

San Francisco Contemporary Music Players
David Milnes, Music Director

Things fall from the sky

Monday, 23 February 2009, 8 pm
Herbst Theatre

Performers:

Lawrence Ragent, horn
Jeff Biancalana, trumpet
Hall Goff, trombone
Carey Bell, clarinet (Hyla)
Peter Josheff, clarinet (Cox)
William Wohlmacher, bass clarinet
David Henderson, saxophone
Ann Yi, piano (Hyla)
Christopher Froh, percussion (Hyla)
Daniel Kennedy, percussion (Cox)
Roy Malan, violin
Nanci Severance, viola
Stephen Harrison, cello
Richard Worn, contrabass

Roscoe Mitchell, *Bells for New Orleans* (2006)

World Premiere
(Approximate duration: 7 minutes)
William Winant, glockenspiel

Terry Riley, *Quando cosas malas caen del cielo* (2003)

(Approximate duration: 17 minutes)
David Tanenbaum, national steel guitar
I. National Broadstreet March
II. La Melodia que se sienta solo (The melody that feels alone)
III. Carriente directa
IV. Quando cosas malas caen del cielo (When bad things fall from the sky)

Roscoe Mitchell, *WR/C 2A Opus I* (2008)

World Premiere
(Approximate duration: 18 minutes)
Roscoe Mitchell, saxophone
William Winant, percussion

↻ Intermission ↻

Lee Hyla, *Polish Folk Songs* (2007)

(Approximate duration: 13 minutes)

Cindy Cox, *En círculo* (2008)

World Premiere
(Approximate duration: 17 minutes)
Cindy Cox, piano
I. As if from far way / Bright incisive
II. Motionless
III. Mercurial
IV. Motionless
V. Violent, Disruptive
(all movements played without pause)



*Tonight's performance is funded in part by:
National Endowment for the Arts, Aaron Copland Fund for Music, Alice M. Ditson
Fund of Columbia University, and BMI Foundation.*

Program Notes

Roscoe Mitchell [b. 1940]

In August of 2007, the faculty at Mills College welcomed into its ranks one of the foremost composer-improvisers of the last four decades, Roscoe Mitchell. As holder of the Darius Milhaud Chair in Composition, Mitchell takes up a seat occupied by Lou Harrison, Iannis Xenakis, Pauline Oliveros, and Anthony Braxton and he brings to this position an extraordinary blending of skills: saxophonist, flutist, innovator, collaborator, individualist and musical organizer. Mitchell is in fact an eloquent advocate for and embodiment of a new species of total musicianship. As he told interviewer Fred Jung, “we’re living in the age of the super-musician. That is what is emerging right now, musicians that defy categories.... I think that is why you have musicians that have diversified to playing different instruments. Not only do they specialize in several different instruments, they specialize in several different areas of music. The super-musician has to be concerned about not only learning his instrument, but they have to be a good performer and a composer. Everybody is being faced with the problem of improvisation and it is really difficult to be a good improviser if you don’t know anything about composing.”

In his mid-twenties, having learned clarinet and saxophone from musical family members and having honed his skills in a U. S. Army band, Mitchell co-founded two of the groups with which he is most strongly associated: the cooperative Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) and the Art Ensemble of Chicago. Under the auspices of these and dozens of other groups—the Roscoe Mitchell Sextet, Trio Space, Sound Ensemble, and the Note Factory, to name a few—Mitchell fostered a unique and mercurial improvisation style, drawing on but quite distinct from both the driving virtuosity of Charlie Parker’s bebop and the luminescence of John Coltrane. In the words of *San Francisco Chronicle* writer David Rubien, “The Art Ensemble made and still makes astonishing, joyful, swinging, sometimes difficult music based not only on the revolutions of the ‘60s, but on bebop, big band swing, kitschy vaudeville, 20th-century classical and African percussion.”

