SFCMP in residence at Z Space 2016
Mar 15 & 17
works by David Lang
Mar 16 & 18
works by Gérard Grisey and Marianthi Papalexandri-Alexandri
Mar 19
45th Anniversary Retrospective Celebration
San Francisco Contemporary Music Players

Hrabba Altadottir, violin
Jeff Anderle, clarinet
Tod Brody, flute
Kyle Bruckmann, oboe
Kate Campbell, piano
Susan Freier, violin
Chris Froh, percussion
Hall Goff, trombone
Karen Gottlieb, harp
Stephen Harrison, cello
Graeme Jennings, violin
Peter Josheff, clarinet

Bill Kalinkos, clarinet
Adam Luftman, trumpet
Loren Mach, percussion
Roy Malan, violin
Lawrence Regent, french horn
Sarah Rathke, oboe
Nanci Severance, viola
David Tanenbaum, guitar
Peter Wahrhaftig, tuba
William Winant, percussion
Nick Woodbury, percussion
Richard Worn, contrabass
Special Preview: 2016-17 Season

Our 46th Year will offer Bay Area audiences the greatest and latest works of composers from around the world with an emphasis on California composers. We’ll bring you behind the scenes to explore classical music that is advancing and challenging musical space and sound, and you’ll hear new works by talented national and local emerging composers.

on Stage Series
Join us in concert to hear the leading national and international works of contemporary classical music

“In the Light of the Air”  
Sat, Oct 8, 2016  
Herbst Theatre

in the Laboratory Series
Join us in concert to hear leading works in the contemporary classical repertoire with unusual instrumentation or stage arrangements.

“Emerging Voices”  
Fri, Jan 20, 2017  
San Francisco Conservatory of Music

at the Crossroads Series
Join us in a comfortable atmosphere to listen to iconic contemporary classical composers alongside top emerging composers in the classical contemporary music scene

“Stravinsky Interpolations”  
Fri, Feb 17, 2017  
Herbst Theatre

“Lou Harrison and Companions”  
Fri and Sat Apr 21 – 22, 2017  
Venue TBA

SFCMP in the Community

Phil Kline’s “Unsilent Night”  
Dec 10, 2016

Sound and Wine with SFCMP  
Mar 25, 2017

SFCMP Education Series

SFSearch: Emerging Composers Competition and Reading Panel plus How Music is Made noontime talks, and Master Classes with Steven Schick and SFCMP Players
We have spent a season in space. Or at least in various dimensions and manifestations of musical space from the plaintive “Songscape,” with music by Lang and Grisey, to the sere “Xeriscape” with its provocative implications in the interrelationships between humans beings and their changing habitat. Our point of departure is that for music to remain relevant, it must be a tool for exploring new spaces for listening, thinking and living.

Now we arrive at twinned explorations of scales from large to small, and bright to dark in “Oscuroscape” and “Starscape.”

In “Starscape” we’ll return to the extraordinary music of Gérard Grisey with his Le Noir de l’Étoile. The conceit of the piece is that rhythm is a foundational value in the universe. The proof can be found in the metronomic impulses of pulsars that emanate from the farthest reaches of the universe. We can’t really hear Pulsars, but we can use their regular bursts of electromagnetic energy to activate loud speakers and thereby listen to their rhythms. These pulsations, the interlocking grooves of deep space, form the rhythmic bedrock of a piece for six percussionists. Grisey creates this most expansive piece of the percussion repertoire by mapping the rhythmic signals from distant pulsars onto the fascinating earth-bound sonic terrain of six percussionists. The players surround the audience with arsenals of wooden planks,
tuned drums, bags of marbles (to be dropped onto bass drums at critical junctures), along with rubbed, bowed, and brushed gongs. At various points in the work, recordings of the pulsars themselves appear, first as a poetic reminder of the inspirational source of the pieces, and then later as musical material with and against which the percussionists engage in polyrhythmic commentary.

