

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

April 19, 2024 12:00 p.m.

Baisley Powell Elebash Recital Hall



Carrie Frey, viola with Tomás Cruz, voice, and Sam Kelder, Anna Griffis, and Martine Thomas, violas

“The Rose Once Blown” from *The Romance of the Rose* (2020) Kate Soper
(b. 1981)

the power of moss (2021) Celeste Oram
(b. 1990)

with Tomás Cruz, voice

Viola Quartet “IJVER” (2006-7) Eric Wubbels
(b. 1980)

with Sam Kelder, Anna Griffis, and Martine Thomas, violas

INTERMISSION

Seagrass/Reed (2021) Carrie Frey
(b. 1992)

Suite in D Minor (1696) **transcribed for viola in G Minor* Johann Paul von Westhoff
Allemande (1656–1705)
Courante
Sarabande
Gigue

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.

Habitual (2017) **viola premiere*

Lawrence Dunn
(b. 1991)

Weroon Weroon (2022) **viola premiere*

Hannah Kendall
(b. 1984)

Notes on the Program

“The Rose Once Blown” from *The Romance of the Rose* (2020), by Kate Soper (b. 1981)

This rondeau is excerpted from Kate Soper’s opera *The Romance of the Rose*, whose title mirrors a 13th century poem bizarrely written by two authors forty years apart. Soper is a core member, both as vocalist and composer, of Wet Ink Ensemble, the composer-performer-improviser band whose group style my dissertation explores. The piece features several of the elements that mark the Wet Ink composers’ work — repetition, philosophical text choice, and meditative qualities — and grows out of years of close collaboration with Wet Ink’s violinist Josh Modney. *The Romance of the Rose* is emblematic of Soper’s polystylistic blending, bringing together ballads, minimalism, musical theater, a confessional singer-songwriter “Torch Song,” and more. In classic Soper style, it features a didactic treatment of a variety of texts, distinguishing characters through their singing styles: “classical,” “new music,” “Romantic,” and “Baroque,” and weaving the original medieval poem into a meta-narrative interrogating the nature of music, meaning, truth and love. “The Rose Once Blown,” sung by “The Dreamer,” is a Rondeau, one of the medieval *formes fixes* (formulas for musical poetry setting). The form requires a repetition structure of AB aA ab AB, where upper-case letters share the same music and text, and lower-case letters share the same music with a different text. The circular form allows the text to recontextualize the repeated melodies, adding layers of meaning that keep the music fresh yet familiar as the poem gradually unfolds. Soper’s text follows:

The rose once blown must die:
And I, who by the flame of your love drew breath, must in cold death repose.

As glows true love but once in every life,
The rose once blown must die.

The throat must sigh its last long sigh:
The eye, upon its last glimpse of you, must forever close.

The rose once blown must die:
And I, who by the flame of your love drew breath, must in cold death repose.

the power of moss (2021), by Celeste Oram (b. 1990)

Celeste Oram, born in Aotearoa New Zealand and based in New York, is interested in sonic and social histories and micro-cultures. Like her recent show “Varpcast,” which is dedicated to the cultural and social impact of the radio, many of her works incorporate this technology, and she has also frequently

composed for dance-theatre. Her dedication for this piece for voice and viola pays homage to “the two flame-haired women who taught me how to sing,” nodding to Oram’s own composer-performer practice. Like the close working relationship between Soper and Modney of Wet Ink, Oram developed this work in collaboration with violinist Keir GoGwilt. The text comes from *The Spit Children* by Jo Randerson, also from New Zealand -

Right now, it's not the power of the sword we need
but the power of moss
the oldest surviving plant EVER
it's not tall, it doesn't thrust up above everything else
It doesn't define itself well, there's no shiny grand statement
it just quietly and softly persists
and is known in every continent

Fittingly for the poem, this piece lives in the simplicity and interiority shown in other works on this program (Dunn, Soper), with voice and strings gently wandering, blending, and every now and then stumbling upon a quiet cadence. Oram’s writing here is, like moss, adaptable and universal. Not only is the accompanying instrument unspecified — “any 12-tone instrument” — she also leaves it up to the performers to make octave transpositions for register, decide on appropriate dynamics, and add ornamentation in whatever style is relevant to their interests and training.