While he fully embraces the mysterious, even spiritual, aspects of the improviser’s art, Mitchell has also become one of the most influential developers of what might be called a piecemeal pedagogy of improvisation. In conversation with percussionist/journalist Jack Gold-Molina he explained, “Of course, you are working on extending your ideas just like you do in composition. You should be able to think that way.... I mean, I’ve developed all sorts of practice methods for doing things. Sometimes I get one of those big clocks, you know, with the minute hands, and I may do a series of one minute pieces and then structure these so that, like, in fifteen seconds something changes, in thirty seconds something else changes, forth-five seconds or somewhere in

between you’re reaching the middle of the piece and then at the end you’re going down.” One of the pieces on this program, *WR/C 2A Opus I* involves another of Mitchell’s trademark methods called “score-improvisation,” using a “card catalog” of cues for group improvisation. Viewing improvisation as a controlled journey, he offered the following metaphor to interviewer Celeste Sunderland: “What I’ve discovered about music is that when you get one area going, it opens up some doors to other things, and so on like that so it’s a constant thing, you can open up one door, and stay in that room for a while, and pretty soon you want to go to another room so you open up another door, and that gives you accessibility to those two rooms, now you have access to three, four, five....”

Mitchell has often spoken of his desire to create “an ensemble of improvising musicians with an orchestral range,” and beginning in the 1990s, Mitchell’s projects have included an increasing amount of crossover with figures from the worlds of classical music. His *Fallen Heroes* (1998; for baritone, alto saxophone, and orchestra) and *Non-Cognitive Aspects of the City* (2003; for baritone and orchestra, with text by Joseph Jarman) were premiered by the Petr Kotik SEM Ensemble at major venues in New York (Alice Tully Hall, Willow Place Auditorium). In 2004, he received a commission from the City of Munich to compose *Composition / One, Two and Three*, and he has continued to produce important new works for his large ensemble The Note Factory.

Mitchell has nearly forty albums to his name and has appeared on well over one hundred recordings, sharing his career with prominent creative artists through the AACM (Anthony Braxton, Henry Threadgill, George Lewis, Amina Claudine Myers, Leroy Jenkins, and Wadada Leo Smith); the Art Ensemble of Chicago (Malachi Favors, Joseph Jarman, Lester Bowie, Philip Wilson, Don Moye); and elsewhere Muhal Richard Abrams, Jack DeJohnette, Pauline Oliveros, Thomas Buckner, David Wessel of the Center for New Music and Technology [CNMAT] and several musicians at the French electronic music studio IRCAM [Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/ Musique]. Mitchell’s honors include awards from the International Jazz Critics Poll and *Down Beat* Magazine, the National Association of Jazz Educators’ Outstanding Service to Jazz Education Award, the John Cage Award for Music, a Certificate of Appreciation from the Smithsonian Institute, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s Image Award. He has received composition and performance grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, Arts Midwest Jazz Masters, Michigan State University, the Minnesota Composer’s Forum, and Chicago’s Center for International Performance and Exhibition, among others. In addition to his work at Mills College, Mitchell has taught at the University of Illinois, the University of Wisconsin–Madison, the California Institute of the Arts, the AACM School of Music, the Creative Music Studio, New England Conservatory, and as Artist-in-Residence for such projects as the 2003 Chicago Jazz Festival.

Mitchell, *Bells for New Orleans* (2006)
for unaccompanied orchestra bells

The role of percussion in Mitchell's oeuvre has been fascinating and changeable. The Art Ensemble of Chicago has often featured African and other percussion instruments to add an element of what Mitchell calls "ceremony" to its performances. Particularly after the departure of drummer Philip Wilson, Ensemble members were encouraged to take up percussion and other instruments. As Mitchell has continued to move freely between jazz and contemporary classical realms, he has also created pieces like *The Bells of Fifty-Ninth Street* (2000), for alto saxophone and gamelan (Indonesian percussion orchestra). Shortly after creating a work called *The Maze* (late 1990s) that included various rattles, hubcaps, pots and pans and the like, Mitchell spoke in an interview with Jason Gross of his desire to write a piece for "just bells" because "so many bell sounds are available, different levels, soft ones and loud ones and so on." *Bells for New Orleans* is one result of this impulse.

