

From the Artistic Director



John Cage was a great American composer and deserves to be celebrated for his enormous contributions to the music of the 20th century and beyond.

That's obvious, right?

After all, thousands of

concerts all over the world will have been devoted to celebrating this year's Cage Centennial this year. (He was born on September 5, 1912.) Yet in those thousands of events we have seen relatively little attention played to John Cage, Composer. We have seen multiple essays and a new book describing Cage's relationship to Zen Buddhism. We have seen exhibitions of his paintings, his poetry, his correspondence. We have focused on Cage's personal relationship with Merce Cunningham and his aesthetic rapport with Rauschenberg and Duchamp. We have fêted his well-known interest in Thoreau, in Joyce and Satie. We have saluted the cross-cultural, and even countercultural impulses behind his devotion to chance procedures and the I Ching.

A well-known composer, and good friend of mine, claims that Cage was a revolutionary theorist, "but not really a composer" – a view shared by Cage's most famous teacher, Arnold Schoenberg, who while bemoaning Cage's utter lack of sensitivity to harmony nevertheless proclaimed him to be, "an inventor of great genius."

Judging from the welcome outpouring of affection and attention this year's centennial celebrations have presented, Cage is apparently "all of the above." But is he a real composer?

Our answer is, resoundingly, YES! He was a great composer, and furthermore, his music can stand alone as great music with

In his centenary year, we have considered Cage as a Buddhist, a painter, poet, and philosopher. This weekend, we focus on John Cage, composer.

or without the attractive aspects of his personal philosophy and artistic taste.

The celebration of John Cage by the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players may be small by comparison to some – see the ten-day festival in Washington last month or week-long celebration in Cologne in May, among many others. But by restricting ourselves to a presentation of his works, we can ask a single important question: Does the music of John Cage still engage us as “contemporary music,” that is to say music that exerts significant leverage on the welter of today’s aesthetic and cultural concerns, or is his oeuvre now to be filed on the increasingly dusty shelves of music history of the very recent past?

With tonight’s concert, our hope is that Cage as the twenty-something composer of the late 1930’s and early ‘40’s might speak across the decades to today’s young composers. Is the sense of delight and exploration, so present in the Cage works, a part of their music as well? Are the musical processes and professional travails much different now? Will they understand each other, the young New York transplant by way of California six decades ago and the young New Yorkers and Californians of today? Again, I think the answer will be a resounding, yes, but let’s find out together.

We start with the percussion pieces because they are indeed points of departure, both to Cage’s notoriety as a composer but also to contemporary percussionists as the foundational works of a repertory. Here we see not just the opening of cultural floodgates whereby a Burmese gong is played next to a Mexican *teponaxtl*, next to some Chinese tom-toms, next to a set of Oxen Bells (what are Oxen Bells, anyway?) By engaging the multiplicity of percussion sounds Cage took an important first step along his path towards indeterminacy.

Think of all the possibilities implied in the simple indication of “medium gong.” This could be a gong from one of many cultures and it could be played with a large variety of sticks. In short a “medium gong” could mean a huge spectrum of sonic possibilities.

So in his percussion music Cage could specify an action (“hit the gong now”) but not necessarily the sound it would produce. Controlling what music might act like *rather than what it might sound like* can be bewildering to listeners. Someone who taps his foot through *Third Construction* might well wonder if the same composer was also responsible for the metrically directionless *Freeman Etudes*. Or perhaps a naturalist devotee of music for amplified cactus (believe me, there are such people) will find herself completely at sea in the mechanical world of the prepared piano.

But there is a single coherent mind at work in all of this music. Consistency is a product of what I think of as the “Cage theorem,” a behavioral model whereby strictly emplaced limitations in the realm of musical construction allow for rich unpredictability in sound and style. Nearly every Cage piece operates on this principal. The theorem dictates that the more securely anchored the formal dimension, the greater the amount of chance-based freedom is possible.

Take *First Construction (In Metal)* for example: here we find a rigidly repeating cycle of 16-measure phrases, each subdivided regularly into a strict rhythmic template. The sounds that fill this template, however, are a volcanic admixture of clangorous metallic percussion. According to this formula, Cage did not claim to know what sounds his ensemble of percussionists would make, just when and for how long they would make them.

In subsequent years, increasingly rigorous formal mechanisms led to increasingly free sonic results until at the very midpoint of his life we have *4’33”*, his famous piece in which a performer(s) does not play at all, leaving to complete chance the sounds that will fill the four minutes and thirty-three seconds of musical time.

**The “Cage Theorem” -
keɪdʒ
'θi:əreɪm -
when strict directives in musical construction prescribe unpredictability in sound and style.
•
4’33” is not a musical joke, but rather the ultimate focus on process over product.**

A long debunked mythology claimed that this was a piece of whimsy, a musical joke. In fact it is the ultimate focus on process over product. It is a crystalline structure, filled with nothing. Indeed to paraphrase Cage himself, he had nothing to say and he was saying it.

