

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

May 12, 2023 6:00 p.m.

Baisley Powell Elebash Recital Hall



Sean Statser, percussion with guest percussionist Joshua Quillen

Aphasia (2010)

Mark Applebaum
(b. 1967)

Indeterminacy: New Aspect of Form
in Instrumental and Electronic Music (1958–9)

John Cage
(1912–92)

with special guest, Joshua Quillen

Songs I – IX (1980 – 1982)

Stuart Saunders Smith
(b. 1948)

Lost and Found (1985)

Frederic Rzewski
(1938–2021)

?Corporel (1985)

Vinko Globokar
(b. 1934)

**This performance is presented without pause between pieces - please save applause until the end of the program. Thank you!*

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

Mark Applebaum is a composer, instrument builder, performer, and genre defying artist. Born in Chicago in 1967, his teachers included Brian Ferneyhough, Joji Yuasa, Rand Steiger, Roger Reynolds, and Phillip Rhodes. His interests have led him to a wildly diverse career, both as a performer and composer. He notes that his compositions are often “characterized by challenges to the conventional boundaries of musical ontology: works for three conductors and no players, a concerto for florist and orchestra, pieces for instruments made of junk, notational specifications that appear on the faces of custom wristwatches, works for an invented sign language choreographed to sound, amplified Dadaist rituals, and a 72-foot long graphic score displayed in a museum and accompanied by no instructions for its interpretation.” He currently serves on the composition faculty at Stanford University and runs the Stanford Improvisation Collective, and likes to note that his TED Talk on boredom has over three million YouTube views.

Aphasia is perhaps one of Applebaum’s most recognized and widely performed compositions. Tonight’s program focuses on the importance of sight to sound, and in no piece is that more evident than *Aphasia*. Originally written for “singer and tape,” one could easily argue that it is not a percussive work at all (nor a vocal piece for that matter). Applebaum has meticulously notated 122 gestures, each accompanied with a paragraph of descriptive text explaining exactly how the motion is to be performed. Nothing is left to chance or personal interpretation. I’ve included instructions for just 1 of the 122 gestures below:

M80



Seal Ziplock: an imaginary large ziplock bag is held in the left hand, pinched between the thumb and first two fingers (with remaining fingers relaxed) with knuckles facing left and palm facing right, and held at shoulder height almost two feet in front of the body, while the right hand seals the top of the bag from above by dragging its pinched thumb and first two fingers from left to right with knuckles facing upward—that is, from the left hand fingers across a horizontal plane parallel to the body and equidistant from the floor, to a resting position adjacent to the right shoulder. Note: given its lengthy duration, the imagined bag can be significantly wider than an actual one, the right hand extending beyond the plane of the right shoulder if necessary.

Applebaum has brilliantly created a score containing elements of graphic notation, standard notation, a timeline that divides the piece into seconds, and wavelengths of the accompanying audio track (transformed vocal samples sung by Nicholas Isherwood) – any and all information one could need to accurately align gesture with sound. He says of the piece, “The hand gestures represent a kind of alien, pre-verbal, and rhythmicized sign language. The face stares blankly at a fixed point in the middle of the audience and remains unchanging, expressionless. The performer should not appear to be ‘searching’ or project a process of discovery or self-realization. Rather, the audience beholds a foreign ritual with the flattest of affects – automatic, robotic, preformed, steady, practiced, habitual, and silent. Histrionic or theatric comportments are unnecessary and unwelcome; the piece’s expressivity resides in the very straightforwardness of the gestures themselves.” *Aphasia* can be thought of as a choreographed dance for the hands.

