

## **sfSoundSeries Program Notes 9.13.2009**

### **Harrison Birtwistle: *An Interrupted Endless Melody* (1991)**

*An Interrupted Endless Melody* comprises an oboe part and three different piano accompaniments. A performance consists of a version for oboe with any one piano accompaniment, or all three in succession to form a three-movement piece. Alternatively, individual 'movements' might be interspersed between other pieces in a recital program.

*An*

*Interrupted Endless Melody* (with piano accompaniment I only) was composed for Nicholas Daniel to perform at a concert in memory of Janet Craxton given on 7 November, 1991 in the BBC Concert Hall, London, with Julius Drake (piano). Piano accompaniments II and III were added in 1994.

**Harrison Birtwistle** is 'the most forceful and uncompromisingly original British composer of his generation' (The New Grove). He was born in Accrington, in the north of England, in 1934. Large-scale works from the past decade include the operas *Gawain* and *The Second Mrs. Kong*, the concertos *Endless Parade* for trumpet and *Antiphonies* for piano, and the orchestral score *Earth Dances*, which has been toured and recorded by Christoph von Dohnányi and the Cleveland Orchestra. Recent scores include *The Cry of Anubis*, for tuba and orchestra, and *Panic*, scored for saxophone, drummer and orchestra, which received a high profile premiere at the Last Night of the 1995 BBC Proms, with an estimated worldwide audience of 100 million.

Mr. Birtwistle was knighted in 1988; he received the Siemens Prize in 1995. Recordings of his music (by Pierre Boulez, Oliver Knussen, Sir Simon Rattle, Daniel Barenboim, and others) are available on the Collins Classics, Decca, Philips, Deutsche Grammophon, Etcetera, NMC and CPO labels.

### **Kyle Bruckmann: *Cell Structure* (2009)**

In all my creative work, I gravitate toward the liminal and uncertain, seeking out intersections such as those between composition and improvisation, the electronic and the acoustic, stasis and tension. Not coincidentally, this contrarian bent and affinity for discomfort zones is central to the working methods of sfSound as a collective. *Cell Structure* is very much a product of this unique and wonderful creative environment; it is a direct outgrowth of a sub-strain of our activities in which we continually develop, mercilessly critique, steal, and repurpose each other's ideas. Particularly prominent here is an exploitation of the uncanny overlap in Matt's and my improvisational 'bag of tricks;' a select handful of our favored tendencies are yanked into a confrontation with similarly textured electronic fragments.

I owe credit and thanks to Ernst Karel, David Rothbaum, and Olivia Block, friends who helped to record those electronic fragments, which are primarily the leftover detritus of other projects I couldn't bear to let go to waste. I firmly believe in the spirit of *bricolage*, not just as obviously manifested in this piece's mosaic structure, but in the creative challenge of attempting to make compelling sense out of whatever malformed materials happen to be at hand. I suppose there's a (once again rather timely) Depression-era ethos at play here, exploring yet another intersection: between thrift born of necessity and obsessive-compulsive behavior.

Oboist **Kyle Bruckmann's** creative work spans a dizzying aesthetic range, from a classical foundation into genre-bending gray areas encompassing free jazz, electronic music and post-punk rock. International touring and appearances on more than 40 recordings have led to his recognition as "a modern day renaissance musician" and "a seasoned improviser with impressive extended technique and peculiar artistic flair."

Since moving to the Bay Area in 2003 and joining forces with sfSound, he has performed with the San Francisco Symphony, Quinteto Latino, and orchestras throughout the region while becoming firmly enmeshed in the vibrant local improvised music community; current working groups include Shudder, Ghost in the House, and Pink Mountain. From 1996 until his westward relocation, he had been a fixture in Chicago's experimental music underground. Long-term affiliations include the electroacoustic duo EKG, the "rock" monstrosity Lozenge, and the Creative Music quintet Wrack.

Bruckmann earned undergraduate degrees in music and psychology at Rice University in Houston. He completed his Masters degree in 1996 at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, where he studied oboe performance with Harry Sargous and contemporary improvisation with Ed Sarath.

### **Chaya Czernowin: *Afatsim* (1996)**

Afatsim

(Hebrew) are galls. Webster's dictionary defines galls as a swelling or excrescence of the tissues of a plant that results from the attack of parasites, often distinguished by a characteristic shape or color. For example, alloggall is a hard brittle spherical body that is about the size of a hickory nut and is produced on the twigs of an oak by a gall wasp.

