

San Francisco Contemporary Music Players
Steven Schick, Artistic Director

Zone 3: in which an inscription is erased but leaves a trace

Monday, February 27, 2012 • 8:00 pm • Herbst Theatre

LUIGI DALLAPICCOLA

Piccola Musica Notturna (A Little Night Music) (1954, 1961)

Approximate duration: 8 minutes

MICHELLE LOU

paralipomena (2012)

World Premiere, commissioned by the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players

Approximate duration: 8 minutes

SALVATORE SCIARRINO

Le Voci Sottovetro (The Voices Behind Glass) (1998)

*Elaborations on Carlo Gesualdo of Venice, for voice and ensemble
with readings from the letters of Torquato Tasso*

- I. Gagliarda del Principe di Venosa (Galliard of the Prince of Venosa)
Tasso: To Girolamo Mercuriale, Padova
- II. Tu m'uccidi, o crudele (You kill me, o cruel one)
Tasso: To Maurizio Cataneo, Rome
- III. Canzon francese del Principe (French Canzona of the Prince)
Tasso: To Giovan Battista Cavallara
- IV. Moro, lasso, al mio duolo (Pitifully, I die of my pain)

Mary Bonhag, soprano; Luciano Chessa, readings

Approximate duration: 26 minutes

Intermission

PASCAL DUSAPIN

Comoedia (1992)

Mary Bonhag, soprano

Approximate duration: 10 minutes

IANNIS XENAKIS

Palimpsest (1979)

Approximate duration: 12 minutes

The Performers

Steven Schick, conductor

Mary Bonhag, soprano

Tod Brody, flute

Sarah Rathke, oboe (Sciarrino, Dusapin)

Kyle Bruckmann, oboe (Dallapiccola, Lou, Xenakis)

Peter Josheff, clarinet (Sciarrino, Dusapin)

Bill Kalinkos, clarinet (Dallapiccola, Lou, Xenakis)

Rebekah Heller, bassoon

Lawrence Ragent, horn

Adam Luftman, trumpet

Eric Zivian, piano (Sciarrino)

Cory Smythe, piano (Xenakis)

Karen Rosenak, celesta

William Winant, percussion (Sciarrino)

Christopher Froh, percussion (Xenakis)

Karen Gottlieb, harp

Roy Malan, violin I (Sciarrino, Dusapin)

Graeme Jennings, violin I (Dallapiccola, Lou, Xenakis)

Hrabba Atladottir, violin II (Xenakis)

Nanci Severance, viola (Sciarrino, Xenakis)

Roxann Jacobson, viola (Dallapiccola, Lou, Dusapin)

Mary Artmann, cello

Richard Worn, bass

Luciano Chessa, readings

Robert Shumaker, recording engineer



Please join us in the lower lounge
for a reception after the concert.



This concert is sponsored in part by grants from
The Ross McKee Foundation and the Istituto Italiano di Cultura.



We dedicate this concert to the memory of Marcella DeCray (1925-2011), co-founder, former Executive Director, and longtime harpist of the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players.

A remembrance of Marcella DeCray by ensemble member Roy Malan, who worked closely with DeCray for many years as a member of the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, the San Francisco Ballet, and the Telluride Chamber Music Festival:

Students at the Curtis Institute in the early 1960's were admitted free to the Philadelphia Orchestra's matinees. From our seats we enjoyed a ringside view of the musicians and I was always struck by Marcella's commanding presence. How could I have imagined that, shortly following my graduation, I would have the privilege of making music with her on the concert stage and in the orchestral pit for more than two decades?

Marcella searched indefatigably for worthwhile new music for her own and the Contemporary Music Players' repertoire. Her persona in the group combined scintillating charm with a disarming directness and practicality. Her incomparable artistry was enhanced by her noble deportment. There was nothing quite as grand as Marcella onstage with her harp, especially when she joined colleagues for chamber music summers in Telluride, Colorado's little opera house.

At some point during our years in the San Francisco Ballet pit a ballet was programmed that involved our playing the *Thais* 'Meditation' together while a debauched party scene was taking place onstage. The dancers were required to become increasingly loud in their dissolute laughter until not a note we were playing could be heard. I'll never forget Marcella's total focus: as she finished playing she raised her head and hands heavenward just as if we were performing in Carnegie Hall.

Roy Malan

LUIGI DALLAPICCOLA (1904-1975)

For a significant number of contemporary music lovers, the music of Luigi Dallapiccola is nearly perfect. Though he himself made no such claim, his music does provide a rare and elegant balance of quintessentially twentieth-century traits: a blending of Italianate lyricism and structural sophistication, a commitment to political expression that does not abandon intellectual rigor, and a deep respect for musical traditions of the past that also aims for new freedoms and new horizons.

