

PCD2017/02/16

FORBES CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY.

School of Music

presents

36th Contemporary Music Festival

Guest Artists

Augusta Read Thomas, *composer*

Argus Quartet

Triplepoint Trio

Concert III

Thursday, February 16, 2017

8 pm

Concert Hall

330



There will be one 15-minute intermission.

Program

bad black bottom kind (2011)

Jacob Cooper

Argus Quartet

Clara Kim, Jason Issokson, *violins*

Dana Kelley, *viola* | Joanna Whang, *cello*

recorded and processed sound

Plead (2016)

Michael Laurello

Sam Suggs, *amplified bass*

It Goes Without Saying (2005)

Nico Muhly

Patrick O'Brien, *clarinet*

recorded sound

10-Minute Intermission

Sun Threads (1999-2002)

Augusta Read Thomas

Eagle at Sunrise

Invocations

Fugitive Star

Rise Chanting

Argus Quartet

Patrons are reminded to turn off all pagers, cell phones, personal computers, and any other electronic devices.

The unauthorized videotaping or any other recording of this production is strictly prohibited in adherence with Federal copyright laws.

Program Notes

bad black bottom kind

"Interpret signs and catalogue

A blackened tooth, a scarlet fog.

The walls are bad. Black. Bottom kind.

They are sick breath at my hind"

– Nick Cave, "The Mercy Seat"

When it came time to write a piece for the Calder Quartet, two pieces that I had been enthralled with for quite some time bubbled to the surface of my mind and approached the point of obsession: "Sheets of Easter" by the band Oneida, and "The Mercy Seat" by Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds. Each work pounds through hundreds of repetitions of the same lines, yet manages to hold—or even build—the tension throughout, in a manner that is ecstatically harrowing. The original opening section of *bad black bottom kind*, rhythmic and relentless, drew inspiration (and its title) from these works. I have since thrown away the opening material, instead expanding the final drone-focused portion to comprise the entire work. The hammering is gone; the *bad black bottom* remains.

Plead by Michael Laurello

Note from the composer:

"For me, the music is more or less an impression of the act of asking for forgiveness. I tried to make it as sincere as I could. There isn't anything particularly autobiographical about the piece in that regard; I just think that that state of mind, while painful, is very beautiful." –Michael Laurello

Note from the performer:

"I might be biased, but even if I weren't a bassist... if I were only a composer, I would love the double bass for its rich duality between pure harmonics in the vocal range, and the raw physical vibrations of the deep tones which you listen to less with your ears than your stomach. In *Plead*, my good friend and collaborator Michael Laurello reconciles this duality using a rare technique called flautando/flute harmonics which speak an octave higher than where my left hand is placed; and extremely low dissonances creating pulsating "beats" which confuse the ear into hearing rhythm where it expects pitch. The composition opens with a series of addition and subtraction patterns - crystalline, but not perfectly regular - moving towards greater entropy and randomness. Structurally analogous to the "anaphoric" Greek rhetorical tradition, each phrase of the middle section begins with the same throbbing dissonance, giving way to an extinguished recapitulation. Eventually out of the new chaos, a resolute but extremely fragile dance emerges - pushing back and pleading, as does the entire work, against the inevitability of closure - a sudden stillness marking the end." –Sam Suggs

Plead was commissioned and premiered at the Kaufman Music Center in New York City by Sam Suggs in 2016

It Goes Without Saying by Nico Muhly

For a piece with such a strong electronic component, *It Goes Without Saying* is surprisingly organic. While the electronics include chillier, metallic noises—samples ranging from a kitchen whisk to a unique set of tiny bells—most prominent are the warm, woody sounds of a harmonium and of clicking clarinet keys, sounds that share a certain sonic DNA with the live components of the performance. The piece also develops according to organic principles. Over the initial drone of the harmonium, the rhythm track and the clarinets build the material of the piece up from small, replicating cells into a lively and elaborate texture. The minutely wrought surface is stretched over the simplest possible formal contour, the drone undergirding the piece progressing from C to F and back again. When the slowly building dissonance of the underlying harmonium chord finally reaches its tipping point, the resolution corresponds to a dramatic timbral

Program Notes *continued*

shock: a burst of industrial noise, dominating rather than complementing its acoustic surroundings. Finally, the machine noises die away and the harmonies return home, the texture warms once again, now leavened by the gentle sound of the celesta. — Daniel Johnson

Sun Threads by Augusta Read Thomas

Sun Threads, for string quartet, in four movements, has a duration of 35 minutes and [the April 30, 2003] performance by the Avalon String Quartet represents the world premiere of the entire piece.