As with his haunting *Quatre Chants pour franchir le seuil*, which we presented in October, *Le Noir de l’Étoile* was composed immediately following Grisey’s tenure as professor of composition at the University of California in Berkeley. To what extent these late, great pieces of his were incubated at Berkeley is difficult to judge. But the impact of his compositional process on the music of the late 20th century cannot be overstated. In brief, Grisey was able to find an artesian source, in the form of a detailed analysis the spectral qualities of sound, for the creation of large-scale, emotionally important pieces. In short he found a way to connect the smallest elements of sound to very large musical ideas, and by doing so to suffuse both with purpose and integrity.

As we look outward towards distant space, we also offer music by Marianthi Papalexandri-Alexandri that looks inward toward the beauty of modest noises. Papalexandri-Alexandri has spent the past five years or so as a sound sculptress, creating fascinating cross-fertilized structures that appeal simultaneously to the eyes and ears. *No. 45 Immense* is a (ironically brief) precursor to those projects. Here a solo percussionist is drawn inward to the sonic qualities of everyday objects and small percussive noise-makers. Papalexandri-Alexandri is one of the most original voices among an emerging generation of composers. I find that after hearing the way her music invigorates small, seemingly unimportant sounds, that even a walk around the block seems full of sonic vitality and purpose.

In a parallel program, “*Oscuroscape*” explores the scale from dark to light.
in the music of David Lang. His darker rests on a simple idea: a short melody in mid- to low strings repeats for nearly an hour while an interlocking ornamental part for violins seems to circle it. Over the course of the piece the music grows gradually a little darker; not a lot, just a little. A video by Suzanne Bocanegra, the New York based visual artist, accompanies to heighten the effect of darkening. Taken together the music and visuals celebrate a very introspective kind of ecstasy: not the kind of joy that makes you want to pump your fist, or even the kind of existential joy that attends a moment of sudden wisdom. No, at least for me, the ecstasy of darker is like the mini-celebration you feel when a good friend winks knowingly at a private joke, or the intimate joy that comes from noticing the beauty of something that everyone else has walked by. But, maybe that’s just me. You, as listeners, will have nearly an hour to explore the insides of your minds and determine what it means to get darker.

We’ll set the stage with Lang’s warmth for two electric guitars. The sense of warmth is generated by a tight embrace of harmonies filtered through guitar distortions we associate more often with 60’s rock than recent contemporary concert music. For this we are grateful: in warmth, as in all that we will present this week, we are aiming for impact not artfulness; intimacy rather than cultural sophistication.

Whether we will have succeeded is up to you, of course. But as we put a cap on our season of exploring new spaces, we invite you to share your thoughts with us. We are playing this music for you, our intrepid listeners, and ultimately it is the space that results from your listening that we care most about.

Steven Schick
Welcome

It is a delight for us to host our 45th Anniversary Retrospective Celebration where we will celebrate the music, our dedicated friends, and honor our founders Charles Boone, Jean-Louis LeRoux and Marcella DeCray for their vision and dedication. The founding years ran from 1971 through 1988. Surrounding the room you will find memorabilia, archival footage and photographs from this time period. Thank you for coming and enjoy the music!

Program

6:00 pm Complimentary wine and beer, cocktails for purchase, small plates, and a display of memorabilia gathered from the founding years.

6:50 pm Welcome and Tribute by Steve Schick and Roy Malan

7:05 pm Concert

7:45 pm Closing and Drawing

Thank you to Paul Draper, Jerry Elkind, Susan Hartzell, Margot Golding, Don Blais, Steven Schick, Diane Ellsworth and Paul Asplund for their in-kind contributions for the 45th Anniversary Celebration

Concert Program

George Crumb
Five Pieces for Solo Piano (1962)
Kate Campbell, piano
~10 minutes

John Cage
In A Landscape (1948)
Karen Gottlieb, harp
~8 minutes

Lou Harrison
Serenade (1952)
Karen Gottlieb, harp
~2 minutes

Mark Applebaum
Aphasia (2010)
Steven Schick, vocalist
~9 minutes
Charles Boone (b. 1939) is a composer of classical music who lives in San Francisco. His works have been performed by the San Francisco Symphony, the Chicago Symphony, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and other organizations. He has received commissions from the National Endowment for the Arts and the San Francisco Symphony, and has been a composer-in-residence for the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). His writings have appeared in Leonardo, Arts and Architecture, Sculpture Magazine, and Threepenny Review. Mr. Boone was associate professor for many years at the San Francisco Art Institute. In 1971 he founded BYOP Concerts, the forerunner of today’s San Francisco Contemporary Music Players.