As British musicologist John C. G. Waterhouse once observed, “The seeds of Dallapiccola’s intense concern for liberty were sown early.” Born in disputed territory between Italy and Austria, he and his family were interned in Graz, Austria at the close of World War I; some twenty years later the racial repression of Italian and German fascism forced him into seclusion with his Jewish wife. Small wonder that three of his most famous scores are the opera *Il Prigioniero* (The prisoner) (1944-48), the *Canti de prigionia* (Songs of imprisonment) (1938-41), and *Canti de liberazione* (Songs of liberation) (1951-55). He even named his daughter Annalibera and, in the manner of J. S. Bach’s “Notebook for Anna Magdalena,” lent her name to an album of keyboard pieces. In fact, Dallapiccola was a professional caliber pianist, and he worked from 1934-67 as a piano instructor, primarily at the Florence Conservatory.

Dallapiccola’s reputation rests in part on his status as the first composer outside of Arnold Schoenberg’s immediate purview to adopt and adapt principles of that composer’s twelve-tone technique, in which all twelve pitches of the chromatic scale are presented in permutations of a carefully ordered “row” or “series.” Though he had been thunderstruck by an April 1924 performance of Schoenberg’s song cycle *Pierrot lunaire*, circumstances prevented a closer association with the Second Viennese School. Instead, as he wrote to music historian Hans Nathan in 1957: “due to the political circumstances, I had no contact with the masters of dodecaphony, the idea of confronting its problems seemed to me to be an adventure. For those who chose to follow this path, it took more than thirty years, and in the absence of books explaining the system, it was possible to make many mistakes, and yet at the same time to discover, purely by chance, something new. It was necessary, more than anything else, to have faith in one’s own instinct rather than in written or spoken rules.”

Like Schoenberg’s pupil Alban Berg, Dallapiccola found his most ambitious expressive outlet in opera and other vocal music. Like Salvatore Sciarrino, he was inspired by the musical monuments of the Italian past, particularly by the madrigals of Carlo Gesualdo, as can be heard in his *Cori di Michelangelo Buonarroti il giovane* (1933-36), and by the opera *Il ritorno di Ulisse in patria*, attributed to Claudio Monteverdi, which Dallapiccola adapted in the early 1940s and took as a point of departure for

his own *Ulisse* some twenty-five years later. Dallapiccola’s most ambitious dramatic work is *Il Prigioniero*, which reflects the influence of Berg in its idiosyncratic treatment of its twelve-tone rows and in its gritty and psychologically rich subject matter. Though the opera is set during the Spanish Inquisition, there is little doubt that Dallapiccola meant to reflect on the more contemporary conflicts that he himself had endured. Later in life, advising students on selecting an operatic libretto in 1967, he offered an admonishment that resonates much more generally: “Memory, memory, and again memory. Take careful notice of everything around you: none of you can know a priori how important your brief notes might be to your later work.”

Dallapiccola, *Piccola Musica Notturna* (1954, 1961)

for flute, oboe, Bb clarinet, harp, celesta, violin, viola, and cello

For Mozart, “a little night music” evoked good times: evening parties and serenades. How different is the nocturnal world of Dallapiccola. While it may partake of the dreamy qualities present in the piano Nocturnes of Frederic Chopin, or even the midnight intensity of Wagner’s *Tristan*, Dallapiccola’s *Piccola musica notturna* exhales the distinctively twentieth-century timbres of Béla Bartók (who developed an entire “night music” style of his own), and the moonlit madness of Schoenberg’s *Pierrot lunaire*, even drawing some of its pitch material from Pierrot’s eighth song, “Nacht” (Night). Unusually for Dallapiccola, the score is prefaced by a poem: Antonio Machado’s *Noche de Verano* (Summer Night), depicting a peaceful evening stroll.

Originally written in 1954 as a short orchestral piece, commissioned and premiered by Hermann Scherchen at a festival in Hanover, *Piccola musica notturna* was arranged in 1961 for chamber ensemble of eight instruments and has become famous in this more transparent, ethereal version. Like most of the composer’s mature works, it relies on the twelve-tone techniques explicated by Schoenberg, Webern and Berg, in this case using materials drawn from two related rows, each saturated with major and minor thirds, eschewing the more pointed dissonances of the half-step and tritone. In part for these reasons, Dallapiccola’s is a tremendously allusive score, a chiaroscuro play of light and shadow, uncanny, yet imperturbable.

MICHELLE LOU (b. 1975)

In thinking about her recent scores, composer Michelle Lou invokes a “process of discovery,” a “sense of archaeology,” and even a “mythology” of sound and relationship to tradition. Tonight we will hear Lou’s creative response to Luigi Dallapiccola’s *Piccola musica notturna*, one which she describes as a play of shadows and silence, affirmative connections and negative space. At a distance of more than half a century in time and several thousand miles in space, her new work *paralipomena* reflects distinctly twenty-first-century attitudes toward sound, pacing and (dis)continuity of form. Still more strongly, it shows Lou’s own strikingly original voice.