There is little one can say about **John Cage** that hasn’t already been said a dozen times before. He changed the direction of music, both in the US and abroad, and his impact as a composer and performer is still seen today. Cage, most notably, studied composition with Henry Cowell in 1933 and Arnold Schoenberg from 1933 – 1935, though Schoenberg did not believe he had the talent necessary to succeed as a composer. This attitude only seemed to have further inspired Cage to continue however. He is most notably associated with the New York School of composition, which included

several other iconoclast composers: Morton Feldman, Christian Wolff (a student of Cage), Earl Brown, and David Tudor (one of Cage's most important collaborators). In the early 1950's, Cage was given a copying of the *I Ching* by Christian Wolff, which he immediately implemented as a compositional device, marking a monumental turning point in his career and compositional style.

Indeterminacy was first premiered in 1958 at the Brussels World's Fair, and consists of 190 paragraph-long stories, which come from his Folkways recording with David Tudor, and books *Silence* and *A Year From Monday*. The instructions are simple and as is often the case with Cage's music, open to interpretation. He suggests that the stories should be read over the course of one minute each, meaning, at times, very fast or slow depending on how much text the performer must get through. The stories can be accompanied by music, can be read by multiple speakers simultaneously, or anything else the performer finds to be a suitable accompaniment.

For many years, Cage would be invited to lecture at schools or organized events, and would present these stories as the entirety of his lecture. He recalls, "M.C. Richards asked me why I didn't one day give a conventional informative lecture (adding that that would be the most shocking thing I could do), I said, I don't give these lectures to surprise people, but out of the need for poetry. As I see it, poetry is not prose, simply because poetry is one way or another formalized. It is not poetry by reason of its content or ambiguity, but by reason of its allowing musical elements (time, sound) to be introduced into the world of words. Thus, traditionally, information, no matter how stuffy was conventionally transmitted by poetry. It was easier to get that way." He would later go on to incorporate these stories into a piece with Merce Cunningham (Cage's lifelong collaborator), *How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run* (1965), with the added instruction that the performer must open a bottle of Champagne before he can begin reading.

Tonight's performance contains 13 stories that were, of course, selected at random. I will be joined by Joshua Quillen and will discover, at the same time you, what he has chosen to accompany this particular performance.

Stuart Saunders Smith was born in Portland, Maine and at age six, he began studying percussion and composition. His schooling included time at the Berklee School of Music, Hartt School of Music, and his doctorate was completed at the University of Illinois. Smith currently resides in Vermont with his wife (and percussionist) Sylvia Smith, the primary publisher of his compositions and one of the most notable performers of his works. John Welsh notes that "the music of Stuart Smith is where jazz, the avant-garde, and sound poetry coalesce." Smith has written over two hundred works, with over half of these composed for percussion. Writers and critics have attempted to neatly divide Smith's compositions into a variety of categories (traditional scores, speech song, musical theatre, musical portraits, rhythmic intricacy, trans-media) – the primary issue we face with this classification, however, is that the majority of Smith's works utilize and combine elements from multiple of these categories, and it's often this combination that makes Smith's compositional style so unique.

Songs I – IX was written in 1981, during a period when we saw a substantial number of compositions for percussionist functioning as an actor – including several of the pieces on tonight's program. Smith describes the work as a mini-opera, though it's clear that a more accurate description would be to call it an anti-opera. In contrast to our typical perception of opera, *Songs* is short (9'), primarily makes use of found objects for instrumentation, there is no plot, no costumes, and most notably, there is no singing. Smith was once quoted saying, "it's obscene that we have institutions like the Metropolitan Opera spending millions on productions while homeless people sleep outside, cold in winter. It is like

playing the fiddle while Rome burns,” and *Songs* would then appear to be a direct response to his disapproval of these high-budget productions.

Smith’s instrument selection focuses primarily on found household objects, which include: a dinner bell, plastic jug, glass jars, wooden bowls, frying pan, and broken glass in a paper bag. The only “standard” percussion instruments used are a cowbell, ratchet, and maraca. The text for this mini-opera is generally without meaning, at least in connection with itself. There is no throughline or correlation as we move from song to song. Smith does not think of himself as a lyricist or a poet, but rather one that composes using the sound of words – he has often said that he thinks of his text as nonsense, which becomes new sense after acquainting oneself with it, which eventually becomes common sense over time.