Marcella DeCray was a prominent harpist and teacher with a devotion to both the standard repertoire and contemporary music. She spent 26 years as principal harpist for the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra. Her devotion to new music found an outlet with the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, which she co-founded in 1973. Ms. DeCray was an important teacher, providing leadership to generations of students at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, where she founded the harp department in 1964 and taught for 45 years. When she retired from the Ballet Orchestra in 2006.

Jean-Louis LeRoux was principal oboist with the San Francisco Symphony for two decades; co-founder/director of the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players (SFCMP) and of the Chamber Symphony of San Francisco; conductor of the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra for 15 years; prominent advocate for Messiaen, Ernst Krenek, Carter, Babbitt, and many others; Mr. LeRoux held careers in France, Uruguay, Brazil, and Canada.
The French government named him Chevalier de L’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, France’s high cultural honor.

Performers

Kate Campbell performs frequently as a soloist and chamber musician, and is at home with styles ranging from thorny modernism, to “sleek and spirited” minimalism, to indie classical. She co-founded the duo KATES, and the contemporary ensemble REDSHIFT. She is also proud to be on the team of organizers for Omaha Under the Radar Festival. She can be heard on New Amsterdam Records.

Karen Gottlieb has performed, toured and recorded with such notable ensembles as the San Francisco Symphony, with which she is the recipient of multiple Grammy Awards, San Francisco Girls Chorus, Pacific Boychoir, San Francisco Boys Chorus, California Symphony and the Skywalker Recording Symphony. She has worked personally with many leading composers, including Elliott Carter, John Adams, Lou Harrison, Phillip Glass, John Williams, Gunther Schuller, & Witold Lutoslawski.

Steven Schick was the founding percussionist of the Bang on a Can All-Stars (1992-2002), “red fish blue fish,” and the summer course on contemporary percussion “Roots and Rhizomes.” Among his acclaimed publications are a book, “The Percussionist’s Art: Same Bed, Different Dreams,” and numerous recordings including the complete percussion music of Iannis Xanakis and a DVD of the early percussion music of Karlheinz Stockhausen.

For complete biographies, visit sfcmp.org

Jean-Louis LeRoux remembers:

“We were impelled by a great love and deep conviction that music of all ages, especially the contemporary, deserves to be well performed to be appreciated. Northern California composers were important to us as much as the rest of the world. We were to reflect in our programming the latest meaningful trends, season after season … Our first five years were heavily influenced by the thinking of Darius Milhaud and our previous activities with the Mills Performing Group. Nevertheless, little by little, a personal quality of programming took shape, reflecting the passing years.”

Subsequent concerts were held at venues such as the Grapestake Gallery and at the College of Notre Dame. Other musicians who were involved in the earliest concerts include soprano

The Founding and Early Years
The San Francisco Contemporary Music Players is the oldest ensemble in the West dedicated to the performance, commissioning, and recording of contemporary chamber music. It had its origins in early 1971, when composer Charles Boone organized a group of professional musician friends to present a series of informal concerts which they called “Bring Your Own Pillow” since the audience had to sit on the floor. The first three concerts took place within a single week of March, 1971, at the Hansen-Fuller Gallery. They included works by Charles Boone, Charles
Miriam Abramowitsch, violist Nancy Ellis, violinist Roy Malan, and clarinetist Don O’Brien. Roy is still a faithful member of the ensemble.

Although the music and the composers may have been unfamiliar to the early audiences, the concerts were highly successful.

In the fall of 1974, Charles Boone, Marcella DeCray, and JeanLouis LeRoux incorporated the ensemble as The San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, a tax-exempt, non-profit organization. The first concerts under that name were performed in the spring of 1975, and the first full season of six concerts began the following fall. The original three founders served as the Board of Directors until the spring of 1978. At that time, Jane Roos was asked to assemble an independent board of directors.

