

**MONDAY  
EVENING  
CONCERTS**

**A PORTRAIT OF  
JULIUS EASTMAN**

**January 23, 2017 | 8:00 PM  
Zipper Concert Hall**

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**MONDAY EVENING CONCERTS JANUARY 23, 2017**

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**A Portrait of Julius Eastman**

**Prelude to the Holy Presence of Joan d'Arc** (1981) Los Angeles Premiere (Transcription by Ben Skubi) [12']

Davóne Tines, bass-baritone

**The Holy Presence of Joan d'Arc** (1981) Los Angeles Premiere (Transcription by Clarice Jensen) [20']

T.J. Borden, cello  
Seth Parker Woods, cello  
Judith Hamann, cello  
Jennifer Bewerse, cello  
Ashley Walters, cello  
Derek Stein, cello  
Timothy Loo, cello  
Eric Byers, cello  
Erika Duke-Kirkpatrick, cello  
David Mason, cello  
Jonathan Hepfer, conductor

*intermission*

**Crazy Nigger** (1979) [55']

Richard Valitutto, piano  
Brendan Nguyen, piano  
Todd Moellenberg, piano  
Joseph Kubera, piano  
Assistant Pianists:  
Seth Parker Woods  
Vera Weber  
Thomas Feng  
Leanna Goddard  
Jonathan Hepfer  
Katie Eikam  
Sidney Hopson  
Clinton Dodson

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**PREFACE by Renée Levine Packer**

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The American composer/performer Julius Eastman (1940-1990) is a fascinating figure. Awareness of his work has been growing, due in large part to the 2005 New World Records release of *Unjust Malaise*, a three-CD set of his music, and the more recent release of what the New York Times called "his shining, tidal masterpiece," *Femenine*, on the Frozen Reeds label. As singer and pianist, he worked under the baton of luminaries such as Zubin Mehta, Pierre Boulez, and Lukas Foss, receiving national acclaim and a Grammy nomination for his electric performances and recording of Peter Maxwell Davies' *Eight Songs for A Mad King*.

Julius Eastman was born in New York City and raised in Ithaca, New York. He studied piano and composition at the Curtis Institute of Music, graduating in 1963. In the late sixties, he moved to Buffalo, New York, where he was invited by composer-conductor Lukas Foss to join the prestigious university-based new music group, the Creative Associates, eventually becoming a member of the University of Buffalo music faculty. In Buffalo, his colleagues at the new music center included Petr Kotik, Gwendolin Sims, James Fulkerson, Jan Williams, and Morton Feldman. During his highly productive years in Buffalo, he composed *Thruway*; a ballet score, *The Moon's Silent Modulation*; *Macle*; *Trumpet*; *Colors*; and *Stay On It*; among other pieces. In the summer of 1976, Eastman moved to New York City where he became part of the "downtown" New York music scene. During this period he performed with Arthur Russell, Meredith Monk, Peter Zummo, and others in venues ranging from Carnegie Hall and the Brooklyn Academy of Music to downtown lofts and disco clubs. From 1976 until his death in 1990, Eastman's "model of musicianship," as music historian Ryan Dohoney terms it, "expanded to include free Jazz, improvisation, new wave rock, disco, as well as his own composed music that is marked by intense repetition and political aggressiveness." This "political aggressiveness" is evident in the series of multi-piano pieces that Eastman wrote with provocative titles such as *Crazy Nigger*, *Evil Nigger*, and *Gay Guerrilla*. Following a series of personal struggles and misfortunes such as eviction from his apartment for non-payment of rent and the confiscation of his possessions including his musical scores, Eastman returned to Buffalo, where he died in 1990 at age 49.

Renée Levine Packer is co-editor of "Gay Guerrilla: Julius Eastman and His Music" (University of Rochester Press, 2015.)

## PROGRAM NOTES by Paul Griffiths

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### Introduction

There are many stories to be told, and perhaps some lessons to be learned, from the life, and the work, and the death, of Julius Eastman. First off, Eastman was a greatly gifted artist who, in the 1970s, started creating a music all his own, partly through a fusion, as strong as it was unlikely, of everything from Diana Ross to Meredith Monk, from Miles Davis to Maxwell Davies, certainly by way of Frederic Rzewski. The "classical" part of this heritage he knew from the inside, as an extraordinary vocalist and keyboard player; Davies's Eight Songs for a Mad King he performed for Zubin Mehta in Los Angeles, Pierre Boulez in New York, and the composer in London. But for everything he took, from his models and exemplars, he gave back in abundance. His ensemble piece *Stay On It*, performed in New York in December 1973, in some respects anticipates the composition Steve Reich began the following year: *Music for 18 Musicians*. More than that, he challenged classical orthodoxy in construing the written score not as the representation of some ideal but as a prompt, useful only in performance. A shape, and many of the details and processes building that shape, would be prescribed, but it would need to be lifted into life by the responses of individual performers, of whom Eastman himself was normally one. The pieces on this evening's program are powerful signals from one of the wildest spirits in a rich and turbulent era.