Viola Quartet “IJVER” (2006-7), by Eric Wubbels (b. 1980)

I first became acquainted with Eric Wubbels’ music during his year as composition faculty at Oberlin Conservatory, where I was completing my undergraduate degree. I was captivated by the intense energy and non-stop virtuosity of his duo performed with Josh Modney, “the children of fire come looking for fire.” Like Soper, Eric Wubbels is a member of Wet Ink ensemble, serving as both composer and pianist. His Viola Quartet, one of his early works and the subject of his own dissertation, exemplifies the Wet Ink signature blend of rhythmic vitality, intense physical energy, trance-like repetition, and timbral experimentalism. Wubbels expertly exploits the viola quadrupling in athletic unison passages and thorny counterpoint hockets from which melodies sharply emerge and dense sonorities scintillate. The non-hierarchical structure stretches each violist to the limits of their instrument and a full range of expression, four equal soloists interweaving for a feat of endurance and beauty. This viola quartet makes an argument for the four-violin group as equal to any string quartet in expressivity, virtuosity, and technique and pushes the limits of the viola as a rival to the violin and cello in feats of skill. Underperformed due to its intensity and difficulty, this quartet stands out for its marriage of minimalistic repetition with complex timbre and harmony.

This rehearsal period and performance of Wubbels’ Viola Quartet and our upcoming showcase of this work at the American Viola Society Festival in Los Angeles this June are supported by the Baisley Powell Elebash Award.

Seagrass/Reed (2021), by Carrie Frey (b. 1992)

Born out of my obsession with Arkady Martine’s masterpiece *A Memory Called Empire* and its sequel *A Desolation Called Peace*, *Seagrass/Reed* rhapsodizes on how it might feel to have one consciousness in many bodies or, conversely, many consciousnesses in one body. This piece was commissioned by Adrienne Munden-Dixon and grew out of our years of collaboration. I envisioned this as a choose-your-own-adventure piece of sorts, meaning that the performer has the agency to travel between sections at will, so each trip through the piece will be slightly different in its structure. The piece is subdivided into

five sections that organically flow into one another and, at times, cross-fade or interrupt each other. *we send our starflyers whirling* spins up the spaceships and prepares the violist for travel; *how our eyeshine glowed in the dirt home* exploits the fractured resonance of pressurized harmonics and multiphonics; *to think of a we that fragments!* splits the viola into aggressor, mediator, and defender, all in one; *she felt her mouth curve in his smile* loops one melody through a multitude of perspectives; and *to think /we/ and not have a tongue-sound for its crystalline depths* brings the theme home to rest in a many-voiced chorus. All of these beautifully descriptive texts are derived from Arkady Martine's novels, which I heartily recommend.

Suite in D Minor (1696) (transcribed for viola in G Minor), by Johann Paul von Westhoff (1656–1705)

In keeping with this program's theme of composer-performers, Johann Paul von Westhoff was regarded as one of the best German violinists of his era. Born to a musical family in Dresden, he toured widely from a young age, tutored princes, and performed for the Sun King himself. Westhoff's 1683 Suite for Solo Violin is considered the earliest known multi-movement work for unaccompanied violin, setting the stage for a genre that is still expanding. Westhoff and J.S. Bach were colleagues in Weimar, where Bach began composing his own Partitas and Sonatas for solo violin. Whether coincidence or intention, certain motives in this suite, like the rising tetrachord that begins the Sarabande and the arpeggiated triad that opens the Courante, may sound familiar to listeners who are familiar with Bach's Partita No. 2 in D Minor. This suite is the fifth of six that were published in 1696 — possibly reprinted from a 1682 collection that was lost. Each of the suites in this collection features four Baroque dance movements: Allemande, Courante, Sarabande, and Gigue. Westhoff's style, perhaps taking after his lute-playing father, generously sprinkles in the double, triple, and even quadruple-stop chords, using four strings to full advantage. The first movement, allemande, introduces the suite's scalar themes with a courtly elegance, running sixths and thirds up and then down. The Courante bridges a regular chordal structure with leaping quarter notes that bounce from bar to bar in a lively conversation. The sarabande perfectly balances an ever-ascending first half of steadily escalating tension with a second part that wanders from high to low and back to a timely repose. The showstopper Gigue closes with a densely harmonized melody that must be thrown off with danceable lightness.