The Grapestake Gallery in San Francisco hosted concerts until the spring of 1977, when the series was moved to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. There, the relationship between music and the visual arts, implicit in the early gallery venue, was developed more fully, and the slogan “Listen to Modern Art” came into use. Programs were sometimes selected to complement museum exhibitions, such as Berliner art 1961-1987 and Tokyo: Form and Spirit. They took place sometimes in the Green Room and sometimes in the galleries themselves.

While pillows were no longer required, the tone of the series at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
music brought the Players national recognition. He was supported by Marcella DeCray, who served as General Director from 1974 to 1989, and who has been acclaimed as one of America’s great contemporary harpists.

LeRoux brought deep insight not only to the performance of European and Latin American works, but to that of local composers as well. During the 1978-79 season, he presented a special program of works by Olivier Messiaen, in celebration of the composer’s seventieth birthday, and in the following season, he conducted two special events honoring the work of Darius Milhaud and Ernst Krenek, while in 1980-81 a concert was devoted to the work of Conrad Cummings, a young San Francisco composer.

The correlation of visual art with music was widely popular. Three well-attended concerts were given in conjunction with the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art’s exhibition Expressionism: a German intuition. These were followed in 1981-82 by

remained informal. Audiences had the opportunity to wander through the Museum’s galleries before each concert, and at the intermission. Composers were often present, and available, along with the players, for questions and discussions. Scores could be inspected by the curious.

The LeRoux Era
Charles Boone directed the early “Bring Your Own Pillow” concerts, but in 1974, Jean-Louis LeRoux was chosen as Music Director, and he remained in that position until 1988. LeRoux graduated from the Conservatoire Nationale de Paris. He first came to San Francisco in 1960 to play principal oboe with the San Francisco Symphony, a position he held until 1980. At the same time, he served as music director of the Modesto Symphony Orchestra and the Mills Performing Group. In 1975, he became conductor of the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra, and he founded and directed the Chamber Symphony of San Francisco. His discerning knowledge and inspired programming of contemporary
three special concerts of American composers entitled “Edward Hopper: the Music of His Time,” presented in conjunction with the Museum’s Edward Hopper retrospective exhibition, and one concert devoted to French and Belgian music, complementing an exhibit of photographs by Henri Cartier-Bresson. A sell-out concert in January, 1983, featured works by several young European composers then unknown in the United States, including the thirty-year-old Wolfgang Rihm.

In February 1983, the Contemporary Music Players marked the births of Varèse and Webern with a One Hundredth Anniversary Celebration benefit concert at the War Memorial Opera House. The legendary rock musician and composer Frank Zappa served as guest conductor. Grace Slick was Mistress of Ceremonies. The audience numbered 2500, and the concert drew unprecedented national media attention and congratulatory reviews.

In this era, the ensemble also began to tour. In 1986, the Players presented the Los Angeles premiere of Boulez’s new work Derive at the Los Angeles County Museum. The first international tour took place in summer of 1986, with a debut performance at the Cheltenham Festival, England, where the group presented works by California composers, including Lou Harrison, Andrew Imbrie, William Kraft, and Conrad Cummings.
This concert is made possible through the generous support of the National Endowment for the Arts and the Clarence E. Heller Foundation

San Francisco Contemporary Music Players
Steven Schick, Artistic Director

Oscuroscape

David Lang
warmth (2006)
Travis Andrews and David Tanenbaum, guitars
~7 minutes

David Lang
darker (2010)
Hrabba Atladottir, Roy Malan, Matthew Szemela, Alisa Rose, Iris Stone, Deborah Tien-Price, violins
Evan Buttemer, Clio Tilton, violas
Hannah Addario-Berry, Helen Newby, cellos
Richard Worn, double bass
projections by Suzanne Bocanegra
~60 minutes
Notes by Robert Kirzinger

David Lang’s “A Simple Song #3” was nominated for an Academy Award this year; the song comes from his soundtrack for the Paolo Sorrentino film Youth; the other nominees included songs cowritten and performed by such pop megastars as Lady Gaga, The Weeknd, and Sam Smith, whose “The Writing’s on the Wall,” from the James Bond movie Spectre, was awarded the Oscar. (For the sake of completion, J.Ralph and Anohni’s “Manta Ray” was the fifth nomination.) Lang won a Pulitzer Prize in 2008 for his substantial little match girl passion, another vocal work. These relatively high-profile recognitions are small traces of the success of the composer’s broad philosophy of reintegrating our nameless genre—new music, art music, classical music—into common, lived experience.