The composer states: "I was commissioned in 2005 by Sylvia Smith of Smith Publications to write a composition for unaccompanied orchestra bells to be published in a book of music titled *SUMMIT: compositions for unaccompanied orchestra bells*. *Bells for New Orleans* is the composition I wrote for the people who suffered and continue to suffer through the horrors of the devastating Hurricane Katrina. Tonight's performance of *Bells for New Orleans* is a world premiere."

Mitchell, *WR/C 2A Opus I* (2008)
for saxophone and percussion

The composer writes: "*WR/C 2A Opus I* is the first in a series of compositions I intend to write for the percussionist William Winant and myself. *WR/C 2A* is a completely notated composition that includes sections that have both scored and open improvisation. The scored improvisation is a set of six cards with notation that can be put in any order including overlapping to create different arrangements of the written materials. Musicians can choose their own tempos and select the times when they are playing and when they are resting. The open improvisation part of the composition in this case is titled 'rapid'. Tonight's performance of *WR/C 2A Opus I* is a world premiere."

Terry Riley [b. 1935]

"I feel it's my field to try to create magic in sound. Magic in the sense of transcendence of this ordinary life into another realm. An awakening...." Few composers could utter these words with such powerful spiritual overtones

as Terry Riley. Recorded in William Duckworth's interview-book *Talking Music*, they testify to Riley's status as inspiring musical mystic and guru of the so-called "minimalist" movement.

A long-time resident of the Bay Area, Riley has retained strong Californian ties, despite a career that is "global" in many senses. He studied composition in San Francisco and Berkeley during the 1950s with Wendell Otey, Seymour Shifrin, William Denney, and Robert Erickson; and in the early 1970s, he became the disciple of classical Indian vocalist Pandit Pran Nath, with whom he worked for more than twenty-five years. While at Berkeley, he met La Monte Young and the two embarked on an enduring and productive friendship. Although Riley's very earliest scores display some of the complexities of Karlheinz Stockhausen and the European avant-garde, he was soon enthralled by Young's "long-tone" pieces, which sometimes involve the prolongation of a single harmony, or even a single interval. Following the example of John Cage, Young and Riley collaborated on found-object and tape music for dance and worked on the earliest stages of the San Francisco Tape Music Center.

Although Riley has taught Indian classical music at Mills College and more recently at the California Institute of the Arts, the Nairopa Institute, and New Delhi's Christi Sabri School, he has more often supported himself by performing, improvising, and composing. In the 1960s, his formidable skill at the keyboard enabled him to spend nearly two years in Europe, performing at piano bars and U. S. Air Force officers' clubs. As noted by Edward Strickland, this European sojourn gave Riley the opportunity to attend the Summer New Music Courses at Darmstadt and to use the electronic music resources at the ORTF (l'Office de la radiodiffusion-télévision française), where he produced a score for Ken Dewey's play *The Gift* (1963) that took Chet Baker's recording of Miles Davis's *So What* and further transformed it with a variety of over-dubbing and time-lag techniques. The resulting echo effects represent some of Riley's earliest experiments with the aural intricacies of inexact repetition.

No treatment of Riley's career would be complete without recounting the reputation-making, style-changing, piano-hammering premiere of *In C* in 1964. Even though Riley himself has always maintained a certain distance from the "minimalist" label, Strickland points out that, "*In C* defined the minimalist style of modular repetition and was the first work to bring minimalism into the mainstream." Since its first performance in San Francisco—where the players included Steve Reich, Jon Gibson, Pauline Oliveros, and Morton Subotnick—the piece has been reincarnated by an astonishing variety of ensembles, including a participatory performance led by Michael Tilson Thomas at Davies Symphony Hall and a performance in Shanghai using traditional Chinese instruments. Easily adaptable to these new contexts, the score of *In C* lists fifty-three fragments or melodic cells that players take up in order,

repeating each as often as desired to yield an unpredictable pile of overlapping canons and rhythmic patterns.