Habitual (2017), by Lawrence Dunn (b. 1991)

Lawrence Dunn's music offers an introspective counterpoint to the flashy virtuosity displayed in other works on this program (i.e. Wubbels and Westhoff). The Manchester-based composer's piece "Habitual," written for violinist Sarah Saviet, instructs the performer to play sitting, as though at home practicing just for herself. The piece's surface simplicity drew me in: it presents itself as a gradual elaboration on a set of repeating notes, as though the performer were improvising on a favorite chord. Practicing this piece feels like stepping into someone else's well-worn fantasy on a remembered theme, complete with detailed ornamentations and careful rhythmic notation that precisely describes each note's length, unequal and delicately balanced (Dunn invents a novel marking to show subdivisions of five). The irony in the name is that in order for this piece to become habitual, the learner must erase their own habits and tendencies in order to take on those of the piece itself. Interestingly, this "transcribed" version, like the original for violin, uses only the G, D, and A strings, avoiding the extremes of the C and the E, which makes it almost a piece for a collection of three strings rather than for either particular instrument. Dunn's own description of this work is as follows: "Circulating music, confined to habit. Habit as self-similarity and self-resemblance; as personal character, that which is self-consciously known or reflected. Has echoes of change bellringing – where each individual pattern is individually named, but all are infinitely circulating and self-similar."

***Weroon Weroon* (2022), by Hannah Kendall (b. 1984)**

London-born composer Hannah Kendall, who like Soper and Wubbels completed her doctoral work at New York City's Columbia University, often seeks inspiration in art and poetry. Her Tuxedo series shares a common spark from Jean-Michel Basquiat's eponymous artwork, and while this piece isn't overtly a member of that series, it overlaps significantly with the viola part I recently performed for Kendall's "Tuxedo: Between Carnival and Lent." *Weroon Weroon* was commissioned in honor of and premiered by violinist Pekka Kuusisto, and this will be the first performance on viola. Like many of Kendall's Tuxedo string parts, this piece owes its distinctive sound to an unusual and inventive preparation: pairs of strings are bound together with dreadlock cuffs. The cuffs restrain the natural resonance of the strings, creating a varied sound that ranges from multiphonic, gong-like harmonies to muffled squeaks. Constant tremolo requires a quiet endurance from the performer, a sort of meditation as the steady movement of the bow explores every possibility of the prepared strings' sounding, moving from the bridge over the fingerboard, on to and past each cuff. "Weroon Weroon" is the title of a poem by Guyanese poet and activist Martin Carter, whose life is the subject of Kendall's one-act chamber opera, *The Knife of Dawn*. The opera takes place in Carter's prison cell during his 1953 hunger strike; he was incarcerated without charge. Kendall, herself a composer of Caribbean/Guyanese descent, uses Carter's story to highlight the continuing resonance of cultural, political and social issues. It is possible that the cuffs around the viola strings mirror the walls around Carter, the roaming bow like the poet's mind seeking past the edges of the enclosed space. Kendall includes two texts to inform the performance. First, in the piece's title page, a quote from Psalm 8:3 follows the title, "Weroon Weroon" (My God My God): "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place..." And alongside the tempo marking of "meditative; as slow as possible," follows: "Beyond a pattern of stars, reserved for sundown; beyond and through slats once closed, now open..."

About the Artists

Carrie Frey is a New York City-based violist who "conjures an inviting warmth that leaves her virtuosity on the margins, placing the focus on her humanity (*Bandcamp Daily*)."¹ An enthusiastic proponent of new music, she has premiered over 250 pieces. Frey is the violist of the Rhythm Method ("a group of individuals with distinct compositional voices and a collective vision for the future of the string quartet" - *I Care If You Listen*) and a founding member of string trio Chartreuse and string quartet Desdemona. She has performed with many of New York City's notable contemporary ensembles, including Wet Ink Large Ensemble, AMOC*, Talea Ensemble, Wavefield, Cantata Profana, and the International Contemporary Ensemble. Her own compositions, described as "a moldering compost heap" (*I Care if You Listen*), have been performed by the Rhythm Method, RE:duo, Arco Belo, Adrienne Munden-Dixon, and Kal Sugatski. Her debut sonata album, *The Grey Light of Day*, with pianist Robert Fleitz, was released in 2016. Hailed as demonstrating "not only a great technique but a verve and grit and a commitment to pushing her instrument forward" (*An Earful*), her first solo album, *Seagrass*, was released on Gold Bolus in December 2023. Carrie is a graduate of Oberlin Conservatory and the Manhattan School of Music Contemporary Performance Program, and is currently pursuing a doctorate at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Her mentors throughout her studies have included Kathryn Dey, Peter Slowik, Nadia Sirota, Danielle Farina, and Daniel Phillips.

