

BLACKBOX ENSEMBLE

THE SOUND OF SPACE
BETWEEN US

September 30, 2023
4 pm

WE
THE
CLARK

PROGRAM

Seth Cluett: interference is partial/afterimage

Anna Thorvaldsdottir: Spectra

Morton Feldman: Passage from Clarinet and String Quartet

*The Body As Host**

Dai Fujikura: Being as One

Amber Evans, Soprano

*Transformation**

Annie Nikunen: The Sound of Space Between Us

Camilla Caldwell, Violin

*Morphing**

inti figgis-vizueta: Form the Fabric

***from Meg Stuart:** Choreographic Exercises

PROGRAM NOTES

The Sound of Space Between Us is a site-specific, Live-Art-infused, interdisciplinary performance experience connecting sound and movement through and within the natural and physical environment. Space becomes a meeting place for music and dance to converse from both ecological and interpersonal perspectives; our public place in the ecosystem and our private paths with(in) it. Stationed around the serene reflecting pool at the Clark Art Institute, overlooking the Berkshire mountains, the musicians become choreographic agents, responding to each other, the dancers, and audience, and the surrounding landscape, working as individual parts in a predetermined map or improvising as a unit. The program traverses a spectrum of notated scores, sonic maps and choreographic exercises by Annie Nikunen, Meg Stuart, Anna Thorvaldsdottir, Dai Fujikura, Morton Feldman and inti figgis-vizueta with choreography by Annie Nikunen and Joelle Santiago.

Seth Cluett: interference is partial/afterimage (2018)

Seth Cluett is an artist and composer whose work ranges from photography and drawing to video, sound installation, concert music, and critical writing. Exploring the territory between the senses, Cluett's works are marked by a detailed attention to perception and to the role of sound in the creation of a sense of place, the workings of memory, and the experience of time. In this work, two pieces - *interference is partial* and *afterimage* are performed simultaneously. *Interference is partial* relies on a single, repeated melodic line that is passed throughout the instruments of the quartet over the course of the work's four sections, around which three shorter melodies revolve. In response, the musicians of the *afterimage* trio respond symbiotically to the quartet, representing three different types of sensory memory - ways of paying attention to what you are seeing, hearing, or feeling and responding with sound.

Anna Thorvaldsdottir: Spectra (2018)

Icelandic composer Anna Thorvaldsdottir is one of today's most prominent composers with a distinct musical voice and striking sound world. Her music is composed as an ecosystem of sounds, where materials continuously grow in and out of each other, carried by one performer to the next throughout the process of the work. *Spectra* is divided into six short, continuous sections. Throughout, the musicians of the string trio receive, carry, and pass on these materials amidst one another, resulting in a sonic landscape in which materials continuously grow in and out of each other, growing and transforming throughout the piece.

Morton Feldman: *Passage* from Clarinet and String Quartet (1938)

The music of Morton Feldman is characterized by his distinctive approach to harmony and structure, often marked by repeated patterns and oscillating chords which unfold in muted textures over a relatively long duration of time (indeed, his later works often extend beyond an hour in length.) In this excerpt from his *Clarinet and String Quintet*, Annie Nikunen explores the choreographic and improvisatory nature of Feldman's music. Nikunen writes of this piece: "I love dancing to Feldman's music because of how it breathes, and how the body can breathe with it - it's incredibly vulnerable, clustered yet exposed. I admire how Feldman treats time and gesture - how his music achieves such heart-wrenching beauty and physical dimension from simplicity, how micro moments feel cosmic in the repetitive textures. Dancing, particularly improvising, is my way of exploring his methodology and picking it apart."

Dai Fujikura: *Being As One* (2013)

A star burns as a star,
light becomes light,
because our murmuring
strengthens us, and warms the night.

