

Guest Artist Recital
The JACK String Quartet
John Pickford Richards, *viola*
Ari Streisfeld, *violin*
Christopher Otto, *violin*
Kevin McFarland, *cello*

Krannert Center
Foellinger Great Hall
Tuesday, November 17, 2009
7:30 pm

GUILLAUME DE MACHAUT
(1300-1377)
arr. Ari Streisfeld

Three Machaut Pieces
Rose, Liz, Printemps, Verdure
Dame, de Qui Toute Ma Joie Vient
Inviolata Genitrix

IANNIS XENAKIS
(1922-2001)

Tetora

intermission

ZACK BROWNING
(b. 1953)

String Quartet

ELLIOT SHARP
(b. 1951)

The Boreal

Three Machaut Pieces – The three works from Machaut's vast œuvres that I have chosen to transcribe and arrange for string quartet include a rondeau (Rose, Liz, Printemps, Verdure), a ballade (Dame, de qui toute ma joie vient), and a motet (Inviolata Genitrix). Throughout these transcriptions, I tried to subtly bring out different timbres and colors that are associated with contemporary string writing while still remaining faithful to the music. In *Rose, Liz, Printemps, Verdure* I moved the lines around between repetitions of the melody, allowing every instrument the opportunity to play each line at least once. This makes for some interesting colors as occasionally the cello plays higher than the other instruments. Throughout the other two pieces, in order to highlight certain lines and harmonies I added gradual timbral shifts from *sul tasto* (playing on the fingerboard) to *sul ponticello* (playing near the bridge) to *ordinario*. In creating these arrangements my goal was not to simply create modern transcriptions but to provide a contemporary perspective on Machaut's incredible musical language. - Ari Streisfeld

Tetora (1990) – *Tetora* may come as a surprise to the listener familiar with Xenakis's earlier works. It opens with a sonorous melody in the low register of the first violin, with each note doubled by one of the other instruments. The result is the gradual tracing out of an expanding harmonic space, like a shooting star tracing an arc through the sky. This almost romantic thrust quickly evolves, increasing in dissonance and intensity as the lower strings break off from the violin solo and rhythmically pulse against the rising melody. Soon after all four voices rejoin to produce block chords of striking intensity that cross wide gaps in register. Throughout the focus is on degrees of harmonic density, from the most consonant modal sonorities to impenetrable eight note chords approaching clusters. The composer constantly shifts the voicing from individual lines or pairs of lines that hocket back and forth to unified homorhythmic statements. Though the music is not programmatic, it is easy to draw parallels between these voicings and concepts from Greek theater: the hubris of the tragic hero, the unison warnings of a narrative chorus, the confrontation of fate.

Notably absent from *Tetora* are much of the compositional devices that embody Xenakis's earlier compositional output. No stochastic clouds of pointillistic elements are present like in his first (and much earlier) quartet, *ST/4*. Complex polyrhythmic stratifications like those found in *Tetras* (his second quartet) are rare, found in only one section toward the end of the composition. Xenakis completely eschews any extended techniques, favoring a consistent sound to best bring his harmonic language to the fore. Many have critiqued Xenakis for his mathematical methods of composition, claiming that these processes lead to a kind of calculated aesthetic. *Tetora* provides an antidote to such contentions, demonstrating that a work can be structurally and theoretically coherent and at the same time beautiful and incredibly expressive. It is a work that conjures an incredible magnitude of power (much greater than the "four" implied by the work's title) but remains, perhaps paradoxically, heartfelt throughout. – Kevin McFarland

String Quartet (2008) was commissioned by the Jack Quartet. The composition uses harmonic and melodic gestures of pop, rap and jazz which are then transformed according to procedures derived from the 3x3 Lo Shu Magic Square as it appears in the Flying Star System of Feng Shui. The result is a combination of musical styles that come together within a dramatic structure. - Zack Browning

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Greek god of North Wind: the ecosystem of sub-arctic (& sub-antarctic) climates; the Boreal Period of our Holocene era (approximately 9000-8000 years before the Present Era); and to the Boreal Sea, a historical body of water comprising the north of the supercontinent Laurasia, one half (with Gondwanaland) of the supercontinent Pangaea. – Elliott Sharp

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The Boreal – Seldom are my titles illustrative or descriptive but allusive: references, keywords, metaphors - elements that play a role in the creation of the piece. Sometimes the title comes first and the composition follows. More often the music is first manifest and then awaits its proper naming, never a trivial process. Most of my formal compositions each have their own "operating system", a set of defining characteristics that may denote a unique soundworld or set of algorithms. In the case of *The Boreal*, I first defined the extent of the sonic materials: hocketed grooves, difference tones, and the usage of alternate bows made from ballchain and metal springs. The title itself refers to a variety of things: "Northern" deriving from Boreas, the

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The JACK Quartet

Praised for its "powerhouse playing" by the Chicago Sun-Times and its "extraordinary precision" by the Boston Globe, the JACK Quartet has quickly established a reputation for giving high-energy performances of today's most demanding works for string quartet. The New York Times called the quartet's performance of Iannis Xenakis' complete string quartets one of the "most memorable classical music presentations of 2008," and in 2009, the quartet received an ASCAP/Chamber Music America Award for Adventurous Programming of Contemporary Music. JACK's recent CD of the complete string quartets by Iannis Xenakis on Mode Records has received critical acclaim.

