XERISCAPE
San Francisco Conservatory of Music
A Look at the Role of Art in Climate Change

JAN
19

2015/16 45TH SEASON
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

X-SCAPE
new spaces for new music
San Francisco Contemporary Music Players
45th Anniversary, 2015-16 Season
Buy tickets at sfcmp.org

X-scape is a season dedicated to exploring new spaces—both literal and metaphorical. By replacing “X” we are able to look at important spaces: from SongScape, an examination of the nature of utterance communication (Oct. ‘15); to XeriScape, which begs the question of the role of art in a discussion of climate change (Jan. ‘16); to OscuroScape and StarScape, on the nature and contents of darkness (Mar. ‘16). Along the way great works of new music serve as our guides through the “selva oscura” of contemporary life.
The dilemma of this New Year, of every New Year, is staring me directly in the face as I write this. How will I fill the space in front of me? There is the dread of the blank page, of course, but also the year ahead. When it comes to 2016, options abound! Saturation seems to be my default personal strategy, but perhaps this year the temporal texture will have a looser weave. Maybe there will be surprises, reprises, or reprieves. Maybe the rhythm of the universe will be stimulated by an extra day in February.

Who knows?

In spite of the abundance of the possibilities, I find myself wishing for more or less the same thing every year: a deeper connection between my non-musical life—what I think of as my real life—and the musical life I enact on concert stages. My real life has become increasingly more tuned to the richness of the natural world—both to its bounty and to the trauma we are wreaking on it. So, my wish this year is to find a way to understand better the big beautiful outside world through music.

In an act of optimism, I have called this concert “Xeriscape,” a word of Greek origin that means a dry space. I say optimism because I hope we might learn something from the dense and impactful works on tonight’s concert that could help us understand our changing climate and the desiccation of California (yes, I know it has been raining, but we have a long way to go).

You’ll note that there is no “environmental music” on this concert: nothing by John Cage, or R. Murray Shafer, or John Luther Adams. Instead we offer music about space and how we fill it. But if there is a central issue lurking in our real-life Xeriscape, it is precisely that: are we filling our spaces wisely?

We’ll start with Zosha Di Castri’s La forma dello spazio, evocative of a short story by Italo Calvino by the same name (translated, The Form of Space), and inspired by the kinetic sculptures of Lee...
Bontecou and Alexander Calder. A violin soloist stands in center stage and passes music to her partners placed at a distance on stage and behind the audience. The score is beautifully textured, a haunting skein of polyphony that outlines and illuminates the space that surrounds us.

What follows are two very different propositions for filling space.

In Louis Andriessen’s *Workers Union* a “loud-sounding” ensemble plays a score of specific rhythms and undetermined pitches. That means that the performers know precisely when to play, but not exactly what. That’s unsettling for anyone, but when an entire group tries it, the result is like a raucous street band, often at odds with itself. Andriessen has said that this music is overtly political in that it requires extraordinary focus and commitment on the part of every individual in order to produce a worthy result in the group.

*Workers Union* is dense and busy, but only slightly scripted, as though activity itself were the goal. In a dizzying shift to the opposite end of the spectrum, the luminous canvas of Morton Feldman’s *For Samuel Beckett* is highly scripted but not very busy. In fact for a work that stretches for more than fifty minutes with barely a silence, it seems almost weightless, somehow under-populated by musical events. *For Samuel Beckett* is Feldman’s final large-scale work, completed just months before his death in 1987—only the quartet, *Piano, Violin, Viola, Cello* comes later. In *For Samuel Beckett*, we find all the conundrums of late Feldman: a space is saturated with sound, yet the music does not seem heavy. The pieces are very long (between one and six hours), yet the music always seems to end abruptly, stopping nearly in mid-sentence. One is left with the question, why should this music end now? Does it die of old age—its weight (as sonic experience) gradually defeating its skeleton (as musical architecture)? And, does it help us understand the Xeriscape of the early 21st century, where so much seems dry and out of kilter, where the tension between weight (as human experience) and skeleton (a sustainable environmental architecture) also creates significant tension? Perhaps late Feldman helps us understand emptiness not as absence but as opportunity. Perhaps we can hear the void as welcoming.

