THE UC DAVIS DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC PRESENTS THE

empyrean
ensemble
Mika Pelo & Kurt Rohde, directors

New Music From Davis

7 pm, Wednesday, 2 June 2010
Vanderhoef Studio Theatre
Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center
for the Performing Arts

6 pm, pre-concert talk
with the composers

Hrabba Atladottir, violin
Tod Brody, flute
Leighton Fong, cello
Chris Froh, percussion
Peter Josheff, clarinet
Michael Seth Orland, piano
Ellen Ruth Rose, viola

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Through compelling performances and diverse programming, the Empyrean Ensemble offers audiences an opportunity to hear original works by emerging and established composers alike. It has premiered more than 200 works and performed throughout California, including appearances at many prominent music festivals and concert series. Empyrean has two full-length CDs released under the Centaur and Arabesque labels and has been the featured ensemble on others. Founded by composer Ross Bauer in 1988 as the ensemble-in-residence at UC Davis, the Empyrean Ensemble now consists of a core of seven of California’s finest musicians with extensive experience in the field of contemporary music. The ensemble is co-directed by composers Mika Pelo and Kurt Rohde.

Swedish composer **Mika Pelo** writes music for soloists, chamber ensembles, and orchestras. After finishing studies in Stockholm, Pelo moved to New York to pursue a doctoral degree in composition at Columbia University under the supervision of French composer Tristan Murail. Last fall, Pelo joined the music faculty at UC Davis and is co-directing the Empyrean Ensemble with fellow faculty members and composers Laurie San Martin and Kurt Rohde. Pelo gained international attention with the string orchestra piece *Apparition*, which was nominated for the Gaudeamus Prize in Holland in 2000 and performed by the Dutch Radio Chamber Orchestra under the supervision of Peter Eötvös. Pelo’s music is performed on both sides of the Atlantic, including recent performances by the Serbian Radio Orchestra and the Manhattan Sinfonietta in May 2009. His new string quartet will be performed in Prague and then released on CD with the Swedish string quartet Nya Stenhammarkvartetten. Pelo’s music is published by Edition Peters (Germany).

Composer and violist **Kurt Rohde** lives in San Francisco with his partner Tim Allen and labradoodle Ripley. Originally from New York, Kurt attended the Peabody Conservatory, the Curtis Institute, and SUNY Stony Brook. He is the recipient of the American Academy in Rome’s Elliot Carter Fellowship in Music Composition, the Berlin Prize, a Guggenheim Fellowship, awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and commissions from the Fromm, Koussevitzky, Hanson, and Barlow Foundations and the National Endowment for the Arts. A member of the New Century Chamber Orchestra and the Left Coast Chamber Ensemble, he is also an associate professor of composition at UC Davis. His recent projects include a work for puppet theatre, a violin concerto for Axel Strauss, a large ensemble work for Southwest Chamber Music, a piano concerto for Sara Laimon and ensemble Sequitur, and a work for speaking pianist for Genevieve Lee (performed here by Ms. Lee in October 2009).
PROGRAM TWO

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PROGRAM

The Shift & The Break
Garrett Shatzer
Peter Josheff, clarinet
Hrabba Atladottir, violin
Leighton Fong, cello
Michael Orland, piano

Synecdoche
Ben Irwin
Peter Josheff, clarinet
Hrabba Atladottir, violin
Leighton Fong, cello
Michael Orland, piano

Beyond the Sound, There is...
Ching-Yi Wang
Tod Brody, flute
Ellen Ruth Rose, viola
Chris Froh, percussion

INTERMISSION

Ballet from Über Wildemann and the Dandy
Liam Wade
watermusic1
The Triumphant Return of Mr. Deelish (Spacewalk Dream)
watermusic2
Lake Berryessa (bad techno)
watermusic3
(all tracks seque)
Tod Brody, flute
Ellen Ruth Rose, viola
Chris Froh, percussion