So is this music, much of which is more than fifty years old, still contemporary? I can only say for myself that the Cagean universe still feels like home. It still feels like today. Like Cage, I believe that sound constrained by form and informed by occasion bears meaning even if those sounds are ultimately unpredictable. I believe that composers, performers, and listeners enjoin an equally shared listening space in which each has responsibility and no one has a free ride. I concur with Satie's phrase, often quoted by Cage: "L'artiste n'a pas le droit de disposer inutilement du temps de son auditeur.*" I smile when I read Cage's statement: "I can't understand why people are frightened of new ideas; I'm frightened of the old ones."

With these sentiments in mind, we continue at Sunday's Musicircus with a kaleidoscopic array of his later music. On Sunday we will hear *Postcard from Heaven* in a version for more than a dozen harps. We'll hear *A House Full of Music* for the members of the San Francisco Girls' Chorus singing their favorite songs, and the *Music for* series for professional musicians playing their favorite sounds. We'll offer recorded birdsong, water gongs, readings from his influential book, *Silence*, and a massed orchestra of radios. You can take a "musical walk" by picking up a map and taking a *Dip in the Lake*, or just sit still and hear what you'll hear in 4'33". We'll visit his landmark works: the virtuosic *Etudes Boreales* for cello and percussionist playing the inside of a piano, and the ground-breaking *Concert for Piano*. We'll also have special guests, dancers brought to us by Anna Halprin, a long-time Cage collaborator.

In short you'll hear the music of an American master: John Cage, composer. Happy birthday, Mr. Cage.

– Steven Schick

* *The artist has no right to waste the listener's time.*

San Francisco Contemporary Music Players
Steven Schick, Artistic Director

Construction

Thursday, October 25, 2012 • 8:00 pm
Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Forum

MISSY MAZZOLI

Still Life with Avalanche (2008)
Approximate duration: 10 minutes

JOHN CAGE

First Construction (In Metal) (1939)
Approximate duration: 10 minutes

Second Construction (1940)
Approximate duration: 7 minutes

LEI LIANG

Aural Hypothesis (2010)
Approximate duration: 11 minutes
West Coast premiere

Intermission

SAMUEL CARL ADAMS

Piano Trio (2011)
Approximate duration: 15 minutes
West Coast premiere

JOHN CAGE

Third Construction (1941)
Approximate duration: 12 minutes

The Performers

Steven Schick, conductor/percussion

Tod Brody, flute

Bill Kalinkos, clarinet

Keisuke Nakagoshi, piano

William Winant, percussion

Daniel Kennedy, percussion

Christopher Froh, percussion

Loren Mach, percussion (*Mazzoli, Liang, First Construction*)

Megan Shieh, percussion (*First Construction*)

Roy Malan, violin

Stephen Harrison, cello

Robert Shumaker, recording engineer

•

We dedicate tonight's concert to the memory of Frances Varnhagen, a member of the original Board of Directors of the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players. She served on our board from 1978-1983, and was an advocate for and supporter of several prominent cultural organizations in San Francisco.

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Tonight's performance of *First, Second, and Third Constructions* is sponsored in part by the Clarence E. Heller Charitable Foundation and the Ross McKee Foundation. The participation of Samuel Carl Adams, Lei Liang, and Missy Mazzoli are sponsored in part by MetLife Creative Connections grants from the Meet the Composer/ New Music USA Foundation.

