

Date du récital/Date of recital: Thursday, March 15, 2018. 5:00 p.m.

Nom/Name: Masashi Usui

Classe de/Class of: Kevin Dean

These program notes are written by the student performing, and are presented by the student in partial fulfilment of the requirements of their course.

Ces notes de programme sont écrites par l'étudiant-interprète et sont présentées en tant que réalisation partielle des critères de leur cours.

Dear Guests,

Welcome to my recital. It is my great pleasure to be here with you today. I am honored to present to you my original compositions. Every composition is building on traditional jazz swing and blues sounds to create original works that I hope will stand the test of time and endure the vagaries of history and fashion the same way beloved jazz standards have for decades and even centuries. I believe music and sound transcend race, language, culture and nationality—like a prayer expressing a universal message. I hope the music my fellow musicians and I will offer you today will uplift and transport you, and we will all have a fantastic time.

Enjoy!

Masashi Usui

Special Thanks

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Kevin Dean for his support and friendship. I also want to thank my great fellow musicians: Julian Paulo Jayme, Jonathan Chapman and Michel Berthiaume. I want to offer my heartfelt thanks to my mentors Masato Kumoi, Fukushi Tainaka, Wataru Hamasaki, and Al McLean for sharing their knowledge and dedication and making me into the saxophonist I am today. Finally, I wish to thank my family for all their support over the years. Truly, I would not be here without them.

Program Notes

I've always wondered, *What kind of music has the power to resonate deep within people's minds? What makes a sound a really good sound?* When I was fifteen years old, I went to a concert by the great trumpeter Mr. Bobby Shew, and he asked the audience these questions. He also said, with great feeling, Music is prayer. The concert—his music and sound—was so fantastic. The rest of the audience and I were impressed not only by his amazing musicianship, but his heartfelt words as well. My experience that day prompted me to explore music further and strengthened my desire to become a professional musician.

“**Midnight in Montreal**” features the contrabass and is a minor medium swing tune. This piece evokes the tranquil, mysterious atmosphere of midnight in Montreal via the sound of the contrabass. One night, on my way home from a jam session at around three in the morning, some nice swinging melodies suddenly came to me. There was no one in the streets at the time, and the quiet spring night spoke to me. Once home, I immediately started writing and ended up with this piece. I wish I could always write tunes this way, but unfortunately, things don't always work out so perfectly...

“**Koijigahama**” is a bossa nova piece named after one of the most beautiful beaches in Japan. *Koiji* means “romance” and *hama* means “beach.” According to local legend, a noble couple in the 1800s was banned from capital due to their forbidden love, and they ended up living in love and exile near that beach. One lovely spring day, some beautiful melodies and harmonies came to me as I was walking along the seaside. This piece evokes that gentle, peaceful shore.

“**Argy-Bargy**” is a fast swing blues tune featuring drums. “Argy-Bargy” is a slang term for a noisy discussion, and this tune stages a kind of competition between instruments. First, the bass starts with simple notes, and then other instruments begin to join in until it becomes a blaring discussion. The saxophone launches into a solo with burning, wild tones. Then the guitar joins in as well, expressing general madness. Finally, the drummer chimes in with a melodious, passionate improvisation. In the end, who wins? Perhaps all of them.

“**I'm with You**” is a ballad I wrote to cheer myself up, along with my family. Living in Montreal has meant that I have lived far away from my family for three years. I have sometimes felt indescribable loneliness, and my family surely has as well. I always say, “I'm with you,” to encourage myself when I felt alone. And so, with this song, I wanted to say to my family that while life is not easy, I am okay, and wherever I happen to be, I am with them.

“**Toe-to-Toe**” features the guitar and has a simple, yet catchy, minor-key melody. The song opens with a floating, vamp-based section that sets a peaceful atmosphere. Then, the melody starts, creating a positive feeling despite the minor key. Recently, I noticed that I

tend to get good ideas for songs and melodies late at night. This song is one of these late-night inspirations, and it wrote itself quickly. In fact, I couldn't get back to sleep once the idea came to me, since I was too excited about completing it! Even though it disturbs my sleep, I would love to have such "nocturnal awakenings" every night...