Searching for an alternative to a linear dramatic temporal experience, this piece suggested a way in which time might be disfigured like an infestation of galls on the surface continuity of a branch. The nonet is subdivided into four composite instruments: viola and bass flute, violin and oboe, cello and

clarinet, and piano, double bass and percussion. In each section of the piece, the interrelationships of the this "quartet" changes. There might be four disparate polyphonic voices of this composite quartet, or the entire ensemble might magnify a single line of the flute, when in fact this line had originally been conceived as only a single voice of pre-composed viola/flute material. Consequently, the perspective on the material and the ensemble zooms in and out as if the "lens" of the listener was in constant flux. Furthermore, coherent, well characterized (even eccentric), extremely gestured and physical musical behaviors are fragmented or torn off into "sentences," "half sentences," "words," and "half words." These then are recombined to create new "utterances." This disfigurement subverts the ability for linear prediction, but does not altogether discard a resynthesized "strange" and implicit narrative continuity, on which, like the branch, the disfigurement is grafted.

The piece is dedicated to the Ensemble Recherche.

**Chaya Czernowin** was born and raised in Israel. Through her studies with Abel Ehrlich, Brian Ferneyhough, Dieter Schnebel and Roger Reynolds as her dissertation mentor and various scholarships and prizes, Czernowin has been able to focus intently on refining her unique musical language since the age of twenty-five, living in such diverse regions as Germany, Japan, the United States and Austria.

Czernowin taught composition at the Yoshiro Irino Institute, JML, Tokyo, Japan, at the International Summer Courses for New Music in Darmstadt (1990-1998, she won the Kranichstein Music Award 1992), and led numerous master classes. During 1997-2006 she was professor of composition at the University of California, San Diego. From 2006 to 2009 she was a composition professor at the University of Music and Performing Arts, Vienna. Starting in Summer 2009, Czernowin is professor for composition at Harvard University.

Several solo CDs with her works have been released by Mode Records, New York ([www.mode-records.com](http://www.mode-records.com)) including a recently released DVD of *Pnima...ins innere*. The first part of the triptych *Maim* has been released on Col Legno. *Zaïde Adama* has been released on DVD by Deutsche Grammophon in November 2006.

**Luciano Chessa : *Inkless Imagination V, for Emile Norman (2009)***

Luciano Chessa & the sfSound Group

*Inkless Imagination V, for Emile Norman (2009)*

Sounds are muffled by the fabric.  
Features are erased, removed from sight and yet  
a correlation between sound and movement,  
between the aural and the visual, is kept.

One performer plays along with the fabric, thanks to the fabric.  
The other plays despite the fabric, against the fabric.

Luciano Chessa  
*Studio per Quartetto* (2009)

First the idea. Then the fragments. Then the epoxy.

It can turn private dialogues into a group conversation.

[...] incorporates theatrical element and a variety of sounds which are treated much like Emile Norman's fabulous usage of foliage, shells, seeds, soil, gravels to create the striking, ringing epiphany of the mosaic stained glass of the foyer of the Nob Hill Masonic Center [...]

Inkless Imagination V may at first be read as a further step in the direction of isolating the musicians.

**Yet** the piece functions in a Braxton-like way (i.e. it is made of a number of simultaneous solos, indirectly/conceptually linked).

When we need a traditional *concert* of parts, meaning a conscious blend of the various instruments to create a somewhat definitive whole, then inked scoring is useful.

**Not here.**

I hope for the "ensemble" playing to be the indirect, serendipitous result of the process, a process that can even occur unconsciously. You can be aware of the glamorous potential of the system and still just let the concert *be*.

The concert is catalyzed by the mercurial percussion. The percussion is the instrument that keeps an *ear* on the whole. It's the epoxy in Norman's sculptures, the artist's instrument which **unites** the various fragments and their dusts into one harmonious whole: it orients them, give them a purpose, finds a common ground in between events, even though they will remain largely unaware of each other.

Each performer focuses on his/her own *tenor*. Much like in 14<sup>th</sup>-century counterpoint, where Suzanne Clerc**x** reminds us that voices were only required to be consonant with the *tenor*, and not among each other. Harmony just happens.

The formal trajectory is still the one of Alessandro Scarlatti's double choir pieces: they open together, the part, they rejoin at the end.

Counterpoint evaporates. We don't experience it directly,  
we experienced a reflection of it.  
An hyper-counterpoint.

I was locked in a room for a day and dealt with that, back in '98.

