



SAN FRANCISCO
CONTEMPORARY
MUSIC PLAYERS

Re-Tuning and Refiguration

November 7, 2022

Faye Sanos Concert Hall
Conservatory of Music
University of the Pacific

A Message from Artistic Director Eric Dudley



Dear adventurers in new music,

It is our absolute pleasure to welcome you to another season of the SF Contemporary Music Players, our 52nd year in the running, and one that's filled with fascinating sonic journeys that we're thrilled to be able to embark on with you.

Our current season is ambitious in scope and offers a number of ways to encounter the music of our time, from intimate chamber concerts to full ensemble presentations, and even a project for recording and eventual realization in a custom-designed Virtual Reality environment! As we continue our return to the city's concert stages, we're overjoyed to present programs that engage with some of the fundamental aspects of musical creation that have captivated composers across the ages - from the physical and acoustic, to the temporal and spatial, and also the interpersonal.

"Re-tuning & Refiguration" (November) makes the world of pitch, and divergent approaches to how it can be defined, the central focus of a concert series. Works by Sky Macklay, Chris Brown and Ben Johnston all employ different tuning systems to change the ways in which we hear harmony and consonance, and to explore frequency interactions that lie outside the "equal-tempered" system. "Temporal Excursions" (April) shifts the focus to rhythm and time, with its centerpiece the newly commissioned Polytempo Music by Brian Baumbusch, flanked by works of Conlon Nancarrow and SF Symphony music director Esa-Pekka Salonen. And "Power Duos & Power Dynamics" (May) closes the season with a focus on human relationships and the drama of performance, with pieces by husband-and-wife and father-and-son duos each exploring the interactions of art, artist and audience. Add to that our several chamber concerts in October, December and January at The Lab in the city's Mission District, and our annual Sound & Wine benefit event, rounding out the season with contrast, community, and celebration.

As always, please keep checking in with our website for up-to-date information about our season events, and THANK YOU for your enthusiastic support of contemporary music and all that we do. We're so honored by your continued engagement with the Contemporary Players and our programs, and if you're joining us for the first time, we hope that you're intrigued by what you hear and keep coming back! Please enjoy all that we have to offer on our 2022-2023 season, and help us to spread the excitement for the music of 'right now!'

Warmest regards,
Eric Dudley



Re-Tuning & Refiguration

November 7, 2022 at 7:30 PM

Faye Spanos Concert Hall

Conservatory of Music of University of the Pacific

Eric Dudley, Artistic Director

PROGRAM

Special performance by 28/78 New Music Ensemble, Pacific Conservatory of Music

Björk Cute (2019)

Yaz Lancaster (b. 1996)

Phoenix Farris, flute

Apollo Parish Mitchell, oboe

Abigail Miller, clarinet

Kylie Ward, trumpet

Matthew Miramontes, trombone

Toby Keys, keyboard

Charlotte Han, violin

Sam Tse, viola

Hasina Torres, cello

Joshua Gutierrez, bass

Braydon Ross, conductor

Welcome and program introduction by Eric Dudley, SFCMP Artistic Director

Performance by San Francisco Contemporary Music Players

Somewhere I Have Never Traveled (1949)

Ben Johnston (1926-2019)

Eric Dudley, tenor*

Kate Campbell, piano

Epimoric Quiverings (2021) Chris Brown (b. 1953)
for Ptolemy Duple metallophone
William Winant, percussion

Xantippe's Rebuke (1993) Mary Jane Leach (b. 1949)
Kyle Bruckmann*, oboe

Sonata for Microtonal Piano (1964) Ben Johnston (1926-2019)
Kate Campbell, piano
Specialized tuning provided by Marty Weiner*
(Pacific Conservatory piano technician)
Supported in part by a grant from the Ross McKee Foundation

Microvariations (rev. 2017) Sky Macklay (b.1988)
Tod Brody, flute
Kyle Bruckmann, oboe*
Peter Josheff, clarinet
Jeff Anderle, bass clarinet
Jeff Robinson, contrabassoon
Alicia Telford, horn
Joe Brown, trumpet
Brendan Lai-Tong, trombone
Kate Campbell, piano
Kevin Neuhoff, timpani
Hrabba Atladottir, violin I
Susan Freier, violin II
Clio Tilton, viola
Stephen Harrison, cello
Richard Worn, double bass

*Conservatory of Music faculty/staff

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

One of the first American composers to extensively examine the realm of just-tuning and pitch relationships from a mathematical standpoint, Ben Johnston created an eclectic musical style informed by a reappraisal and restructuring of the standard 'equal-tempered tuning' system, wedded to rhythmic and harmonic structures that are intentionally complex at times and disarmingly simple at others. His *Sonata for Microtonal Piano* takes full advantage of a keyboard instrument's ability to accommodate an entire range of tuning possibilities on a note-by-note basis, altering the commonly-associated sound world of the 'well-tempered' clavier to take on an entirely different character.