-Osip Mandelstam

Text by **Harry Ross:**

We

neutron stars

drawn together not attracted as inevitable and solid as matter

forming in us reformed

Trinity intensity

By us all clocks are set

Dancing

entwined

tick in rhythm

amazed watching our traces bear

Discovery

another fact

there exists not only death but love as inevitable and solid as matter

proving our being as one

Annie Nikunen: *The Sound of Space Between Us* (2021, revised for string trio 2023)

The Sound of Space Between Us stems from my exploration of “sonifying” space, or capturing the sound of silent space framed and catalyzed by two points – between people, places, objects. I’m interested in how that emotional space - whether physically measurable or boundless, as in any kind of emotional apartness - can have physical qualities. It can feel tense, open, empty, searching, distant, connected.

This piece began as a solo multi-tracked violin piece I wrote for Camilla Caldwell 2 1/2 years ago after we were paired to collaborate in an online intensive. We had to work remotely, as this was still during peak Covid, but I wanted to make it more than a run-of-the-mill solo violin piece I wrote alone and she recorded elsewhere, which felt disconnected in a time when we craved collaboration and personalization. That inspired the multi-tracking, where Camilla would record the chords - different “voices” from different points in time - that harmonically recontextualized her live playing as she moved through and with it. There are four chords nested within that piece that I initially envisioned for orchestra, so I saw the potential for more lives of the piece. This year, it turned into a trilogy, where the first installment is that first version with Camilla, the second is this Clark version with Camilla as the soloist with a string trio as the extension of her, and the third installment is the orchestra version for the Phoenix Symphony (to be premiered in April 2024.) Each version is reminiscent of one another, but continually expanded in different ways around that sole live voice, like someone’s core amidst a changing body, mind and circumstances around them.

In this version, while Camilla is often the one to break out of the texture as the “present voice”, the string trio in a way dictates her material as the voices from different points in time around her, re-contextualizing it or amplifying certain emotions and physical gestures.

inti figgis-vizueta: *Form the Fabric* (2020)

Form the Fabric derives from NMAI archaeologist Ramiro Mato’s phrase describing the cosmological understandings of the Incan & Andean peoples through description of the Inca Road as “threads interwoven to form the fabric of the physical and spiritual world.” This work was made in New York City in January of 2020.

Meg Stuart: *Choreographic Exercises*

Meg Stuart, born in New Orleans, is a choreographer, director and dancer who lives and works in Berlin and Brussels. With her company *Damaged Goods*, founded in 1994, she has created over thirty productions, moving freely between the genres of dance, theater and visual arts. Her work is driven by a sense for experiment and artistic cross-pollination, challenging the limits of the body and expanding our perception of reality. She uses fictions and shifting narrative layers to expose the scripts that are written not only on our bodies, but also on the spaces and landscapes that we move in.

In these exercises, Stuart offers prompts for improvisatory dance rooted in engaging with one's surrounding physical, sonic, and interpersonal environment. Over the course of the program, three excerpts will be interpreted - this time, however, by musicians, as guiding prompts for sonic improvisation. They will be joined by dancers only in *The Body as Host*.

The Body as Host

Standing still, empty your body of its own movement desires. Receive energy from outside forces; perhaps it is delicious, perhaps it is unpleasant, perhaps it is electric, perhaps it is barely perceptible. Let the energy invade you, surprise you, maybe you invite it. You contain the energy, sustain it, letting it affect you. You give it form. It finds pathways through your body, making you move, perhaps it changes in the process, eventually it exits. Allow different exits, perhaps the energy drains out, shoots out, evaporates. Be still, waiting for the next energetic force to enter you.

Transformation

Take a movement or a series of movements that you can repeat easily, a smile for example, a shrug of the shoulders, rocking back and forth. Repeat the movement continuously, allowing it to subtly change its shape, form and texture. Through continuous motion, with the repetition as your guide, your original movement organically transforms. Notice the slightest changes as they occur. Be open to transformation in unusual places and be ready to alter the codes and the context of your material. Eventually you don't recognize your original movement anymore. It has changed its meaning and become something else. Continue this process with new movement material.