Presently a DMA candidate at Stanford University, Lou counts among her teachers Chaya Czernowin and Brian Ferneyhough. She is also an accomplished double bass player (in classical groups and a Latin jazz ensemble) and a student of the viola da gamba with John Dornenburg. One of her most important scores, and clear evidence of her standing with professional new music groups, is *Vertebrae*, which was written for the Arditti Quartet, premiered at the Darmstadt Summer Courses in 2010, and recently revised for performance by the JACK Quartet. Lou describes its compositional process as “an experiment in form and fragmentation,” involving an effort to balance intuitive composition with a more self-conscious resistance to familiar patterns. As its title suggests, the result is a structure of noisy bones and crucial connective tissue, a conduit for musical impulses lively enough to be called electric. “I wanted to challenge my own inner ear,” she notes, using algorithmic and organic considerations to resist the conventional gestures and arch-shaped forms that might come most readily to mind without devaluing the listening experience.

In 2008, Lou participated in an innovative collaboration known as the “Dialogue Experiment.” Her original contribution, *Opening*, has been performed by Ensemble Ascolta, and it shows her interest not just in dialogue with other composers but also with the creative layers of her own artistic development. *Opening* builds upon, or grows out of, what Lou calls a “sonic revelation,” an epiphanic moment from one of her very first compositions. She describes “following her nose” in this early, intuitive score only to find herself at an unexpected “clearing,” a moment of crystalline lucidity. Therefore, she observes, “I called this an opening, from which a new piece emerges, and again opening yet another opportunity for movement and discovery.”

Lou has been invited to participate in the MATA Festival, the Darmstadt Summer Music Courses, and numerous international festivals including Wien Modern and the Donaueschinger Musiktage. She has written for Ensemble SurPlus and is currently working on a piece for the Talea Ensemble in New York (an excerpt from her dissertation). As a

finalist in the Finale Composition Competition she is composing a new piece for the JACK Quartet, and she is also completing commissions for violinist Graeme Jennings and Ensemble Elision.

Lou, *paralipomena* (2012)

for flute, oboe, Bb clarinet, harp, celesta, violin, viola, and violoncello

The composer writes: “*paralipomena* was commissioned by Steven Schick and the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players... as a companion piece to Luigi Dallapiccola’s *Piccola musica notturna*. *paralipomena* comes from the Greek, meaning ‘things omitted from a text.’ As a departure point, I decided to create something like a negative image of Dallapiccola’s work... perhaps a shadowy accompaniment. All of his silences become opportunities for expression in my piece; therefore Dallapiccola’s voice is preserved, albeit mostly receded into silence. The mythology I created around his work is one of mirrors, shadows and reflections that are blurred, superimposed or distressed. It is not exactly a photo negative, but a terrain that has always existed in his silences, unearthing a kind of darkness behind the beauty and clarity of his world. The darkness is spurred by two poems.

“Antonio Machado’s poem *Noche de Verano* appears as a prologue in Dallapiccola’s score. There is a sense of solitude and isolation heavy in the heart of the subject despite the beauty and stillness of the night. He walks alone through the village, ‘like a ghost.’ The poem that I include as a prologue is also by Machado, *Una noche de Verano*. The poems both seem to describe the same village and the same opened balcony door, however this work illuminates a tragedy that I imagine precedes the former poem, providing a background to his solitude. I’ve included ghosts in my piece by mapping subtle references of other works over it, as the disembodied voices of spirits that I’ve connected to Dallapiccola’s work. He appears as a shadow as well, however transformed.

“*paralipomena* is meant to be performed tempo-wise as if *Piccola musica notturna* was being heard in the mind’s ear... The piece is static in many places, asking the player for no variance in sound, being almost machine-like during long tones, repetitions or in the obsessive ticking, which takes the place of the melodic material. The ticks mark out an otherworldly clock, sometimes stretching or speeding the sense of time. There is also a kind of restraint or internal gaze. This shall be regarded as a form of expressivity. Therefore expressivity is important here. Although there are subtle changes in dynamic, the changes must be clear. Timbre is also quite important in this piece. Sounds may fail at places. This fragility lends the sounds presence. In an imagined future, this work could be performed concurrently with Dallapiccola’s rather than sequentially, with two ensembles rather than one, spaced apart on stage, showing that the structure of both pieces are intimately related.”

ANTONIO MACHADO: POEMS

NOCHE DE VERANO

Es una hermosa noche de verano.
Tienen las altas casas
abiertos los balcones
del viejo pueblo a la anchurosa plaza.
En el amplio rectángulo desierto,
banco de piedra, evónimos y acacias
simétricos dibujan
sus negras sombras en la arena blanca.
En el cenit, la luna, y en la torre,
la esfera del reloj iluminada.
Yo en este viejo pueblo paseando
solo, como un fantasma.