One obvious question is why it took so long for this music to be recognized, and here we have to consider another story. By the early 70s, it was O.K. for a classical musician to be gay, but not to shout it from the rooftops the way Eastman did. To be black was a whole other matter – and on this, too, Eastman felt the need to "speak boldly," as he puts it in his prelude to *The Holy Presence of Joan d'Arc*. As a result, he not only faced prejudice and misunderstanding from institutions, he also seems to have felt the strains internally, the strains of having to be at once a respected, respectable composer and a brother. They pulled him apart. The gigs dwindled away and the creative energy lost its outlet as slowly he slid down the social ladder to the very bottom.

His was thus also the story of the poète maudit, the artist who, critical of the ruling order, must combat the very machinery that sustains the arts. Eastman, as a composer, could not keep quiet. He wrote and performed in a spirit of self-declaration, as a gay black male, and protest. Where the protest was concerned, he was virtually doomed to frustration, especially when America was turning, post-Vietnam, to a new conservative solidity.

Hence another story, that of the rediscovered genius. Some people remembered Eastman – remembered the excitement, the daring. Not least among them was Mary Jane Leach, herself a composer-performer, who in 1998 began collecting what remained, in the way of notated music and recordings. She put together an anthology of the latter, released by New World Records in 2005 as *Unjust Malaise*, an all-too-fitting anagram of "Julius Eastman." She was also co-editor with Renée Levine Packer of *Gay Guerrilla* (one of Eastman's titles), a symposium on the composer published ten years later.

The album, and latterly the book, stimulated performers to restore the music to life from decades of silence, and so another, continuing story began to emerge, that of how to deal with incomplete musical materials, since much had gone astray as a result of the deteriorating conditions of Eastman's existence. In this story, Eastman became, as Matthew Mendez has pointed out, a composer like Johannes Ciconia, many of his works lost, others surviving only in part, leaving experts to finish them.

There is, of course, the difference that the twentieth-century musician, unlike his early Renaissance counterpart, left recordings, and yet the messages from these are ambiguous. With notation open to improvisation and decisions taken on the fly, Eastman's performing practice surely depended on the musicians working with him, on his relationships with those musicians (and theirs with each other), and on the nature of the venue and audience. It certainly depended on his presence. His performances were not realizations of eternal "works" but high-energy moments in time, bound to be different next time. They ask us now to consider how western music has generally understood notation, and whether any performance of one of the classics we cherish, from whatever period, should be deemed a cover version.

### **The Holy Presence of Joan d'Arc: Prelude**

Those contributors to *Gay Guerrilla* who knew Eastman agree that he was a "spiritual man," even a "religious fanatic." Certainly by the time he wrote his work devoted to Saint Joan, there was nothing camp in this. What he venerated in Joan was her unyielding adherence to her inner voices and her ceaseless struggle for her own and her people's liberation, even when such action would take her to the stake.

The *Holy Presence of Joan d'Arc* had its initial run of performances at The Kitchen, New York, during the first week of April 1981, in company with a dance by Andy de Groat, then a leading downtown choreographer. For the occasion, Eastman wrote a program note in the form of a letter to the saint:

"Dear Joan, Find presented a work of art, in your name, full of honor, integrity, and boundless courage. This work of art, like all works of art in your name, can never and will never match your most inspired passion....But I offer it none the less. I offer it as a reminder to those who think that they can destroy liberators by acts of treachery, malice, and murder...."

He also added to the score a prelude he himself would declaim. (A year before, also in New York, he had performed a whole evening of "sacred songs.") In certain respects – of spirituality, fully out-there homosexuality, uncompromising search for an authentic music – there are parallels between Eastman and Claude Vivier. This prelude, however, in its absoluteness and implacability, suggests he might have become the American Ustvolskaya.

### **The Holy Presence of Joan d'Arc**

Unlike other downtown composers of his time in New York, Eastman did not have a regular performing group, with all its corresponding advantages of support and continuity, if also its disadvantages of homogeneity from piece to piece. Instead, he flew free. He created compositions and improvisations for himself as vocalist, pianist, or both, and he wrote pieces for multiple pianos that he could perform with colleagues, such as the one to be heard in the second half of this concert, but he also composed for larger mixed formations and, in *The Holy Presence of Joan d'Arc*, for an ensemble of ten cellos.