Morphing

Moving very slowly, start a gesture or a movement that is already dissolving into something else, never fully completing an image. You are never arriving but instead simultaneously coming and going. You are constantly becoming and unbecoming.

BIOGRAPHIES

Annie Nikunen is a NYC-based multidisciplinary sound-movement artist, drawing from both areas in her process, and amalgamating them in her practice. As a composer, flutist, choreographer, dancer, curator and radio broadcaster, she uses physical space as a vector and vessel to invite dialogue between ear, eye and body. She de-/re-constructs performer-composer boundaries, keen to expand interconnections between movement and sound, and how they relate to emotion, memory, and time, and furthermore how they represent brokenness and healing within the silent role of real time. With her work spanning a wide variety of form, genre and medium, Nikunen creates based on collective human experiences that are paradoxically individualized, striving to make her work broadly relatable yet deeply personal, sonically and somatically communicating emotion as empirically and intimately as possible so listeners and observers may find personal resonance. With improvisation, Live Art and a narrative-driven methodology at the core of her sonic and physical exploration, Nikunen extracts sound from choreographic gesture and the open secrets of emotion, inviting performers to embody the story within their own body, mind and heart. Nikunen sees her movement practice as ephemeral installation, where she works from uniquely-stitched lineages of people, experiences and memories that can never be replicated, filled with the past we built, present we live, and future yet to be seen. After initially pursuing ballet, she began exploring modern dance as well as contact improvisation, all of which influence her mappings of movement and sound. Her research interests examine sound-body connections, composer-choreographer relationships, embodied cognition, and sound's relationships with gesture, language/text, space, time, emotion and memory.

Nikunen's works have been featured nationally and internationally across the US and Europe, performed by ensembles including International Contemporary Ensemble, the TMC Fromm Players, ZOFO, BlackBox Ensemble, Earth Ears Ensemble, The Rhythm Method, Fonema Consort and Hint of Lime Brass, as well as renowned soloists including Jeffrey Zeigler, Eleonor Sandresky, Melinda Faylor, Mieko Kanno, Iida-Vilhelmiina Sinivalo, and Jamie Clark. An avid collaborator, she has worked with composers, performers, theorists, visual artists, sound artists, music technologists, photographers, cinematographers, filmmakers, dancers and choreographers including Ron Wasserman, Da'von Doane, Rohan Bhargava, Julian Day, Zara Lawler, Kosta Karakashyan, Anselm Havu, Camilla Caldwell, Joelle Santiago and more. She has taught, led workshops and presented at The Center for Ballet and the Arts at NYU, NYU Tisch School of the Arts, Stetson University School of Music, Williams College, and Posey School of Dance.

Nikunen holds a MM in Composition at NYU as well as a BA in Music (composition/theory) from Barnard College of Columbia University, where she also studied contemporary flute performance at Manhattan School of Music with Tara O'Connor. Principal composition mentors include Julia Wolfe, Michael Gordon, Joan La Barbara, Georg Friedrich Haas, Zosha di Castri and Ellie Hisama. Nikunen was a 2023 Tanglewood Music Center Composition Fellow, and has received recognition from

ASCAP and Columbia University, where she was the recipient of the Charles S. Miller Award as well as the Boris & Eda Rappoport Prize, both for distinction in music composition.

Joelle Antonia Santiago is a New York-based interdisciplinary artist. Her work straddles dance, performance, and film. Joelle is currently a Fulbright Scholar as a recipient of the Harriet Hale-Woolley Award for the Arts (Paris). She has presented collaborative and solo work at the NYU Tisch School for the Arts, the International Studio and Curatorial Program, Columbia University Ballet Collaborative Workshop, and with the PROMPTUS collective. Joelle graduated Cum Laude from Barnard College of Columbia University (B.A., Dance), a nominee of the Bold Award, honoring alumna Grace Lee Boggs. In addition to her choreographic work, she is the director of the NYU Tisch School of the Arts Summer High School Dance program.