UNA NOCHE DE VERANO

Una noche de verano
— estaba abierto el balcón
y la puerta de mi casa —
la muerte en mi casa entró.
Se fue acercando a su lecho
— ni siquiera me miró —,
con unos dedos muy finos,
algo muy tenue rompió.
Silenciosa y sin mirarme,
la muerte otra vez pasó
delante de mí. ¿Qué has hecho?
La muerte no respondió.
Mi niña quedó tranquila,
dolido mi corazón,
¡Ay, lo que la muerte ha roto
era un hilo entre los dos!

SUMMER NIGHT

It is a beautiful summer night.
The tall houses leave
their balcony shutters open
to the wide plaza of the old village.
In the large deserted square
stone benches, burning bush and acacias
trace their black shadows
symmetrically on the white sand.
In its zenith, the moon, in the tower
the clock's illuminated globe.
I walk through this ancient village
alone, like a ghost.

trans. Mary G. Berg, Dennis Maloney

ONE SUMMER NIGHT

One summer night —
my balcony door stood open
and the front door also —
death entered my house.
He approached her bed —
not even noticing me —
and with very fine hands
broke something delicate.
Death crossed the room
a second time.
What did you do?
He did not answer.
I saw no change in her,
but my heart felt heavy.
I knew what he broke:
It was the thread between us!

trans. Robert Bly

SALVATORE SCIARRINO (b. 1947)

Salvatore Sciarrino, widely believed to be the foremost Italian composer of his generation, has likened his music to “an erupting volcano seen from a distance.” His metaphor aptly captures the fact that one’s perception of the composer’s works depends radically on one’s sense of perspective. From up close, the energy of his atomistic writing explodes into its constituent tone colors. From a distance—even from the typical distance between stage and seat in a concert hall—his compositions appear exquisite, delicate, and rarefied almost to the threshold of human comprehension.

Though Sciarrino has more than fifty recordings to his credit, a host of influential European performers among his admirers, and students throughout the Italian peninsula, especially in Rome, Milan, and his hometown Città di Castello, Sciarrino has gained fame in the United States relatively recently. Beginning in the late 1990s, Sciarrino’s dramatic works gained him a foothold in New York—the *Aspern Suite* (1978) and *Luci Miei Traditrici* (O my betraying eyes) (1998) were heard in 2001, and his retelling of *Macbeth* (2002) reached Lincoln Center only a year later.

A child prodigy in music and the visual arts, Sciarrino began composing at age twelve and was featured at Palermo’s International New Music Week when he was only fifteen. He was largely self-taught, though subsequent years involved brief periods of study with Turi Belfiore and Franco Evangelisti (at Rome’s Accademia di S. Cecilia); far more important was the influence of well-established contemporary composers, particularly Luigi Nono and to a lesser extent György Ligeti. One could say that Sciarrino’s most important training came instead from performers, whose “extended techniques” (unusual performance effects such as string harmonics or flute key-clicks) form the fabric of many of his works, and less formally from philosophers, whose ideas have left their traces on Sciarrino’s ideas about nature, tradition, sound and silence.

The most immediately striking aspect of Sciarrino’s aesthetic is his preference for soft sounds; his music is quiet but never still. In vocal and instrumental pieces alike, his exploration of the noisy frontier on the edge of audibility seems linked (intentionally) to an understanding of the ordered chaos of nature and (perhaps unintentionally) to the ruminations of American experimental composer John Cage. Beginning in the early 1970s, Sciarrino explored this musical philosophy with great consistency. Among the highpoints of Sciarrino’s oeuvre is his impressive series of pieces for solo flute—including *Hermes* (1984) and *Canzona di ringraziamento* (Song of thanks) (1985)—replete with breath sounds, key clicks, multiphonics, and implied polyphony. Written during the 1980s for flutist Roberto Fabbriciani (who had also collaborated with Nono) and during the 1990s with Mario Caroli, these works create what musicologist Luciano Chessa describes as “a natural language made out of extended techniques.” In

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the words of contemporary music critic Gavin Thomas, “Sciarrino’s disembodied works...ignore all that is normally considered the substance of music, stripping away everything except the very extremities of sound, the residue, the noise of bow on string, the sound of breathing, as though the whole of western musical tradition had been filtered down to its constituent atoms.... [His] music is an art of submerged nostalgia...whether for the primeval innocence of nature or the extinguished traditions of western music.”

Sciarrino, *Le Voci Sottovetro* (The Voices Behind Glass) (1998)

for voice, bass flute, English horn, bass clarinet, piano, percussion, violin, viola, and cello

No matter what the medium, Sciarrino’s art involves the decomposition of conventional sound. But in many cases, it also involves the re-composition of elements from past styles in western music, including Renaissance vocal music as in *Luci miei traditrici*, which builds on the music of Claude le Jeune; baroque counterpoint, as in *Morte a Venezia* (Death in Venice) of 1991; and even American popular song, which makes audible appearances in *Vanitas* (1981), and *Nove canzoni del XX secolo* (New songs of the 20th century) (1991).