The darkness on the stage is intended to enhance the performers' *clausurae* as solitary, meditative, compassionate endeavors.

The piece can also be experienced as a **tableau** vivant, and then again as a sound installation.

A profound silence

can be filled by a desert ambulation.

So walk. In silence.

Then sit.

Then, slowly, unveil.

As a composer, pianist, and musical saw / Vietnamese dan bau soloists, **Luciano Chessa** has been active in Europe, the U.S., and Australia. Among his compositions, it is worth mentioning a piano and percussion duet after Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Petrolino*, written for Sarah Cahill and Chris Froh and presented in 2004 at the American Academy in Rome, *Il pedone dell'aria* for orchestra and double children choir, premiered in 2006 at the Auditorium of Turin's Lingotto and subsequently released on DVD, *Louganis* (San Francisco, Old First Concerts, 2007), for piano and TV/VCR combo, *Inkless Imagination IV* (UC Davis, Mondavi Center, 2008) for viola, mini-bass musical saw, turntables, percussion, FM radios, blimp and video projection (both works in collaboration with artist Terry Berlier), *Recitativo, aria e coro della Vergine* (Concert Hall of the San Francisco Conservatory, 2008), and *Strelitzie*, a newly published work for amplified baritone and string orchestra. Together with the piece being premiered this evening, he has just finished composing *Ragazzi incoscienti scarabocchiano sulla porta di un negozio fallito an.1902*, a large orchestral work commissioned by the Orchestra Filarmonica di Torino, which will be premiered in Turin, Italy in December.

His research on Italian Futurism, which he has presented and published internationally, has shown for the first time the occult relationship between Luigi Russolo's *intonarumori* and Leonardo da Vinci's mechanical noisemakers. He is currently working on *Luigi Russolo Futurista. Noise, Visual Arts, and the Occult* the first monograph dedicated to Russolo and his Art of Noises, to be published by the University of California Press in 2010. Chessa's Futurist expertise has resulted in an invitation by RoseLee Goldberg, General

Director of the prestigious New York-based Biennale of the Arts PERFORMA to direct the first complete reconstruction project of Russolo's *intonarumori*, and to curate concerts of music specifically commissioned for this ensemble. Based on the original patents, which his UC Press book will make entirely available for the first time to English audiences, the constructing project has been completed with luthiers Keith Cary and Dna Hoover, as well as a team of technicians from EMPAC. The new *intonarumori* ensemble will be unveiled in October 2009 with a concert at SF's YBCA featuring a series of pieces written by such composers and ensembles as Ellen Fullman, Blixa Bargeld, Elliott Sharp, Theresa Wong, Text of Light and the sfSoundGroup. The concert will also include Chessa's brand new *L'acoustique ivresse* for intonarumori ensemble and sound poetry.

**Bruce Christian Bennett: *Translucent Night* (2009)**

*Translucent Night*, a piece for trumpet and electronics, was composed for my friend and colleague, Tom Dambly. It receives its world premiere at the Festival of New American Music this year.

*Translucent Night* is a re-composition of an earlier work for trumpet and string trio, *noche transluciente*, which is the fifth movement of a larger work for voice, electronics, and ensemble, *Canciones de amor y la noche*. In the earlier piece, the string trio acts as both a resonator and an echo to the trumpet line, effectively shadowing the trumpet. In the new work, the electronics function much in the same fashion, as resonators and delay lines capture and sustain parts of the live trumpet. The electronics also support the harmonic framework of the trumpet part using common synthesis and sampling techniques.

While *Translucent Night* uses the earlier composition as a starting point, employing some of the same melodic gestures, its harmonic material has been completely reworked and the form has been expanded. The trumpet line navigates a series of harmonic fields and artificial modes based on frequency modulation (FM) synthesis-generated spectra. The modulation and carrier frequencies used are derived from the fundamental pitches (pedal tones) of the trumpet. Thus, the latent harmonic implications of the instrument itself are extrapolated to create the harmonic language of the piece. The melodic character of the piece is loosely inspired by the imagery of Federico García Lorca's poetic depictions of *Andalusia* and the *cante jondo* ("deep song").