Ouachita
Scott Perry
Tod Brody, flute
Ellen Ruth Rose, viola
Chris Froh, percussion

Transitoire
Hendel Almetus
Peter Josheff, clarinet
Hrabba Atladottir, violin
Leighton Fong, cello
Michael Orland, piano
Garrett Ian Shatzer (b. 1980, Detroit, Michigan) is a second year graduate student at UC Davis. Holding degrees from the University of Michigan and the University of Miami, he has also had the privilege of studying in Paris, Rome, Melbourne, and Buenos Aires. After concentrating on popular electronic music for many years, his focus is now exclusively on acoustic compositions. Aside from writing for the concert hall, he has also written and produced music for films, dance clubs, rock and metal bands, hip hop M.C.’s, modern dancers, and theater productions.

**The Shift & The Break** can be interpreted both literally and figuratively. In the literal sense, melodies shift and ideas suddenly break away—for example, the rigid opening becomes something much more fluid. Figuratively speaking, this piece began as a feeble attempt to “modernize” my style (whatever that means), the idea being that my style would “shift” to something new or simply “break away” from something old. Ironically, this exercise cemented my belief that my style works perfectly well, hence the resolution to pure tonality just prior to the brief coda.

—GS

Ben Irwin holds master’s degrees in composition and clarinet performance from the University of Wisconsin at Madison and a bachelor’s degree in music from Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota. He is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in composition and theory at the University of California at Davis. This summer, he will participate as composer and clarinetist in the MusicX Festival in Blonay, Switzerland, and the soundSCAPE Festival in Maccagno, Italy; he will also attend the Czech-American Summer Music Institute in Prague, Czech Republic. In August, Ben’s *Shadows Under Ice*, for soprano, viola, and piano, will be performed by the One Art Ensemble in a series of concerts premiering new works by UC Davis Graduate Student Composers.

I love writing melodies, and in **Synecdoche**, I decided to use a single melodic line as the foundational “first stage” of composing the piece. The remaining components of the musical fabric—composite rhythm, counterpoint, timbre, harmony, etc.—were layered onto this “Hauptstimme” (main voice, adapted from Arnold Schoenberg), which is passed between instruments throughout the piece.

All melodic lines imply harmony, and in the middle portion of Synecdoche, centered on the piano cadenza, harmonies pulled from the Hauptstimme come into focus. However, like many of my favorite harmonizations, in, for example, songs by Franz Schubert, Hugo Wolf, Cole Porter, and Duke Ellington, I wanted the outer portions of Synecdoche to draw a sharp distinction between implied and sounding harmony, to differentiate, in Benjamin Boretz’s words, between “constructs of succession” (melodic pitch structures) and “constructs of simultaneity” (harmonic pitch structures). To do so, I constructed contrasting harmonies from a synthetic spectrum that I imagined radiating symmetrically above and below each note in my Hauptstimme.

To heighten textural distinctions between (and across) sections of the piece, and add to the evolving and dramatic formal narrative, I created contrasts in perspective, in which the Hauptstimme and the synthetic spectrum depart from a shared middle-ground and stand in relief against one another—alternately occupying the background and foreground, and often articulating on different scales of musical time, yet always tied together by the foundational role of the Hauptstimme.

—BI

A native of Taiwan, Ching-Yi Wang is a doctoral candidate in theory and composition at University of California, Davis, where she studies composition with Ross Bauer, Pablo Ortiz, Mika Pelo and Kurt Rohde. She started pursuing composition as a career at the age of twelve. Wang received her BFA and MFA in theory and composition from Taipei National University of the Arts in Taiwan (TNUA). One of her chamber music works, Yu Lin Ling, was awarded the Tune in Taiwan 2002. Her music can be found on the Taiwan Composer League’s “Taiwan Contemporary Composers I: Chamber Music” CD, released in 2007. This spring, her trio *Surging Clouds*, for Gayageum, Viola, and Cello, was premiered at the Pacific Rim Festival in Boston and Santa Cruz; the Spring Autumn Forum performed her sextet *Solitude* in Taipei. She is the winner of 2010 UC Davis Symphony Orchestra Composition Readings. Her orchestral work *Lament* will be premiered on June 3, 2010.

