

Chamber Music

Fall Fest 2023 Concert 2

Program Notes

Clara Schumann: Piano Trio

Clara Schumann, born in Leipzig, Germany in 1819, was famous for her talents as a pianist and, later, for her music compositions. Her dad, Friedrich Wieck, taught her piano at a young age, and she started performing across Europe as a kid. Even despite society's expectations for a woman in music, Clara both composed and performed. She and Robert became acquainted after he started studying piano with Friedrich. He opposed their marriage, fearing that Robert wouldn't be able to support her and she would have to give up performing. In 1840, they married, despite Friedrich's attempts to stop them.

Most of Clara's music features the piano, and she managed her creative work along with taking care of her family. One of her most famous works, this *Piano Trio* was written in 1846, during a challenging year where she suffered a miscarriage and Robert was sick. In addition, Clara was supporting the family financially with her performances, and at the time she wrote this trio, she was caring for three children under 5 years old. A year after she wrote this work, Robert was inspired to write his first piano trio. Highly talented, but as caring for their family became more difficult, her compositions became fewer and farther between; much of her legacy remains as a performer and editor, especially for Robert's work.

William Grant Still: Vignettes

With over 150 pieces under his belt, William Grant Still was a groundbreaking composer of his time. He was the first African American conductor to conduct a major American orchestra, the first African American to have his own opera performed in the United States, and the first African American composer to be broadcast on television.

A product of the Harlem Renaissance, his work often upon other black poetry, art, and culture. Still was versed in many styles, and his music can be seen as a fusion these inspirations, blending of classical ideas and African American music. These *Vignettes* are a great example of this, drawing upon folksongs from different cultures; the six movements each have a unique title in Creole. This piece was composed in 1962; in his 60s, many of his works had already received awards and acclaim, and he had been established as one of the most widely performed American composers.

Yuko Uebayashi: Au-Delà du Temps

Yuko Uebayashi's *Au-Delà du Temps* is a captivating exploration of temporality and different types of light. Born in Japan and educated in both Tokyo and Paris, Uebayashi seamlessly blends Eastern and Western musical influences, creating a sonic landscape that transcends cultural boundaries. Her meticulous craftsmanship is evident in the way she weaves intricate textures, allowing each instrument to contribute to the overarching narrative.

Scored for two flutes and piano, this piece opens with ethereal flute lines that seem to be suspended in time. The delicate texture between the two flutes sets the stage for a contemplative journey that unfolds as the piano joins in. The piece invites the listener to reflect on the cyclical nature of temporal experiences, juxtaposing moments of introspection with lively exchanges.

The final moments of the composition return to the contemplative atmosphere of the opening, creating a sense of full-circle completion. The listener is left with a lingering sense of having traversed a temporal landscape, each note a steppingstone in the exploration of the piece's thematic depth.

Barbara Strozzi: La Tre Grazie a Venere

A singer and composer, Barbara Strozzi is hailed as a strong female musician of the 17th century. In her setting of her father Giulio Strozzi's poem *Le Tre Grazie*, her sparkling and intuitive lines tell an empowering story. The poem is presented by the Three Graces, handmaidens to the "beautiful mother of love," Venus. The Graces recount the judgment of the shepherd, Paris, who had deemed Venus the most beautiful woman of all—a choice criticized for its vanity. The Graces describe her prized beauty and sexuality, which she conceals and withholds to her advantage.

Setting this text, Strozzi beautifully interweaves the vocal lines, yielding a strong connection between the singers and the continuo. Strozzi cleverly plays with call and response and exciting rhythmic changes as the Graces shift dramatic emotions; commands are in a swinging 3/2 while questions a slow, pensive 4/4.

As an ensemble, it is a joyous process to feel so connected to our collaborators: each of our breaths taken, unison or in answer, to serve the great Venus - or, perhaps, Barbara Strozzi herself.

Le Tre Grazie a Venere

Text by Giulio Strozzi, translated by Richard Kolb

Bella madre d'Amore,
Anco non ti ramembra
Che nuda havesti di bellezze il grido
In sul Troiano lido
Dal giudice Pastore?

Beautiful mother of love,
have you forgotten that you were nude
when you carried away the prize for beauty
on the Trojan shore,
in the shepherd's judgement?

Onde se nuda piaci
In sin a gl'occhi de' bifolchi Idei,
Vanarella che sei,
Perché vuoi tu con tanti adobbi e tanti
Ricoprirti a gl'amanti?
O vesti le tue Gratie e i nudi Amori,
O getta ancor tu fuori
Gl'arnesi, i mantie i veli:
Di quelle care membra
Nulla, nulla si celi.
Tu ridi e non rispondi?
Ah, tu le copri, sì, tu le nascondi,
Che sai ch'invoglia più, che più s'apprezza
La negata bellezza.

So if nude you pleased
the eyes of the herdsmen of Mount Ida,
vain that you are,
why do you conceal yourself from lovers
with so many ornaments?
Either clothe your graces and the naked cupids,
or you too cast away
the attires, robes and veils:
Let nothing be hidden
of those dear limbs.
You laugh and don't answer?
Ah, you cover them, you conceal them,
for you know that more enticing,
more valued is beauty that is withheld.

Eleonor Sandresky: In Short, D \flat

Involved in avant-garde projects, such as modern concert-as-theater performances and films with live music, Eleonor Sandresky's work explores ideas about the connection between motion and emotion, improvisations, electronics, and collaborations with other composers.

In Short, D \flat originated through an invitation from New York City composers Jed Distler and Patrick Grant to participate in a project called "In Key," celebrating the 50th anniversary of Terry Riley's *In C*, a hallmark piece of the minimalist movement. Scored for an ensemble of undetermined size and instrumentation, *In C* consists of a set of 53 musical fragments, which are repeated at the discretion of each player. The effect of this is that over time, the sound will start very simple and grow quite dense and complex, before once again converging on a single idea as the players each reach the end of the piece.

In Short, D \flat follows the same compositional structure, although Sandresky scored two sets of cells based on register to be played simultaneously. Because of this, Sandresky cautions that it will be "a wild ride, so hang on tight!" Sandresky's composition is one of eleven works written for the "In Key" project, and it reminds us that minimalist music, though simple in its construction, often realizes soundscapes that are quite maximalist in nature.

All notes written by the student ensembles, with light editing by the Chamber Music Department.