Riley spent the next five years in New York, performing with Young and making a name for himself as an able and eclectic improviser conversant in western and non-western melodic construction. By the time he returned to the Bay Area in 1969, he was devoting his time primarily to improvising, a practice also fostered by his studies with Pandit Pran Nath. It is no exaggeration to state that members of the Kronos Quartet were responsible for coaxing Riley out of his compositional “retirement” and back into the realm of notated scores. Only after repeated encouragement from David Harrington and other Kronos members in the 1980s, did Riley compose what have since become some of his most widely known works, including the concert-length *Salome Dances for Peace* (1986) and no less than twelve others involving string quartet. More recently, Riley has also composed for the orchestra: *Jade Palace* (1990), written for the Carnegie Hall centenary; *June Buddhas* (1991), commissioned by the Koussevitzky Foundation. In *The Sands* (1991), he unites string quartet and symphony in a reflection on the first Gulf War, and the piece we will hear tonight, *Quando cosas malas caen del cielo* (When bad things fall from the sky) (2003) may be considered a continuation of this peace-making strain in Riley’s oeuvre.

No matter what the medium, Riley places great emphasis on the connectedness of different musical traditions and the power of the subconscious mind to shape musical meaning across time and space. In a 1987 interview with Edward Strickland, when asked whether *In C* bore any relationship to Arnold Schoenberg’s surprising comment that, despite his own atonal works, “good music remained to be written in C major,” Riley responded: “I didn’t even know he said that! All these things have meaning.... When I started singing Indian classical music later we began in C—we tuned the tamburas there, the key Pandit Pran Nath always sang in.... Maybe when Schoenberg said that he was thinking *In C* was going to be written.... What goes on in the subconscious is, I think, very important.” Together with his innovative treatment of repetition and his extraordinary improvisations, that faith has made Riley’s a prophetic and sometimes political voice, not just for “new age” musicians, but for those of many ages and persuasions.

Riley, *Quando cosas malas caen del cielo* (When bad things fall from the sky) (2003)
for national steel guitar

Guitarist David Tanenbaum has performed Riley’s *Quando cosas malas caen del cielo* around the world, and on many occasions he has taken time to tell the story of its inception: One month before the onset of the Iraq War in 2003, Riley joined his fellow citizens in Nevada City, California as they participated

in an international day of anti-war protest. The protesters had a slogan, “raga singers for peace,” but alas no permit. They were arrested and imprisoned, and when Riley came before a judge he was given three choices: a monetary fine, jail time, or community service. The judge accepted Riley’s proposal that a new piece of music might fulfil his community service requirement and thus *Quando cosas malas caen del cielo* became perhaps the first protest piece commissioned, in effect, by the California judicial system.

The vehicle for *Quando cosas* is a specially tuned national steel guitar. Invented to give the guitarists of jazz ensembles in the 1920s a fair chance to be heard, the steel guitar used aluminum cones as a means of non-electric amplification. The frets in this case are made to correspond with the “just intonation” system championed by composer Lou Harrison, in which the notes of the piano keyboard are slightly stretched or compressed to create purer mathematical ratios between the vibrations that constitute pitch. In Riley’s communicative piece, the unusual tuning system yields contrasting effects. Its impact is negligible on the third movement, which circles among only five pitches to portray the composer’s determination to continue his efforts with the peace movement. In the second movement, many questions of specific tuning are beautifully obscured by the use of a slide to create an intimate, keening sound meant to echo Riley’s lonely hours in prison. In the first movement, however, “just intonation” (together with the hint of a rock backbeat) helps reinforce a jangling sense of homespun self-assurance as the protesters march down Broad Street. And in the final movement, written in response to the first air-strikes on Baghdad, the unfamiliar tuning suggests a profound and uncanny discomfort with current events.

Quando cosas is part of Riley’s series of pieces called *The Book of Abbeyoz-zud*. Each features the guitar, as soloist or together with other instruments, and each begins with a different letter of the Spanish alphabet (an attribute hinted at in the A-to-Z flair of the Book’s fanciful title). When complete, the series will be a twenty-eight part compendium, “indebted to the great Spanish music traditions.”