**Beyond the Sound, There is...** was inspired by classical Chinese landscape painting. In the classical Chinese art world, everything is related to two essential ideas: Xu and Shi. Xu translates literally as void and represents such qualities as softness and lightness; Shi represents fullness and solidness. The concepts of Xu and Shi are opposing but interdependent, since Xu can transform into Shi and vice versa. White (empty space) in Chinese landscape paintings suggests Xu. This type of emptiness is named “designing the white,” and it allows the viewer to imagine freely. When this concept is applied to music, soundless moments become significant, as they convey more than sound.

The twin concepts of Xu and Shi relate to different aspects of the piece: the contrasting middle section, for example, indicates the duality of Xu and Shi, transforming Xu into Shi by moving from the flute’s air-sounds or the viola’s harmonics (Xu) to regular tones (Shi).

—CW
Liam Wade, doctoral candidate in composition at UC Davis, currently studies composition with Kurt Rohde. Previously, he studied at La Schola Cantorum in Paris, at the Longy School of Music in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and as a private student of Philip Lasser in New York. Wade is co-founder and executive director of the San Francisco based ensemble CMASH, a new-music repertory group committed to long-term collaborative relationships between living composers and performers.

This piece is a 10 minute excerpt from a psychedelic rock opera called Über Wildemann and the Dandy. The instrumentation is piccolo/flute, viola (played with chopsticks) and percussion (mostly mallet percussion and beer bottles also played with chopsticks). There is a pre-recorded track that has spacey, Isao Tomita like passages alternating with sloppy rock passages of me playing guitar, bass, fake drums, piano, etc., (some of which recorded at the Flying Pig Hostel in Amsterdam). Improvised narration by Susannah Balestracci weaves in and out of this soundscape. The sound of this piece owes very much to the music of Frank Zappa and The Mothers of Invention, The Velvet Underground and the Danielson Famile ... with a bit of Cheech and Chong and George Crumb thrown into the mix in a lowbrow attempt at humor. The 21+ crowd might enjoy a cold one with this piece.

—LW

Scott Perry likes to sit around and attempt to “think non-thinking.” He is currently attending graduate school at UC Davis. He holds a B.A. from UCSB (CCS) and an MFA from California Institute of the Arts. He currently studies composition with Pablo Ortiz. His past teachers were: Beverly Grigsby, Jeremy Haladyna, Kurt Rohde, Wolfgang von Schweinitz, Ulrich Krieger, and David Rosenboom. He was a principle participant in a master class with Roger Reynolds. Intensive short encounters include Mario Davidovsky, Julio Estrada, and Pauline Oliveros.

Psycho-crypto-ornithology: An academic sounding neologism which would mean something like: the study of nearly-existing birds of the mind (if it was not a word I made up). The Ouacka bird meets the above criteria. The piece is a sonic portrait of a peppy but reclusive bird that looks and sounds something like a pigeon-tucan-turkey-hawk. The landscape in which this bird dwells is mostly depicted by the viola and piccolo. However, it isn’t totally clear to me where the bird’s body-call-song begins and ends, and the synaesthetic description of its environment ends or begins.

Some notable differences between this music and the music of the 20th-century mammoth important composer, Olivier Messiaen.

1. The use of micro-intervals. The viola and piccolo are asked to play intervals derived from the overtone series in addition to “normal” equal-tempered intervals.

2. The use of cyclical additive structures which are more akin to an extrapolation of process (minimalist) composition than Messiaen’s.

3. I wrote this piece. That said, there is an undeniable connection to the hours and hours I have spent listening to Messiaen.

Ouacka, in point of fact, may quite justly be considered an homage to Messiaen.