Along similar lines, Chris Brown offers a piece for solo percussion on a constructed instrument, the Ptolemy Duple, that divides the octave into sixteen alternatively-tuned pitches rather than the usual twelve. Sky Macklay's *Microvariations* creates a musical fantasy on the anecdote of British conductor George Thomas Smart, who travelled across Europe in 1825 comparing the tuning of his A = 423.5hz tuning fork to the variant tuning of every musical group he could find. The disposition of a chamber orchestra is broken into two distinct 'towns,' with both groups layering cadences upon each other while playing a quarter-tone apart, at first distinct and eventually congealing and blurring.

In *Cosmigimmicks*, Unsk Chin turns the concept of pantomime into a sphere in which to blur the identities and timbres of the instruments themselves, with plucked strings as the protagonists toward which the other sound colors bend through unconventional playing techniques and preparations. Each of its three movements play upon applications of pantomime in different settings - shadow puppetry, TV plays, and masks - in a dialogue of instrumental theatre driven by the ability and intent of miming 'to incisively sum up archetypes and whole life stories in a few gestures, without having to be concerned about linear time or plain narrative.'

Chris Brown, Notes on Epimoric Quiverings

Epimoric Quiverings (2020) is a solo for the Ptolemy Duple, a keyed percussion instrument built for Lou Harrison by his partner Bill Colvig, and tuned in Just Intonation, which uses

whole number ratios from the harmonic series to tune all its pitches. The instrument's tuning includes all three pairs of the 1st century music theorist Ptolemy's duple divisions of the tetrachord: namely the $5/4$ (major 3rd) and $16/15$ (minor 2nd); $10/9$ (small major 2nd) and $6/5$ (minor 3rd); and $8/7$ (septimal whole tone) and $7/6$ (septimal minor 3rd). Note that all these ratios are all epimoric, whose numerators are 1 greater than their denominator. Including two septimal pitches in each of the two tetrachords in an octave thus requires a pitch-set of 16 notes to the octave. In addition, every ratio between adjacent notes in the tuning is also an epimoric ratio! Ptolemy, and a couple of millennia later Harrison, considered epimoric intervals to be "the most musical".

While Harrison used these primarily for their melodic identity and character, my piece focuses equally on the orderly beating of these frequencies with each other on the instrument. Beats are heard when two sounds with slightly different frequencies are played together, manifesting as a periodic variation in loudness whose rate is the difference in their frequencies. Listening for and eliminating these beats (possible because they are part of the harmonic series) is how Just intervals are tuned; and regulating the evenly increasing speed of beats of all the intervals except the octave is how equal temperament is tuned by ear. Tuning is an art and practice that reveals many more musical possibilities than it is possible to explore in a lifetime. Tuning provides the foundation defining the diversity of human musical languages. Beats can be used for their rhythmic and timbral qualities as well as for tunings. Perhaps the word "quiver" is a more potent descriptor for these musical beats, as it appears in the Book of Hopi describing the tuning of the universe: 'the whole earth trembled; the universe quivered in tune.' Frank Waters, *The Book of Hopi*, Penguin Books, New York, 1977, p.4.

Dedicated to William Winant — thanks, Willie, for encouraging me to write for this beautiful and unique instrument!

— Chris Brown

Composer Bios

Benjamin Johnston Jr. (1926 – 2019) was an American contemporary music composer, known for his use of just intonation. He was called "one of the foremost composers of microtonal music" by Philip Bush and "one of the best non-famous composers this country has to offer" by John Rockwell. Johnston was born in Macon, Georgia. He attended the College of William and Mary and Cincinnati Conservatory, later studying with Harry Partch, Darius Milhaud, and John Cage. Johnston taught composition and theory at the University of Illinois from 1951 to 1983.

Works include Quintet for Groups, Sonnets of Desolation, Carmilla, Sonata for Microtonal Piano, and Suite for Microtonal Piano, and ten string quartets. All ten quartets have been released in a series of three recordings by the Kepler Quartet (New World Recordings).

Awards include a Guggenheim Fellowship, a grant from the National Council on the Arts and the Humanities, and two commissions from the Smithsonian Institute.