Finally it is Samuel Beckett himself who, while not writing about Feldman here, comes very close to the heart of this music.

“only dust and not a sound only what was it it said come and gone was that it something like that come and gone come and gone no one come and gone in no time gone in no time.”
San Francisco Contemporary Music Players
Steven Schick, Artistic Director

Xeriscape
January 19, 2016
San Francisco Conservatory of Music

Zosha DiCastri
La forma dello spazio (2010)
Tod Brody, flute • Bill Kalinkos, clarinet • Kate Campbell, piano • Hrabba Altadottir, violin • Helen Newby, cello
West Coast Premiere - 8 minutes

Louis Andriessen
Workers Union (1975)
Tod Brody & Won Lee*, flutes • Kyle Bruckmann & Ashley Ertz*, oboes • Bill Kalinkos & Gordon Daole-Wellman*, clarinets • Kristen Flock* & Kristopher King*, bassoons • Margarite Waddell* & Craig Hansen*, horns • Dylan Girard & Dominic Favia*, trumpets • Hall Goff & Weston Olencki*, trombones • Peter Wahrhaftig, tuba • Meredith Clark, harp • Kate Campbell, piano • Susan Freier & Julia Suh*, violins • Stephen Harrison, cello • Richard Worn, contrabass
17 minutes

~ intermission ~

Morton Feldman
For Samuel Beckett (1987)
Tod Brody & Won Lee*, flutes • Sara Rathke & Ashley Ertz*, oboes • Jeff Anderle & Kat Large*, clarinets • Kristen Flock* & Kristopher King*, bassoons • Margarite Waddell* & Craig Hansen*, horns • Dylan Girard & Dominic Favia*, trumpets • Hall Goff & Weston Olencki*, trombones • Peter Wahrhaftig, tuba • Meredith Clark, harp • Kate Campbell, piano • Willie Winant, percussion • Roy Malan & Julia Suh*, violins • Nanci Severance, viola • Stephen Harrison, cello • Richard Worn, contrabass
55 minutes

*These students join SFCMP tonight through our education program in partnership with San Francisco Conservatory of Music
Program Notes  
by Robert Kirzinger

The three works on this program are connected via the visual arts and via various explicit or implicit musical processes; they sound virtually nothing like one another, but share a concern for music as a way of urging the listener to explore not only the piece at hand but the world at large.

Canadian-born, New York City-based composer Zosha Di Castri takes a multidimensional approach to her work, although that means different things for different pieces. In pursuing the interstitial ambiguities of sonic arts, the composer pushes the boundaries of presentation in both her conventionally scored works and in pieces involving theater and specially created media. These include not only projections and theatrically conceived events but also constructions that serve as sound source and visual presence. Di Castri began her musical life with piano lessons at age three, and is still an active performer. Both of her parents have been involved in music, and encouraged her curiosity beyond her traditional training. Growing up in the Edmonton suburb of St. Albert, Alberta, she was exposed to European classical music through the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra and visits to Banff, but her awareness of classical music history scarcely went beyond the early 20th century. She arrived at composition via improvisation, and only began composing more formally in high school, when she was introduced to Edmonton Symphony Orchestra composer in residence Allan Gilliland. She studied piano performance (with Sara Laimon) and composition (with Brian Cherney) at McGill University in Montreal and was exposed to new currents in music. Toward the end of her time at McGill, she spent a year abroad in Paris, where she studied composition with Philippe Hurel. She went on to earn a doctorate from Columbia University in New York City, working with Fabien Lévy, Tristan Murail, and Fred Lerdahl, and she has since joined Columbia's
music faculty. She has worked with numerous composers in masterclasses and at festivals, and has received special encouragement from John Adams, whom she encountered first in a residency at the Banff Centre. She has assimilated the \textit{spectrale} influence of Murail, Hurel, and Lévy, as is evident in some of her harmonies as well as the richness of her instrumentation. She also frequently uses electronics in her work.

