

RUTGERS

Mason Gross School
of the Arts

MUSIC DEPARTMENT

HELIX! + "Asian Modernism"

Kynan Johns, Conductor

Dan Shengquan 淡圣泉, oboe

Susana Jenson-Leiva, soprano

Christopher Beckett, Assistant Conductor

Sunday, April 21, 2024 | 7:00 pm

Shindell Choral Hall

Douglass Campus

New Brunswick, NJ

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

PROGRAM

The Hunter's Funeral (2017)

Donghoon Shin
(b.1983)

20:21

Capriccios
Meditabondo
Elegico
Vuoto
Pazzo

Alon Nechustan
(b.1974)

a Boy and the Woods

Elliott Wells
(b.1999)

Rain Coming

Toru Takemitsu
(1930-1996)

Latido (2024)

Melancólico
Fuga y Montuno
Agitado y Calmado
Vivo

Andrés F. Maldonado
(b.1992)

Puzzles and Games

Unsuik Chin

from *Alice in Wonderland* (2017)

(b.1961)

- I. Alice – Acrostic
- II. If I never reach the garden
- III. What a curious feeling
- IV. Curiouser, Curiouser
- V. Who in the world am I?
- VI. The tale-tail of the mouse
- VII. Sleep tight, my ugly baby
- VIII. Cat's Aria
- IX. Twinkle, twinkle, little star
- X. Speak roughly to your little boy

Susana Jensen-Leiva, soprano

Extase II

Qigang Chen

(b.1951)

Dan Shengquan 淡圣泉, oboe

PROGRAM NOTES

Shin: *The Hunter's Funeral* (2017)

For a long time, I have been fascinated by different types of funeral march music in diverse cultures. What intrigues me is the irony in this specific genre. Melody and harmony in minor keys express sorrow and remorse while a rhythmic feature repeats itself underneath, evoking slow dance music. Many composers were interested in this irony. For instance, in the third movement of Gustav Mahler's *Symphony No.1*, what starts as funeral music turns into a sarcastic dance. According to the Mahler scholar Constantin Floros, Moritz von Schwind's woodcut 'The Hunter's Funeral' (1890) was possibly the inspiration for this music.

The Hunter's Funeral, scored for twelve players, is my response to the same woodcut. It depicts animals carrying a coffin of a hunter in a solemn march. This paradoxical scene gave me a strong inspiration for the piece. It starts with a very simple and rather mundane pitch cell, C-D-E-F. The harmony structure and the melodies in the piece are all derived from the simple pitch cell, which gradually changes color from bright to dark.

The music is divided into two movements with no gap in between. The first movement has a fast and rhythmic feature like dance music – groovy, sharp and energetic. The tempo of the dance music gets slower and a funeral march emerges in the second movement. Over the repetitive rhythm of the strings, the melodies in the woodwinds and the brass dominate the movement. In the final section, the melodies become heterophonic and eventually obsolete.

— Donghoon Shin (courtesy of Ricordi)

Born in South Korea in 1983, Donghoon Shin studied composition at Seoul National University, the Guildhall and King's College London. Major awards include the Royal Philharmonic Society Composition Prize, a UK Critics' Circle Music Award, and the Claudio Abbado Prize. He has served as Young Composer in Residence with the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group and has had his music performed by the London Symphony Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, Helsinki Philharmonic, Dresden Philharmonic, Spanish National Orchestra, Minnesota Orchestra, Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra, Ensemble Intercontemporain, and the Ensemble Recherche. Recent works include *Of Rats and Men* (2019) for chamber orchestra, premiered by the Karajan Academy of the Berlin Philharmonic conducted by Peter Eötvös, *Kafka's Dream* (2018/19), inspired by Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges's essay about Kafka, first performed by the London Symphony Orchestra and a new *Cello Concerto* for

Bruno Delepelaire and the Karajan Academy conducted by Kirill Petrenko which premiered in May 2022.

Nechustan: 20:21

This piece was conceived between the late 2020 and early 2021 and written between 2023 and 2024, drawing its inspiration from my personal feeling of isolation associated with the years 2020 and 2021: challenging, problematic, dreadful, monotonous years, and some even say horrific and nightmarish. The pair of numbers 20 and 21 are constantly intertwined in the work in different ways and constitute the structural framework on which the work is based, an almost obsessive struggle between these two forces from the very first seconds, represented by the respective tonal motifs, the harmony composed of these aforementioned intervals and first and foremost the rhythm attributing mystic strength to the numerological values, while a constant battle between this pair represents a duel between the visceral and the unknown, between our time and a future time that has just begun, between despair and hope. From the ensemble's standpoint, a number of soloists flicker in 5 short episodes representative of several 'mood swings' or manifestations': the cello, trombone, clarinet, violin and xylophone, and finally the trumpet, symbolizing in their own way the variety of feelings the past year has created – this is the emotional arc on which the work rests upon.