Music is my entire life! I Cherish things deeply felt. I believe my music must be passionate, involving risk and adventure, such that a given musical moment might seem like a surprise right when you hear it but, only a millisecond later, seems inevitable. I think of my music as nuanced lyricism under pressure. I strive to attain quality of thought when it comes to inventing musical ideas, and writing for the string quartet is quite terrifying in this regard since the genre has a massive and wonderful repertoire. It is very hard to find quality new and personal sounds when composing for the string quartet.

To all music, every listener brings his or her own unique perspective. In this regard, what is of greatest concern to me in Sun Threads is that I lead my listener to new aesthetic engagements with the world and themselves and that with each new piece, I continue on a life's journey of self-discovery.

Music of all kinds constantly amazes, surprises, propels and seduces me into a wonderful and powerful journey. I am happiest when I am listening to music and in the process of composing music. I care deeply that music is not anonymous and generic or easily assimilated and just as easily dismissed. I would say that Sun Threads has passionate, urgent, seductive, and compelling qualities of sometimes complex, but always logical thought, allied to sensuous and engaging sonic profiles.

My favorite moment in any piece of music is the moment of maximum risk and striving. Whether the venture is tiny or large, loud or soft, fragile or strong, passionate, erratic, ordinary or eccentric! Maybe another way to say this is the moment of exquisite humanity and raw soul. All art that I cherish has an element of love and recklessness and desperation. I like music that is alive and jumps off the page and out of the instrument as if something big is at stake.

One of my main artistic credos has for a long time been to do with examining small musical objects (a chord, a motive, a rhythm, a color, etc.) and exploring them from every possible perspective. The different perspectives reveal new musical elements, which I then transform and which in turn become the musical development. Thus my works, and Sun Threads in particular, take on a kind of organic, circular, self-referential quality, while at the same time, they clearly progress forward.

Eagle at Sunrise was commissioned by the Koussevitzky Foundation for the Ying String Quartet. The work was premiered in January 2002. The work is dedicated to the memory of Serge and Natalie Koussevitzky and to the members of the Ying String Quartet with admiration and gratitude.

Invocations was commissioned by the Santa Fe International Chamber Music Festival for the Miami Quartet with support from Chamber Music America. The work is dedicated to Santa Fe and the Miami Quartet.

Fugitive Star was commissioned by the Caramoor International Chamber Music Festival for the Avalon Quartet with support from Chamber Music America. It is dedicated to Caramoor and the Avalon Quartet

Rise Chanting, which was commissioned by the Krannert Center and composed for the Alexander String Quartet. The work is dedicated to Mike Ross and the Alexander String Quartet with admiration and gratitude.

Biographies

The music of **Augusta Read Thomas** (b. 1964 in New York) is nuanced, majestic, elegant, capricious, lyrical, and colorful — "it is boldly considered music that celebrates the sound of the instruments and reaffirms the vitality of orchestral music." (*Philadelphia Inquirer*)

In February 2015, music critic Edward Reichel wrote, "Augusta Read Thomas has secured for herself a permanent place in the pantheon of American composers of the 20th and 21st centuries. She is without question one of the best and most important composers that this country has today. Her music has substance and depth and a sense of purpose. She has a lot to say and she knows how to say it — and say it in a way that is intelligent yet appealing and sophisticated."

The *New York Times* article of March 6, 2015 states that Thomas had the distinction of having her work performed more frequently in 2013-2014 than any other living ASCAP composer, according to statistics from the performing rights organization. Former Chairperson of the American Music Center, she serves on many boards, is a generous citizen in the profession at large, and, according to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, "has become one of the most recognizable and widely loved figures in American Music."

Thomas was the longest-serving Mead Composer-in-Residence with the Chicago Symphony, for Daniel Barenboim and Pierre Boulez, from 1997 through 2006. This residency culminated in the premiere of *Astral Canticle*, one of two finalists for the 2007 Pulitzer Prize in Music. During her residency, Thomas not only premiered nine commissioned orchestral works, but was also central in establishing the thriving MusicNOW series, through which she commissioned and programmed the work of many living composers

An influential teacher at Eastman, Northwestern, Tanglewood, and Aspen Music Festival, she is only the 16th person to be designated University Professor at the University of Chicago (one of only seven currently holding the title). Augusta said, "Teaching is a natural extension of my creative process and of my enthusiasm for the music of others."

A Grammy winner, her impressive body of works embodies unbridled passion and fierce poetry. The *New Yorker* magazine called her "a true virtuoso composer." Championed by such luminaries as Barenboim, Rostropovich, Boulez, Eschenbach, Salonen, Maazel, Ozawa, and Knussen, she rose early to the top of her profession.

The **Argus Quartet** was formed in the summer of 2013 and is receiving invitations from concert series throughout the United States and abroad. Recent performances include appearances at Carnegie Hall, Laguna Beach Live!, the Hear Now Music Festival, Music Academy of the West, the Birdfoot Festival, and the Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ in Amsterdam. This season also includes performances with the Brentano Quartet and clarinetist David Shifrin at the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival, the Oneppo Chamber Series, and Carnegie Hall. The Argus Quartet will serve as the Ernst Stiefel Quartet in Residence at the Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts during the 2016-17 season.