Le Voci Sottovetro shows Sciarrino borrowing in a way that is both literal and playful. At its core are pieces by the eccentric Renaissance composer and Prince of Venosa, Carlo Gesualdo (1561-1613): a galliard dance, two madrigals, and an instrumental canzona. This performance of Sciarrino’s four ethereal re-compositions of Gesualdo’s work is interspersed with readings from the correspondence of poet Torquato Tasso (1544-1595), a friend of Gesualdo and an inspiration to generations of madrigal composers.

On connotations of his title, and his quasi-historical project, Sciarrino mused: “What is the title *Le Voci Sottovetro* alluding to? Locking up a voice, the living essence, in a bottle reminds us of the genie who is caught by King Solomon and thrown into the sea. The Moslem fantasy literature is teeming with such legends. We may also think of the baroque penchant for the monstrous and spectacular, which, as is well known, goes hand in hand with science and the need to exhibit life as interrupted and anatomically dissected. And then there is the question of the madrigal: what remains of the old voices? Are they now no more than transparent or can we still perceive the sediment, as small as it may be, which has not yet escaped the vessel?”

CARLO GESUALDO: MADRIGALS

Gesualdo’s madrigals, as transcribed in the second and fourth movements of *Le Voci Sottovetro*, appear below:

<p>II. Tu m’uccidi, o crudele, E vuoi ch’io taccia e’l mio morir non grida? Ahi, non si può tacer l’aspro martire Ond’io ne vo gridando: ‘Oimè, ch’io moro amando!’</p>	<p>II. You are killing me, cruel lady, And you expect me to remain silent And not to cry out that I am dying? No, it is impossible to say nothing of the cruel torment which compels me to cry out: “Alas, I die loving.”</p>
<p>IV. Moro, lasso, al mio duolo e chi mi può dar vita ahi, che m’ancide e non vuol darmi aita!</p>	<p>IV. I die, alas, in my suffering, And she who could give me life, Alas, kills me and will not help me.</p>
<p>O, dolorosa sorte, chi dar vita mi può, ahi, mi dà morte!</p>	<p>O sorrowful fate, She who could give me life, Alas, gives me death.</p>

TORQUATO TASSO: THREE LETTERS

Three letters by Tasso, written during and shortly after his seven-year confinement at the St. Anna lunatic asylum (1579-1586), are summarized below. Full translations are available in the liner notes for ensemble recherche’s 1999 recording of *Le Voci Sottovetro* on the Kairos label.

To Girolamo Mercuriale, Padova (1583): In this letter, Tasso describes the mysterious illness that has plagued him for several years. He believes he is bewitched, and suffers from burning innards, loud ringing in the ears, and hallucinations both visual and auditory. He implores the letter’s recipient to give advice and help, and writes effusively of the gratitude that he would owe for it.

To Maurizio Cataneo, Rome (1585): Tasso believes that a goblin has stolen letters, food, and other items from his room and caused him to have hallucinations and physical pain at night. During these nights of pain and horror, the Virgin Mary appears to him, a miracle that keeps him from despair.

To Giovan Battista Cavallara (1586): Writing shortly after his release from the asylum, Tasso requests that pills be prescribed for him, and suggests other possible treatments, including blood-letting. He writes of the value of health restored.

PASCAL DUSAPIN (b. 1955)

Pascal Dusapin is a composer who has distanced himself from avant-garde ideology without abandoning avant-garde music. “For years I have been accused of being too accessible,” he told Alan Riding in a *New York Times* interview: “In the evangelical world of contemporary music, you can’t talk of love, emotion, expression. It’s badly viewed.” As his tone suggests, Dusapin has for the most part chosen to keep his distance from musical institutions. He made a brief foray to the French electronic music studio IRCAM [the Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique] in 1978, and he has occasionally served as composer-in-residence, but he makes his living primarily as a free-lance composer, with a welcome spirit of departure from the hallowed institutions of the French avant-garde.

Dusapin’s early inclinations set him apart from many of his compatriots. He was trained as an organist and studied art history at the Sorbonne, while writing music on his own. Encouraged by the French composer Andre Boucourechliev to seek more systematic instruction, he attended classes with Olivier Messiaen at the Conservatoire only briefly before settling into a longer apprenticeship with Iannis Xenakis, punctuated by occasional contact with Franco Donatoni. As Yves Lecoq of Radio-France has observed, these last two figures exerted an audible influence on Dusapin’s early works, including *Souvenir du Silence* (1976, inspired by Donatoni) and *Timée* (1978, dedicated to Xenakis).

