Stuart Jackson
Program Notes for December 16th Recital

Geräusche (1992) . . . Carola Bauckholt (b. 1959)
  Carola Bauckholt was commissioned by Deutschland Radio, Cologne to write this work for the commemoration of the death of John Cage. Geräusche translates roughly to "noises" in English, and Bauckholt claims that at the time of composition, this was her most radical work to date because of the way the various noises are treated in the piece: "Here noises are left in their unaltered natural state and are simply combined to form chords."
  Written for two players, *Geräusche* is composed of sounds derived from ten different objects that are divided evenly among the performers. While it's true that the noises are presented in an unaltered state, the musicality of the objects really emerges in the way Bauckholt combines and arranges them rhythmically. With no dynamic markings other than the occasional accent, durational values take on a significant role, and more quick and strident sounds function to articulate the beginnings and ends of more delicate sounds with a longer duration. Silences also play an important role, an obvious nod to the music of Cage who used silence in many of his pieces from the 1950's up until his death in 1992.
  The absence of any need for traditional virtuosity in this piece is replaced by the enormous amount of time required to find the right sounds. Many hours were spent at thrift stores and flea markets trying to find an old crank that would consistently squeak. I eventually found a device for shuffling playing cards that worked well. Another sound that took considerable time to find was that produced by a soap bottle. Though a soap bottle is very easy to find, it was difficult to find one that produced the sound Bauckholt asks for in the score, which is a swallowing sound that occurs when a soap bottle is nearly empty. The sound that is perhaps most representative of this piece is an empty cassette tape case hung from the lamp. It is meant to be swung back and forth gently, "as waving farewell to John Cage."
  In a sense, *Geräusche* represents certain aspects and challenges of every piece on this program. In *Guero*, quiet sounds are punctuated by silences and the grand piano is treated like a found percussion instrument. *Clash Music* requires a very small (15 cm) pair of cymbals and explores the many timbral variations that are possible within a single instrument, through use of very quiet friction-based sounds as well as louder rhythmic passages. *Psappha*, though it uses more familiar percussion instruments like bongos, congas, and other drums, requires the performer to search for pieces of metal and wood that accentuate the polyrhythmic lines throughout the work. Finally, *Dust* asks for a very long list of unique instruments that the performer must find and/or build themselves. All of the pieces on the program tonight involved either finding a special object to use as an instrument or developing a multitude of unconventional playing techniques.

Clash Music (1988) . . . Nicolaus A. Huber (b. 1939)
  Clash Music is a cymbal solo that can also be played with an indeterminate number of performers. Though usually played as a solo, it is also included in the percussion quartet *Herbstfestival*, which he completed a year later, in 1989. It is one of many pieces by Huber that explore the idea of konzeptionelle rhythmuskomposition, or conceptional rhythm composition.

Huber first developed this concept of rhythm composition with the piano piece *Darrabuka* in 1976, and he claims it has been an essential component of all his compositions since. Huber describes it as "a compositional technique in which the rhythm, standing out in the foreground, influences and determines all other musical phenomena." With *Clash Music*, this idea can be perceived quite clearly. Scored only for a very small pair of cymbals, Huber explores all the various timbral possibilities with the two cymbals, but in a way that always accentuates the rhythmic structure. For example, dampening of the cymbals always occurs at rhythmically precise moments sometimes only with one cymbal at a time, making the production of rhythm present in the clashing of the cymbals as well as the snuffing out of their resonance.

The fact that this piece only requires two 15-centimeter cymbals and either a wooden table or floor makes it a wonderful addition to the percussion repertoire, in which solo pieces usually require large set-ups which cannot be transported very easily. This makes it possible to be performed pretty much anywhere, and Huber has also stated that the simple structure and pared down instrumentation allow for spontaneous performances to occur wherever a table can be found.

Guero (1970/1988) . . . Helmut Lachenmann (b. 1935)

Guero is a piano study that fully explores Lachenmann's concept of *musique concrète instrumentale*, where unconventional playing techniques are used to create a novel sound world, and approaches to sound and its organization are borrowed from the world of electronic music and carried out on a traditional instrument. According to the composer, this is music "in which the sound events are chosen and organized so that the manner in which they are generated is at least as important as the resultant acoustic qualities themselves. Consequently those qualities, such as timbre, volume, etc., do not produce sounds for their own sake, but describe or denote the concrete situation: listening, you hear the conditions under which a sound- or noise-action is carried out, you hear what materials and energies are involved and what resistance is encountered."

In other words, the resultant sounds are important, but the directions in the score denote actions to be carried out. In *Guero*, the "resistance encountered" between the "materials and energies" might be found in the forte dynamic given to fingernails moving across and plucking the white keys of the piano, which not only physically resists the action but also the musical material that the piano was not designed to produce.

In the end, the point is to listen. In using only extended playing techniques on the piano and treating it like a large and unusual guiro (hence the title), Lachenmann shows us that an extraordinary amount of expressivity can be achieved through exploring the minute timbral details found in the quiet liminal space between pitch and noise.

Psappha (1975) . . . Iannix Xenakis (1922-2001)

The name *Psappha* comes from the name Sappho, a Greek poetess from the Island of Lesbos, who was widely regarded as one of the greatest lyric poets during the 6th century BCE. Although much of her poetry is lost, Xenakis used metric patterns from the fragments of her poetry to constitute much of the rhythmic structure of the piece. Although it is not confirmed, it is possible that the middle section of the piece which features long silences punctuated by

bass drum and woodblock sounds corresponds to a section where much of the poetry has been lost.

