* comprises a series of simple alterations to traditional cellistic gestures. These variations of movement conform to the rules and central components of sound production, making use of the cellist's training and understanding of cellistic action while producing drastically different sonic results. By translating and reorienting traditional movements, Lachenmann develops a distinct, and markedly corporeal musical language, allowing the performer's body to emerge from the performance event.

## About the Artists

**John Popham** is a cellist and educator based in Brooklyn, NY. A versatile and dynamic performer, John has collaborated with a wide range of composers, musicians, and performing artists both within the United States and abroad. His "brilliant" and "virtuosic" (*Kronen Zeitung*) playing can be heard on numerous solo and chamber music releases on Tzadik, Carrier, New Focus Recordings, Albany, and Arte Nova record labels. Critics have noted his "velvet tone," "remarkable technique" (*Fanfare*), and "warm but variegated," and "highly polished" artistry (*The New York Times*). John is a founding member of Longleash, an "expert young trio" praised for its "subtle and meticulous musicianship."

In addition to his work with Longleash, John is a current member of Either/Or Ensemble, and has performed with Klangforum Wien, Talea Ensemble, the Wet Ink Ensemble, the Argento Chamber Ensemble, and ECCE. Recent festival appearances include Donaueschinger Musiktage (Germany), Monday Evening Concerts (Los Angeles), reMusik (St. Petersburg), Beijing Modern Music Festival (China), FUAIM Concerts (Ireland), Brücken (Austria), Internationales Musikfest Hamburg (Germany), Open Music (Austria), Wiener Festwochen (Austria), and the Contemporary Classical Music Festival (Peru).

In 2016, John joined the cello faculty of The Juilliard School's Music Advancement Program, a program dedicated to nurturing the talents of students from backgrounds historically underrepresented in classical music. Since 2013, he has co-directed The Loretto Project, an annual composition seminar and new music festival held at the Loretto Motherhouse in Nerinx, Kentucky.

John holds a BM and MM from the Manhattan School of Music where he was a student of David Geber and David Soyer. In 2013, he received a Fulbright Research Grant to study the performance practice of Austrian contemporary music ensemble Klangforum Wien. Mr. Popham is currently a doctoral candidate at the CUNY Graduate Center where he studied with Marcy Rosen.

**Pala Garcia** is a critically acclaimed violinist, balancing a full performance schedule with her work as an educator and advocate of socially conscious artistry. A contemporary music specialist, she is the violinist of Longleash, an “expert young trio” (The Strad). She also co-directs the Loretto Project, a new music festival and seminar now in its seventh season. Her debut solo album, featuring the music of Peter Kramer, will be forthcoming on New Focus Recordings in Spring 2023, with support from the Aaron Copland Fund for Music.

Pala has performed as a regular guest with celebrated ensembles including the International Contemporary Ensemble, Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, Orchestra of St. Luke’s, and others. In addition to her longstanding involvement as a teaching artist in Carnegie Hall’s social impact programs, Pala also teaches at Hunter College and the Juilliard School’s Prep Division. She is currently a doctoral candidate and the recipient of a certificate in Women and Gender Studies at the CUNY Graduate Center.