

**MONDAY
EVENING
CONCERTS**

**SÉVERINE BALLON:
SOLITUDE**

March 28, 2016 | 8:00 PM
Zipper Hall at the Colburn School

MONDAY EVENING CONCERTS MARCH 28, 2016

Rebecca Saunders (b. 1967) – **Solitude** (2013) [~16']

Mauro Lanza (b. 1975) – **La bataille de Caresme et de Charnage** (2012) [~14'] for cello and electronics

Liza Lim (b. 1966) – **Invisibility** (2009) [~14']

Intermission

Chaya Czernowin (b. 1957) - **Adentium capillus veneris no. I / SONGS OF THE MUTED ONE** (2015) [~13']

(Arr. Severine Ballon) World Premiere

Brian Ferneyhough (b. 1943) – **Time and Motion Study II** (1973-76) [~18']

for cello, tape delay, ring modulators, voice and pedals

Juan Cristóbal Cerrillo, electronics

Séverine Ballon, violoncello

PROGRAM NOTES

Rebecca Saunders – Solitude

British composer Rebecca Saunders (b.1967), now living in Berlin, researched the sounds of her cello solo **Solitude** (2013) in collaboration with Séverine Ballon. The extraordinary work resulting from their collaboration constitutes something of a hallucinatory manifesto of materials so low that they seem to emanate from a previously unknown reservoir hidden within, or even behind, the cello and its walls. Saunders deploys this technique — allowed for by detuning the cello's lowest string by more than an octave, audible in the opening moments of the piece — as a type of bathic canvas from which the music emerges and on top of which the music inscribes increasingly many small gestures that reach ever higher towards the instrument's upper parts.

In the program notes included with the score, the composer reflects on the emptiness solitude provides. “A state or quality of being alone, solitary, or remote. Implies the absence of all others: inaccessibility, withdrawal, seclusion, isolation. A state of separation. A lonely or secluded place: wilderness, waste, desert, emptiness, wasteland. In silence, vacuous and devoid.” Saunders's reflections — which yoke together solitudes of place with silence as a solitude of sound — invoke psychological states that, like darkness, may change so slowly that we fail to notice they are changing at all, a comparison worth keeping in mind given the ways the music develops formally as a gigantic and slow-moving wave, from which emerges a distant song at only a few unexpected moments.

Saunders includes a short poem in the preface to the score. “Absent, silent, sole, | | Naught beside. | | Solitaire, Santon, pariah, | | Cenobite. | | Either, neither, solus, | | Unified.” This back-and-forth between the three-part strings of images Saunders writes (“Absent, silent, sole”) and the uninterrogable points-of-arrival of those images (“Naught beside”) helps us reflect on the two fundamentally different classes of material out of which the music develops: the first dark and incredibly low and the second coruscating and bright. The poetry's transformations help us reflect, too, on the different affects of emergence that the music creates: emergence-from-darkness, emergence-from-sea-depths, emergence from slow-moving types of time to much faster-moving types of time. Saunders summons these emergences vividly and intensifies their shapes with exponential loudnesses that cause the phenomena of the music to manifest suddenly, as though shining forth from around a corner in the dark.

Mauro Lanza – La bataille de Caresme et de Charnage

Italian composer Mauro Lanza (b.1975), now living in Berlin, wrote the first version of **La bataille de Caresme et de Charnage** (2012) for cello and piano; the composer later recorded the piano's sounds to tape and added important elements of electronics to produce the version presented tonight. The composer writes that the title of the piece "refers to the well-known painting of Pieter Bruegel depicting a common festival of the late Middle Ages. It is an early-modern period staging of the fight between meat and fish, feasting and fasting, winter and spring, tavern and church ..." Extensive preparations are made to both instruments: the third of the cello's strings, for example, carries a mound of putty fixed at the fourth harmonic node; the aural result masks the sound of the string behind a halo of auxiliary pitches. Likewise, seven of the piano's strings are weighted with coins while another twenty-one are dampened with putty or rubber: the coins transpose the strings' pitches while the putty leaves what the composer describes as only a "shadow of pitch" in the instrument's sound. In addition to the instruments' preparations, the cellist plays both a bird call and whoopee cushion; the recorded sounds of desk bells and a harmonica can be heard in the electronics.

La bataille de Caresme et de Charnage directs the listener through two large-scale transformations at once: first, from the sustained sounds of a hidden chorale (with the cellist singing one of the lines) to sounds that are quickly re-attacked (the shudders of the smaller percussion instruments being crucial to the effect); and, second, from one field of harmonies to another. The taps and the dripping of the coda that closes the piece — diminutive, toylike, inconclusive — suggests that it is perhaps the second of the forces implied in the piece's title that remains standing at the music's end, though how this might have come to be the case remains a question as charming, and sphinxlike, as the music itself. Lanza wrote *La bataille de Caresme et de Charnage* in close collaboration with Ballon, whom, at the head of the score, the composer thanks as a "tireless researcher of the cello's new sounds."