From these men and from his experiences as an organist, Dusapin developed his interest in instrumental timbres and textures. Although he has for the most part eschewed electronics, it is not hard to hear ideas sparked by electronic media resounding in his acoustic scores. For example, in his cello octet *Loop* (1995-96), Dusapin treats groups of four cellists “somewhat like two 16-stringed cellos” that move in and out of sync with one another, waxing and waning their way through shifting rhythmic patterns. Diversity in nuance and articulation enlivens almost all of Dusapin’s instrumental scores—often giving his instrumental lines the flexible expression of spoken language and occasionally involving quasi-theatrical movements of the instrument through space.

It is no accident that Dusapin’s instrumental works should breathe the air of the theater, for opera and oratorio have always held pride of place among the composer’s efforts. “I go to the opera all the time nowadays,” he says: “When I was in my 20s, I liked opera music but would attend operas with my eyes closed. Now the theatrical side fascinates me.... I notice there is a broad public for opera, which represents all the forms of [the] human psyche.” Dusapin began his stage career with the opera *Roméo & Juliette* (1985-88, on a text by Olivier Cadiot), which draws together singing and speaking, a central tableau for orchestra, a quartet based on Native American song, and a solo clarinet part. According to musicologist

Paul Griffiths, it “unfolds in expanses of sustained expressive color,” within a narrative that is at times “close” and “intense” and at other times “distant” and “memorialized.”

Since the early 1990s, Dusapin has completed a series of ever more ambitious stage works. In addition to his *Medeamaterial* (1991) on a libretto by Heiner Müller, he composed what he calls an “operatorio” called *La Melancholia*, treating passages from Plotinus, Homer, Shakespeare, St. Ambrose, and Chaucer, among others. His chamber opera on the cryptic poetry by Gertrude Stein, *To Be Sung* (1992-93), fractures her already abstract prose by dividing it up between three soprano voices and speaker. In 2003, *To Be Sung* was performed at the Sounds French festival, and his opera *Perelà, Man of Smoke* premiered at the Opéra National de Paris/Bastille to great acclaim under the baton of James Conlon. His opera, *Faustus, the Last Night* (2006) was first heard at the Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin and was reprised in Lyon and Paris before reaching the United States at the Spoleto Festival in 2007; it has recently been released on DVD.

In 2007, Dusapin was awarded the Dan David Prize (shared with Zubin Mehta), an award totaling one million dollars and recognizing the composer for his compelling style of writing, “at that same time complex and yet immediately understandable,” and for providing such compelling evidence that “contemporary music is not meant to remain within closed circles, but can truly link itself to the ‘wide world’ and help us to understand it.”

Dusapin, *Comœdia* (1993)

for soprano, flute, oboe/English horn, clarinet/bass clarinet, trumpet, violin, and viola

Any composer who has written as much vocal music as Dusapin will have developed some ideas about text selection and the handling of the human voice. In *Comœdia*, Dusapin seems in search of origins. First, he has taken his text from what most consider the first masterwork of vernacular European literature, the *Divine Comedy* of Dante Alighieri. Second, he has selected not the tormented journey of the *Inferno* or the soul-searching of *Purgatory*, but the blissful new beginning of *Paradise*. The three movements, performed practically without pause, draw upon passages from Canto I treating the blazing light of the divine, the friction between lofty intention and material realization, and the obscurity of the human condition.

If Dante’s text represents a certain kind of literary primacy for the vernacular, then Dusapin seems in search of a primal or vernacular voice to match the text. Rather than the careful utterances of a language of state, an artificial or a learned language, Dusapin’s score offers up multiple idiomatic tongues—one for each instrument and the most primal, of course, issuing from the mouth of the soprano. Amid instrumental flutterings and filigree, she awakens to new language and new life.

DANTE ALIGHIERI: THE DIVINE COMEDY

Excerpts from Dante's *Divine Comedy* (*Paradiso*, Canto I) that appear in Dusapin's *Comœdia*:

I. (v. 1-9)

La gloria di colui che tutto move
per l'universo penetra, e risplende
in una parte più e meno altrove.

Nel ciel che più de la sua luce prende
fu' io, e vidi cose che ridire
né sa né può chi di là sù discende;
perché appressando sé al suo disire,
nostro intelletto si profonda tanto,
che dietro la memoria non può ire.

The glory of Him who moveth everything
Doth penetrate the universe, and shine
In one part more and in another less.

Within that heaven which most his light receives
Was I, and things beheld which to repeat
Nor knows, nor can, who from above descends;
Because in drawing near to its desire
Our intellect ingulphs itself so far,
That after it the memory cannot go.

II. (v. 127-138)

Vero è che, come forma non s'accorda
molte fiata a l'intenzion de l'arte,
perch' a risponder la materia è sorda,
così da questo corso si diparte
talor la creatura, c'ha podere
di piegar, così pinta, in altra parte;
e sì come veder si può cadere
foco di nube, sì l'impeto primo
l'atterra torto da falso piacere.

Non dei più ammirar, se bene stimo,
lo tuo salir, se non come d'un rivo
se d'alto monte scende giuso ad imo.

