

San Francisco Contemporary Music Players

**Longing for Utopia:  
Graeme Jennings plays Nono**

Monday, March 1, 2010, 8:00 p.m.

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Forum

Pre-concert talk at 7:15 p.m. with Professor Bruce Durazzi

**Luigi Nono**, *La lontananza nostalgica utopica futura* (1988)

Graeme Jennings, violin

Christopher Burns, sound diffusion

(Approximate duration: 1 hour)

↻ 5 minute break ↻

Talk-back with the performers

and Professor Bruce Durazzi

moderated by Professor Luciano Chessa

(Approximate duration: 30 minutes)

*Following the concert, please join us in the lobby for a  
reception with free prosecco  
donated by the Istituto Italiano di Cultura.*

Tonight's performance of music by Luigi Nono is presented in collaboration with the Istituto Italiano di Cultura.



## Program Notes

### *Luigi Nono* [1924-1990]

“It takes courage and power to recognize one’s own time and to decide in its favor. It is much easier to stick one’s head in the sand: ‘We’re free since we have no choice; we’re free since we are dead; free as a rock.’” In his polemical essay “Historical Presence in Music Today,” Luigi Nono exhorted his fellow composers to examine contemporary social issues and engage with them both creatively and ethically. The primary target of his 1959 critique was John Cage, whose recent visit to Darmstadt had excited the new music community, but to a lesser extent he was also expressing his disappointment in the isolated, future-oriented abstraction of Milton Babbitt’s or Pierre Boulez’s works of the early fifties. Nono felt that Cage’s depersonalizing chance procedures were morally flawed—an abdication of the artist’s responsibility to make courageous choices. When it came to serialism or twelve-tone writing, Nono had no quarrel with the technique; when he wished, he could be as devoted to rigorous structuring as any of his contemporaries. Instead, he reacted against the ways in which some of his colleagues detached art from politics.

Nono’s initial attraction to serialism stemmed from his early training in Venice with Gian Francesco Malipiero (who was intrigued by the Second Viennese School), from shared studies with his friend Bruno Maderna, and especially from his association with the older Italian avant-garde figure Luigi Dallapiccola. Nono’s ties to Arnold Schoenberg were multifaceted—his first piece after arriving to study in Darmstadt was a set of canonic variations on a Schoenbergian theme, and in 1955 he married the composer’s daughter Nuria. From the very beginning of his career, however, Nono’s commitment to political music set him apart. He became a member of the Communist party in 1952, and his best known early work, *Il canto sospeso* (1955-56), relied on the words of condemned political prisoners. In 1961, his musical theater piece *Intolleranza 1960* created a scandal in Venice because of its controversial themes: racism and oppression, fascism and violence.

For Nono political engagement did not necessarily mean writing popular or “accessible” music. Rather, he believed that a composer must make use of all available resources to make music that is both ideal and timely. Indeed some of his most politically engaged scores are also his most technologically “advanced.” Working at the electronic music studio of

the Italian radio in Milan, he produced such works as *Musica-manifesto* (1968) and *Al gran sole carico d’amore* (1972-74), which deals with women’s liberation in a variety of historical contexts. As musicologist Gianmario Borio has pointed out, the writers Nono chose to set during the sixties and seventies make plain his sympathies: Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, Karl Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, Bertold Brecht, and Malcolm X, among others.

Beginning in the later seventies, Nono’s writing grew more introspective and less overtly political, culminating in the restraint and abstraction of his string quartet *Fragmente-Stille, an Diotima* (1979-80). One watershed work in this larger aesthetic shift is . . . *sofferte onde serene* . . . (... serene waves suffered ...) (1976), which the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players featured in 2002. Written for piano and two-channel magnetic tape, the piece was inspired by the different kinds of articulation and pedaling techniques used by Nono’s friend Maurizio Pollini. While some of the composer’s earlier electronic music had suggested a conflict between man and machine, in this score (and in the work we will hear tonight) the two parts are beautifully, intimately related. Playing, as Nono’s works so often do, on matters of perception, the “waves” of his title have acoustic, literary, allegorical, and even biographical meaning. The composer explained the pervasive bell sounds of the score by recalling, “In my house on the Giudecca in Venice, the sound of various bells rung in different ways and with different meanings reach our ears continuously, day and night, through the fog or in the sunshine. They are indications of life on the lagoon, on the sea. Calls to work and meditation, warnings.” The diverse messages of the bells (commemorating, summoning to action, marking the passage of time) are both purposeful and equivocal.