Liza Lim – Invisibility

The music of Australian composer Liza Lim (b.1966) engages nonwestern traditions of music-making in the context of complex and intricately written scores for chamber ensembles, orchestra and the stage. Such is the case in *Pearl, Ochre, Hair String* (2010), for large orchestra, informed by the aesthetics of Australian aboriginal art, and in Lim's earlier orchestra piece, *The Compass* (2005-06), which features both a flutist and Australian didgeridoo as soloists. In ***Invisibility*** (2009), which Lim wrote for Séverine Ballon to premiere at the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, Lim continues her research into these concepts and the position of their cultural situatedness. The preface to the score states the following. "Invisibility is part of my ongoing investigation into an Australian Aboriginal 'aesthetics of presence' in which shimmering effects both reveal and hide the presence of the numinous. The work is a study in flickering modulations between states of relative opacity / dullness and transparency / brightness, between resistance (noise, multiphonics and other distorted sounds) and ease of flow (harmonics, clear sonorities). Striated, shimmer effects are created in the interaction between the competing planes of tension held in the retuned strings as they are affected by fingers and the varied playing surfaces of the two bows traveling at changing speeds, pressure and position."

The effect of these moments of shimmer are heightened where the cellist is asked to play with a "guiro bow" made by wrapping long runs of the bow's hair around the wood of the bow in loops. The guiro bow that results — with strands of hair looking much like the interwoven stripes of a barber's pole — smoothly alternates wood with hair when passed over the surface of the cello's strings, contributing in complex ways to the flickering effects Lim describes. The first section of the piece is played with the guiro bow alone. At the start of the second section the cellist trades the guiro bow for a normal one. The cellist's transition between bows — from guiro to 'normal' — transforms the presence given to the materials of the music: the loudest of the cello's dynamics emerge only after the exchange of bows, evidencing the type of numinous, or spiritual, revelation Lim draws forth from Aboriginal approaches to objects and sight. So, too, does the exchange of bows prompt a question: Will the guiro bow return? Or will it not? What will be the interaction between these different ways of summoning sound and of moving in the world?

Chaya Czernowin - *Adantium capillus veneris* no. I / SONGS OF THE MUTED ONE

Adiantum capillus-veneris is the botanical designation for a species of maidenhair fern. Drooping light green fronds stagger subdivided leaves down a black central stem, lending the plant a handsomeness as it grows in loam or limestone in the shaded parts of a habit stretching across the world. Israeli-American composer Chaya Czernowin (b.1957) encountered the fern first in Israel and then later in the shaded places of many countries, the carrier of a certain stripped-down type of beauty in both color and shape wherever it is found. Czernowin borrowed the Latin name of the plant for the title of a bare, and delicately composed, study for amplified voice.

Adantium capillus-veneris (2015), subtitled “Etude in fragility,” is a short piece written for a vocalist of any range. In the notes to the score, Czernowin writes about the intersection the music navigates between subjective experiences of emotion and expansive experience of the world obtaining in one’s relation to nature. “*In this piece, the voice and the breath play an equal role in executing the musical text, as breath is (at times) independent from the voice and equal to it in an almost contrapuntal relationship. This is not an expressive piece in the more standard way in which a singer employs all of his personality in an attempt to express emotions or other expressions of the ‘self.’ It is rather almost a sketch using the voice and the breath like a small brush painting a line. Even though it is only a line made out of water (breath) with some color (voice), this line is actually transmitting a whole landscape.*” The enchaind gestures that constitute the sheer surfaces of the piece — gentle ups and downs of the breath carefully specified by contour with only minimal indications as to pitch — move with the strange sensuousness of a skeleton or a mime: bare bones animated one after the other in a slow-moving discovery of space. In the version presented tonight the role of the voice is given to the cello in the world premiere of Séverine Ballon’s transcription of the piece for her own instrument.

Brian Ferneyhough – *Time and Motion Study II*

American industrialist Frederick Taylor published *The Principles of Scientific Management* in 1911. The book summarized Taylor’s investigations timing the movements of laborers employed in the work of things like steel production and the inspection of ball bearings. Taylor’s research brought the stopwatch to the factory floor to determine the amount of time, down to the second, to be allotted to each task required of workers in an effort of manufacture. In response to Taylor’s “time studies,” American management consultants Frank and Lillian Gilbreth elaborated an analogous practice of “motion study” as a way to increase the efficiency of soldiers or factory workers by removing excess movements of the body in the handling weapons or machines. By the 1950s, Taylor’s and the Gilbreths’ methods had merged and “time and motion studies” have been a part of industrial optimization ever since. Predictably, workers responded to the measured surveillance of their work as dehumanizing overreach on the part of management; the presence of the “time and motion man” with his stopwatch on the factory floor made visible the differing concerns of management and workers.