Thank You

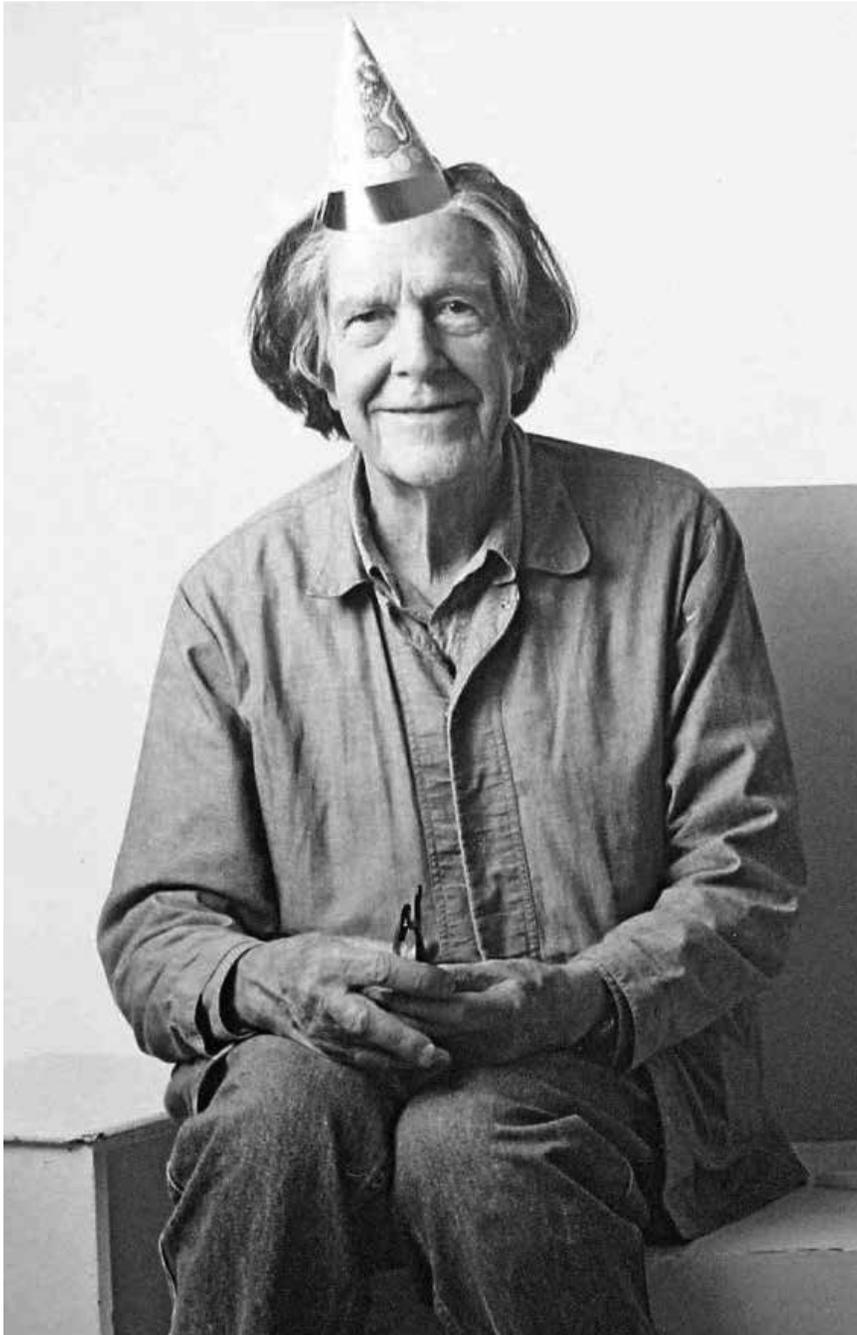
The San Francisco Contemporary Music Players wish to thank Isabel Yrigoyen and the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts for their extraordinary openness and collaborative spirit. We also thank Kathy Budas, Maureen Dixon, Michael LoPresti, and everyone on the YBCA marketing and PR teams, Jose Maria Francos, Kathy Rose, Roko Kawai, and everyone else who played a part in this weekend's collaboration.

We thank the musicians and student percussionists from UC Davis, Mills College, and Sacramento State University, our exquisite harp ensemble, and the other guest artists, including the lovely young voices of the San Francisco Girls Chorus. We thank Anna Halprin and dancers of her Dancer's Workshop for sharing their art and generosity; Laurel Butler, Jova Vargas, and their army of YAAW students for being young, energetic, and devoted to artistic inquiry and experience.

We of course thank the board, staff, and the Players for their tenacity and dedication in supporting this huge undertaking.

Finally, we wish to thank you, intrepid listeners, for joining us in another sonic adventure.





Cage at surprise party for his 80th birthday. He died ten days later.
Credit: Steven Speliotis

***Still Life With Avalanche*, by Missy Mazzoli**

for flute, clarinet, piano, percussion, violin, and cello

Still Life With Avalanche is a pile of melodies collapsing in a chaotic free fall. The players layer bursts of sound over the static drones of harmonicas, sketching out a strange and evocative sonic landscape. I wrote this piece while in residence at Blue Mountain Center, a beautiful artist colony in upstate New York. Halfway through my stay there, I received a phone call telling me my cousin had passed away very suddenly. There's a moment in this piece when you can hear that phone call, when the piece changes direction, when the shock of real life works its way into the music's joyful and exuberant exterior. This is a piece about finding beauty in chaos, and vice versa. It is dedicated to the memory (the joyful, the exuberant and the shocking) of Andrew Rose. – MM

***Aural Hypothesis*, by Lei Liang**

for flute, clarinet, piano, vibraphone, violin, and cello

Professor Chou Wen-chung once made the remark, "Calligraphy is music in ink, and music is calligraphy in sound." Recalling many inspiring conversations with him, *Aural Hypothesis* is a quasi-fantastical study on how lines may find expression in sound. The lines in this piece, however, are not modeled after traditional Chinese calligraphy; they are something more basic or primal: a simple curve or a straight line, drawn slowly with a thin brush with intense attentiveness, or with a thick brush with explosive speed.