— Alon Nechustan

Wells: *a Boy and The Woods* (2023)

a Boy and The Woods is my entry into the long tradition of stories that juxtapose childhood innocence with an unfamiliar setting. Recently I packed everything I owned into my car and moved from my home state of Oregon to New Jersey, and have since been dealing with the stresses of such a big change; I lost the community I had on the west coast, and the trees are different here. "The Woods" has also taken on a less literal meaning for me; for most of my adult life I have been wrestling with issues of identity. My mother was brought to America at a very young age during the Vietnam War, and as a result the both of us have little to no connection to our Vietnamese heritage. In my ongoing project to reconcile with this nebulous aspect of my identity, I imbued this piece with theoretical concepts I learned from studying pieces by other composers of the Asian-American diaspora. Ultimately, *a Boy and The Woods* is about persevering through hardship while maintaining the wonder of childhood.

— Elliott Wells

Takemitsu: *Rain Coming*

Rain Coming is one of a series of works by the composer inspired by the common theme of rain. The complete collection entitled “Waterscape” includes other works such as *Garden Rain*, scored for brass ensemble (’74), *Rain Tree*, composed for vibraphone and two marimbas (’81), and *Rain Spell*, for flute, clarinet, harp, piano and vibraphone (’82).

Rain Coming is a variation of colors on the simple figure played mainly on the alto flute which appears at the beginning of the piece.

— courtesy of Schott, Japan

Maldonado: *Latido* (2024)

Latido is the Spanish word for “heartbeat”. The work was inspired by the rhythmic heart-beat of salsa music, the clave. There are four short and distinct sections in which the clave serves as the rhythmic engine. In each of these sections I present the clave at varying levels of augmentation and diminution. The essence of the clave rhythm is refracted through the emotional states described by each short movement; it also reflects the varying emotional high and low conditions of the heart and being alive.

— Andrés F. Maldonado

Chin: *Puzzles and Games from ‘Alice in Wonderland’* (2017)

Unsuk Chin, arguably Korea’s most celebrated and world-known composer, first drew international attention with her *Akrostichon-Wortspiel* (1983) – Acrostic Word-play for soprano and ensemble. A student of Ligeti and living in Germany since the mid 1980’s, Chin’s attraction to European avant-garde styles of the late 20th century is prevalent throughout her work. Her opera *Alice in Wonderland* was originally commissioned through the LA Opera for Kent Nagano’s last season, but ended up being premiered with great success in Munich during Maestro Nagano’s first season (2007) as Music Director there. The initial reviews commended the fantastical orchestration which created the perfect dream-world. The opera, from which these ten pieces are excerpted, is in eight scenes, with a libretto by the celebrated playwright David Henry Hwang. The text is very faithful to Lewis Carroll and the epoch, with its nonsensical rhymes and off-beat rhythms. In an interview, Unsuk Chin spoke about her love of dreams, how complex and non-sensical they can be and her attraction to Carroll’s enigmas, acrostics, puzzles and wordplay. The influence of Ligeti abounds, especially in terms of orchestration and overall sonorities. While the original opera is scored for an

extremely large orchestra, nothing is lost in this greatly pared down chamber version. The lyrical moments stand out in child-like contrast to the more concrete musics. Whisps of Hindemith, but also blues pervade with accompaniments including harmonicas and melodicas. As a side note, I was fortunate to conduct the US premiere of the opera with New York City Opera a decade ago in which New York City school children learned the children's choruses from the opera and sang along from the audience.

— Kynan Johns

Chen: *Extase II*

Qigang Chen was a student at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing before becoming the last pupil of Olivier Messiaen, who once remarked:

“his [Chen] compositions display real inventiveness, great talent and a total assimilation of Chinese thinking to European musical concepts. All his works written since 1985 are remarkable for their thought, their poetry, and their instrumentation.”

After IRCAM and Darmstadt around 1990, Chen made stylistic changes distinctively different from the aesthetics of French avant-garde and European modernism. Chen composed *Extase* for oboe and orchestra in 1995 and reduced its instrumentation for an ensemble of 14 instruments in 1997 named *Extase II*.

The oboe concerto was written in homage to Chen's fellow student Mo Wuping (1958-1993)'s swansong *Fan I*, as Chen once remarked:

“Mo Wuping composed a work in 1991 called Fan I in which the folk-tune 三十里舖 was borrowed fully. The work gained minimum attention at its premiere as the audience felt that it was abrupt for Mo to quote such a complete melody in his so-called ‘modern’ music. When Mo Wuping died young in June of 1993, it shocked and inspired me in a way that, thinking about Mo's perseverance and struggles, I thought of myself and questioned: why must music be written in a particular way? This is one of the reasons I wrote Extase. I wanted to, in the style of call and response, echo Mo's Fan I and quote the complete melody from this exact folk tune.”