This was the context, then, when in the 1970s British composer Brian Ferneyhough (b.1943) began work on a series of three “time and motion studies” for different musical forces: *Time and Motion Study I* (1971-77) for bass clarinet; ***Time and Motion Study II*** (1973-76) for cello and electronics; and *Time and Motion Study III* (1974) for sixteen-voice chorus with percussion and electronics. Famously difficult for the musical demands it places on performers — above all in details of rhythm and the effort of musical gesture — Ferneyhough’s music provides fecund terrain for critique of production of all sorts; two such points of critique recurrent in the composer’s work being the tension between frequently conflicting currents of mental and physical effort required during musical performance and the relationship between human (musical or ontological) agents and mechanical or electronic tools and systems, both manifest in the second *Time and Motion Study* presented tonight. Throughout the score — blistering in a surfeit of musical detail that at times has the cellist counting and playing as many as five different rhythms simultaneously against the work of at least two additional technicians responsible for the piece’s electronics — Ferneyhough leaves a trail of performance indications that provide something of the sense of strenuous urgency required by the music and directed back to the world: “exaggeratedly expressive and effete,” “brilliantly superficial,” “violent but reserved, coldly inscrutable” and even “very (homicidally) aggressive.”

This is not a music that accepts the status of the world into which it was written. In this respect it is worth quoting the composer’s notes provided at the beginning of the score. “... *it is important that the effect of this work is not stripped of alternative layers of import by treating it as an example of the category of ‘music theatre’ ... [but that] is not to say that certain predictable secondary associations must be excluded at all costs; the very complexity and nature of the instrumental / electronic layout will almost certainly induce associations with extra-musical events (i.e. capital punishment practices of various national varieties ...) which, whilst not entirely unwelcome, are not in any way to be boosted onto a level of importance equal to that represented by the purely musical substance ...*”

Ferneyhough asks, that is, that the elaborately layered details of the music not be reduced to a single affect; but, at the same time, Ferneyhough acknowledges that certain very powerful affects — including, astonishingly, the implicit reference to electrocution as a type of capital punishment — will indeed emerge while the cellist plays and while we watch the cellist engage with the manifest difficulties of the score and with the work of timing and coordination required when playing together with the electronics. Whether in spite, or because of the fact that *Time and Motion Study II* lasts something longer than twenty minutes, the formal experience of the music is markedly directed. The music divides into sections — in, for example, the pervasive use of only percussive effects of tapping and rapping on the strings and sides of the cello in the opening section of the piece — and even establishes relatively long regions of harmonic continuity provided by fixed pitches that glue together moments of the music. But it is also worth listening to parts of *Time and Motion Study II* as failed moments of coherence and failed attempts at production: the flatly Marxist critique of the ways that measurement and machinery may be made to dehumanize work pervades the music in a way that should be understood as coequal in importance to the frequently scintillating details of a music that is its own most powerful vehicle of critique.

Program notes © Trevor Bača. American composer Trevor Bača (*1975) grew up in Texas. His compositional concerns include lost and secret texts; broken and dismembered systems; sorcery, divination and magic; and the effects, action and beauty of light. Bača's music has been played throughout the US, Europe and Japan. His scores have been exhibited as art.

BIOGRAPHIES

Séverine Ballon's work focuses on regular performance of key works of the cello repertoire, as well as numerous collaborations with composers; in addition, her researches as an improviser have helped her to extend the sonic and technical resources of her instrument.

She studied the cello at the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin and in Lübeck with Joseph Schwab and Troels Svane. In 2004-2005 she was 'academist' at the Ensemble Modern (Internationale Ensemble Modern Akademie). She perfected her contemporary cello technique with cellists Siegfried Palm, Pierre Strauch and Rohan de Saram. In 2005-2006 she was solo cellist of the Toulouse Chamber Orchestra, but subsequently decided to concentrate on contemporary music and on the premiere of new works. Currently she is working on developing extended techniques for her instrument and finding an appropriate notation.

Séverine Ballon particularly enjoys working with contemporary composers and has worked with Helmut Lachenmann, Chaya Czernowin, Rebecca Saunders and Liza Lim. She has premiered a number of solo works which have been written especially for her, including those from Rebecca Saunders, Mauro Lanza and Franck Bedrossian. She has also worked with many of the best known contemporary music ensembles including Klangforum Wien, musikFabrik, Ensemble Intercontemporain and Ictus. She is a member of the Elision ensemble (Australia).

Séverine Ballon has given masterclasses for composers at Harvard University, Stanford University, the Hochschule für Musik in Stuttgart, at the University of Huddersfield, the University of California Berkeley, and at the Tzlil Meudcan composition course (Israel)...

In 2008-2009 she was resident artist at the Akademie Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart.

Thanks to the Harvard French Scholarship Fund and an Arthur Sachs grant she was a fellow at Harvard University during academic year 2014-2015. Currently, she is a visiting artist at CCRMA / Stanford University, where she is completing a book on contemporary cello techniques. Her debut solo album *Solitude* (released on AEON) has received tremendous critical acclaim, making the 2015 'best of' lists of the New Yorker, the Deutsche Schallplattenkritik, as well as garnering the coup de coeur from the Academie Charles Cros.

Juan Cristóbal Cerrillo is a composer. He participated in the year-long composition course at IRCAM and holds a DMA from Stanford University where Erik Ulman and Brian Ferneyhough were his principal advisors. He lives in Mexico City.

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