With a grant generously provided by the Jebediah Foundation, *Aural Hypothesis* was commissioned by Boston Musica Viva and dedicated to Professor Chou Wen-chung. The first performance was given by Boston Musica Viva on October 1, 2010 at the Tsai Performance Center in Boston, MA. – LL

Piano Trio, by Samuel Carl Adams

for piano, violin, and cello

After spending the last year and a half working with an intense focus on electroacoustic composition (*Tension Studies # 1, 2; Meridians*) I took an almost complete departure in writing *The Piano Trio*. This work is a concise, kaleidoscopic composition whose transparency and compressed classical form are a sort of consequence to the antecedent of noise, pulsating rhythms, and slow harmonic movement that define these recent works. – SCA

About the Cage Percussion Revolution

The standard trope is that percussion music came to the fore in the 20th century because new composers needed new sounds. Indeed the raucous confederation of early century percussion noises did produce a lot of interesting and novel noises. But, though percussion music may have ended as “new sounds,” it started as “new culture.”

Until the late 19th century percussion operated as the force of *otherness* in an otherwise culturally coherent music. Percussion was a necessary outsider in this distinctly non-contradictory world. After all, how do you know you belong unless you can point to someone who doesn't? Think of the storm scene in the third movement of the *Symphonie fantastique* or the “Turkish” use of cymbals and drums at the end of Beethoven's 9th. Those percussion sounds refer to forces outside of the concert hall, and therefore outside of European culture. In their essence they are totems of an external threat: the uncontrollable power of the natural world or the perfumes and perils of civilizations beyond the reach of Europe. Much later we also see percussion as symbolic of the unspeakable or grotesque. See Alban Berg's tam-tam crescendo in the third act of *Wozzeck* as a stand-in for emotions too searing to be uttered.

But by the 1930's the notion of a coherent aesthetic and cultural center in Western music had been smashed to smithereens by the mighty hammer of World War I. Splinters of it were flying everywhere, and with the center in shambles it wasn't possible to

tell the insiders from the outsiders anymore. Relieved of duty as the “voice of the other,” percussion became the voice of all others. As John Cage said, “Here comes everybody.”

Cage's three “Constructions in Percussion” are anthems of a new order in which extreme cultural and sonic juxtaposition is inherent. Here the *other* is not barred at the gate but is allowed in. Cage's new percussion sounds, only recently transplanted to the decorous and unfamiliar customs of the insiders, combined with each other to make musical jet fuel. This chemistry calls for radical juxtaposition: instruments of the old order – venerable relics from established traditions like the piano and the gong – are distorted by the latest tricks. The piano is prepared and the strings are scraped; the gong struck then lowered into water. And just look what's happened to the neighborhood! The piano, accustomed to being downstage and center, sits next to railroad spikes, tin cans, the jawbone of an ass, and split bamboo cricket callers!

The early century view of technology was a rich source of contradiction and therefore a potent set of artistic impulses. On one hand there was a puerile awe of the machine and the supposition that it could create a perfect life for its human masters. On the other hand there was the fear that this very same technology would spin out of control and kill us all. The Cage Constructions represent both sides of that equation: they are the constructed products of a mechanized world, a world that makes pianos and uses tin cans; one that arranges instruments from high to low and organizes music into the neat architecture of musical form. But each piece is also indebted to a mystical, fluid, and considerably less constructed world. Among the instruments are a *teponaxtli*, a Mixtec log drum sometimes associated with ancient human sacrifice, and a blown conch shell, once the call to arms of the Haitian slave revolt of the late 18th century.

The great contribution of the Cage percussion constructions to the 20th century is that here for the first time these juxtapositions are not problematized. The world of string music would never have tolerated a quartet for banjo, sitar, violin, and ehru, yet Cage

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parses an equally disparate group of percussion instruments as a unified whole. What was once contradiction has become co-existence. And with that simple paradigm the most unexpected and moving results occur. The piano, the voice of Chopin and Monk, now seems like a clunky machine – a kind of tuned typewriter – but the tin cans, the bass drum roar and the crickets are practically operatic. The pieces are indeed highly constructed essays in form, but they also flow effortlessly on freshets of new sounds. What were once threats from the outside have become the essential organs on the inside. Our current version of young-century *michigas* could stand to take a closer look at this vibrant music. We might profit by a lesson in tolerance and the healthy friction of diversity. – SS

Composer Biographies

MISSY MAZZOLI

Recently deemed “one of the more consistently inventive, surprising composers now working in New York” (*New York Times*), and “Brooklyn’s post-millennial Mozart” (*Time Out New York*), Missy Mazzoli



has seen her music performed globally, by the Kronos Quartet, eighth blackbird, the American Composers Orchestra, New York City Opera, the Minnesota Orchestra, Dublin’s Crash Ensemble, New York City’s NOW Ensemble and many others. She is currently Composer/Educator in residence with the Albany Symphony, and the recipient of the Detroit Symphony’s 2011 Elaine Lebenbom Award.