—SP

Hendel Almétus is a second year Ph.D. student in composition at UC Davis. He was born in Haiti where he began his musical training at the age of 12. He earned a B.M. in composition from Houston Baptist University and an M.A. in composition from the Eastman School of Music. At Eastman he developed an interest in computer music, particularly in the area of Synthesis and has, since then, used various sound synthesis software for some of his compositions. At the 2008 Image Movement and Sound festival in New York, he collaborated with a film maker and a choreographer in a multimedia work called “Polarity” that was performed at the Rochester Institute of Technology. He has written for ensembles of various sizes that occasionally include electronics. His music has been performed by the Empyrean Ensemble, Schola Cantorum and various ensembles from the Eastman School of Music.

Transitoire expresses the gradual transition from time into eternity that people, buried under the rubble in locations inaccessible to rescuers, experienced after the devastating earthquake leveled the city of Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Although the piece is not descriptive of the concepts of time and eternity, the perceptual effect of a sustained sonority and the seemingly unrelated gestures allude to a non-temporal and temporal dichotomy in the piece.

—HA
Icelandic violinist Hrabba Atladottir studied in Berlin, Germany, with Axel Gerhardt and in Klagenfurt, Austria, with Hellfried Fister. After finishing her studies, she worked as a freelancing violinist in Berlin for five years, regularly playing with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, Deutsche Oper, and Deutsche Symphonie Orchester. Atladottir also participated in a world tour with pop artist Björk and a German tour with violinist Nigel Kennedy. In 2004, she moved to New York and continued to freelance, performing on a regular basis with the Metropolitan Opera, the New York City Opera, the Orchestra of St. Luke's, and the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, among other groups. She performs a great deal of new music, most recently with the Esther/Or ensemble in New York in connection with their Helmut Lachenmann festival.

Tod Brody, flute, has enjoyed a career of great variety. He was a member of the Sacramento Symphony for many years, where he was a frequent soloist on both flute and piccolo. He currently teaches flute and chamber music at UC Davis, where he performs with the Empyrean Ensemble. As a member of Empyrean, Earplay, and the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, Brody has participated in many world premieres and has been recorded on the Arabesque, Capstone, Centaur, CRI, Magnon, and New World labels. When not performing contemporary music, he often can be found in the orchestras of the San Francisco Opera and the San Francisco Ballet, and in other chamber and orchestral settings throughout Northern California. In addition to his activities as a performer and teacher, Brody is the director of the San Francisco Bay Area chapter of the American Composers Forum, an organization dedicated to linking communities, composers, and performers, encouraging the making, playing, and enjoyment of new music.

Leighton Fong, cello, is a longtime member of the Left Coast Chamber Ensemble and also serves as principal cello with the California Symphony. He plays regularly with the Berkeley Contemporary Chamber Players and the Empyrean Ensemble and is an active freelancer in the Bay Area. He has taught at UC Berkeley since 1997. Fong studied at the San Francisco Conservatory, the New England Conservatory, the Bern Conservatory in Switzerland, and the Royal Danish Conservatory in Copenhagen. He joined the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players in 2006.

Chris Froh is a freelance percussionist specializing in new music written for solo and chamber settings. He received his bachelor's and master's degrees at the University of Michigan and has also studied at the Eastman School of Music and the Toho Gakuen Conservatory of Music, where he was a special audit student of marimbist Keiko Abe. Froh was a founding director of the Ann Arbor, Michigan-based Brave New Works ensemble, where he produced and performed in dozens of concerts. Since moving to the Bay Area in 1999, he has been heard in a variety of settings, from solo percussionist with the Berkeley Repertory Theater to marimba player for a video game about monkeys and pirates for LucasArts. He is a member of the Empyrean Ensemble, the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, new music improvisation group sfSound, and Gamelan Sekar Jaya. He has also performed with Earplay, the Berkeley Contemporary Chamber Players, and Santa Cruz New Music Works and at the Other Minds, Berkeley EdgeFest, Festival Nuovi Spazi Musicali, and Pacific Rim music festivals. He performs abroad frequently, including regular tours of Japan with marimbists Keiko Abe and Mayumi Hama. He has taught percussion at California State University, Sacramento, and currently teaches at UC Davis.