Perhaps the choice of medium came from a desire to find an image for Joan's interior voices, crowding to be heard. However, Eastman's use of cellos places the music much more in his own, baritone register.

At the start of the work, which plays for around twenty minutes, the cellos are all together, repeating a figure Eastman took from the refrain of a Patti Smith song, "Rock 'n' Roll Nigger," where she sings the word "nigger" rapidly seven times. Individual cellos soon begin winding away along their own melodic paths and coming together to enunciate other motifs, but the ostinato remains in evidence, if distorted, until suddenly, about halfway through, there is a break. Strength and insistence are then regained around a new focus, with the old ostinato sometimes present; the ending, though, comes as a surprise.

*The Holy Presence of Joan d'Arc* was played in San Francisco two months after the New York performances, and was recorded in New York for radio broadcasting. The score was subsequently lost apart from the first page, and so this evening's performance depends on a reconstruction by Clarice Jensen, made from the recording.

### **Crazy Nigger**

In 1978-9, Eastman worked on several projects for which he appropriated a hostile term and made it a badge of honor, including this piece, which he wrote in 1978, and which had its first performance the following year, in his first collaboration with de Groat. Beyond that, as he explained before his concert at Northwestern University in January 1980, the word had for him a robust and even revolutionary meaning. The field nigger, working the Southern plantations, was "fundamental" to U. S. development and prosperity; the word thus conveyed a sense of "basicness." The musical connotation here by no means accidental, Eastman was rerouting a slur – a term of separation, of denigration – so that it spoke for what underpins the whole substance of music and of sound. He was also inviting another understanding of the term: Crazy Nigger marshals a mass of basic elements, of musical "niggers," notated as black noteheads, in constant rapid, insistent movement.

This movement executes a sequence of processes that add up to one big trajectory, whose starting point is B flat, the tone that may still be ringing in our ears after *The Holy Presence of Joan d'Arc*. Now, however, that tone comes from multiple pianos – four at the Northwestern performance, two when the piece was repeated at The Kitchen the next month. The pianists move at the same fast pulse, but the choice of register is generally free, and may change freely, so that there is swirling variability within the unity. Things then develop gradually. Eastman notates shifts that happen every minute and a half to begin with, the first shift introducing a reiterated A flat that moves chromatically up to the B flat of the opening, and the second, roughly symmetrically, adding a skip down from C to B flat. Meanwhile, the old regular B flat is still going, for, by Eastman's principle of "organic music," new events are added to the old, so that there is steady accumulation – in this case, until there are seven figures on the go. The pattern then changes subtly, and changes again far more emphatically so that A is now the repeating note.

By this point, we are twelve minutes into a performance that lasts almost an hour. The A becomes a slow, descending pentatonic melody, and then there is a dramatic restart on B flat, which now follows a different course, accepting this melody, in accordance with the "organic" principle. Just after the twenty-four-minute point comes a new beginning on the F minor triad, eight minutes later another on B in upper registers, this time expanding quite quickly at a continuous crescendo until all twelve tones are in play.

In the next fourteen minutes or so, pulse rates as well as pitches are varied in organic fashion, until there is coalescence on a low C sharp – the tone that has barely appeared before (it was in disguise as D flat in the twelve-tone passage just mentioned). As many as are possible, upper partials are added, so that the piece ends in a spectral harmony, a new unity that, by virtue of the piano's mechanism, has to be continuously reactivated. Finally, the performers are asked to stop their action, depress the sustaining pedals, and "Let Sonorities Ring."

Program notes © Paul Griffiths. Paul Griffiths is an acclaimed writer on contemporary and classical music whose books include *A Concise History of Western Music* and *The Penguin Companion to Classical Music*. He is also known as a librettist (Elliott Carter's *What Next?*) and novelist. In 2002, Griffiths was honored by the French government as a Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres.

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### **TEXT TO "PRELUDE TO THE HOLY PRESENCE OF JOAN D'ARC"**

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Saint Michael said / Saint Margaret said / Saint Catherine said / They said  
"When the question you, speak boldly, Joan. Speak boldly now."