2012 has included many exciting new projects, including the premiere of her first multimedia chamber opera *Song from the Uproar* at New York’s seminal performance venue The Kitchen. Excerpts of this new work, based on the life and writings of Swiss explorer Isabelle Eberhardt, were previously performed by New York City Opera as part of their VOX series, and by students at the Bard College Conservatory under the direction of Dawn Upshaw. Other premieres have been presented by the Albany Symphony, and the Detroit Symphony, along with *SALT*, Missy’s new multimedia collaboration with cellist Maya Beiser and writer Erin Cressida-Wilson, based on the biblical story of Lot’s wife. 2012 will also include performances by the Britten Sinfonia and Kronos Quartet at London’s Barbican Centre.

Mazzoli is the recipient of four ASCAP Young Composer Awards, a Fulbright Grant to the Netherlands, and grants from the Jerome Foundation, American Music Center, and the Barlow Endowment. She is also active as an educator/mentor to young composers; in 2006 she taught composition in the Music

Department of Yale University, and from 2007-2010 was Executive Director of the MATA Festival in New York City, an organization dedicated to promoting the work of young composers.

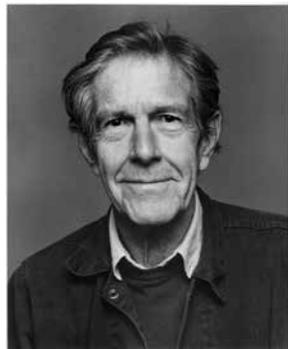
Mazzoli is an active pianist and keyboardist, and often performs with Victoire, an “all-star, all-female quintet” (*Time Out New York*) she founded in 2008 dedicated exclusively to her own compositions. Their debut full-length CD, *Cathedral City*, was named one of 2010’s best classical albums by *Time Out New York*, NPR, the *New Yorker* and *The New York Times*. Missy attended the Yale School of Music, the Royal Conservatory of the Hague and Boston University. Her music is published by G. Schirmer. **www.missymazzoli.com**

JOHN CAGE (1912-1992)

“Wherever we are,” John Cage observed, “what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating.” In the process of calling our attention to the sounds around us, Cage also transformed the very actions, ethics and aesthetics of contemporary music performance.

Born in Los Angeles one hundred years ago, Cage counted among his early mentors Henry Cowell, whose sound experiments and interest in music from around the world were to have far-reaching consequences. Cowell also encouraged Cage to make his first trips to New York City, where he would prepare himself to study with the magisterial Arnold Schoenberg back in Los Angeles. Their unlikely relationship is most often remembered by way of Schonberg’s declaration that Cage was “not a composer, but... an inventor – of genius.” In fact, Cage absorbed from the Viennese émigré certain ideas about musical structuring and the transformative power of art.

Beginning in 1937, Cage took a job as a dance accompanist,



first at UCLA, and then in the interactive environment of Seattle’s Cornish School. Here he met dancer-choreographer Merce Cunningham, with whom he would enjoy a decades-long association. He also found support for his first forays into musical electronics (using radio), and conceived his most famous musical “invention”: the prepared piano, an outgrowth of his fascination with percussion music. In his famous essay “The Future of Music: Credo,” Cage considered percussion music “a contemporary transition from keyboard influenced music to the all-sound music of the future.” Although it required only a single performer, Cage’s music for prepared piano – most especially his famous *Sonatas and Interludes* of 1946-48 – transformed the concert piano into a one-player percussion orchestra by inserting into the piano strings metal screws, pieces of wood, rubber erasers and the like.

In the mid-forties, having moved to New York’s Lower East Side, Cage underwent a number of spiritual and personal crises coinciding with his separation from his wife Xenia in 1945 and his increasing closeness to Cunningham. After considerable distress about his marriage and his sexuality and a very brief attempt at psychoanalysis, Cage discovered new sources of strength in his study of philosophy – first in Indian aesthetics, then in the Zen Buddhism of Daisetz Suzuki and the medieval mysticism of Meister Eckhart, all of which suggested to him an aesthetic of renunciation that would grow more pronounced as the composer grew older.