Argus is dedicated to reinvigorating the audience-performer relationship through innovative concerts and diverse repertoire — connecting with and building up a community of engaged listeners is at the core of the quartet's mission. The quartet also believes that today's ensembles can honor the storied chamber music traditions of our past while forging a new path forward. In that spirit, their repertoire includes not just staples of the chamber music canon but also a large number of pieces by living composers.

Through Chamber Music America and the Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts, Argus has commissioned a number of new works including quartets by Donald Crockett, composer and GRAMMY nominee Eric Guinivan, and the 2014 Hermitage Prize winner Thomas Kottcheff. Argus served as the Quartet in Residence at New Music on the Point under the guidance of the JACK Quartet, and was also selected as one of three ensembles to perform works from Kronos Quartet's "Fifty for the Future" commissioning project at Carnegie Hall.

The quartet recently began an appointment as the Yale School of Music's Fellowship Quartet in Residence and is the first ensemble to be mentored by the Brentano String Quartet in that capacity. In addition to their teaching responsibilities at Yale, Argus has worked with students through residencies and masterclasses at James Madison University, Rockport Music, the Milken School, the Young Musicians Foundation, California State University Long Beach, and the Birdfoot Festival.

About the Festival

Special Thanks

Contemporary Music Festival Committee

Casey Cangelosi, Gabriel Dobner, Eric Guinivan, Jason Haney, Dorothy Maddison, John Peterson, Sam Suggs

School of Music Faculty, Staff and Students

Jeff Bush, *Director of the School of Music*

George Sparks, *Dean of the College of Visual and Performing Arts*

Regan Byrne, *Executive Director of the Forbes Center for the Performing Arts*

Shawn Tucker, Bradley Monahan, Tom Carr, *Forbes Center Production and Technical Staff*
JMU Visiting Scholars Program

—

The first JMU Contemporary Music Festival was held in 1981, initiated by then-director of the School of Music Joe Estock and faculty composer John Hilliard. In the years since, the festival has hosted many of the most prominent composers and performers of new music in the world today. Recent guest artists include:

Stephen Hartke
The Virginia Sinfonietta
Roger Reynolds
JACK Quartet
American Modern Ensemble
Sir Peter Maxwell Davies
Alarm Will Sound
Steven Stucky
Steve Reich
New Millennium Ensemble
George Tsontakis
Samuel Adler
George Crumb
Donald Erb
Adolphus Hailstork
John Harbison
Karel Husa
Libby Larsen
David Maslanka
Thea Musgrave
The New Music Consort
Joseph Schwantner
Joan Tower
Chinary Ung
Chen Yi

Next academic year, the festival moves to the fall, October 23-25, 2017, with a program celebrating the sesquicentennial of Canada, featuring music by Canadian composers. Check the JMU School of Music website for updates as the festival approaches!

Upcoming Events

February 2017

JMU Brass Band	Sat., Feb. 18 @ 8 PM, Concert Hall*
JMU Chorale and Symphony Orchestra	Sun., Feb. 19 @ 4 PM, Washington, D.C.
School of Music Auditions	Mon., Feb. 20, All Day, Forbes Center
<i>Guys and Dolls</i>	Feb. 21-26, Tues. – Sat. 8 pm Sat. 3 pm Sun. 2 pm Mainstage Theatre*
Univ. Choruses & Treble Chamber Choir	Tues., Feb. 21 @ 8 pm, Concert Hall*
JMU Jazz Combos	Tues., Feb. 21 @ 7 pm, Artful Dodger

*These concerts provide student credit for MUS 195.

For tickets and further information, visit www.jmuforbescenter.com or call the Forbes Center Box Office at (540) 568-7000. For more on the School of Music, go to www.jmu.edu/music or call (540) 568-6714.

Music and You

How you can make a difference!

Thank you for supporting music and the arts at JMU through your attendance at the Forbes Center. We strive to provide musical experiences of the highest caliber for our students and community. The passion and commitment we see from our students, particularly as they have opportunities to perform in the magnificent Forbes Center, is a pleasure to share with you.

Scholarship contributions help young musicians blossom into mature musical artists. With your support, we will be able to offer our talented students more financial help in pursuing their goals. If you appreciate the desire and dedication of our students, please consider making a contribution to the music scholarship fund at James Madison University.

Name: _____
Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
Amount: \$ _____

I would like to support the following foundation account:

Music General Scholarship Fund #15600

Make checks payable to JMU Foundation and send to:
Advancement Gifts and Records, James Madison University
220 University Boulevard, MSC 3603
Harrisonburg, VA 22807

www.jmu.edu/give