True is it, that as oftentimes the form
Accords not with the intention of the art,
Because in answering is matter deaf,

So likewise from this course doth deviate
Sometimes the creature, who the power possesses,
Though thus impelled, to swerve some other way,
(In the same wise as one may see the fire
Fall from a cloud,) if the first impetus
Earthward is wrested by some false delight.

Thou shouldst not wonder more, if well I judge,
At thine ascent, than at a rivulet
From some high mount descending to the lowland.

III. (v. 85-93)

Ond'ella, che vedea me sì com'io,
a quietarmi l'animo commosso,
pria ch'io a dimandar, la bocca aprio,
e comincì: «Tu stesso ti fai grosso
col falso imaginar, sì che non vedi
ciò che vedresti se l'avessi scosso.

Tu non se' in terra, sì come tu credi;
ma folgore, fuggendo il proprio sito,
non corse come tu ch'ad esso riedi.»

Whence she, who saw me as I saw myself,
To quiet in me my perturbed mind,
Opened her mouth, ere I did mine to ask,

And she began: "Thou makest thyself so dull
With false imagining, that thou seest not
What thou wouldst see if thou hadst shaken it off.

Thou art not upon earth, as thou believest;
But lightning, fleeing its appropriate site,
Ne'er ran as thou, who thitherward returnest."

IANNIS XENAKIS (1922-2001)

Not long after the death of Iannis Xenakis in 2001, Paul Griffiths paid tribute to the composer in the *New York Times*, commenting that his music retained a "primitive power" despite its origin in "highly sophisticated scientific and mathematical theories." This unusual juxtaposition—of the very old and very new, of the very basic and the highly refined—is crucial to understanding Xenakis's music and his influential theories about mathematics and composition.

Growing up in Romania and Greece, Xenakis was fascinated by ancient literature and philosophy, and his formal education was devoted to mathematics and engineering rather than music (although he received rudimentary vocal and keyboard lessons). Perhaps because of this distance from the compositional trends of Western Europe, he developed strikingly original methods of musical creation. While fighting with the Greek resistance during World War II, Xenakis was wounded, captured, and sentenced to death. With the end of the conflict, he escaped to France, where his death sentence was revoked and he became a citizen. Throughout his life, however, he retained strong ties to his homeland and the political ideals that had forced him into exile.

Shortly after arriving in Paris, Xenakis found a job in the architecture studio of Le Corbusier. He was deeply involved in designing the Philips Pavilion, which would become the spatial home for Edgard Varèse's pioneering tape piece, *Poème électronique*. Though Nadia Boulanger turned him down as a pupil, he received guidance from Arthur Honegger and Annette Diuononné, who quickly sensed that he had little interest in traditional harmony. She sent him to study with Olivier Messiaen and Darius Milhaud, whose open-minded approaches to pitch organization inspired him to explore parallels between music and architecture.

This experimentation bore fruit in his first major orchestral work, *Metastasis* (1953-54) which took even the avant-garde by surprise when it was premiered at the 1955 Donaueschingen festival of contemporary music. Xenakis compared this watershed work to the Philips Pavilion, noting that each represents an exploration of continuity: "parabola shapes" in the building, and glissandi (slides) in *Metastasis*. His replacement of specific pitches with sonic shapes reached an even greater extreme in *Pithoprakta* (1955-56) which took theories about the movement of gases and applied them to music, resulting in "clouds of sound."

Implicit in *Pithoprakta* was a conjunction between music and mathematics that grew ever more technical through Xenakis's career. He codified his ideas under the rubric "stochastic music," a term that invokes probability theory and the laws of "large numbers" or "rare events." His fascinating but formidable writings, many of which are collected in *Formalized Music* (1963, rev. 1992), reveal the depth of his engagement

with the sciences. Intuitively drawn toward natural sounds that are both complex and unpredictable (thunder, wind, insect noises), Xenakis began to create similar sounds synthetically. Beginning with *Achorripsis* of 1956-57, he used computer programs to link certain musical parameters (timbre, duration, intensity, etc.) with mathematical operations derived from calculus and game theory. By separating non-temporal parameters (like pitch) from temporal ones (like rhythm) in his calculations, Xenakis achieved extremely intricate constructions in pieces like *Nomos Alpha* (1965-66) for cello, or *Tetras* (1983), dedicated to the Arditti Quartet.

Xenakis viewed composition as an endeavor based on rules and variables, suggesting a moral and aesthetic stance that he summed up: “This is my definition of an artist, or of a man: to control.” Yet this ostensibly anti-expressive philosophy has roots in Xenakis’s personal history, and in connecting his musical style to his wartime experiences he acknowledged a desire for the transcendent: “I became convinced—and I remain so even today—that one can achieve universality, not through religion, not through emotions or tradition, but through...a scientific way of thinking. But even with that, one can get nowhere without general ideas, points of departure... born of intuition, some kind of vision.”