***Lee Hyla* [b. 1952]**

There is something emblematic of Lee Hyla’s oeuvre in the title of his woodwind duo *We Speak Etruscan* (1993). For one thing, it indicates his interest in systems of human speech—as do the wordless *Polish Folk Songs* on this program. Perhaps more important, as composer Eric Moe points out, the “bold claim” of *We Speak Etruscan* “cannot be challenged; the ancient Etruscans, creators of extraordinary artwork, spoke a language that is now lost (only the alphabet is decipherable). The obvious connection to the plight of contemporary art music is contradicted by the engaging surface of the piece, which

bubbles with jazz-like riffs.” The vocabulary of Hyla’s work, then, involves nimble connections and unexpected juxtapositions that reach out to audiences despite occasional complexity or elusiveness.

As many have noted, the roots of Hyla’s musical argot are multiple. The composer recently told reporter Jeremy Eichler of *The Boston Globe* about several “seismic jolts” that had shaped his musical youth: “First were the Rolling Stones and James Brown, both of which electrified him. He immediately pledged his keyboard skills to the nobler aim of starting a rock band. Then at age eighteen he experienced a one-two punch from which he has never really recovered: the explosive free jazz of Cecil Taylor and the complexly probing Cello Sonata of Elliott Carter. A solid dose of late Beethoven was the coup de grace. At that point, Hyla had been studying religion at Indiana University but he packed his bags and came to Boston’s New England Conservatory.” Hyla would return to the NEC in 1992 and remain there as Co-chair of the Composition Department until 2000 and as Chair until September 2007, when he joined the faculty at Northwestern University. Between his student days and his return to NEC, including a stint at the American Academy in Rome, Hyla was hard at work fashioning what Moe calls “a personal language capable of both the simple, exquisitely polished opening of the String Quartet No. 3 [1989] and the raw Jerry Lee Lewis-like riffs in the Piano Concerto No. 2 [1991].... What he brings from rock is its energy, and, on occasion, its brute power and rhythmic sensibilities, so different from those of jazz and classical music. From his classical training he brings a gift for musical organization and, unapologetically, a modernist aesthetic; from jazz, a melodic and gestural language that he separates from its traditional harmonic underpinnings.”

The wide range of Hyla’s musical and intellectual interests has allowed him to tackle a variety of surprising and admittedly idiosyncratic subject matter with delicacy and imagination. Only one year after writing the potent lines of language recovery in *We Speak Etruscan*, Hyla tackled beat poet Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl*, producing a piece for the Kronos Quartet and narrator in which the composer intended “to convey a sense of the music emerging from the poem/reading and then, as the piece evolved, throwing it into a variety of textural reliefs.” Again, music and language approach, interpenetrate, and bounce off of one another in ways that only Hyla could conceive. In 2000, he touched on a different kind of text—a 19th-century ornithological treatise—to create *Wilson’s Ivory-bill*, which incorporates a 1935 field recording of the giant ivory-billed woodpecker whose presumed extinction became a symbol for the incipient conservation movement.

How does one come to terms with such a diversity of allusive power—an oeuvre that also includes such artful “abstract” scores as the Concerto for Bass Clarinet and Orchestra (1988), the orchestral fantasy *Trans* (1996) or the Violin Concerto of 2001? The best answer is to proceed piece by piece, or

(as writer Anne Lamott would have us do), “bird by bird.” Each listener is likely to find his or her own path; a few guideposts are offered up by cellist Ted Mook, who has known Hyla since the early 1980s: “without exception, I have always felt that the jagged, honking, barking, raucous, strongly articulated rhythmic layer patrols and protects an inner layer of timeless, crystalline beauty, almost too fragile to survive on its own. His obsessive recycling of material, subtly transformed over the course of the piece, rude interruptions, and unexpected glimpses of an internal radiance, all add to a sense of uneasy striving toward a kind of transcendent experience.”

Hyla’s honors and awards include the Stoeger Prize from the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the Goddard Lieberson Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the St. Botolph Club Award, and the Rome Prize from the American Academy in Rome, as well as a Guggenheim Fellowship, two fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and a fellowship from the Camargo Foundation in Cassis, France. He has received commissions from the Koussevitzky, Fromm, Barlow, and Naumburg Foundations, the Mary Flagler Carey Charitable Trust, Concert Artist’s Guild, Chamber Music America, and many others and has earned performances by such groups as the Boston Modern Orchestra Project, the Lydian String Quartet, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, Speculum Musicae, Boston Musica Viva, the Los Angeles Philharmonic New Music Group, and House Blend (the resident ensemble at The Kitchen, in New York City).