Crucial elements of this new aesthetic involved the celebration of silence and acceptance that

More About Cage

The official Cage site, administered by the John Cage Trust: **johncage.org**

Discography, worklist and other info: **johncage.info**

Alex Ross article on Cage at 100: **www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/culture/2012/09/john-cage-at-100.html**

John Cage prepared-piano app for iPad: **https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/john-cage-piano/id553864918?mt=8**

the goal of music is “to quiet and sober the mind, thus making it susceptible to divine influences.” Cage’s exploration of silence culminated in his famous “Lecture on Nothing” and his infamous “silent” piece, initially titled “Silent Prayer,” but eventually published with the impersonal designation 4’33”– the combined length of its three movements at the premiere given by pianist David Tudor in 1952. Similar in many ways to the “white” paintings of Robert Rauschenberg (whom Cage had met while teaching at North Carolina’s Black Mountain College in 1948), 4’33” provides an empty frame for the sounds that come from the listener’s own physical environment. Creating a formidable controversy even within the avant-garde, the piece affirmed that silence was not the absence of sound but the purposeful negation of authorial intent.

Getting rid of authorial intent is easier said than done. The music that Cage wrote during his last four decades serves as an idiosyncratic and thought-provoking manual for achieving sounds that could appear independent of composerly volition. His experiments flourished in the New York apartment that served as studio and meeting place for Morton Feldman, David Tudor, Christian Wolff, and later Earle Brown, who gathered to share their ideas about improvisation, indeterminacy, and chance operations. In the early 1950s, Cage began to use the ancient Chinese “Book of Changes,” or I Ching, and as his fame grew through the fifties and sixties, so did the variety of his “chance operations” – seeking out imperfections in staff paper, tracing the outlines of rocks in the Zen garden Ryoanji, selecting sounds and symbols from the writings of Joyce or Thoreau, or using star charts.

Cage will always be remembered for expanding the horizons of what we consider musical sounds and musical actions—for granting the status of art to the rumble of a truck or the sound of one’s own heartbeat and for transforming the composer’s “choices” into “questions” that could be answered (though not framed) independently of volition: “...if I have the opportunity to keep working,” he said, “I think the work will resemble more and more, not the work of a person, but something that might have

happened even if the person weren’t there.” It was this mixture of individuality and self-renunciation that allowed Cage to embrace the ephemeral, to blur the boundaries between choice and chance, to divide his time between mushroom hunting and music making, and to copyright certain periods of silence. – Beth Levy

These notes first appeared in the program for our November 14, 2011 concert where the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players performed Credo in Us.

LEI LIANG

Lei Liang is a Chinese-born American composer whose works have been described as “hauntingly beautiful and sonically colorful” by *The New York Times*, and as “far, far out of the ordinary, brilliantly original and inarguably gorgeous” by *The Washington Post*.

Winner of the 2011 Rome Prize, Lei is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship and an Aaron Copland Award. He was commissioned by the New York Philharmonic and Alan Gilbert for the inaugural concert of the CONTACT! new music series. Other commissions and performances include the Taipei Chinese Orchestra, the Heidelberger Philharmonisches Orchester, the Thailand Philharmonic, pipa virtuoso Wu Man, Chamber Music America, the NEA, MAP Fund, Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust, Arditti Quartet, Shanghai Quartet, the Scharoun Ensemble of the Berlin Philharmonic, and Boston Musica Viva. Liang’s recorded music is available on several labels, and as a scholar he is active in the research and preservation of traditional Asian music.

Lei studied composition with Sir Harrison Birtwistle, Robert Cogan, Chaya Czernowin, and Mario Davidovsky, and received degrees from the New England Conservatory of Music (BM and MM) and Harvard University (Ph.D.). A Young Global Leader of the World Economic Forum, he has held fellowships from the



Harvard Society of Fellows and the Paul & Daisy Soros Fellowships. Lei taught in China as a Distinguished Visiting Professor at Shaanxi Normal University College of Arts in Xi'an; served as Honorary Professor of Composition and Sound Design at Wuhan Conservatory of Music and as Visiting Assistant Professor of Music at Middlebury College. He currently serves as Associate Professor of Music and Chair of the Composition Area at the University of California, San Diego. Lei Liang's music is published exclusively by Schott Music Corporation. www.lei-liang.com

SAMUEL CARL ADAMS

California-born, Brooklyn-based composer Samuel Carl Adams is a creator of acoustic and electro-acoustic music. His works draw from his experiences in a wide array of fields including jazz, noise and electronic music, programming, and phonography. Sam has received commissions from The San Francisco Symphony, The New World Symphony, The Paul Dresher Ensemble Electroacoustic Band, ACJW (The Academy, a program of Carnegie Hall, Juilliard, and The Weill Institute of Music), MATA (Music at the Anthology), Lisa Moore, TwoSense (Lisa Moore and Ashley Bathgate), and The Living Earth Show.



Adams recently developed a work for the New World Symphony utilizing their new and dynamic performance space in Miami, Florida. The piece, entitled *Drift and Providence*, had its premiere under the baton of Michael Tilson Thomas in the spring of 2012 and was recently performed at Davies Symphony Hall and at Stern Auditorium at Carnegie Hall. He was, in April and May of 2012, was an artist-in-residence at the Baryshnikov Arts Center in New York, where he developed the score to *Woman Bomb*, with text by Croatian writer Ivana Sajko and Canadian director Charlotte Brathwaite. Other near-future projects include a recording of his *Tension Studies* with the Living Earth Show, the same work

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alongside the works of Tyondai Braxton, Ted Hearne, and Matt Marks as part of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Brooklyn Festival, and the premiere of a piano concerto for the Berkeley Symphony in Spring 2014.