Tomás Cruz is known for his “sweet tenor (*All About Jazz*),” “gorgeous, mellifluous, pure tone (*New York Classical Review*),” as well as his stylistic flexibility. A regular in the new music and choral scenes, he has performed new operas and concert works by Steve Reich, Judd Greenstein, Evan Ziporyn, Ted Hearne, Missy Mazzoli, Giacinto Scelsi, Salvatore Sciarrino, Aaron Cassidy, Neil Rolnick, Anthony Braxton, Pulitzer Prize-winning Du Yun, Jason Cady, Petr Kotik, and Matt Marks, among others. Recently, Tomás played the role of Harry Balter in the world tour of Toshi Reagon's operatic adaptation of the Octavia Butler novel *Parable of the Sower*. Other credits include the world tour of Philip Glass and Robert Wilson's opera, *Einstein On The Beach*, a guest appearance on Arturo O'Farrill's Grammy Award-winning album *Four Questions*, appearances on SNL and America's Got Talent, performances with Damien Rice, Lyra Pramuk, Michael Mayo, and Helga Davis. He has recorded for Nickelodeon, Matthew Schickele, Chris Cerrone, jazz composers Matthew Sheens, Yelena Eckemoff, and Eric Johnsen, and has performed/recorded for live art and dance works by Martin Creed, Andrea Galvani, Miguel Gutierrez, Amber Sloan and Jane Benson. Ongoing projects include new music ensemble Ekmeles, a cappella group Duwende and vocal jazz group West Side 5. Tomás is in his third season with the Saint Thomas Choir of Men & Boys. In 2023, Ekmeles and Duwende both had their first European tours, and Tomás began working with Trinity Wall Street and The Crossing.

Martine Thomas, violist, performs internationally as a soloist, chamber musician, and improviser. She has appeared at the Berliner Philharmonie, Carnegie Hall, BBC Proms, and Lucerne Festival and has performed with Yo-Yo Ma and the Silk Road Ensemble, the International Contemporary Ensemble, and Ghost Ensemble. Martine has recently premiered works by Tyshawn Sorey, Catherine Lamb, and Miya Masaoka. She looks forward to solo recitals this season in New York City, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and upstate New York. Martine studied in the Harvard-NEC dual degree program, is currently working on her doctorate in viola performance at CUNY Graduate Center, and is on the string faculty at Brooklyn College Conservatory. For more of her music and writing, please visit martinethomas.com.

Anna Griffis made her concerto debut with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra at 16 and has performed across Mexico, Europe, and Taiwan on modern and period instruments. Principal viola of New Bedford Symphony, member of Albany Symphony, Anna also performs with Portland Symphony, Emmanuel Music, Blue Heron, BEMF, Odyssey Opera, and Boston Lyric Opera. Anna co-founded Trio Speranza and is executive director and violist of Ludovico Ensemble. She teaches at Tufts University, is an affiliate artist at MIT, and works as a graphic designer. Anna is the proud product of her Maryland public school music program, Lawrence University, and Boston University.

Praised by the Boston Globe as "committed and dynamic", violist **Samuel Kelder's** interpretations of contemporary repertoire have led him to become a sought after soloist and chamber musician, performing widely across the United States, Mexico, and Europe. Member of Sound Icon, Boston Modern Orchestra Project, Callithumpian Consort, ECCE, and founding member of Shizuka Viola Duo, Dr. Kelder works frequently in collaboration with many prominent living composers. Samuel graduated from University of Houston, Mannes The New School for Music, and was teaching assistant to Michelle LaCourse during his D.M.A. at Boston University, specializing in the Karen Tuttle Coordination Technique.