Hyla, *Polish Folk Songs* (2007)

for clarinet, bass clarinet, violin, viola, cello, piano, and percussion

Hyla has often remarked on the impossibility of classifying his own music. In 2007, the same year he completed his *Polish Folk Songs*, he told Jeremy Eichler: “I’m happily not part of any particular -ism.... There was a time around eight years ago that I vowed that in every piece I was going to write, I had to do something I’d never done before.” This is a hard dream to achieve, but with his *Polish Folk Songs*, Hyla may well have succeeded.

The work was inspired by Hyla’s journey to Zakopane in 2003, a town in southern Poland at the foot of the Tatra Mountains. He recalls, “I was completely taken by the music of the region, which can be characterized as clear, annunciatory, mournful, unpredictable in tempo and meter, and timbrally vibrant. In my composition I have taken a number of the songs commonly heard in the area, and recombine them, allowing them to bump heads as well as to interact peacefully.”

With no texts to provide a “message” and no narrator around which a “point of view” might coalesce, Hyla himself becomes the agent in a phantasmagoria of folk elements, freely combined. Do you hear the wailing clarinet of

klezmer or the rhapsodic gypsy fiddle? So be it. What about a whiff of pastoral Americana *a la Appalachian Spring*? Perhaps. The backbeat of a folk-rock opera? A moment of Mahlerian pathos? Occasionally the faint strains of an organ sound a fractured cantus firmus of memories, the tolling of not-quite bells marks the passage of time. Was that the drone of a distant bagpipe? Or is it just the percussionist in costume?

Cindy Cox [b. 1961]

Critic Robert Carl describes the compositions of Cindy Cox as “well-wrought, imaginative, and not easily classifiable.” Nonetheless, there is something close to a unifying thread in her oeuvre: she writes music of great reflection, in every sense of that word. Many of her scores are meditative and mysterious; they journey into the mind’s eye. On other occasions, her pieces sparkle with a play of color and texture reminiscent of sunlight on water, fleeting gestures seen as if in a mirror. Sometimes her “reflections” are actual musical palindromes or echoes of popular music, filtered through the fun-house of her creative imagination. In every case, Cox shows that it is possible to be both responsive (to new technological developments, to the music of the past, to contemporary events) and creative.

Already in her relatively early score *Four Studies of Light and Dark* (1989), one can hear Cox’s fascination with opposites and see her love of symmetries: outer movements frame interior pairs that explore light and dark, low and high, carefully written-out nuances and passages meant to be improvised “like a rock and roll soloist.” With *Geode* (1996, for flute, clarinet, cello, percussion, and piano) and *Primary Colors* (1995, for violin, clarinet, and piano), the metaphor of “reflection” takes on new meanings. Though quite different in sound, each work surrounds a luminescent middle movement with faster, more ebullient music. In *Primary Colors*, the “delicate” center is set in relief by movements labeled “Fast, Swinging–Bold, Fun” and “Cheeky and Cheerful.” With *Geode*, the internal symmetry has more complicated connotations. Poet, composer, and Cox’s husband, John Champion shares intimate insights into this piece: “Like crystals forming around a dirty speck of earth, the shimmering glockenspiel, the high winds, and piano tremolos dance about the binding cello of the second movement... [which] provides the central fractal for the piece’s larger inflorescence, which is replicated in the work’s overall structure.” The compelling union of opposites continues in Cox’s more recent scores like *Hierosgamos*, whose title indicates the “sacred marriage” of dialectic entities like self and other, yin and yang. In this case, she explores and explodes the piano’s dual identity as “essentially a percussion instrument” that is, at the same time, a “huge (horizontal) harp” capable of “incredibly powerful resonance.” In seven dazzling etudes, Cox addresses “harmony and harmonic resonance,” allowing the inner pairs of movements (2-3, 5-6) to

form “sharp, apparent contrasts with the beginning, end and middle, even though...they are all created from the same originating material.”