Co-founder of the remarkable Bang on a Can Festival with Michael Gordon and Julia Wolfe, David Lang was born in Los Angeles, but is now strongly identified with New York City. His experience with Bang on a Can doubtless helped inform the immediacy and directness of his style, which draws on influences from the Renaissance and Bach to minimalism. His early interests in music were unimpeachably inclusive. He took an interest in such experimental paths as Cage’s and LaMonte Young’s open-ended process forms and theatrical presentations as well as more traditional music, and studied formally at Stanford University, the University of Iowa, and Yale University, where he subsequently taught. He was also a Fellow of the Tanglewood Music Center, where he worked with and was encouraged by Hans Werner Henze.
In keeping with the breadth of his aesthetic intent, Lang’s work encompasses many instrumental, vocal, and musical theater works, along with film soundtracks. His work ranges from delicate, tightly constructed pieces to experimental forays, such as his loony crowd out for “1000 people yelling,” commissioned by the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group. Encouraged by the range and flexibility of Bang on a Can’s varied participants, Lang has embraced the potential of any number of non-standard ensemble types. Recent works include questionnaire, a piece for 120 guitars celebrating the 120th anniversary of the Third Street Music Settlement; and the percussion quartet concerto man made for So Percussion, premiered by So and the BBC Symphony and co-commissioned by the Barbican Centre and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Cloud-River-Mountain was premiered in June 2015 by Bang on a Can and soprano Gong Linna. Beyond Bang on a Can, Lang has explored other alternative routes to music curation, sometimes from within conventional institutions.

His David Lang Piano Competition invited pianists from around the world to video record a performance of one of his pieces (the winner was the Australian Peter Poston), and he held Carnegie Hall’s Debs Composer’s Chair for 2013-14, creating the highly eclectic and acclaimed “collected stories” programming.

Lang wrote warmth for two electric guitars on commission from the Cygnus Ensemble for its guitarists Oren Fader and William Anderson, who premiered it April 23, 2006, at Merkin Hall in New York City. Lang said, “I wrote it thinking that it might be interesting to write a guitar solo and have two people play it almost exactly at the same time.” The pitch and rhythmic content are both highly constrained, but the rhythmic patterns are out of phase with the pitch contours, and continual adjustment of the ostensibly simple material defies easy predictability. The rhythmic trickiness heightens the tension between the players in their goal of achieving their intertwined aggregate solo.
On the surface, precedents for Lang’s *darker* for twelve solo strings range in affective content from Schoenberg’s *Verklärte Nacht* and Strauss’s *Metamorphosen* to Andriessen’s *Symphony for open strings*. The expressive template that Lang brings to bear in his piece is modeled on his perception of his own emotional experience—perhaps not really in “real time” but eschewing the amplified peaks and valleys of drama and contrast that have been, and often still are, the norm and the ideal in classical music (*Verklärte Nacht* being one exemplar). Of this piece, Lang writes:

> There is a big gulf between the way that classical music teaches us to experience emotions and the way that our emotions are actually felt.

> We have a great tradition in Western music of embracing great swings of temperament and mood—we have no problem thinking that a piece can move seamlessly from something that is whisper-soft to ear-splittingly loud. When I think of how my life actually works, however, I don’t think of it in terms of giant emotional leaps from one extreme to another—most of my emotional range is not from extreme bliss to gut-wrenching misery and back, all in a short period of time; my range is much more narrow, and too slowly changing for that. In my piece *darker* I wanted to make a piece of music that more closely matches my own emotional narrative than the narrative we have inherited from the dramatic music of the past.

*darker* is in many ways more like an object than a piece of music. It is a long, slow passing from something mostly even and pleasant to something a little less pleasant. My piece, like life, expends a lot of effort to go a very short distance, from beautiful to a little less beautiful, from a little light to something a little darker.