Outside of composing, Adams maintains an active career as a contrabassist working nationwide and overseas. When he is not thinking about music (a rare occurrence) he can be found training on his bicycle in Prospect Park or developing his culinary skills in his New York kitchen-ette. He currently lives in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. samuelcarladams.com

"I have nothing to say / and I am saying it / and that is poetry / as I needed it"

"I compose music. Yes, but how? I gave up making choices. In their place I put the asking of questions. The answers come from the mechanism, not the wisdom of the I Ching, the most ancient of all books: tossing three coins six times yielding numbers between 1 and 64."

"If something is boring after two minutes, try it for four. If still boring, then eight. Then sixteen. Then thirty-two. Eventually one discovers that it is not boring at all."

"The first question I ask myself when something doesn't seem to be beautiful is why do I think it's not beautiful. And very shortly you discover that there is no reason."

"Which is more musical: a truck passing by a factory or a truck passing by a music school?"

"As far as consistency of thought goes, I prefer inconsistency."

"The emotions - love, mirth, the heroic, wonder, tranquility, fear, anger, sorrow, disgust - are in the audience."

"The first question I ask myself when something doesn't seem to be beautiful is why do I feel it's not beautiful? And very shortly you discover there is no reason."

"Every something is an echo of nothing"

"The world is teeming; anything can happen."

MISSY MAZZOLI

Q: *You once said that one of the most important things you were taught was that "one must live a life in music instead of simply having a career in music." This seems particularly relevant to a piece like Still Life With Avalanche where some of the music is derived from your actual life events, and unanticipated ones. Is this a standard part of your compositional process?*

MM: Actually when I was referring to having a "life in music," I was thinking of it more in a positive sense, in that I try to make artistic decisions that help me lead the life I want to lead and be the person I want to be, even when I'm not in the act of composing or performing. I think it's one of the advantages of being an artist – I don't think of my career or my music as something separate from who I am when I'm truly being myself.

That said, the inevitable flip side of that is that the nasty stuff in your life finds its way into your work when you're distraught or unhappy. When my cousin died I wasn't thinking about music. I just wanted to bang on things and cry and make noise. When I got tired of that I robotically went back to composing, only to find that I had become a completely different person. It didn't feel right to continue in the same direction.

Yes, I pulled the piece in a dissonant, angry direction, but there's never that simple life-to-art translation of "I was angry so I made angry music" or "I was sad so I wrote a melody in D Minor". When composers say things like that it feels a little too facile; I think there's usually a much more complicated process of translation happening there, and it's a process that is fascinating and mysterious. So yes, every day the events of my life find their way into my music, but in a way that is complex and often hidden, especially to me.

Q: *Perhaps one of the defining features of new music is its use of instruments not typically found in what might be considered the "classical canon." Could you talk about how you deal with new*

timbres and perhaps explain what qualities of the harmonica led you to include it in Still Life?

MM: I love harmonicas because they're always slightly out of tune! I love introducing an unpredictable, vulnerable element into highly structured music. Most people in the audience are familiar with the sound of someone breathing in and out into a harmonica, and I wanted to draw them in with a timbre that was both comfortable and haunting. I love the contrast of the wheezing harmonica, played in a way that any non-musician could play it, with these virtuosic string passages that are only really playable by .0001% of the population.

Q: *Inevitably, referring to a composition as a "still life" is going to raise questions given the fact that any kind of change over time is typically perceived as "motion." While your piece clearly delineates the difference between static and motive elements, it never quite reaches the total stasis implied by a "still life." Tell us how the concept of a "still life" can exist in music – and why you chose an avalanche as the motive element.*

MM: Honestly, this title was always like this joke that only I seemed to find funny! The point is not that it's actually a "still life" or an "avalanche," but that it's something impossible, something that had within it two elements that were pulling on each other because they can't co-exist. The music has this conflict too; there is a theme that wants to dig its heels into the dirt and repeat over and over in an almost manic, clown-happy kind of way, and all this harmony piled up that wants to drag it off the cliff and into the ocean.

LEI LIANG

Q: *In the performance notes for Aural Hypothesis you mention that "the overwritten 'cadenzas' are meant to trigger improvisatory action and accidents," and that what you prefer from the performer is "not deliberate details...but rather an explosive energy that threatens to destroy the overall balance of the composed work."*

Certainly these directions seem appropriate, given your description of contrasting calligraphy brushstrokes in the program notes, or shigaraki ware in the piano note, but is this kind of openness to the unpredictable typical of your work? As a composer, how much control are you willing to relinquish?

