

# c o n t e m p o

CONTEMPORARY CHAMBER PLAYERS

| a new music collective

Performance Hall, Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts

**05.05.17** FRI | 7:30 PM

## ***Tomorrow's Music Today***

### **Ensemble Dal Niente**

Ben Melsky, harp

Emma Hospelhorn, flute

Kyle Flens, percussion

Russell Rolan, cello

Doyle Armbrust, viola

Michael Lewanski, conductor

Andrew McManus, electronics

### **Spektral Quartet**

Clara Lyon, violin

Maeve Feinberg, violin

Doyle Armbrust, viola

Russell Rolan, cello

RODRIGO BUSSAD

*Looking Up*

Spektral Quartet

DAVID "CLAY" METTENS

*Without Air*

Ensemble Dal Niente

Michael Lewanski, conductor

WILL MYERS

*October*

I. Dusk

II. Nocturne I

III. ... like a blossom / as it breathes slowly.

IV. Nocturne II

V. Echoes

Spektral Quartet

ANDREW McMANUS

*pathways, bursting [neurosonics 2]*

Spektral Quartet

Andrew McManus, electronics

## PROGRAM NOTES



### **RODRIGO BUSSAD**

b. 1985, Sao Paulo, Brazil

Rodrigo Bussad is the winner of the 2014 American Prize in Composition category in the Student Chamber Music Division with the work, *Loin*. He was also winner of the same competition in two other occasions.

Bussad is the winning composer of the 2015 Valencia International Performance Academy (VIPA), selected by the Eastman School of Music board of composers. He has had his works premiered on three continents and selected for music festivals and conferences such as the IRCAM'S Manifeste, Ukho Ensemble Workshop, Mise-en Festival, Composit, SoundSCAPE Festival among others. His music has travelled the Americas, Italy, Spain, France, Ukraine, Moldova, Taiwan and Korea. Renowned ensembles, including the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Frost Symphony Orchestra, Spektral Quartet, Imani Winds, Ukho Ensemble, Brower Trio:B3, Ensemble motoContraio, cross.art Ensemble, Ensemble Paramirabo, NanaFormosa Percussion Duo, and performers such as Svet Stoyanov, Ermis

Theodorakis, Allison Balcetis, Céline Papiou and Pedro Gadelha, have commissioned/ worked with him.

Bussad is currently pursuing his PhD degree at The University of Chicago under the tutelage of Augusta Read Thomas.

### ***Looking Up***

Duration: approximately 8 minutes

Premiere: Tonight marks the world premiere

*Looking Up* for string quartet was commissioned by the University of Chicago's Contempo series for the Spektral Quartet. The piece was inspired by the sculpture that carries the same name by the American artist Tom Friedman, who kindly provided the composer with the permission to entitle the piece after his work's name. A figure of a giant slim humanoid forever looking up to the sky is placed in front of the waters of Lake Michigan, in Hyde Park, Chicago.



## DAVID "CLAY" METTENS

b. 1990

The *Chicago Tribune* has praised the music of David "Clay" Mettens as "a thing of remarkable beauty," displaying a "sensitive ear for instrumental color." His work has been recognized with a 2016 ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composer Award, the 2015 SCI/ASCAP graduate student commission, and a commission from the American Opera Initiative, premiered in December 2015 by Washington National Opera at the Kennedy Center. His orchestral piece "Sleeping I am carried..." was selected for the 24th Annual Underwood New Music Readings with the American Composers Orchestra and the 2015 [tactus] Young Composers Forum with the Brussels Philharmonic. Subsequently, the Brussels Philharmonic, led by Stéphane Denève, performed the piece in December 2016 at Flagey Studio 4.

Additionally, his works have been performed by Ensemble Dal Niente, the Civitas Ensemble as part of the Ear Taxi Festival, the [Switch~ Ensemble] at the Queens New Music Festival, and on the Café MoMus new music series

at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. He is currently a student in the PhD composition program at the University of Chicago, where he has studied with Augusta Read Thomas and Sam Pluta. He earned his masters degree at the Eastman School of Music and completed undergraduate studies at the University of South Carolina with a degree in music composition and a clarinet performance certificate.

## *Without Air*

Duration: approximately 8 minutes

Premiere: Tonight marks the world premiere

*Without Air* is based on a short story from Italo Calvino's *Cosmicomics*. In this collection, each story takes as its premise a scientific conceit ranging from astronomy and physics to geologic time. My favorite is set on Earth before the atmosphere had formed. Calvino describes this theoretical landscape as an undifferentiated grey expanse (much like our Earth's moon), occasionally transfigured by bursts of color resulting from the contrail of a meteorite filtering the Sun's light as it passes by. I love Calvino's fanciful contrast of grayness and color, and have sought to render that opposition in music with dryness and resonance. The piece begins with short, brittle sounds: pizzicato strings, high harp, and a consort of wooden non-pitched percussion instruments. Over the course of the piece, small bursts of resonance accumulate into increasingly sustained music, culminating in a sonorous climax and coda. These final sections cast each of the musical ideas from the beginning in a new, resonant light.