*darker* is dedicated to the memory of Jeanette Yanikian.

Jeannette Yanikian (1935-2008) was a guitarist, and the wife of composer Louis Andriessen.
Unlike, say, Metmorphosen, in which the motivically melodic-based content is based on a fairly traditional sense of musical narrative (over about half an hour’s time), or on the other hand a work like Glass’s Music in Twelve Parts, in which a single groove might obtain for a significant stretch of time, Lang’s darker (like warmth) is assembled of asymmetrical, difficult-to-predict patterns that deflect complacency. The surface of darker is continuously active, with fast-moving repeated-note patterns deployed in layers of rhythmic canon above sustained and slower patterns in the lower strings. The ebb and flow of this cumulative texture suggests the quasi-periodic, constantly changing, and overlapping processes of physiology. At the same time, the actual physical activity of playing the piece, for each amplified performer, over the course of an hour creates another layer of apprehensive energy, amplifying too the intensity of attention required both individually and collective. It’s a remarkable experience from all perspectives. Lang also conceived the piece as being performed with appropriate lighting that would change over its course.

darker was commissioned by Ensemble Musiques Nouvelles, Jean-Paul Dessy, artistic director, and the Concertgebouw Bruges, Jeroen Vanacker, artistic director. Dessy and Musiques Nouvelles gave the premiere at the Bruges Concertgebouw, Belgium, on April 2010, with lighting by Koert Vermeulen.

Projection artist Suzanne Bocanegra
This concert is made possible through the generous support of the National Endowment for the Arts and the Clarence E. Heller Foundation

San Francisco Contemporary Music Players
Steven Schick, Artistic Director

Starscape

Marianthi Papalexandri-Alexandri
Loren Mach, percussion
~9 minutes

Gérard Grisey
Le Noir de l’Étoile (1989-1990)
William Winant, Loren Mach, Chris Froh, Nick Woodbury, Sean Dowgray, and Megan Shieh, percussion
~60 minutes
Marianthi Papalexandri-Alexandri was born in 1974 in Greece and earned a doctorate in music composition from the University of California–San Diego. She also attended Goldsmiths College of the University of London and the University of Music and the Performing Arts, Vienna. Her teachers have included Chaya Czernowin and Rand Steiger, and she also worked with Steven Schick while in San Diego. Based in Berlin, she has presented her work in Europe, Japan, and the U.S., including New York’s MATA Festival. Papalexandri-Alexandri is one of a new generation of artists who blur the boundaries (if such actually exist) between visual art, performance, art, and music; her work repurposes and discovers new sonic and dramatic possibilities not only of traditional musical instruments but of everyday objects as well.

Working with Swiss kinetic artist Pe Lang, she has exhibited and presented her work as often in galleries and alternative art spaces as in the concert hall. Her creative impulses are not unrelated to those of the Fluxus movement, in which the conventional attitude toward objects and their use is re-examined, brought into crisis, leading to new sounds and modes of expression. Many of her scores, including that of No 45 Immense, are hand-drawn catalogs of events and procedures, along the lines of a storyboard or comic strip. In some works she uses technology to automate sound-producing processes. The objects producing sound are frequently as beautiful and delicate in their aspect as the sounds themselves.

No 45 Immense was commissioned by the Stockholm International Composition Course (SICC) and was premiered at the Spelplan Festival in Stockholm by Niklas Brommare in
2002. The piece employs a red apple, newspaper, magnifying glass, water, zipper, plastic cup of water, sand blocks, coins of various sizes, small bells, shoe box, bass guitar string, espresso saucer, clear transparent plastic pen, wooden table, and “fizzy vitamin C tablet.” The actions are prosaic, if bordering on obsessive; the act of observing the piece brings one a sense almost of voyeurism, of sharing a secret, even if the actions have no apprehendable narrative “content.”

Of No 45 Immense, Marianthi Papalexandri writes,

When does an instrument become an ‘object’? Do we treat instruments differently from objects? If so, why? At the end of the piece, No 45 immense, the percussionist picks up a fizzy vitamin C tablet (hidden inside the box), which he drops into a glass of water. He pauses, and waits for it to dissolve completely. The absence of action and sound here is what I call an ‘energetic silence’. The performer is not trying to become invisible. He is not acting. On the contrary, his body language maintains energy and tension. The action is now taking place inside the water. One can argue who is the performer- the person, the tablet or the water?