Two very different kinds of resonance inhabit *Columba aspexit* (1998) and *Into the Wild* (1997). Commissioned for the Kronos Quartet by the National Endowment for the Arts, *Columba aspexit* is a dazzling elegy that takes flight from a chant by the twelfth-century abbess Hildegard von Bingen. Hildegard’s music and visions have become touchstones for spiritual seekers across the years, and Cox’s quartet aspires to the same spiritual ground with music that Champion rightly calls “ecstatic and transcendent,” full of canons, inversions, and retrogrades that “mirror” a relationship between the believer and the divine. While *Columba aspexit* moves in and out of the pages of music history, *Into the Wild* uses amplified violin, soprano saxophone, Mallet-Kat, electronic drums, electric guitar, and keyboards to gloss the story of Christopher McCandless, the young recluse whose death was chronicled by Jon Krakauer in 1992. In many of her scores, including tonight’s premiere, Cox has made a searching exploration, and celebration, of the natural world. *World a tuning fork* (commissioned by the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players in 2001) evokes “the living, canopied sound world in the Amazon rain forest,” and *De rerum Natura* (On the nature of things) takes the poetry of Lucretius as invitation for an orchestral menagerie first brought to life by David Milnes and the U. C. Berkeley Symphony Orchestra. Cox’s new CD *Nature is...* (recently released by Albany Records) bears witness to her ecological inspirations both in *Axis Mundi* (2004, commissioned by Earplay), which evokes the celestial understanding of many traditional cultures; and in the title track (2005, for amplified trombone quartet and live electronics), which sets text from John Champion’s *Squaring the Circle*. Here, poet and composer together treat ideas from a Mayan manuscript about the intrinsic connection between opposites: “the high and low, the sacred and the profane.”

An impressive pianist, Cox studied the keyboard with Lili Kraus and composition with Harvey Sollberger, Eugene O’Brien, John Eaton and Donald Erb while earning her doctorate from Indiana University. Fellowships to the Tanglewood and Aspen Music Festivals also brought contact with John Harbison, Bernard Rands, and Jacob Druckman. Cox has earned awards and commissions from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Fromm Foundation at Harvard University, the National Endowment for the Arts, ASCAP, and the Gemeinschaft der Kunstlerinnen and Kunstfreunde International Competition for Women Composers. Her scores have recently attracted attention from such ensembles as the Kronos Quartet, the Paul Dresher Ensemble, Alea III, the National Symphony, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Oakland Symphony, and the Festival di Musica Contemporanea at the American Academy in Rome. In addition to commissioning *World a Tuning Fork*, the San Francisco Contemporary Music premiered *Piece in Two Halves* in 1993. Cox is currently Professor of Composition at the University of California, Berkeley.

Cox, *En círculo* (2008)

for alto saxophone, clarinet, horn, trumpet, trombone, double bass, percussion, and piano

The composer writes: “Listening to me practice the piano in this piece, my sister said, ‘I hear all sorts of natural sounds, things blowing, shaking, leaves rustling, waves rolling.’”

“The title *En círculo* is derived from the verb ‘encircle,’ as approaching from the outside, and the phrase ‘in a circle,’ as from the inside. The performers are continually trading the same music around and around, rotating it spatially in overlapping and recurring sequences. The piece opens with the pitch G, played as quietly as possible and then passed between all of the instruments, with a long increase/decrease like a primal breath.

“My recent approach to harmony has evolved from studying the construction of instruments, especially their tunings. Within a larger group such as this, I try to find overlapping characteristics and gradations of colors shared between performers. In this piece the harmony and tonal centers are primarily related to the double bass tuning (strings G, D, A, and E), especially G. In the percussion, the tom-toms, roto-toms and gongs, as well as the timpani, are tuned to a G-based sonority to complement the sonority of the double bass.

“*En círculo* was commissioned by The San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, and is dedicated to my friend and colleague, David Milnes.”

—*Program Notes by Beth E. Levy*



Please join us for a reception after the concert. Scores from tonight’s program are also on display there.