In addition to the rhythm from Sappho's poetry, Xenakis employed the use of sieves, a type of algorithm that he used to distribute those rhythmic patterns. Xenakis had used sieve theory to construct unconventional and disjunct scale patterns that could span multiple octaves in other pieces, but in Psappha it is used strictly to organize rhythm. With simple sieves, one sound may occur at a steady periodicity while one or more occur at another, resulting in complex polyrhythm or basic pattern that cannot be subdivided evenly by metered bars. Xenakis used the visual metaphor of a gearwheel to represent this concept, which is found in his sketches from when he was composing *Psappha*:
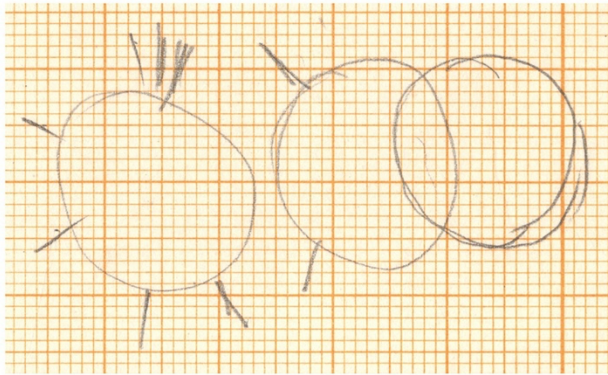
Xenakis' drawings of gearwheels in his sketches for *Psappha.*

Although the rhythmic values are strictly determined in *Psappha*, the instrumentation remains open. Xenakis organizes instruments by register and material, with groups A-C being skin or wood instruments, and D-F being metal. Apart from group E, which contains a single non-pitched or "neutral" sound, each group contains three instruments arranged by pitch from low to high. The choice of instrumentation thus becomes a significant factor in the interpretation of *Psappha*.

There are couple of details in *Psappha* that demand some innovation from the performer, and which are sometimes overlooked. The first being the fast tremolos that occur between the wood, skin, and metal instruments at the end. Some players have devised the solution of hanging duplicate instruments upside down so that one instrument can be hit on the downstroke and one on the upstroke. Not wanting to build too complicated a set-up for the piece, I've devised a simple solution using extra wood and metal instruments that I play with four mallets instead of two. The other puzzle involves the gradual glissando in group B that occurs near the beginning of the piece. Group B, which is almost always played on skins, is supposed to gradually descend in pitch until reaching the lowest drum of group C (typically a large bass drum). It is difficult to come up with an elegant solution for this, but I'm attempting to use muted roto toms to achieve this effect. The overall idea is to feel that group B (for me, two bongos and one conga) is gradually decreasing in pitch and increasing in resonance, slowly transforming into group C (two floor toms and a resonant pedal bass drum).

intermission

Dust (2017/18) . . . Rebecca Saunders (1967)

Dust was written for percussionists Dirk Rothbrust and Christian Dierstein of Ensemble Musikfabrik. The piece reveals a strikingly unfamiliar sonic world that is separated into eight modules, which can be used in any order by the interpreter to create a personal and unique realization of *Dust*. I've chosen to perform 7 of the 8 modules, omitting the 4th one (Crystal), because what I'm doing in the cadenza has rendered it somewhat redundant. I've listed the order of my version below:

7. dry
3. triangles
1. melody
6. bass drum
2. resonance
5. metal
8. cadenza

The text at the beginning of Saunders' score provides some clues as to the significance and/or origin of the title:

> dust / dʌst / n.: a fine, dry powder of tiny particles of waste matter or earth.
> A film of dust is a like a membrane, covering or layering the body or thing, on the ground, on surfaces or carried in the air. The dust of the earth is a place of burial.
> Dust within a room is composed mostly of dead skin, a powder of mortal remains.
>
> *"...not a sound only the old breath and the leaves turning and then suddenly this dust whole place suddenly full of dust when you opened your eyes from floor to ceiling nothing only dust and not a sound only what was it it said....come and gone in no time   gone in no time."* That Time, Samuel Beckett

The definition and Beckett quote imply a strong association of dust with death. However, the sonic association that immediately emerges when hearing the piece is the abundance of buzzing from snare drums, aluminum foil on bell plates, and a small chain on the bass drum. The grainy texture of the snares, chain, and foil is the closest connection I can make with the word dust, and ironically, the "dust" of the snares and foil are primarily used to extend the life of resonance that comes from the metal instruments such as singing bowls, bell plates, and other instruments.

For me, the significance of the piece lies in the amazing new sounds which Saunders has discovered in collaboration with Rothbrust and Dierstein. Among them are microtonal aluminum flowerpots (an invention of Dirk Rothbrust), which have proven to be almost impossible to find. However, I've managed to find a solution of using hollow aluminum tubes, which works just as well. Also featured are spring coils from automobile suspensions, long aluminum strips suspended by monofilament, and other microtonal sounds from various resonant metals. For the cadenza, the score opens possibilities to use many other instruments. I've chosen to use some other resonant metals from my own collection, as well as a special "overtone triangle," an invention of the late percussionist and composer Mathias Kaul, which consists of a styrofoam hemisphere that amplifies select frequencies emitted by the triangle.