Stemming from her life as a pianist, Di Castri has established engagement with the physical processes and tools of music-making as a central concern, but the means have expanded greatly. She has been in demand of late for orchestral scores: her \textit{Alba} was commissioned for the Cabrillo Festival at John Adams’s instigation, which led indirectly to \textit{Lineage} (2013), co-commissioned by the New World and San Francisco symphonies. This past fall her \textit{Dear Life}, a multimedia orchestral work based on a short story by Alice Munro, was premiered by the National Arts Centre Orchestra in Ottawa. Other (and more radical) multidisciplinary collaborations include her \textit{ETBTTA (Everything too big to take apart)} (2012), created in partnership with the choreographer Thomas Hauert and the ZOO Contemporary Dance Company and which features the interactive controllers of the Nintendo Wii system, and \textit{Akkord I} (2012), for flute, piano, electronics, and a large kinetic sculpture like the bellows of a van-sized accordion. Di Castri in fact took a course on sound sculpture in order further to immerse herself in the possibilities of that world. She has also worked with such groups as the JACK Quartet, Talea Ensemble, International Contemporary Ensemble, and Esprit Orchestra, among many others.

\textit{La forma dello spazio} (“The Form of Space”), written in 2010, predates some of Di Castri’s more ostentatious involvement with extended media, but as noted above, part of its stimulus was the work of Alexander Calder and Lee Bontecou, both of whom pushed their respective media beyond its traditional limits. The title comes from Italo Calvino, whose influence in this case is less specific, but whose \textit{Cosmicomics} and other works, contemplating the porousness of the borders between things and ideas, have catalyzed some of Di Castri’s aesthetics. \textit{La forma dello spazio} was commissioned by the Banff Centre for the Arts and is scored for flute, clarinet, violin, cello, and piano. As the piece evolved, Di Castri decided to feature the violin in a solo role; Claudia Schaer was soloist in the premiere. The composer asks that the ensemble be deployed spatially within the performance space, with the flute and clarinet situated behind the audience while the soloist,
piano, and cello are positioned, widely separated, onstage. This results in an activation of the audience’s awareness of the space as well as of the individual performers and instrumental colors. Di Castri compares her musical materials to the components of mobile sculptures, with “gestures [that] appear to be fairly static, yet are permitted a certain flexibility to move freely within a given space.” The solo violin triggers or is the source of activity for the ensemble, which transform its gestures and energy into their own idioms. Sustained pitches and harmonies contrast with sparkling, active episodes, travelling dynamically through and redefining the physical space.

**Louis Andriessen’s *Workers Union*** is a watershed in postwar musical politics, using musical collectivism to create an abstract but powerful statement about the potential of social collaboration among free individuals. At the time of its composition in the mid-1970s there was vibrant activity at the crossroads of politics and music, especially the subset of “minimalism” we associate with Andriessen at that time. He had begun on a more traditional path.

Andriessen was born in Utrecht into a family of musicians; his father (Hendrik) and uncle (Willem) were accomplished composers, as was his older brother Jurriaan, who introduced him to jazz. Louis studied at the Conservatory of The Hague and later with Luciano Berio. He absorbed modernism’s preoccupation with process and craft, but was drawn as well to social and populist concerns, in common not only with Berio but also such composers as Luigi Nono, Cornelius Cardew, and Frederic Rzewski. Like Cardew and Rzewski and the “minimalist” composers Steve Reich and Michael Nyman, he was both uncomfortable with and unlikely to be programmed by mainstream, standing ensembles, so he co-founded De Volharding in 1971 as a vehicle for performance and experimentation. He started
a second group, Hoketus, in 1976. As his career has developed, he has found success both with mainstream orchestras and in the opera house, where his *Writing to Vermeer* and *Rosa* (both with libretti by filmmaker Peter Greenaway) met with acclaim, as did his “film opera” *La Commedia*.