## BIOGRAPHIES

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**JONATHAN HEPFER** is a percussionist, conductor, and concert curator specializing in avant-garde and experimental music. He began playing classical music at age 17 after discovering the work of John Cage while studying at SUNY Buffalo. Subsequently, Jonathan attended Oberlin Conservatory, UC – San Diego and the Musikhochschule Freiburg (with the support of a two-year DAAD fellowship). He has taken part in the US premieres of major works by Salvatore Sciarrino, Gérard Grisey, György Kurtág, Rolf Riehm, Jo Kondo, Aldo Clementi, Klaus Lang, Ramon Lazcano, Francisco Guerrero, Thomas Meadowcroft, Simon Steen-Andersen and many others. He was a member of the percussion ensemble red fish blue fish, and has collaborated as a soloist, chamber musician and conductor with ensembles such as Ensemble Mosaik, Ensemble SurPlus, asamisimasa, hand werk, the Formalist Quartet, PALIMPSEST, the Sree Sinfonietta, ICE and Signal. He is on the faculty of Cal Arts and is the Artistic Director of Monday Evening Concerts.

Pianist **JOSEPH KUBERA'S** affiliation with Julius Eastman goes back to the early 1970s in Buffalo, NY, and continued after 1980 in New York City, where he performed with Eastman in his multiple-piano works and in other concert presentations Eastman organized.

Kubera has been a leading interpreter of contemporary music for the past three decades. Recent activities include performances at New York's Tectonics Festival, at Cage 100th birthday celebrations in New York, Boston and Philadelphia, and a TV production for Swiss RSI Television. He has been a soloist at major European festivals and has worked closely with such luminaries as Morton Feldman, La Monte Young, and Robert Ashley. Among many who have written works for him are Michael Byron, Alvin Lucier, Roscoe Mitchell and Elliott Sharp. A longtime Cage advocate, he has made definitive recordings of major Cage works, and toured widely with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company at Cage's invitation. He has been awarded grants through the National Endowment for the Arts and the Foundation for Contemporary Arts.

**TODD MOELLENBERG** is a pianist and performance artist based in San Diego, currently pursuing his Doctor of Musical Arts in contemporary performance at UC San Diego, where he studies with Aleck Karis. He is an active member of UCSD's Palimpsest Ensemble, with whom he will perform as soloist in the Ligeti Piano Concerto in March. Todd's creative work also encompasses durational performance, public intervention, and poetry; he published his first chapbook, *Flood*, last summer.

Pianist **BRENDAN NGUYEN** displays uncommon versatility as a performer, artist, and thinker. His bold programming style, infusion of technology, and novel concert concepts aim to explore new musical territory while casting a contemporary eye on the established canon. As veteran performer of contemporary music having performed throughout North America and Europe, his work has led to a number of premieres and commissions with well-known internationally renown musicians and composers including Aaron Helgeson, Nicholas Deyoe, Roger Reynolds, and Wojtek Blecharz. Brendan is a graduate of the Oberlin Conservatory of Music and holds a DMA from UC San Diego.

**DAVÓNE TINES**, deemed a "...singer of immense power and fervor..." by The Los Angeles Times and a "...charismatic, full-voiced bass-baritone..." by The New York Times, is building an international career commanding a broad spectrum of opera and concert performance. The 2015-16 season offered breakout performances on both sides of The Atlantic: the Dutch National Opera presented his company debut starring opposite French counter tenor Philippe Jaroussky in the premiere of Kaija Saariaho's *Only the Sound Remains* directed by Peter Sellars and The Los Angeles Times exalted Davóne Tines as "the find of the season," for performances of Caroline Shaw's *By & By* with the Calder Quartet and Kaija Saariaho's *Sombre* with members of ICE at the Ojai Music Festival.

With a focus on contemporary keyboard performance, including organ and harpsichord, Grammy® nominated pianist **RICHARD VALITUTTO** a soloist, chamber musician, vocal accompanist, and composing/improvising creative. He has cultivated a stylistically omnivorous taste and a technical dexterity that have enabled him to work with numerous composers including John Adams, Brian Ferneyhough, Sofia Gubaidulina, John Harbison, David Lang, Meredith Monk, and Steve Reich, among many others.

Richard has performed with the LA Philharmonic, Opera Omaha, Monday Evening Concerts, Piano Spheres, Omaha Under the Radar, wasteLAND, Brooklyn Art Song Society, MicroFest, People Inside Electronics, and Jacaranda. Additional projects include productions by Beth Morrison Projects and LA Opera, The Industry, The Hammer Museum, LACMA, and the Green Umbrella series. He is featured on critically acclaimed recordings for Bridge, New World, hat[now]ART, Populist, pfMENTUM, and Bōtt Records labels. Richard is a founding member of gnarwhallaby, called "startlingly versatile" by the NY Times in their Carnegie Hall debut.

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