While Nono’s musical language became still more enigmatic in the 1980s, he retained his devotion to the theatrical aspects of performance and the spatialization of sound, and he expanded his interest in music technology to include live electronics. All these aspects are on display in *La lontananza nostalgica utopica futura*, as is the composer’s overriding humanism. Borio observes: “Nono’s humanistic outlook was formed out of an insatiable curiosity for the viewpoints and methods of other artistic genres (theatre, literature, painting, architecture and cinema) and a strong interest in all human forms of communication (from the workplace to politics, from philosophical thought to the mythical and religious sphere): he believed that art is never exhausted in its technical capacity, that it reflects the totality of human experience.”

**Nono, *La lontananza nostalgica utopica futura* (1988)**  
*for violin and electronics*

The magic of Nono's *La lontananza nostalgica utopica futura* lies not just in its supernatural sounds, but also in its treatment of time. As critic Luigi Pestalozza explains, "time, in Nono's music, is always 'distant, future and nostalgic,' perfectly audible, yet far from any inert or static closure within our own (not just musical) time. It is projected forward on an ideal, ethical, thoroughly utopian scale, a choice Nono confirmed when he added the word 'utopian' to the adjectives 'future, nostalgic' in the title of the final version of *Lontananza* at La Scala in Milan."

Although the title itself coalesced only gradually, all of its keywords resonate in the remarkable process by which it was composed—a stunning combination of individual and cooperative creativity. A number of Nono's scores are intimately connected to particular performers—not just Maurizio Pollini, but also violinist Irvine Arditti, and others. In the case of *Lontananza*, violinist Gidon Kremer was both the driving force and the vehicle for Nono's journey. The metaphor of travel is the composer's. He took as the motto of his later years an inscription that he read in a Spanish cloister: "Caminante, no hay caminos, hay que caminar" (Traveler, there are no paths, but we must go). Accordingly, *Lontananza* bears the subtitle "Madrigal for several 'travelers' with Gidon Kremer, solo violin, eight tapes and 8 to 10 music stands." The most visible of these travelers is the solo violinist, who must move through the space of the stage in a way that is intentionally indirect. Accompanying him and bumping into him along the way are Nono's eight, independent tape-recorded parts—he called them eight "paths"—which are diffused into the hall so as to create a dynamic fabric of overlapping and colliding sound streams. And hovering in the conceptual background of the score is the work's dedicatee, the Italian composer Salvatore Sciarrino, whom Nono describes as a fellow traveler.

The tape recorded material has a history as interesting as the resulting sounds, and its genesis has been lovingly recounted by Kremer himself. The first stage, in Freiburg, Germany, was a virtual marathon of listening, practicing, improvising, and listening again. Kremer recalls: "It did not seem like work to me. I enjoyed every minute of the concentrated time that we spent together in the studio. Gigi [Luigi] simply encouraged me to play for three, four or five hours every day. He invited me to produce whatever sounds I wanted. We had arranged only that, if at all possible, I would keep well clear of familiar territory and avoid works

I already knew. This had to do with improvisation, which was something I had never learned. And so I played simply notes and looked for a possible binding force within them. Only rarely did Gigi speak to me. He was always on the move, constantly passing to and fro between recording studio and playback room.... I moved round the room with my violin or stood rooted to the spot, recalling past sounds or looking for new ones. It was the most unusual way imaginable of working with a composer. At the time I thought that this was Nono's way of getting to know me better.... I did not suspect that the sounds committed to tape during these days in Freiburg had already been transformed into an integral part of the work that was even then in progress. I myself and my search for new sounds had become his instrument."