One of Andriessen’s biggest influences was Charles Ives, particularly in his use of meaning-laden, pre-existing musical materials, ignoring the artificial boundaries between so-called high art and low, using materials familiar to listeners with limited exposure to the entertainment of the elite. The philosophy of the ensemble De Volharding (the name means “Perseverance”) was one of individual responsibility and creativity within a democratic structure.

In some of his music, it’s the abstract approach rather than the materials that solidify the content and aim of the piece. Beginning in the early 1970s, Andriessen composed music for the Amsterdam Theater School, influenced by the work of Hanns Eisler and Bertolt Brecht, and much of his work was explicitly political. In the piece *De Volharding* (for which the ensemble was named), the structure requires negotiation among the musicians; it was premiered during protest against the American involvement in Vietnam. To go along with the individual freedom accorded musicians, Andriessen began to arrive at a musical language stripped of fragility and nuance, requiring almost everything to be uniformly loud and rhythmic (if not necessarily uniformly pitched). He explores nearly absolute rhythmic unison in the choral work *In Principe*, and revisits this idea in *Workers Union*, one of his most unequivocal and successful works of the period, composed for De Volharding in 1975.

Calling for “any loud-sounding group of instruments,” *Workers Union* uses exactly notated rhythms on a one-line staff: above the line is your instrument’s upper range, below the line its lower, with contours within and between registers indicated only by the relative vertical positions of the notes. The whole ensemble (in this case, nearly the same complement as called for by Morton Feldman’s *For Samuel Beckett*) moves up and down in pitch at the same time, but there is no prior agreement as to which pitch to begin on, nor on the size of the rising and falling intervals. Each rhythmic cell is repeated an arbitrary number of times, the pulse remaining constant throughout. Andriessen wrote, “This piece is a combination of individual freedom and severe discipline…. It is difficult to play in an ensemble and to remain in step, sort of like organizing and carrying on political action…. Make the
piece sound dissonant, chromatic and often: aggressive…. Only in the case of every player playing with such an intention that their part is an essential one, the work will succeed; just as in the political work.”

Although their work rarely sounds even remotely similar, there are indeed correspondences between the music of Louis Andriessen and Morton Feldman, in their rejection of traditional and modish approaches to aesthetics and technique, and more specifically in uses of repetition and pattern derived from models other than Western classical music. On the other hand, the sonic results were very, very different, especially in sheer volume: Andriessen, in his process/pattern works, demanded “loud,” but Feldman’s pieces are often characterized by persistently quiet dynamics that demand heightened sensitivity from both performer and listener.

Feldman was born in New York City, and like Andriessen had a somewhat formal education that included studies with Stefan Wolpe and Wallingford Riegger, but after meeting John Cage following a New York Philharmonic performance of Webern’s Symphony, he began moving in the avant-garde sphere of Cage and the New York-based abstract expressionist painters and sculptors, figures who would remain his closest colleagues and influences for the rest of his life. In 1951, still virtually unknown, he wrote the soundtrack for a now-iconic film about Jackson Pollock made by Hans Namuth and
Paul Falkenberg. He bought his first painting, an all-black canvas by Rauschenberg, for less than twenty dollars while visiting the painter for the first time. His approach to composition was influenced by Cage but also by abstract painting, with its concrete elements in fixed relationships to one another, its lack of semantic specificity and narrative. Even in his early works, we find the composer employing tiny, motive-like fragments within deliberately paced structures. In his use of fixed complexes of sound-as-sound (rather than as seeds for traditional development), Feldman was not only close to Cage but to Edgard Varèse, whose interest in and control of instrumental timbres was closer to Feldman’s own concerns.