Peter Cheng is a Taiwanese-American dancer, choreographer, and art model from San Francisco, CA. He has trained with Alonzo King LINES Ballet, ODC/Dance, SFCD, Post:Ballet, Sidra Bell Dance NY, Visceral Dance Chicago, Springboard Danse Montréal, Yin Yue, NW Dance Project, Henny Jurriëns Studio (Amsterdam) and has learned works by Robert Dekkers, KT Nelson, Brenda Way, Liss Fain, Sharon Eyal, Stijn Celis, Ihsan Rustem, Patrick Delacroix, Flavien Esmieu (BalletBoyz) and Lotem Regev. Peter has performed with konverjdans, Thomas/Ortiz Dance, LaneCoArts, Project44 Dance, Tabula Rasa Dance Theater, Hivewild's 'Groove + Paddle', CreArtBox's 'Architecture of a Common Man', and Cacho Falcon's 'ANONYMOUS' at the XXV. Since 2014, he has also presented work at over 25 festivals through PETER & CO. at notable venues such as Judson Church and Martha Graham Studio Theater.

Liana Zhen-ai is a Brooklyn-based interdisciplinary artist and dancer from Los Angeles, CA. Her work uses the frameworks of new materialism and object oriented ontology to examine relationships to the more-than-living world, the changing landscape of narrative in the Anthropocene, and the aesthetics of wellness. She has had the honor of dancing for Marla Phelan as a part of Lincoln Center's Planting Connections, Holly Blakey for Puma's New York Fashion Week Show, and Andrea Miller for Beautiful Destinations Panama. As a collaborator and movement director, Liana has created works with performance artist EYIBRA and neo-soul rapper Felukah. She received her BFA in Modern Dance with minors in Biology and Chemistry from Marymount Manhattan College in 2018, and completed her Master's in Contemporary Dance Performance at London Contemporary Dance School, University of Kent in 2021.

Amber Evans is a vocalist, composer and conductor based in New York. Winner of the inaugural Dwight and Ursula Mamlok Advancement Award for Interpreters of Contemporary Music, she premiered over thirty new vocal works and became well-versed in modern contemporary classic works of the last few decades. A recent graduate of the contemporary classical Masters at Manhattan School of Music under the tutelage of Lucy Shelton, Ms. Evans is also a featured soloist and chorusmaster on the CD of Poul Ruders' new opera The Thirteenth Child due to be released in

conjunction with the Santa Fe Opera premiere in the summer of 2019 on the Bridge Records label. Previous summer engagements have included the Cortona Sessions for New Music, Darmstadt Summer Music Festival, Melbourne International Singer's Festival and the Contemporary Performance Institute as part of Mario Davidovsky's Composer's Conference. Upcoming performances for 2019 include joining the Ekmeles Vocal Ensemble for their performance season, presenting a concert of Marta Gentilucci's works with the Talea Ensemble and Steve Reich's Tehillim at Manhattan School of Music for the Contemporary Performance Program's tenth anniversary celebrations.

In addition to her masters in vocal performance, she completed her choral conducting degree at University of Cambridge, and has conducted performances of Australian contemporary choral works in the US, UK and Europe. Originally from Australia, she was composer-in-residence and assistant conductor with The Australian Voices. Two choral compositions premiered by the group have been published by Edition Peters and recorded under the Warner Classics label.

Camilla Caldwell is a NYC-based, classically trained violinist-composer whose repertoire pushes the limits of violin texture and sound through advanced techniques, electronics and creative partnerships. Through her multidisciplinary collaborations with other experimental artists and her own multi-tracked, lushly-orchestrated compositions, she uses the violin to create unique sonic environments and soundscapes. She is currently studying for a second Masters degree at Mannes The New School, under Curtis Macomber and Stefan Jackiw, and works as a sessional violinist across diverse genres. She was concertmaster for Taylor Mac's 'A 24 Decade History of Popular Music' and Opiuo's Syzygy Orchestra, and has performed with Blackbox Ensemble, Contemporaneous, the Australian International Opera Company, Melbourne Opera Company, Tallahassee Symphony, and My Fair Lady launch directed by Dame Julie Andrews and 3MBS radio. Camilla has performed at music festivals including Bang on a Can, Mostly Modern, Sick Puppy, 1:2:1, Festival Suoni d'Abruzzo, Brevard Music Festival, and FSU New Music festival.