The Performers

David Tanenbaum, guitar, has been soloist with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra, London Sinfonietta, and Vienna’s ORF orchestra, playing under such eminent conductors as Esa-Pekka Salonen, Kent Nagano, and John Adams. Among the many works written for him are Hans Werner Henze’s guitar concerto *An Eine Aolsharfe*, Terry Riley’s first guitar piece *Ascension*, four works by Aaron Jay Kernis, and the last completed work by Lou Harrison. He has toured extensively with Steve Reich and Musicians, was invited to Japan in 1991 by Toru Takemitsu, and has had a long association with Ensemble Modern. He joined the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players in 2008.

William Winant, percussion, has collaborated with some of the most innovative musicians of our time, including Cage, Reich, Xenakis, Anthony Braxton, Alvin Curran, Danny Elfman, Fred Frith, Keith Jarrett, Gordon Mumma, James Tenney, Christian Wolff, John Zorn, and the Kronos Quartet. In 1984, along with violinist David Abel and pianist Julie Steinberg, he founded the Abel-Steinberg-Winant Trio, a virtuoso ensemble specializing in new music from the Americas and the Pacific Rim. The Trio has commissioned dozens of works and has recorded for CRI and New Albion. From 1995 to 2001, he recorded and toured extensively with the avant-rock group Mr. Bungle. In 1997, with cellist Yo-Yo Ma and the Mark Morris Dance Group, Winant participated in the world premiere of Lou Harrison’s *Rhymes with Silver* and has since performed the piece around the world. In 1999 he worked with Sonic Youth to produce *Goodbye 20th Century*, a highly acclaimed recording of avant-garde composers, and since 2003 he has been percussionist for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. Winant teaches at U. C. Berkeley and U. C. Santa Cruz, and has been a member of the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players since 1988.

Music Director

David Milnes is a conductor of extraordinary breadth and long-standing commitment to contemporary music. In his early years, he studied not only piano and organ, but also clarinet, cello, and voice. Milnes received his undergraduate education in music at SUNY Stony Brook. In 1984, at age 27, he won the prestigious Exxon Conductor position with the San Francisco Symphony. He remained as the Symphony's Assistant Conductor and Music Director of the San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra until 1986, working closely with Edo de Waart and Herbert Blomstedt. Following study and collaboration with such renowned conductors as Leonard Bernstein, Erich Leinsdorf, Otto-Werner Müller, and Michael Tilson Thomas, he earned his doctorate in conducting from Yale University in 1989.

From 1994-2002, Milnes was Principal Guest Conductor of the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra and also guest conducted numerous orchestras across the United States. He has conducted at the Tanglewood, Aspen, and Monadnock Music Festivals, and has led operatic repertoire ranging from Mozart to Weill.

In 1996, Milnes joined the music faculty at the University of California, Berkeley, where he directs its symphony orchestra and the Berkeley Contemporary Chamber Players. He first conducted the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players in 1997, and joined the ensemble as Music Director in 2002.

The Ensemble

The San Francisco Contemporary Music Players (SFCMP), now in its 38th year, is a leader among America's most distinguished and successful chamber music organizations, performing, commissioning, and recording the music of today's composers. The group presents works written for both large and small chamber ensembles. A ten-time winner of the prestigious national ASCAP/Chamber Music America Award for Adventurous Programming of Contemporary Music, the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players has won this award more times than any other ensemble. It has commissioned 68 pieces and performed over 1,000 new works, including 66 U.S. and 136 world premieres.

Each season the ensemble performs a subscription series in the Bay Area. It has also toured widely throughout California, with performances on such concert series as San Francisco Performances, Cal Performances, the Stern Grove Festival, the Other Minds Festival, Los Angeles' Monday Evening Concerts, the Ojai Festival, and the Festival of New American Music in Sacramento. SFCMP made its European debut at the Cheltenham Festival of Music in 1986 and its East Coast debut at the Library of Congress in 2001. The ensemble has recorded eleven albums of its own and contributed to nine others. Its musical outreach programs include presentations in public high schools and its new *Contemporary Insights* series of intimate performances with conversation.