Feldman was an early (albeit temporary) experimenter with graphic scores, feeling for a time that traditional notation obscured the essential point of his music; the visual character of some of his early scores, such as Projection I was very much in keeping with the paintings of the Abstract Expressionists. Indeterminacy of various kinds, such as desynchronizing multiple instrumental parts, not specifying durational relationships, and allowing freedom of sequencing of events, obtained in most of his works of the 1960s. He returned to traditional notation in the 1970s, although his compositional voice remained as distinctive as ever. Later in the 1970s he became interested in repetition as a metaphor for pattern in visual arts, especially Middle Eastern textiles. His final orchestral work Coptic Light (1986) exemplifies this new development. Other works, although less directly reflecting his interest in textile patterns, also use repetition and subtle change to create musical edifices of increasingly astonishing length. His violin and piano work For John Cage is a circa seventy-minute work in an unbroken span; his most extreme example is the String Quartet No. 2, a performance of which can last over six hours.

Given Feldman’s status as an artist of restraint and individuality standing outside the mainstream, it was perhaps inevitable that he come into contact with Samuel Beckett, the austerity and otherworldliness of whose plays shared something with Feldman’s music. The two met in Berlin in 1976 to discuss writing an opera, a genre both disliked and distrusted, and collaborated on Neither, a monodrama based on Beckett’s very short (eighty-seven word) story by the same name, written for the project. Beckett subsequently suggested Feldman compose the music for the writer’s 1961 radio play Words and Music, which was first produced with Feldman’s “labor of love” score in 1987 for the American Beckett Festival of Radio Plays.
Feldman wrote *For Samuel Beckett* the same year on a commission from the Holland Festival for the Schoenberg Ensemble. The piece is scored for an orchestra of double winds, vibraphone, harp, piano, and strings, and it lasts about fifty-five minutes. Like a Calder mobile, the work juxtaposes strongly defined, gradually changing blocks or complexes of sound, complete in themselves, in continually altered relationships to one another. (Note the very clear nature of the piano writing, for example, which, although it changes as the piece goes on, never melds or blends with the other instrumental groups.) The close-interval, cluster-basis harmonies are very much Feldman’s language, although the consistent density (despite the low volume) of activity is a rare occurrence in his work. Sonically, it very much resembles the Beckett collaboration *Neither*. *For Samuel Beckett* was one of Feldman’s last completed works, written in the final year of his life.
This concert is dedicated to the late George Bosworth for his longtime dedication to and support of San Francisco Contemporary Music Players.
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.

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Artistic Director, percussionist, conductor, and author Steven Schick was born in Iowa and raised in a farming family. For forty years he has championed contemporary music by commissioning or premiering more than one hundred-fifty new works. He was the founding percussionist of the Bang on a Can All-Stars (1992-2002) and served as Artistic Director of the Centre International de Percussion de Genève (2000-2005). Schick is founder and Artistic Director of the percussion group red fish blue fish, and Music Director of the La Jolla Symphony and Chorus. In 2012 he became the first Artist-in-Residence with the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE). Schick founded and is currently Artistic Director of “Roots and Rhizomes,” a summer course on contemporary percussion music held at the Banff Centre for the Arts. He maintains a lively schedule of guest conducting including appearances in this season with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, the Nova Chamber Ensemble and the Asko/Schönberg Ensemble. Schick served as music director of the 2015 Ojai Festival. Among his acclaimed publications are a book, “The Percussionist’s Art: Same Bed, Different Dreams,” and numerous recordings of contemporary percussion music. Steven Schick is Distinguished Professor of Music at the University of California, San Diego.
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Hung Liu was born in Changchun, China in 1948, and grew up under the Maoist regime. She immigrated to the US in 1984 to attend the University of California, San Diego, where she received her MFA. She currently lives in Oakland and is a tenured professor of art at Mills College.

As a painter, Liu subjects the documentary authority of historical photographs to the more reflective process of painting; she has written: “I want to both preserve and destroy the image.” Much of the meaning in Liu’s work comes from the way the washes and drips dissolve the images, suggesting the passage of memory into history, while working to uncover the cultural and personal narratives fixed but often concealed—in the photographic instant.

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2015/16 45TH SEASON

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