Peter Josheff, clarinet, has premiered hundreds of solo and chamber works by a wide range of composers, and has had numerous pieces composed for him. He has appeared on many recordings, concert series, and festivals, both nationally and internationally. He performs with Earplay, the Paul Dresher Ensemble, the Empyrean Ensemble, the Berkeley Contemporary Chamber Players, and the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players. Also active as a composer, Josheff has been in residence at the MacDowell Colony and has been the recipient of grants from the American Composers Forum, Meet the Composer, and the Zellerbach Family Fund. His most recent compositions have grown out of a decade of collaboration with Bay Area poet Jaime Robles, including Memento (2001), Diary (2002), 3 Hands (2003), and House and Garden Tales (2005). The latter was premiered by Earplay at the Herbst Theater in San Francisco and featured bass-baritone Jeremy Galyon. Viola and Mallets (2007) was commissioned by the Empyrean Ensemble and premiered by them in April 2007. Josheff’s most recent work, Inferno (2008), a chamber opera, was produced by the San Francisco Cabaret Opera in June 2009.

Michael Seth Orland has appeared extensively in the Bay Area as a chamber musician, playing with the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, Earplay, the Berkeley Contemporary Chamber Players, New Music Theater, the Empyrean Ensemble, and Other Minds and in the San Francisco Symphony’s New and Unusual Music series. He has performed modern works throughout California, including UC campuses at San Diego, Davis, and Santa Cruz, at Sacramento State University; and at Cal Arts. Orland may be heard on recordings of contemporary music released by CRI, Centaur, and Capstone. In addition to frequent appearances as a freelance symphony musician, Orland has accompanied many vocal recitals and vocal master classes given on the UC Berkeley campus by Frederica von Stade and Sanford Sylvan. Orland is on the music faculty at UC Berkeley and also teaches there in the Young Musicians Program. Orland studied piano with Margaret Kohn and is a graduate of the UC Berkeley music department, where he studied composition with Gérard Grisey. He later continued his study of composition with David Sheinfeld.
A champion of contemporary music in the United States and abroad, violist Ellen Ruth Rose is currently a member of the Empyrean Ensemble and Earplay and performs regularly with other California ensembles, including the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, the Left Coast Ensemble, Santa Cruz New Music Works, and the Berkeley Contemporary Chamber Players. She has worked extensively throughout Europe with Frankfurt’s Ensemble Modern and the Cologne experimental ensembles Musik Fabrik and Thürmchen Ensemble. She has performed as soloist with the West German Radio Chorus, Thürmchen Ensemble, the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, and Santa Cruz New Music Works; at the San Francisco Other Minds and Ojai Music festivals; and at Monday Evening Concerts in Los Angeles. Over the past several years, she has premiered numerous works by Northern California composers, including Empyrean director Kurt Rohde (Double Trouble, a double-violin chamber concerto), UC Davis faculty composer Pablo Ortiz (Le vrai tango argentin), Steed Cowart (Zephyr), Edmund Campion (Melt me with thy delicious numbers), Aaron Einbond (Beside Oneself), Cindy Cox (Turner), William Beck (Aquarium), Robert Coburn (Fragile Horizons 2007), and Linda Bouchard (4LN). Rose holds degrees in performance from the Juilliard School and the Northwest German Music Academy in Detmold, as well as a bachelor’s degree with honors in English and American history and literature from Harvard University. Her teachers have included Heidi Castleman, Nobuko Imai, Marcus Thompson, and Karen Tuttle. She is on the instrumental faculties at UC Davis and UC Berkeley.
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