Once the tape parts were in place, however, Nono struggled to finalize the solo violin part; in fact, Kremer had only a matter of hours to prepare for the premiere in Venice, and as a result an element of improvisation also infiltrated the written score, as the part solidified under Kremer's fingers and the two made final decisions about the work's visual and aural choreography. "For the premiere that evening I was keyed up as never before," Kremer recalled: "Now and again Gigi would surprise me by his handling of the tape, which his feeling for silence—a feeling which, he emphasized, was a very real need for him—would make him forget to turn on. But there was nothing I could do to object: after all, it was *he* who was sitting at the mixing desk, he who had written the piece. Yet our 'conversation' acquired its own vocabulary, stimulating us both. As a result, we felt we were playing a duet. The premiere was a success. Avoiding every vulgar or familiar sound. Nono had created a type of music which had never before been heard, never before been *answered*."

Though the creation of *Lontananza* may seem idiosyncratic, it is in fact entirely typical of Nono's combination of fierce originality and openness (both in terms of musical traditions and in terms of real-time interaction) to the input of his fellow musicians. As Kremer puts it: "While not wanting to shroud [Nono] in mystery, I can best describe him by using the metaphor of a magnetic field with its forces of attraction and repulsion. Everyone who came into contact with Nono was able to feel this for themselves. He too was motivated by it: it brought him into apparently spontaneous contact with the world around him or with a specific idea, thereby igniting the spark for conversations, sounds and actions." Tonight we enjoy the opportunity to eavesdrop, even to participate in one such conversation.

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### **“Not the singer, not the song.”**

Three prints remain for sale out of the series of 32  
that the artist, **William T. Wiley**, generously donated  
to the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players.

Price: \$3,000, not including tax.

100% of the sale's price benefits the ensemble.

We thank the artist and Electric Works  
for their extraordinary support.

A lifetime retrospective exhibition of Wiley's work,  
**“What's It All Mean?”**, was recently on view at the  
Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D. C.

This exhibit will move to the  
Berkeley Art Museum on March 17, 2010.



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## The Performers

**Graeme Jennings** is an Australian violinist and violist, who was born in 1968 and studied in the USA and Australia. Formerly a member of the legendary Arditti String Quartet (1994-2005), he has toured widely throughout the world, made more than 70 CDs, given over 300 premieres and received numerous accolades including the prestigious Siemens Prize (1999), two Gramophone awards and the Deutsche Schallplatten Preis. As a recitalist, Jennings has a wide repertoire ranging from Bach to Boulez and beyond. His main focus these days is on chamber music, as well as being an enthusiastic proponent of new music. He has worked with and been complimented on his interpretations by many of the leading composers of our time, including such luminaries as Ades, Andriessen, Barrett, Berio, Birtwistle, Carter, Dillon, Dusapin, Ferneyhough, Furrer, Kurtag, Lachenmann, Rihm, Stockhausen and Zender. After hearing him give the Australian premiere of his *Partita* in 1987, Lutosławski described Jennings as an “inspired performer.”

In 2005, Jennings moved to San Francisco where he enjoys pursuing a wide range of musical activity. In addition to the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, he has also performed with numerous other Bay Area groups such as the Adorno Ensemble, Berkeley Contemporary Chamber Players, Earplay, SFSound and in recital with pianist Christopher Jones. He has served on the faculties of Mills College, U. C. Berkeley and Stanford University. In recent years, he has appeared at numerous international festivals and as guest Concertmaster of the Adelaide and Melbourne Symphony Orchestras and guest Associate Concertmaster of the Sydney Symphony. Since 2003, he has been a core member of Australia's internationally renowned new music group, Elision, performing some of the most cutting-edge music being written today and touring to major cities such as London, Paris and Moscow. In July 2009 he was appointed Senior Lecturer in Violin at the Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University in Brisbane Australia and now enjoys a trans-pacific existence.