Comprising violinists Christopher Otto and Ari Streisfeld, violist John Pickford Richards, and cellist Kevin McFarland, the quartet has performed at Carnegie Hall (USA), La Biennale di Venezia (Italy), the Lucerne Festival (Switzerland), the Wittener Tage für neue Kammermusik (Germany), and the Festival Internacional Chihuahua (Mexico) with future appearances at the Miller Theatre (USA), the Library of Congress (USA) and the Donaueschinger Musiktage (Germany).

The commissioning and performance of new works for string quartet is integral to the JACK Quartet's mission, leading them to work closely with composers Helmut Lachenmann, György Kurtág, Matthias Pintscher, Wolfgang Rihm, Elliott Sharp, Samuel Adler, and Aaron Cassidy. Upcoming premieres include works by Caleb Burhans, Peter Ablinger, and Alan Hilario.

The quartet has lead workshops with young composers at Columbia University, New York University, Northwestern University, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the University of Iowa, the University of Victoria, and the University of Washington. In addition to working with composers and performers, the JACK Quartet seeks to broaden and diversify the potential audience for new music through educational presentations designed for a variety of ages, backgrounds, and levels of musical experience. The members of the quartet met while attending the Eastman School of Music, and they have since studied closely with the Arditti Quartet, Kronos Quartet, Muir String Quartet, and members of the Ensemble Intercontemporain.

The Composers

GUILLAUME DE MACHAUT (1300 -1377), was an important Medieval French poet and composer. Guillaume de Machaut was "the last great poet who was also a composer," in the words of the scholar Daniel Leech-Wilkinson. Well into the 15th century, Machaut's poetry was greatly admired and imitated by other poets including the likes of Geoffrey Chaucer. Machaut was and is the most celebrated composer of the 14th century. He composed in a wide range of styles and forms and his output was enormous. He was also the most famous and historically significant representative of the musical movement known as the ars nova. Machaut was especially influential in the development of the motet and the secular song (particularly the lai, and the formes fixes: rondeau, virelai and ballade). Machaut wrote the Messe de Nostre Dame, the earliest known complete setting of the Ordinary of the Mass attributable to a single composer, and influenced composers for centuries to come.

IANNIS XENAKIS (1922-2001) was a Greek composer, music theorist and architect. He is commonly recognized as one of the most important post-war avant-garde composers. Xenakis pioneered the use of mathematical models such as applications of set theory, varied use of stochastic processes, and game theory in music, and was also an important influence on the development of electronic music. Among his most important works are *Metastasis* (1953–4) for orchestra, which introduced independent parts for every musician of the orchestra; percussion works such as *Psappha* (1975) and *Pléïades* (1979); compositions that introduced spatialization by dispersing musicians among the audience, such as *Terretektorh* (1966); electronic works created using Xenakis' UPIC system; and the massive multimedia performances Xenakis called polytopes. Among the numerous theoretical writings he authored, the book *Formalized Music: Thought and Mathematics in Composition* (1971) is regarded as one of his most important. As an architect, Xenakis is primarily known for his early work under Le Corbusier: the *Sainte Marie de La Tourette*, on which the two architects collaborated, and the *Philips Pavilion at Expo 58*, which Xenakis designed alone.

ZACK BROWNING (b. 1953) writes music that is "way-cool in attitude" and "speed-demon music" as described by *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. *The Irish Times* proclaims he is "bringing together the procedures of high musical art with the taste of popular culture". Browning's CD "*Banjaxed*" on Capstone Records contains eight of his original compositions for voice, instruments and computer-generated sounds and has been called "dramatic, exciting, rhythmic, high-energy music". Composition awards have included an Illinois Arts Council Composer Fellowship and a Chamber Music America Commission. Performances include the Bonk Festival of New Music (Tampa), the International Society for Contemporary Music Festival (Miami), International Computer Music Conference (New Orleans), Spark Festival (Minneapolis), Gaudeamus Music Week (Amsterdam), Composers Choice Festival (Dublin), Sonorities Festival (Belfast), Skinneskätteberg Festival (Sweden) Asian Contemporary Music Festival (Seoul), National Chiang Kai Shek Cultural Center (Taipei) and Jilin University and Northeast Normal University (Changchun, China). Browning is an associate professor of music composition and theory at the University of Illinois.

ELLIOT SHARP (b. 1951) is an American multi-instrumentalist, composer, and performer. A central figure in the avant-garde and experimental music scene in New York City since the late 1970s, Sharp has released over eighty-five recordings ranging from blues, jazz, and orchestral music to noise, no wave rock, and techno music. He pioneered the use of a lap top computer in live performance with his *Virtual Stance* project of the 1980s and more recently has used algorithm and Fibonacci numbers in experimental

composition. He has cited literature as an inspiration for his music and often favors improvisation. He is an inveterate performer, playing mainly guitar, saxophone and bass clarinet. Sharp has led many ensembles over the years, including the blues-oriented *Terraplane* and *Orchestra Carbon*.