Le Noir de l’Étoile is one of the most iconic works of a composer who produced more than his fair share of iconic works, and who was known as one of the central figures of a highly influential mode of composition. Gérard Grisey studied with Messiaen and Dutilleux, two quite different but quintessentially French composers whose concentration on musical timbre opened new vistas for composers of the latter half of the 20th century. Grisey followed suit, also studying electronic
music and acoustics and beginning to explore the physical properties of sound via computer analysis, folding his research back into his own music. Grisey met Tristan Murail while in Rome as holder of the Rome Prize in the early 1970s, and with Murail, Michaël Lévinas, Hugues Dufourt, and Roger Tessier, founded the Ensemble l’Itinéraire. Grisey taught at Darmstadt and the Paris Conservatoire, and also at the University of California–Berkeley.

In such seminal works as the multipart Les Espaces acoustiques (1974-85), Grisey explored how a piece of music might be modeled on the changing timbral characteristics of individual sounds. This approach came to be known as spectrale for its basis on the harmonic spectrum, although Grisey himself found the term (not unexpectedly) too limiting; few of his pieces were “pure” spectrale. Nonetheless the systematic exploitation of timbre as an observable, independent parameter has become one of the most important developments in music theory and practice. The acoustic spectral analysis approach built on ideas explored by Messiaen, Stockhausen, Vivier, and others, and came as a breath of fresh air to many composers looking to solve problems of form, harmony, and flow organically in a post-serial era. This approach (helped by with the increasing ease of computer analysis of sound) has been growing in influence for the past few decades, and had its effect not only on concert music but also on some pop and electronica.

Along with timbre, and closely related, is perhaps the most striking aspect of Grisey’s innovation: the treatment of musical time. Both intuitively and empirically, Grisey’s forms are based on an organic reflection of time as experienced in the world, though the base structures can be and are manipulated for essential musical ends. The experience of passing time in Grisey’s work has its parallels less in European traditions than in certain Asian classical traditions, such as those of India or Tibet; strict repetition of episodes or individual elements has a very limited role. Grisey contemplated time, too, via poetic metaphors,
considering that different organisms could and presumably do perceive time very differently. In some of his later works, Grisey addressed the relativity of time as experienced in different contexts and by different organisms. *Le Temps et l’écume* (1989) and *Vortex temporum* (1996) both contemplate the time scales of whales, humans, and insects by compressing, “normalizing,” and stretching the musical materials.

Timbre, modeled as harmony changing over time; time as articulated by organically modulating sonority; and, ultimately, musical form modeled on varieties of natural phenomena: these were the foundations of Grisey’s music.

*Le Noir de l’Étoile* (“The Black of the Star”) was commissioned by the French Ministry of Culture for Les Percussions de Strasbourg, who gave the premiere on March 16, 1991, at the Halle de Schaerbeek in Brussels during the Festival Ars Musica. The piece is scored for six percussionists, arrayed in a large circle and playing among them some 400 objects, plus pre-recorded sound, including the acoustic translation of the sound of a pulsar, a spinning neutron star believed to be a result of a supernova. Such objects were predicted before they were actually observed via their radio transmissions; the first pulsar discovered was PSR B1919+21, in November 1967 by Jocelyn Bell. 1919+21 had a period of about 1.3 seconds, a pulse mimicked by the bass drum at the start of *Le Noir de l’Étoile*. The piece otherwise is centered on the Vela pulsar, which spins at a rate of 11.195 times per second, a burst appearing as a recurring motif throughout *Le Noir* in the percussion instruments as well as in the recorded sound. Grisey was alerted to the pulsar phenomenon while at Berkeley in 1985, and found Vela’s “sound” entirely seductive, comparing his mental delight with Picasso’s on wondering what he could do with a bicycle seat. Grisey also used sound from the PSR B0329+54 pulsar (whose very different “tempo” is about 84 beats per minute). *Le Noir de l’Étoile* is prefaced by a few paragraphs about pulsars by the astrophysicist Jean-Pierre Luminet; the tone of the text falls somewhere
between hard science and mysticism, mirroring the combination of natural physical phenomena and ritualization that pervades *Le Noir*.