LL: Sometimes I write passages that are meant to be so challenging that it forces the musician to wrestle with it in live performance. Their difficulty level is not absurd, but rather attainable – or almost attainable. In fact, every detail should be realizable, and it should be rewarding for practice. It is a special feeling for me to experience the intensity of struggling to gain control. I don't think of it as relinquishing control – it is not about that. Rather, it is about the challenge of attaining, and gaining control in an intense moment. It is about the willingness to sacrifice the correctness of a few notes in order to channel the explosive energy. I find this struggle – and the mistakes that come with it – to be very human.

Q: *Your technique of "overwriting" along with specific cadenzas creates an interesting tension between the specificity of notation and the acceptance, even expectation, of deviation from that same notation. It's as if you're allowing the performer license with the notes based on his or her own experience of interacting with the sonic results of your score. Can you talk about how you chose exactly which notes to write in terms of the actual sonic results you desired?*

LL: I write these rapid passages very slowly, and I test them out with care to make sure that they are playable, and at the same time awkward – "awkward" in the sense that they pose real physical challenges to the pianist. How rapidly and precisely can one play? How far can one's fingers leap? What is a really "awkward" move that makes the passage challenging yet still musical?

Q: *The title of the piece is intriguing, pairing somewhat scientific terminology ("aural") with an art form traditionally perceived as exceedingly subjective ("hypothesis," which suggests conjecture of some sort. There's much to think about before even hearing the*

first note! Tell us about the title – do you conceive the piece as a “hypothesis”?

LL: Chou Wen-chung, the composer to whom this piece is dedicated, once made the remark that “music is calligraphy in sound, calligraphy is music in ink.” I have been intrigued by this remark, and by another one he asked me, “when is a line not a line?”

Writing music is a speculative process for me. In this piece, I was trying to discover for myself whether there is a parallel between lines in ink and lines in sound. When is a melody no longer merely a melody? The second half of the work is really an effort to answer this question.

SAMUEL CARL ADAMS

Q: *One of the most interesting aspects of your Piano Trio is the pairing of very sophisticated motivic, rhythmic, and harmonic idioms with an easily discernible structure and fairly transparent development of ideas. Could you speak a little about this?*

SA: This piece is very much an experiment in classical formalism. I found it a satisfying gesture to break away from working with unconventional forms, which is what my focus had been prior to writing the trio. The piece has all the elements of a Sonata Allegro form: three large formal sections, a coda, a Da Capo, but it is condensed, kaleidoscopic, and functions using a harmonic language I have been developing for some years. It was a lot of fun and very liberating to work this way.

Q: *Continuing along the same path, it’s interesting to see titles and clips from performances of pieces like Woman Bomb and GAIN alongside compositions like the Piano Trio. Do you try to maintain a binding current throughout your oeuvre (you mention in the program note that the trio is a sort of acoustic “consequent” to your “antecedent” electronic works) or do you prefer just to jump in and immerse yourself in whatever you feel potential in?*

SA: I have always had an adaptive personality, and I think one of the most gratifying aspects of being a composer (especially a young one) is working in many different contexts. So, I tend to say ‘yes’ to projects that involve unfamiliar territory. Perhaps this is haphazard behavior – just jumping in, so to speak – but it has been rewarding and fascinating thus far. I am not so concerned with carefully maintaining a ‘binding current’ through my catalogue. That seems too Apollonian for my personality.

Q: *The Piano Trio combines the wide tessitura of the piano with interesting uses of articulation, rhythm, and bowing in the strings, creating strong convergences and contrasts of timbre. Could you talk about how you, a composer of electronic music, approached this piece in terms of the extremely diverse palette provided by its instrumentation? How do you explore timbre factors in general?*

SA: To me, timbre is simply another expressive component of music. When I am trying to express something, I pay attention to timbre the same way I pay attention to harmony, rhythm, what have you. This piece expresses itself in a number of ways, so, naturally, it’s timbral world is ever-shifting.

Q: *Tension Studies is the only piece we’ve found of yours that includes the use of an amplified instrument, in this case, the electric guitar. How do you, as an electro-acoustic musician approach such sonic intermediates as loudspeakers and amplifiers? Are they separate instruments or as much a part of the same body as, say, the strings and the resonant surfaces of a violin?*

SA: I think the role of loudspeakers and amplifiers change depending on the piece. With live electro-acoustic works like *Tension Studies*, the processing and resonating bodies are part of the instrument, as the performer is making decisions about how the electronics function during the performance. For fixed works, like *Gain* and some other pieces, this is not the case. The music is plastic like a painting – or a sculpture. In these cases, the listening experience is not influenced by the whims of a human being during a performance.

Q & A compiled by Paul Paroczai