It’s rare that someone discusses composer and pianist **Frederic Rzewski** without also mentioning his strong political beliefs, anti-establishment conviction, and his commitment to make this a focal point of his compositional output. One of his most notable works, *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!*, is an hour-long piano solo consisting of 36 variations on the Chilean protest song *¡El pueblo unido jamás será vencido!* Another of his most recognized pieces is *Coming Together*, which is based on a letter written by one of the primary instigators of the Attica prison takeover. Rzewski studied composition with a long list of notable teachers, which included: Elliot Carter, Milton Babbitt, Roger Sessions, Luigi Dallapiccola, and Walter Piston. He was widely recognized as one of the three founding members of Musica Elettronica Viva, and his catalogue of works is extraordinary. I would suggest, however, that his compositional output was so large it is perhaps the reason why there are so many of his pieces that continue to be relatively unknown and unperformed.

Lost and Found is one of these. Written in 1985 for legendary percussionist Jan Williams, the concept was simple – write a piece that required minimal instrumentation and could easily be performed on tour. Rzewski recalled a letter he had found in the New York Times, written by Lieutenant Marion Lee Kempner to his parents on August 7th, 1966. Lieutenant Kempner was an American soldier, later killed in the Vietnam war. The letter reads:

I have just given a class on ambushes. I was chosen because of my charm, intelligence, and messianic-like personality, and besides, I am the only graduate of the Basic School besides the Captain in the whole company, and therefore have all the books. So I gave a brilliant dissertation on the fine art and the finer points of committing mayhem from a hidden position on unsuspecting and probably innocent people to a sea of young and blank faces. As I finished there were resounding cries of 'Bravo!', 'Encore!', etc., flowers were thrown, and I was carried off to my tent by my audience. As I think I might have stated, my Sergeant got my people into shape and they are now obeying orders without question, as exemplified by the above.

The influence of Vinko Globokar is on full display throughout, and is why I have always found *Lost and Found* to be the perfect companion piece for *Corporel*. Rzewski himself notes, “One late night in early 1985 the idea came for a piece in which the percussionist played only on his own body, while reciting the letter from Vietnam. I wrote it in a couple of hours. It was not an original idea. Although I was not thinking about it at the time, I realized later that I must have been influenced by a performance of Vinko Globokar's ‘Laboratorium’ which I had witnessed in Toronto, in which a similar technique is used.” Each line of text has an accompanying gesture that ranges from staring blankly at the audience to violent attacks of oneself. The text of the letter is written with no insight into the author’s personal feelings on the subject, but Rzewski’s accompanying actions create an entirely different image – one

of a man that is angered, saddened, disgusted, agitated, and demoralized by what he has been asked to do.

Composer and trombonist **Vinko Globokar** was born in northern France in 1934. At the age of 13, his family relocated to Ljubljana, Slovenia, where he first took interest in studying music. He would return to France in 1955 to attend the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Paris, and following graduation, began taking composition lessons with renowned composer, René Leibowitz. It was during this time that Globokar would become familiar with the music of Luciano Berio, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Pierre Boulez, and would later go to Berlin to study with Berio. It was here that he made several connections and relationships that remained throughout his career. He would join Stockhausen's ensemble, premiere Berio's *Sequenza V*, and serve as the director of Instrumental and Vocal Research at IRCAM (founded by Pierre Boulez). In 1981, Globokar relocated to Florence, where he stayed for 18 years as the head of 20th century music at the Scuola di musica di Fiesole.