As Grisey has written, the piece is created less from the sound of the pulsars directly but by the accretion of overlapping patterns derived from those rhythms—“reference points” that allowed him to create interrelations among tempos, explore different approaches to periodicity (that is, measured recurrence of materials), and, with the spatial arrangement of the recorded sound and percussionists, create ways of moving and rotating music in space. Faults or glitches in the sound are explored; the percussionists also push against what is normally a strict regularity by accelerating or slowing the base tempos, creating further complexities in the patterns. Taking place over the course of an hour, *Le Noir de l’Étoile* allows for gradual changes to achieve remarkably dramatic ends. Grisey also spoke of the possibility of keeping time itself at bay.

The piece is structured in several large sections. The percussionists array themselves around the audience, and the piece begins with the 1.3” pulse in the bass drum. The Vela “motif” encroaches and gradually becomes more prevalent. In the “First Window,” the Vela recording is played for the first time (almost fifteen minutes into the piece), establishing a connection between the percussion and the original “source.” The percussionists modify and modulate the pulsar’s tempo. The “Second Window” presents pulsar 329+54 (the 84 bpm pulse), interrupted by the percussionists. Then metal percussion begin to dominate in a chaotic outburst. The “Third Window” is an “imagined pulsar” with its new tempo. In the Final, “centrifugal” forces create motion among the six players, with great variance in speed via accelerations. The “Fourth Window” stabilizes the tempo with the instruments themselves as a new pulsar with period of 100 milliseconds. The final bright sound brings the focus to the center.
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Behind every successful nonprofit organization you’ll find a team of dedicated volunteers. If you would like to join our team of volunteers, please give us a ring at (415) 278-9566 or email volunteer@sfcmp.org to discuss your interests and our available opportunities. Here are a few of our most urgent volunteer needs:

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About SFCMP

The San Francisco Contemporary Music Players is one of the longest-standing new music ensembles in the nation. Through performances, collaborations, and education activities we give people opportunities to discover music that is new to them—and ways to use those experiences to better understand and enjoy life and our world.

We are devoted to 20th- and 21st-Century repertoire because—as with all art—our collective societal imagination requires the stimulation of the new. Across cultures and stylistic constraints, composers today are creating a vast and vital 21st-century musical language. We want to share it with as many people as possible, both inside and outside the traditional concert setting.

Our ensemble features the Bay Area’s leading musicians devoted to exploring new music. In the course of 45 years we’ve performed more than 1,200 new works by more than 550 composers, including music commissioned from renowned and emerging artists alike. Through our community partnerships and education programs we are committed to helping our audiences explore the music of the future.

SFCMP gratefully acknowledges the support of the following foundations and agencies:

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Thank you, Hall Goff!

After 37 years with the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, Hall Goff is leaving the group. What an extraordinary contribution he has made!

I can’t speak with personal knowledge about his first three and a half decades, but when I joined SFCMP in 2011 (a mere cup of coffee ago by comparison), I was delighted to work with Hall. From his absolutely rock-solid performance of Varèse’s *Octandre* to his inventive sonic explorations in our Cage *Musicircus* to a truly virtuosic solo turn last season in Koji Nakano’s chamber concerto for trombone and ensemble, Hall delivers art and integrity with every performance. He told me he would be leaving SFCMP during a rehearsal break as we prepared Morton Feldman’s *For Samuel Beckett*, a part of the recent concert we did in collaboration with the San Francisco Conservatory. When we started up again after the break, I noted how often Hall leaned over to his student trombonist stand partner to offer words of advice or encouragement.

Later, that student told me, repeatedly, how much he had gotten out of the project. His positive experience, I am sure, was largely due to Hall.

As we celebrate 45 years of SFCMP and pay tribute to our founders, we’ll also honor Hall and recognize his many gifts to us: of musical honesty, pervasive good will, and just straight-up great playing.

Thank you, Hall!

– Steven Schick
Dirge (2002)

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