**Bruce Christian Bennett** (b. 1 July 1968) is a native of Seattle, currently residing in Pacifica, California. In addition to an active performing and composing career, he teaches composition, orchestration, counterpoint, and 20th-Century music at San Francisco State University. He was a visiting artist at Reed College in 2005–2006 and visiting assistant professor

of music at Tulane University from 2003–2005. He received his Ph.D. in music composition from the University of California, Berkeley in 1999, his M.M. in composition from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music in 1993, and his B.A. in music from Reed College in 1990. He has received several honors, including a 2003 commission from the Fromm Foundation. His works have been played throughout the United States and abroad by such groups as the Del Sol String Quartet, Earplay, the New Orleans New Music Ensemble, Sirius, and members of the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players; his electroacoustic music has been presented at events such as the Electric Rainbow Coalition Festival at Dartmouth, the Pulse Field exhibition in Atlanta, Sonic Circuits II, Cultural Labyrinth in San Francisco, EX-STATIC and Sonic Residues in Melbourne, Australia, and at ICMA, SEAMUS, and SCI conferences.

**Erik Ulman: *Bacchanale* (2009)**

*Bacchanale* is a tiny oboe concerto, written in March 2009 as an 81st birthday tribute to the painter Cy Twombly, with the skills of Kyle Bruckmann and my colleagues in the sfSoundGroup very much in mind.

**Erik Ulman** is a Lecturer in Music at Stanford University. He studied composition at UCSD, working principally with Brian Ferneyhough, as well as with Helmut Lachenmann at the Stuttgart Musikhochschule on a DAAD grant. He has taught music at UCSD and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. His music has been performed in concerts and festivals across the U.S., Europe, and Australia by such notable interpreters as Magnus Andersson, the Arditti Quartet, Séverine Ballon, Anthony Burr, the Cygnus Ensemble, Ensemble Plus-Minus, John Mark Harris, the New York New Music Ensemble, the Nieuw Ensemble, Ian Pace, the sfSoundGroup, and SONOR. In December 2006 Ulman was awarded a commission from the Fromm Foundation at Harvard for *Canto XXV*, a cello and piano duo for Rohan de Saram. He has also received support from Subito and Meet the Composer, and was a composer-in-residence at Musiques Démesurées in Clermont-Ferrand in June 2007; he was a resident artist and Hewlett Honorary Fellow at the Djerassi Program in Woodside in Summer 2008. Ulman has published essays on music, film, and literature in various journals and books; he is also a violinist with the sfSoundGroup. Since 2004 Ulman and Marcia Scott have organized six Poto Festivals, a forum for artists in diverse media ([potoweb.org](http://potoweb.org)).

**Iannis Xenakis: *Anaktoria* (1969)**

By the mid-to-late 1960s, Iannis Xenakis had become an internationally known composer of an uncompromisingly modernist stance. That was an era of experimentation, and funding agencies, particularly in Europe, were not

hesitant to rain money on all kinds of extravagant projects. Xenakis, by 1969, had been the recipient of three major orchestral commissions for the Royan Festival, and his music had a major focus of the annual new music festival held in Paris the previous year. Along with Royan, another regional festival had been recently launched, this time in Avignon, and for that Xenakis was commissioned to write a more modest work. *Anaktoria* was written for the classical group, Octuor de Paris. Xenakis consulted with each musician of one by one, listening to (and eventually using) both the possibilities and impossibilities of their instruments, with extensive use of glissandi, quartertones, and thirdtones.

Originally scored for clarinet, bassoon(doubling contrabassoon), horn, and five strings, tonight's performance is a "pragmatic interpretation" that utilizes more players (and their unique skills!) from sfSound's core roster.

**Iannis Xenakis** (1922-2001) was a Greek modernist composer, musical theoretician, and architect. He participated in the Greek Resistance during World War II, and suffered from a severe face wound from a British army shell which resulted in the loss of eyesight in one eye. Escaping a death sentence, he fled under a false passport to France in 1947. In Paris he became a member of Le Corbusier's architectural team and producing his first musical work, *Metastasis*, only in 1954, based on the design for the surfaces of the Philips pavilion to be built for the Brussels Exposition of 1958. This, with its divided strings and mass effects, had an enormous influence; but in ensuing works he moved on to find mathematical and computer means of handling large numbers of events, drawing on (for example) Gaussian distribution (*ST/10, Atrées*), Markovian chains (*Analogiques*) and game theory (*Duel, Stratégie*). Other interests were in electronic music (*Bohor*, 1962), ancient Greek drama (used in several settings) and instrumental virtuosity (*Herma* for piano, 1964; *Nomos alpha* for cello, 1966). His later output, chiefly of orchestral and instrumental pieces, is large, many works from the mid-1970s onwards striking back from modernist complexity to ostinatos and modes suggestive of folk music.