## PROGRAM NOTES



### **WILL MYERS**

b. 1991, Los Angeles, CA

Will Myers's work engages with questions of musical causation and implication: can a single gesture tell the story of an entire piece, and should it? His music has been performed by members of the Spektral Quartet, members of Fifth House Ensemble, pianist John McDonald, and conductors Gil Rose, John Page, and Lio Kuokman. His first orchestral work, *Bright Shadows*, won New England Conservatory's inaugural orchestral composition competition in 2013 and was premiered in Jordan Hall by the NEC Symphony.

Will is pursuing a PhD at the University of Chicago, and he holds Bachelor's degrees from New England Conservatory and Tufts University in composition, theory, and cognitive science. He has studied composition with Augusta Read Thomas, Marta Ptaszyńska, Kati Agócs, John Heiss, Robert Beaser, John McDonald, and Efstratios Minakakis, and music cognition with Aniruddh Patel and Peter Cariani.

In addition to his interests in theory and music cognition, Will is a conductor, violist, and violinist. He served as assistant conductor and principal violist of the Tufts University orchestras from 2013 to 2015, and he has premiered works by many Boston-area composers as both a conductor and a performer. As a violist and arranger, he is half of the video game music cover duo Frog & Cid, whose debut album *Boss Chamber Music* was released in 2016.

### ***October***

Duration: approximately 18 minutes

Premiere: Tonight marks the world premiere

*October* is my first string quartet, and the first piece I wrote here at the University of Chicago. There is a swirl of influences at play in the piece, from the musical — Toshio Hosokawa's works for *shō* and string quartet, Perotin's organum, Alban Berg's lyricism, Béla Bartók's "night music," and György Ligeti's, Witold Lutoslawski's, and Toru Takemitsu's chamber music for strings — to the extra-musical — Mary Oliver's poem "October" and the sensory experiences of the month of October (like the first chill in the wind and the filtering of sunlight through brightly-colored leaves and moonlight through bare branches).

The first movement is gestural, quick-moving, and packed with timbral detail. It gives way to a simple second movement that contrasts a dark, lyrical melody with passages of imagined organum counterpoint. The third movement is an extended cello solo, with the violins and viola providing a harmonic tapestry while aligning their bowstrokes with their

breathing (an abstracted imitation of the *shô* in Hosokawa's works); the cello gradually reaches up and recedes into their texture. The fourth movement slowly begins to gather energy and detail, leading into a condensed reprise of the first movement's material in the fifth and final movement.



**ANDREW McMANUS**

b. 1985

Andrew McManus' orchestral work *Strobe*, premiered in June 2014 by the New York Philharmonic, was called "riveting" and "breathless...surging...hazy...sometimes all at once" by the *New York Times*.

The imagery in his recent works ranges from Wagner's "Magic Fire Music" and Dominican *merengue* to the electrical behavior of rat neurons and Renaissance dance rhythms. Ensembles and festivals that have featured his works include Alarm Will Sound, Eighth Blackbird, the Pacifica Quartet, Fort Worth Opera, the Aspen Music Festival, New York Youth Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra, and CULTIVATE, a festival at the Aaron Copland House.

***pathways, bursting [neurosonics 2]***

Duration: approximately 21 minutes

Premiere: Tonight marks the world premiere

*Neurosonics* is a long-term, multi-work creative project that has grown out of a collaboration with Tahra Eissa, a neuroscience graduate student here at the University of Chicago. Tahra's lab puts rat brains on tiny electrode arrays, stimulates them and studies their behavior, with the goal of better understanding epilepsy in humans. I took an interest in her research because I have epilepsy myself (thankfully it's under control), and I've wanted to creatively engage with it for quite some time. All of the electronic sounds in *pathways, bursting* bear some relationship — straightforward or complex — to the neuron data. The pulses of white noise, for instance, come from directly translating the data into sound, while fluttering sine tones come from using it to manipulate pitch. I've assembled these diverse sounds into textures that often become harrowingly dense, even when the electronics are not particularly loud. This certainly is part of my intention: after all, this project is about overloads of electrical activity in the brain. Portions of the electronic track are uncomfortably loud, overwhelming, and even violent. But part of my motivation for this project has always been to communicate aspects of my own experience with the condition, as it has been quite harrowing at certain points in my life. I'm also motivated to communicate this on behalf of others with the condition. So instead of mediating the experience of the electronics, I've set up the quartet as a lyrical foil, particularly in the latter portion of

## PROGRAM NOTES

the piece.

When the electronics reach their loudest, most explosive point, the quartet re-enters following over five minutes of silence, struggling against the overwhelming electronics. The quartet continues to push back, in fits and starts, as the electronics subside. Their jagged, erratic polyrhythms slowly become more regular, and they eventually achieve a much more peaceful space, one that I think realistically counterbalances the violence of the electronics. But in this final passage, there's a slightly brightened consonance that bolsters the quartet's role as a relieving counterweight to the harrowing electronics, one that may even provide an affirmative message in the end — even as it resolves to the justly tuned odd partials of B-flat (5/7/9/11/13).

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