BLACKBOX ENSEMBLE

The BlackBox Ensemble is a collective of young contemporary music performers based in New York City dedicated to exploring the experimental boundaries of the music of our time through projects that are innovative, impactful, and resonant with our contemporary moment. Founded in 2018, their 2023-2024 season is their most ambitious to date, with major performances in New York City and beyond, including touring engagements in Washington, DC, Florida, Michigan, and throughout the Northeast. Their season begins in September with *The Sound of Space Between Us*, a site-specific, outdoor music and dance performance at the Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts. In November, they will present the live premiere of *Borrowed Landscape*, a radio play by German playwright duo tauchgold with music by Dai Fujikura, at the Noguchi Museum, in a program that also features music by Anna Thorvaldsdottir, inti figgis-vizueta, and Toru Takemistu. Their fall season concludes with an educational residency at the University of Florida in collaboration with their composition department and the HARN Museum of Art. In January 2024, the ensemble will

celebrate their 5th anniversary with a weekend-long series of performances culminating in a special program at Roulette. Their spring season includes performances of a new multi-media work about bird migration and ornithological conservation by the Consonance Composers Collective at scientific museums throughout the Northeast, a reprise performance of *Borrowed Landscape* at the Smithsonian Institute of Asian Art, and a performance of *The Sound of Space Between Us* during a residency at the University of Michigan.

Their 2022-2023 season included a season-opening performance marathon on Pier 45 in Manhattan, a portrait concert of Jessie Cox, and performances at Culture Lab LIC and the Columbia University Sacred Music Series. Throughout the season, the ensemble was supported by the Chamber Music America's Ensemble Forward grant for emerging ensembles, through which they received coaching and mentorship from Alan Pierson, Conductor and Co-Artistic Director of Alarm Will Sound. Past projects include world premieres by Paul Novak (for the 2021 New Music Gathering Conference), Annie Nikunen, Erich Barganier, and composer-vocalist Tanner Porter; "Gallery of Sound" a performance of solo pieces performed in isolated rooms at an underground bar and record store in Midtown Manhattan; a performance of Julius Eastman's "Femenine" on the Brooklyn waterfront; and "Elegy," a video concert featuring music by Juhi Bansal, Carlos Simon, Yaz Lancaster, Brittany J. Green, and Jessica Mays. Reviewing this program, *I Care If You Listen* wrote "the 45-minute chamber music program showcased five worthy contemporary composers, with earnest performances that did justice to the extramusical connotations."

Their name, BlackBox, is inspired by this term's meaning in other fields. In theatre, a Black Box is a type of performance space - usually a square room with black walls - that offers flexible staging and seating arrangements, creating an environment ripe for creative experimentation and intimate human connection. Meanwhile, in science, computing, and the humanities, a "black box" is a system with defined inputs and outputs whose inner workings are unknown. The ensemble believes that music, as a cultural medium, fills the role of the black box, enacting an ambiguous but vital relationship between artistic expression and social life. In doing so, they strive to follow the inspiration of the theatrical definition - to foster experimentation, innovation, and human connection.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Clark Art Institute sits on the ancestral homelands of the Mohican people. We acknowledge the tremendous hardship of their forcible removal from these homelands by colonial settlers. A federally recognized Nation, they now reside in Wisconsin and are known as the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. As we learn, speak, and gather here, we pay honor to their ancestors (past and present) and to future generations by committing to build a more inclusive and equitable space for all.