In 2006, Johnston moved to Wisconsin in order to better care for his wife, Betty Hall Johnston, who was seriously ill. After her death in 2007, he continued to rehearse intensively with the Kepler Quartet. He was a member of ASCAP and received the Deems Taylor Award in 2007. His Quintet for Groups was awarded the SWR Orchestra prize at the 2008 Donaueschinger Musiktage.

CHRIS BROWN, composer, pianist, and electronic musician, makes music with self-designed sonic systems that include acoustic and electroacoustic instruments, interactive software, computer networks, microtonal tunings, and improvisation. His compositions are designs for performances in which people bring to life the musical structures embedded in scores, instruments, and machines.

Early pieces featured instruments he invented and built including a prepared electric piano in the orchestral piece *Alternating Currents* (1983) and a digitally-controlled analog signal processor for *Lava* (1992), an environmental piece for brass, percussion and electronics. *Talking Drum* (1995-2000), was a MIDI network installation exploring polyrhythm, distance, and resonance in large architectural spaces. He is a founding member of the pioneering computer network band *The HUB*, which received the 2018 ZKM Giga-Hertz Prize for Electronic Music. Throughout his career he has composed solos for computer and for acoustic instruments with interactive electronics using self-authored software. Since 2005 he writes music in *Just Intonation*, also integrating rhythmic structures that parallel the proportions used in their tunings

His music is available on New World, F'oc'sle Music, Tzadik, Pogus, Intakt, Ecstatic Peace, Red Toucan, Leo, and Artifact Recordings. As a pianist he has recorded music by Henry Cowell, Luc Ferrari, José Maceda, John Zorn, David Rosenboom, Glenn Spearman, and Wadada Leo Smith; recordings as an improviser include with Pauline Oliveros, Fred Frith, the Rova Saxophone Quartet, William Winant, and Frank Gratkowski; and he produced three albums of music by the great Filipino composer and ethnomusicologist José Maceda.

He taught electronic music and composition as Co-Director of the Center for Contemporary Music at Mills College in Oakland, California for 30 years. <http://cbmuse.com>

MARY JANE LEACH is a composer/performer whose work reveals a fascination with the physicality of sound, its acoustic properties and how they interact with space. In many of her works Leach creates an other-worldly sound environment using difference, combination, and interference tones; these are tones not actually sounded by the performers, but acoustic phenomena arising from her deft manipulation of intonation and timbral qualities. The result is striking music which has a powerful effect on listeners.

Critics have commented on her ability to "offer a spiritual recharge without the banalities of the new mysticism" (Detroit Free Press), evoking "a visionary quest for inner peace" (Vice Versa Magazine), and "an iridescent lingering sense of suspended time." (Musicworks Magazine)

Leach has been commissioned by many notable ensembles, including Fondazione ICO Tito Schipa, Relâche, The Downtown Ensemble, Newband, and the New York Treble Singers, and by soloists such as Manuel Zurria, Emanuele Arciulli, Sarah Cahill, Guy Klucevsek, Shannon Peet, and Libby Van Cleve. She has received commissioning awards from the NEA, Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust, Westdeutscher Rundfunk, and many other funders.

The music of Baltimore-based composer, oboist, and installation artist **Sky Macklay** (b. 1988) is conceptual yet expressive, exploring extreme contrasts, surreal tonality, audible processes, humor, and the physicality of sound. Some of her pieces incorporate intermedia and extramusical

narratives, addressing topics ranging from commuting times to the side effects of contraceptive and assisted reproductive technology. As a 2021 Guggenheim Fellow, her next project is a chamber music album that will synthesize her work as a composer and her raucous, multiphonic-rich oboe performance practice.

Sky has been commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Chamber Music America (with Splinter Reeds and Left Coast Chamber Ensemble), the Fromm Foundation at Harvard University (with Ensemble Dal Niente), the Barlow Endowment (with andPlay), the Jerome Fund for New Music (with ICE saxophonist Ryan Muncy), and Kronos Quartet's 50 for the Future project. Upcoming commissions include new works for the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra and Klangforum Wien. As a Fellow at the Columbia Institute for Ideas and Imagination in Paris, she is also collaborating with French ensemble 2e2m.

Sky's music has been recognized with awards and fellowships from The American Academy of Arts and Letters, Civitella Ranieri, and ASCAP, and has been featured at international festivals such as Gaudeamus Muziekweek, The BBC Scottish Symphony's Tectonics Festival, and the ISCM World New Music Days. Since being recorded on Spektral Quartet's GRAMMY-nominated album in 2017, her iconic string quartet Many Many Cadences has been performed around the world by ten different quartets and is studied in dozens of university composition and theory classes.

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