?Corporel remains one of the most revelatory and important pieces of theatrical percussion repertoire. "Badabum," as Globokar refers to it, is the assertion that instruments are only capable of making a single sound. This was a concept he spent his career attempting to refute, and *?Corporel* is perhaps the most notable example of this. Globokar has gone to great lengths to examine the auditory capabilities of both the body and voice. In discussing the composition process, he says, "I first determined the different ways to produce the sound: finger, fist, flat hand, hitting, caressing, sliding, etc. I then explored the places on the body where to produce the sounds, considering areas where the bones are just under the skin like in the head, or if there are muscles separating bones and skin like in the stomach or thigh. Later, I added vocal sounds with the idea to imitate percussion sounds produced on the body using the voice."

Only the most basic stage instructions are provided to the performer: "In canvas trousers, bare-chested, barefoot. Seated on the ground, facing the audience. Stage lighting. Amplification." Words are spoken only once throughout the piece – the performer is instructed to read an excerpt of a poem by René Char (read in French for this performance): "I recently read this remark: The history of mankind is a long succession of synonyms for the same word. It is a duty to disprove this." Scored in six sections, each of the vignettes offers a deeper look into the mental state of the character – vulnerable, exposed, anxious, frenzied, delusional, and increasingly violent, until coming to an end with one final strike to the stomach.

About the Artists

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 Project, Ensemble LPR, Pegasus: The Orchestra, 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 has performed with the American Symphony Orchestra, American Composers Orchestra, and New York Pops, 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.

Josh Quillen has forged a unique identity in the contemporary music world as all-around percussionist, expert steel drum performer (lauded as “softly sophisticated” by the New York Times), and composer. His collaborations with other composers frequently incorporate the steel drums as a core element.

A member of the acclaimed ensemble Sō Percussion since 2006, Josh has performed at Carnegie Hall, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, The Lincoln Center Festival, Stanford Lively Arts, and dozens of other venues in the United States. In that time, Sō Percussion has toured Russia, Spain, Australia, Italy, Germany, and Scotland. He has had the opportunity to work closely with Steve Reich, Steve Mackey, Paul Lansky, David Lang, Matmos, Dan Deacon, and many others.

Josh started performing on the steel drums at Dover High School in Ohio, an interest that continued at the University of Akron, where Dr. Larry Snider founded one of the first collegiate steel bands in the United States. He traveled to Trinidad & Tobago in 2002, performing with the “Phase II Pan Groove” ensemble under Len “Boogsie” Sharpe. This interest in the traditional steel drum music of Trinidad ran in parallel with Josh’s education in western music, first at Akron, and then at the Yale School of Music with marimba soloist Robert Van Sice, where he received his master’s degree in 2006.

These parallel interests led Josh to break ground in the use of the steel drums in contemporary classical music. To date, he has commissioned over a dozen pieces for steel drums from composers such as Stuart Saunders Smith, Roger Zahab, Dan Trueman, and Paul Lansky. In 2010, Steven Mackey's quartet *It Is Time* – commissioned for Sō Percussion by Carnegie Hall and Chamber Music America – featured Josh on a new microtonal lead pan in its Carnegie Hall premiere, receiving rave reviews in the *New York Times*. He's also had the honor to drill the Brooklyn Steel Orchestra (New York) and Skiffle Bunch Steel Orchestra (Trinidad) for conferences in steel pan and the Panorama competition during carnival in Trinidad and Tobago.

Josh's compositions for Sō Percussion are featured in *Imaginary City*, an evening length work that appeared on the Brooklyn Academy of Music's 2009 Next Wave Festival, as well as the site-specific *Music for Trains* in Southern Vermont. Other ensembles to play his pieces and arrangements include Matmos, PLork, The Janus Trio, Adele Meyers and Dancers, The University of Akron Steel Band, and the New York University Steel Band. He's recently performed in a staged work by Ain Gordon and himself called "Radicals in Miniature," telling the stories of influential people who are lost to the pre-internet age.

An avid educator, Josh is a performer-in-residence at Princeton University with Sō Percussion, as well as co-director of the Sō Percussion Summer Institute, an intensive workshop for college-aged percussionists on the campus of Princeton University. He is in his 14th year as the director of the New York University Steel Band.