"**Chit-Chat**" is a solo swing piece for the tenor saxophone, composed as part of a lifelong challenge to play compositions for the solo saxophone. It was inspired by one of the greatest solo guitar albums in history: *Virtuoso* by Joe Pass. There are many difficult things about playing saxophone solo music—playing in tempo for the entire piece, as if backed by a great rhythm section; keeping a great swing feel throughout; improvising melodies that harmonically flow with the chord changes; deciding where the spaces between melodies should go, and how long or short they should be; and making varied stories out of beautiful and expressive sound. In his album, Joe Pass cleared these difficulties easily with his guitar to such wonderful effect. I would like to create saxophone music that can look his music straight in the eye. I believe that even though a saxophonist cannot make a harmony directly, saxophone solos can reach the same level as guitar solos like Joe's.

"**Blues for J.C.**" is a slow blues composition written for my friend Jonathan Chapman, and it is a duo piece for tenor saxophone and acoustic bass. Blues is essential to jazz music, expressing sadness, lamentation and deep feeling. Jonathan and I have played many gigs, and we really love playing slow blues together, as it truly feels like engaging in a good conversation. In addition, because it is chord-less music written for a duo, I found joy in the possibilities opened up by being free from chord progressions. It allowed our feelings to lead us through our musical conversations.

"**Triones**," also known as "The Big Dipper", is a bebop blues song inspired by the music of Charlie Parker. As an originator of bebop, Parker innovated harmonic ideas such as passing chords, altered chords, and chord substitutions. Even though he accomplished these innovations over seventy years ago, his music still feels amazingly fresh. I mixed Parker's ideas with the blues to compose "Triones", and it has some complex chord changes and melodies. Despite the sorrow you might normally feel from the blues, this particular piece may also bring you happiness and joy. One might say that "Triones" is a *happy* blues.

"**The Crooked Man**" is a Latin song inspired by the 1984 British television series *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. I am a big fan of Jeremy Brett, and he was perfect as Sherlock Holmes. "The Crooked Man" is a heartbreaking episode telling the story of a war-weathered veteran. He left his fiancé behind when he went to war, and they ended up losing contact. Thirty years after the war's end, the former fiancé runs into him, but by then, she is married to another man... War produces only sorrow, destroying everyone's chance to have a bright future. This piece expresses my ardent desire to end war forever and bring about a peaceful, better world.

“**Mondegreen**” is a ballad featuring guitar and contrabass. According to the Oxford English Dictionary Online, “*Mondegreen means a misunderstood or misinterpreted word or phrase resulting from a mishearing, especially of the lyrics to a song*” (Shibboleth). Even if we speak the same language, it’s sometimes difficult to understand and get along with each other. And if our languages are different, it’s that much harder to grasp the details. I am not a native speaker of English, and I often experience the difficulties of miscommunication living here in a foreign country. Nonetheless, I strongly believe that we have ways to communicate what’s on our minds. Our conversations can take the form of music.

“**Which Side Are You On?**” is a fast swing tune inspired by the music of Joe Henderson and Wayne Shorter. They were both great tenor saxophonists and composers, and they accelerated the innovation of contemporary jazz in the 1960s. I went through periods of listening to them voraciously, transcribing their music, and it was during one of those times that I wrote this tune. The piece has three sections: the first is calm, dark and enigmatic, but possessing dynamism as well; the second has a pleasant swing feel and harmonies like a clear blue sky; and the third is aggressive and short. The piece builds to a drum solo at its climax.

The last piece for my recital is a medium swing piece called “**All That You See.**” With this song, I wish to express my sincerest gratitude to my family and to all the people who have supported me on my musical journey thus far. Twenty years ago, I was studying classical saxophone in Japan, and I had no idea that I would ever switch to jazz and study abroad! I realize now that when I was young, my view on the future and what it might hold was limited; however, this changed as I learned to open myself up to new opportunities via so many great encounters. No one can know the future, but I hope that it will bring us all to the next stage in our lives as we fulfill dreams we might not even know we have. It is with this forward-looking hope that I want to close this recital by sharing this song with you now.

Works Cited

"Shibboleth Authentication Request." Shibboleth Authentication Request. N.p., n.d. Web. 09 Feb. 2017.

<<http://www.oed.com.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/view/Entry/251801?redirectedFrom=mondegreen#eid>>.