Xenakis, *Palimpsest* (1979)

for oboe, clarinet, bassoon, French horn, piano, percussion, and strings

At its most literal, a palimpsest is a flat surface, such as a manuscript or wax tablet, upon which one inscription has been effaced to make room for another. More metaphorically, in the spirit of tracing and erasure represented by the other works on tonight’s program, a palimpsest is an illustration of the vagaries of historical memory: sometimes whole stories are wiped out, at other times long forgotten references unexpectedly rise to the surface.

Xenakis’s *Palimpsest* exhibits at every level the fundamental quality of its namesake: multi-layered-ness. From the first moments, the pianist’s two hands move according to two different subdivisions of the beat, creating the impression of two distinct ribbons of sound, unfurling at different rates. This is no easy feat, yet it is but a foretaste of things to come, as individual instruments add their own layers of activity, accumulating nearly a dozen superimposed threads of sound. At times the pianist’s message seems the easiest to “read” on the work’s surface; at times the percussionist seems to act as a shaman of sorts, marking the passage between layers of significance, navigating between interpretive streams. On rare occasions, the players join forces (or stories), but more often it is the irreducible multiplicity of strata that gives Xenakis’s *Palimpsest* its historical, even archaeological power.

Program notes by Beth Levy

The Performers

Mary Bonhag made her Carnegie Hall solo debut in 2009 singing scenes from David T. Little’s new chamber opera *Dog Days*, and in 2007 she created the role of “Eve” for the Pine Mountain Music Festival premiere of *The Diaries of Adam and Eve*, a new chamber opera by Evan Premo.

Mary has performed as part of the Fontana Chamber Arts Festival of Kalamazoo, MI; the Maui Classical Music Festival; Strings in the Mountains; Cactus Pear Music Festival; the Lancaster Music Festival; SongFest (as a Stern Fellow); Yellow Barn; and with the American Symphony Orchestra. Upcoming engagements include a multi-media performance of Crumb’s *Madrigals* at Yellow Barn, and performances in NYC of Estonian music with composer Lembit Beecher. She has also been featured on the NPR shows *Performance Today* and *From the Top*.

After studying at the University of Michigan, she earned her Master’s degree at Dawn Upshaw’s Graduate Vocal Arts Program at Bard College, winning concerto competitions at both institutions. She lives in the woods of Vermont where she runs Scrag Mountain Music, an innovative concert series with her husband, double bassist and composer Evan Premo.

Luciano Chessa received a Ph.D. in musicology from the University of California–Davis. Previously, at the Conservatory of Bologna, he earned a D.M.A. in piano and an M.A. in composition. His areas of research interest include twentieth-century music, experimental music and late fourteenth-century music, and he has been interviewed at the CBS (KPIX/KBHK) television channel as an expert on Italian hip-hop. His scholarly writings can be found in MIT Press’s *Leonardo* and *Musica e Storia*, the Journal of the Levi Foundation, Venice. He is currently working on the first English monograph dedicated to Luigi Russolo, to be published by the University of California Press.

Chessa is also active as a composer and performer. His scores (including a large work for orchestra and double children’s choir, and a piano and three turntables duo) are published by RAI TRADE, and many are produced with visual artist Terry Berlier. Since 1999 he has been musical program coordinator for the Italian Cultural Institute in San Francisco, where he produces concerts of Italian contemporary music.

Pianist **Cory Smythe** is an inventive improviser, chamber musician, and performer of contemporary classical music. As a member of the International Contemporary Ensemble, he has contributed to numerous premieres, worked with composers Philippe Hurel, Dai Fujikura, Steve Lehman, Magnus Lindberg, Kaija Saariaho, Mathias Pintscher, and Alvin Lucier among many others, and performed in venues across the U.S. and abroad. His recent performance of solo piano music by Lindberg was praised by the Boston Globe for its “grace and intensity”, and a forthcoming recording by ICE (Mode Records) will feature Cory as the piano soloist in Iannis Xenakis’s *Palimpsest*. Cory has played with or among a wide array of artists, including the Greg Osby Four, the Metropolitan Opera orchestra, violinist Hilary Hahn, Present Music, Tyshawn Sorey, and Anthony Braxton. In the spring of 2011, he released his debut album *Pluripotent*, a collection of original compositions and improvisations for solo piano which has garnered praise from New York Times critic Steve Smith among others. Cory is a graduate of the music schools at Indiana University and the University of Southern California, where his principal teachers were Luba Edlina-Dubinsky and Stewart Gordon.

A former subscriber, **Harold Wollack**, left the first bequest to help underwrite the ensemble’s concerts and programs.



More recently, the ensemble has received a generous bequest from the estate of **Ruth Caron Jacobs**.



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Dr. Claire Harrison, Roy C. (Bud) Johns, Renate Kay,
Jane LeRoux, Jean-Louis LeRoux, Terry McKelvey,
A. Robin Orden, C. Michael Richards, Victor & Esta Wolfram

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