Jennings's recording (with Irvine Arditti) of Luigi Nono's last work, the violin duo *Hay Que Caminar (sognando)* is available on the Kairos label (0012512 KAI). Also due for release this month, is his recording with the Elision Ensemble of Brian Ferneyhough's *Terrain* (0001307 KAI).



**Christopher Burns** is a laptop improviser and composer. He has created and performed new digital realizations of landmark scores by John Cage, György Ligeti, Alvin Lucier, Conlon Nancarrow, and Karlheinz Stockhausen, and his own compositions are deeply influenced by his work as a computer music researcher. The gritty, rough-hewn materials of his laptop instruments are produced through custom software designs, and the idiosyncratic pitch and rhythmic structures of his chamber music are typically created and transformed through algorithmic procedures. His most recent projects emphasize multimedia and motion capture, integrating performance, sound, and animation into a unified experience.

Burns's music has been performed by groups including the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, ensemble recherche, NOISE, and ensemble courage, and by soloists including Mark Menzies, Griffin Campbell, Chris Froh, and Matthew Burtner. In 2002, he won First Prize and Audience Prize for *The Location of Six Geometric Figures* at the International Composition Competition for Chamber Music at the Hitzacker Sommerliche Musiktage in Germany. Burns teaches music composition and technology at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. He has also served as the Technical Director of the Center for Computer Research in Music and Acoustics (CCRMA) at Stanford University, where he co-founded and produced the strictly Ballroom contemporary music series. He currently directs the Unruly Music concerts in Milwaukee, and is a co-curator of sfSoundGroup.



Prof. **Bruce Durazzi** (Ph.D., Yale University) is Assistant Professor of Music Theory at Washington University, St. Louis. His research in music theory emphasizes the relationship between music analysis and broader social, cultural and historical issues. Prof. Durazzi's doctoral dissertation investigated music and politics in the work of Luigi Nono, and his other research interests include politics and musical modernism more generally, the music and aesthetics of Schoenberg and his school, and gender studies in music. He has presented papers at the Archivio Luigi Nono and the Fondazione Cini (Venice), the fifth Feminist Theory and Music conference (London), and at meetings of the Society for Music Theory, the New England Conference of Music Theorists, and Music Theory Southwest. His research has been supported by the Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Before joining the music faculty at Washington University, Prof. Durazzi taught music theory at the University of Arizona and at Northwestern University.



**Luciano Chessa** received his Ph.D. in musicology from the University of California at Davis. Previously, at the Conservatory of Bologna, he earned a D.M.A. in piano and a M.A. in composition. His areas of research interest include 20th-century music, experimental music and late 14th-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' *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. Dr. Chessa is also active as a composer and performer. His scores (including a large work for orchestra and double children 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.



**Gregory T. Kuhn**, sound designer, is a multidisciplinary creator and collaborator in the performing and fine arts since 1986, as composer, sound engineer and designer, visual artist and designer, dramaturge, and collaborator. After receiving a BA in Music from Swarthmore College, he worked with Relâche, New Music America 1987, and at the Yellow Springs Institute in the Philadelphia area. Since 1988 in the San Francisco Bay Area, he has collaborated on diverse projects for theater, multimedia, dance, and experimental and contemporary music performances. Among his recent recognitions are the 2007 Isadora Duncan Award for S.F. Ballet's *Ballet Mori* (with Ken Goldberg and Randall Packer), and the 2008 Lucille Lortel Award for Unique Theatrical Experience for Rinde Eckert's *Horizon*, (directed by David Schweizer.) Kuhn's ongoing activities include new works by Paul Dresher, Rinde Eckert, Joan Jeanrenaud, Margaret Jenkins, Stephen Kent, Shadowlight, Randall Packer/Zakros InterArts, the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, and the Other Minds Festival.

—Program Notes by Beth E. Levy