Extase was therefore given a Chinese name 道情 (Dao Qing) – the melodic model containing the folk-tune quoted in *Fan I*. With a sense of rebellion and grief, Chen used the same Dao Qing melody in *Extase* as the main melodic theme:

“The original folk melody using the F major pentatonic scale, is heard for the first time in *Extase II* around 9 minutes by the solo oboe, with additional embellishments inspired by the vocal traditions of Chinese opera. This brief tonal

calling clashes with an “echo” responded by the ensemble’s woodwind section all in different pentatonic regions, creating a chromatic web through pentatonic foundations. Soon after the echo, the piece is taken over by the “shaking-meter” in Beijing opera, where motion (fast changing thirty-second notes) accompanies stillness (held notes with trill/tremolo) to express “exterior calm with interior tension.” Around 13 minutes into the piece, motions of the shaking-meter, dissonances of the pentatonic chromaticism, and the Dao Qing melody collage concurrently. Led by the trumpet, the climax is a calling. The solo oboe follows with another echoing response, this time, melancholic and meditative.”

Extase II explores extended techniques, including most noticeably circular-breathing, which often pairs with gestures of glissandi in a continuous fashion. This sense of pitch variation reaches its peak after the piece’s climax, where the solo oboist is indicated to “suck in while closing mouth tightly so that the reed gives a sharp, imprecise but very fine sound.”

The piece finishes with the shaking-meter’s motive centered in the F major pentatonic region. Pentatonicism, chromaticism, Chinese folk melody and opera elements come together one last time to serve Qigang Chen’s emotional frenzy – an overwhelming desire to express, the ecstasy.

— Dan Shengquan 淡圣泉

HELIX!

Conductor: Kynan Johns
Assistant Conductor: Christopher Beckett

Flutes – Sarah Harkness-Beaird
Oboe/ Cor Anglais – Tyler Selvig
Clarinets – Tanner Age
Bassoon – Jonathan LiVolsi
Horn – Rebecca Karu
Trumpet – Hugh Ash
Trombone – TL Huang, Matthew Wall
Violins – Wan-Chun Hu, Ann-Francis Rokosa
So Yeong Kim, Emiliano Moreno
Viola – Pietro Molteni
Cello – Tsung-Yu Tsai, Euijin Park
Bass – Seojin Kim
Piano – Mina Perry, Ruihan Zhang
Percussion – Graham Harris, Liang Dong
Harp – Shenna Yang

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Susan Jensen-Leiva is a Chilean soprano living in Highland Park, New Jersey. She has performed with the Rutgers Opera Theatre, playing the roles of Susanna in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Miss Wordsworth in *Albert Herring*, Lauretta in *Gianni Schicchi*, and most recently as Tata in the new opera *Escobar*. Further credits include Alcina in *Alcina* (Music Academy International, Italy), Gretel in *Hansel and Gretel* (La Sierra University), Mabel in *The Pirates of Penzance* (La Sierra University), and Mary in *Oh My Son* (Southern California).

Dan Shengquan 淡圣泉 is a DMA candidate in Oboe performance at MGSA, studying with Andrew Adelson. A native of Xi'an, China, he analyzed the ethnomusical elements and pentatonic schematic designs in Qigang Chen's *EXTASE II* for his lecture recital, advised by Nancy Yunhwa Rao. A recipient of the Steinhardt Award and the Ghez Fellowship, Dan earned his AD and MM from New York University. He has been a member of the Eastern Wind Symphony since 2019 and also performs with the Chelsea Symphony, the American Composers Orchestra, and the New Brunswick Chamber Orchestra.

Kynan Johns was hailed by *The New York Times* as 'incisive, first rate and brilliant.' A protégé of Lorin Maazel, he has conducted over 100 orchestras, including the Israel Philharmonic, Rotterdam Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra, Wiener Kammerorchester, Filarmonica della Scala, Netherlands Radio Symphony Orchestra, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, and the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. He has worked at Covent Garden and conducted at La Scala. Former Resident Conductor of the Palau de les Arts, Valencia, music staff with the New York City opera, Johns currently serves, in addition to his duties at Rutgers, as Principal guest conductor for the Orquesta Clásica Santa Cecilia, Madrid. He has worked with such world renowned artists as Plácido Domingo, Zubin Mehta, Maurice André, Aldo Ciccolini, Vadim Repin, Julian Rachlin, Marina Poplovskaia, Peter Donohoe and Barbara Frittoli.

In 2001, Johns was awarded the inaugural 'Centenary Medal' from the Australian Government, conferred by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, for his services to the community through music.

HELIX! is the resident new music ensemble at Rutgers. A modular group, highly adept and versatile, with a Pierrot ensemble at its core, HELIX! focuses solely on the music of living composers. From solo works to works for 16 players, HELIX! can adapt to the needs of almost any piece. World premieres by Rutgers faculty and students, along with works by leading composers worldwide who are defining new trends in composition are the ensemble's staple.

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