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Classe de/Class of: Marie-Chantal Leclair

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.

Philip Glass (b. 1937)

Melodies for Saxophone: nos. 1, 2, 8, 9, 13 (1995)

Famous for his role in developing minimalist music in the 1960's, Glass is one of the best known American composers of the past century. His works are often highly rhythmic and repetitive, using simple, slowly shifting harmonies.

An important aspect of Glass's career has been composing for theatrical productions. This series of thirteen melodies for solo saxophone was written for the Jean Genet play *Prisoner of Love* (1995) as produced by Joanne Akalaitas (Glass's ex-wife and longtime collaborator). Many of the melodies are evocative of quintessential American styles, such as jazz and pastoral folk music.

I invite you to think of this recital as a musical feast and these melodies as *amuse-bouches* and palette cleansers between courses.

Giacinto Scelsi (1905–1988)

Tre pezzi (1956)

Giacinto Scelsi was an Italian aristocrat who was known to sit at his piano and repeat one note for hours on end. This practice informed much of his writing, including this work for solo soprano or tenor saxophone. Each movement presents a pitch that returns over and over again, taking on new meaning as the movement unfolds. Listen for long, held notes interspersed with frenetic bursts of energy.

Tre pezzi was written following World War II during Scelsi's "second period" when he was heavily influenced by Eastern religion and philosophy. During this period, Scelsi recorded himself improvising at the piano to generate many of his compositions. These recordings were then notated for publication by his assistants. While it is unclear whether *Tre pezzi* is strictly based on such a recording, there is undeniably an improvisatory nature to the work. This effect is achieved, somewhat paradoxically, through extremely precise rhythmic and dynamic notation. Motifs return throughout each movement, but always with subtle variation. In this way, minute details in the score lead to a free, flowing quality in the music.

The three movements follow the standard fast-slow-fast format. The first is declamatory in nature. The second is marked "sweetly, meditative" and evokes a sense of calm and stillness. The final movement, marked "very rhythmic," is an energetic push to the finish. Throughout, they are archetypically "Scelsi."

Colin Labadie (b. 1984)

Strata: mvt. 1, "Sonder" (2012/2015)

Colin Labadie is a Canadian composer and improviser based in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario. He originally wrote *Strata* as a single movement for solo tenor saxophone. Since the 2012 premiere by Allison Balcetis, a second movement was written for alto saxophone and piano, and a third movement will be released in the near future. The first movement is still regularly performed as a stand-alone work. The title of this movement draws its name, *Sonder*, from John Koenig's *Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows*. This "dictionary" is a collection of invented terms that describe unique emotions for which there are no existing words. *Sonder* is defined as "the realization that each random passerby is living a life as vivid and complex as your own."

About his compositions, Labadie says, "I write notably un-classical music for classical instruments. Through simple patterning and subtle variation, I seek to build intricate yet clear structures and sounds." The performance notes for *Strata* explain how, for this piece, he drew inspiration from influences as diverse as Swedish extreme metal band Meshuggah and bebop saxophonists. A steady barrage of notes requires the performer to circular breathe, a technique that allows saxophone players to continue producing sound while simultaneously inhaling. While the underlying rhythm does not change throughout the entire movement, unexpected patterns of accented notes create shifting melodies. Intensity builds across three distinct sections as notes in extreme registers and multiphonics are added.

Jacob TV aka Jacob ter Veldhuis (b. 1951)

GRAB IT! (1999)

Since Arno Bornkamp premiered *GRAB IT!* in Montreal at the 2000 World Saxophone Congress, it has become a staple of contemporary saxophone repertoire. Dutch avant-pop composer Jacob TV's fascination with American jazz, blues, rock, and news media is clearly present in this work. At different moments in the piece, he instructs the performer to emulate famous tenor players such as Sonny Rollins, Clarence Clemons, and Archie Shepp.

In *GRAB IT!*, the performer plays with (and duels against) vocal samples from interviews with life sentence prison inmates. These samples are taken from the Academy Award-winning documentary *Scared Straight* (1978) and are played through a boombox or ghettoblaster on stage. While they are fragmented into short phrases or individual syllables throughout much of the piece, towards the end they become longer and tell the story of an inmate committing suicide. Jacob TV emphasizes that, despite this dark tale, the message of the piece is: "Life is worth living: Grab it!"

Alex Mincek (b. 1975)

Karate (2001/2003)

American composer and saxophonist Alex Mincek is perhaps best known as the Artistic Director of the New York-based Wet Ink Ensemble. This duet, typically played by two tenors, is one of many works he has written for saxophone. Aggressive throughout, *Karate* includes numerous extended techniques including air sounds, multiphonics, altissimo notes, and quarter tones.

While not explicitly programmatic, it is easy to form connections between this music and martial arts practices. The beginning is comparable to a *kata*, a sequence of specific movements executed alone or in pairs. Musically, this is achieved with homorhythmic writing, often only a whole tone apart. The recurrence of motifs in this section could be compared to the repetition of blocks and strikes in a *kata*. As the piece develops, the two voices become more disparate, at times acting in opposition to one another. In these sections, the performers seem to be sparring, or what is known in Japanese as *kumite*. The end of the pieces makes extensive use of rhythmic air sounds. Here, it is as if the saxophonists are martial artists breathing heavily and recovering from their intense training.

Relate/React/Relate (2018)*

This piece is a semi-structured improvisation for two musicians and two dancers that was developed by and for the ensemble performing today. The work explores relationships between the performers based on their position on stage, as well as by assigning leadership roles to different performers at different times. Within this framework, all sounds and movements are improvised and the performers have the freedom to stray from predetermined structural elements at any time.

As the improvisation draws to a close, the performers repeat the refrain from *You Will Always Have A Piece of My Heart* by Austrian singer-songwriter Schmieds Puls. This is meant to serve as an acknowledgement of the experience the performers and audience have shared together.

Eric Séguin (b. 1992)

The Unfolding of Solomon Teal (2018)*

Returning to the analogy of this performance as a musical feast, this piece is dessert! I asked Eric to use his background in electroacoustics and indie-pop music to write a new piece for saxophone and electronic effects. He added himself on synthesizer and his bandmates from Raveen on bass and drum kit. I have invited Dan Freder to contribute audio-reactive projections.

This piece is comprised of three short sections. The first is an R&B influenced duet between saxophone and synthesizer that slowly reveals the main “riff.” The second section adds bass and drums, which outline simple harmonies and provide a steady groove. The final section is more atmospheric and increases the amount of effects applied to the saxophone.

About his composition Séguin says, "This piece developed out of the correction of mistakes in the process of scoring out ideas, and plenty of happy accidents in the process of translating those transcriptions to played dynamics between four musicians. Dustin is easy to write for, the saxophone itself however is a challenge. I know the world of digital audio and its many-varied toolkit. To challenge myself, I sparsely employed the latter in place of emphasizing the beauty of the former. Please enjoy *The Unfolding of Solomon Teal*, a piece for those times when the structure begins to crumble as we scramble to fulfill our role in a desperate attempt to appease a greater force - the same one that keeps our foundation in tact."

N.B. * = World Premiere

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