The Fromm Music Foundation at Harvard and the Harvard University Department of Music present:

Fromm Players 2021, Concert 1

Featuring Violinist Miranda Cuckson and Pianist Conor Hanick

Co-Curated by Anne Shreffler and Miranda Cuckson

Streamed April 16, 2021 and available indefinitely thereafter

YouTube  Vimeo

No registration required
Program
Fromm Players 2021, Concert 1

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Miranda Cuckson, violin, and Conor Hanick, piano

Rebecca Saunders, Duo for violin and piano (1996/1999)
Jeffrey Mumford, *fleeting cycles of layered air* for solo violin (2020, world premiere)
Dongryul Lee, *A finite island in the infinite ocean* for solo violin (2020, world premiere)
  I. Intonazione
  II. A finite island in the infinite ocean
Natasha Barrett, *Allure and Hoodwink* for violin, piano, and electronics (2014)

About the Fromm Music Foundation at Harvard

The annual concerts at Harvard are made possible because of the vision of Paul Fromm (1906-87). Born in Germany, Fromm emigrated to the United States to escape Nazi persecution and became an American citizen. He established his Foundation in 1952 to support contemporary music. The Fromm Music Foundation, since 1972 under the auspices of Harvard University, continues Fromm’s legacy by commissioning new works and supporting concerts, events and contemporary music festivals across the United States. Since its inception, the Foundation has commissioned over 478 compositions in classical, jazz, and hybrid genres.
A note from the curators
Miranda Cuckson and Anne Shreffler

For the very first virtual Fromm concert, we are happy to present violinist Miranda Cuckson and pianist Conor Hanick in recital. The program features works by Natasha Barrett and Rebecca Saunders and world premieres of two solo violin works written especially for Miranda Cuckson: Dongryul Lee's *A finite island in an infinite ocean*, and Jeffrey Mumford's *fleeting cycles of layered air*. We invite you to undertake an exploratory journey for the mind and the senses and experience the varied sound worlds of this program - from the knife-edge timbres of the Saunders to evocations of far expanse and speed in the Lee and the Mumford, to the watery, luxuriant electronics of the Barrett.

The prerecorded concert will be streamed on April 16, 2021 at 8 pm Eastern Daylight Time, and will be available indefinitely after that date.

Video interviews with all four composers and our two featured performers will offer additional information and perspectives about the works to be performed. They can be accessed at these Music Department channels: Youtube, Vimeo.
As a composition for piano and violin, the aptly named Duo explores the duality between collaboration and competition, creating a soundscape permeated by tension and anticipation. As Rebecca Saunders’ first published composition for two instruments, the piece features two instruments integral to her development as a musician: the piano, the instrument most omnipresent in her early childhood memories, and the violin, the primary instrument on which she was trained.

Saunders has reflected:

“When composing I imagine holding the sounds and noises in my hands, feeling their potential between my palms, weighing them. Skeletal textures and musical gestures develop out of this. Then, like pictures placed in a large white room, I set them in silence, next to, above, beneath, and against each other.”

The Duo generates a unique sound world through its non-traditional methods of sounding the instruments. The manipulation of resonance in the piano, in which the keys are silently pressed only to be brought to life by the necromancing collaboration of noisy sounds produced by the violin, particularly subverts the sonic expectations of the instrument. This sophisticated use of resonance outlines Saunders’ concept of “skeletal textures,” seemingly placing silent noise “beneath and against” strikingly tense and dramatic instrumental outbursts.

Saunders masterfully adds to the tension of the Duo with precisely timed silences that provide a sharp disruption to the perceived structure. Her thematic “pictures” are spotlighted and separated in this multifaceted application of silence, which pianist Conor Hanick describes as “philosophical.” This tension between the individualistic identities of the piano and violin paradoxically synergizes these distinct entities into the Duo. Saunders’ manufactured ambiguity of identity thus leaves the listener to reconcile whether this duo comprises symbiotic allies or belligerent adversaries.

-Julia Losner and David Kennedy-Yoon
Jeffrey Mumford (b. 1955)
Fleeting cycles of layered air for solo violin
(2020, world premiere)

Composed for violinist Miranda Cuckson by the award-winning composer Jeffrey Mumford, fleeting cycles of layered air will be performed tonight for the very first time. Throughout the piece, Mumford explores an “alternative reality” in which “coexists many different kinds of experience,” as he explains in the accompanying interview. “The opening material,” he explains, “comes back in different forms and contexts as the piece continues and develops.” Cuckson, who has worked with Mumford for over a decade, emphasizes his use of contrast, describing a “sense of being far off and kind of misty...then suddenly being very present,” within the landscape of the piece.

The piece showcases this motion from the very beginning. It starts with dynamic contrasts to emulate a fleeting nature. As the piece progresses, the prominent theme of quintuplets, or five consecutive sixteenth notes within a beat, undergoes its own kind of motion. Leaps between high notes and low notes occur both within and between quintuplets, while notes tapering off at the end of phrases ultimately bring this motion to a transient pause. These intervallic contrasts underlie larger contrasts in expressive styles, which range from “feathery” to “fiery” and “billowing” to “dancing”.

The idea of “coexisting” described by Mumford ties beautifully into the idea of motion. Though only one violin plays, multiple parts are effectively played in tandem. Notes are, in a sense, tugged apart and back together through the use of certain key intervals, and this coexistent motion creates a conversation between layered voices.

Mumford’s music synthesizes a vast range of musical influences, even his background as a visual artist. He says composers such as Elliott Carter and Olly Wilson “opened up a new world for him,” yet he writes from his individual experience: “his heart and his muse.” He hopes listeners will approach his music with an open mind, and “allow the music to take them someplace they may have never been,” but couldn’t have gotten to “any other way” than through his transformative composition.

-American composer Jeffrey Mumford approaches composition through an imaginative lens, exploring complex sonorities and evoking poetic imagery. He has received numerous awards and fellowships, including an ASCAP Aaron Copland Scholarship and fellowship from the Guggenheim Foundation. Some of his most notable commissions include those from the BBC Philharmonic, the Los Angeles Philharmonic Association and the Library of Congress, and the National Symphony. His music has been performed internationally, such as in London, Paris, and Vienna, as well as across the U.S. -Anabelle Paulino and Miranda Agnew
Dongryul Lee (b. 1978)

*A Finite Island in the Infinite Ocean* for solo violin

(2020, world premiere)

Written during the summer of 2020, *A Finite Island in the Infinite Ocean* takes us on a voyage through space, time and harmony, from the familiar to the unexpected in a dazzling display of sonic beauty. Lee’s fascination with space, stars, and the vast expanse of the universe influenced the title and subject of this work. Through a chance encounter at the Composers Conference led by Mario Davidovsky in 2017, Lee met Miranda Cuckson, to whom this piece is dedicated.

The first movement, “Intonazione,” is an energetic exploration of different sonic territories that allude to Baroque forms with its toccata and prelude-like fast virtuosic passages and whimsical fughetta subjects. This energy is reflected by frequent key signature changes, irregular accents, and dynamics. This movement also functions as a casting of a musical net from the subconscious sea of the musical mind, providing a gateway towards deeper levels of aural perception to both the audience and the performer. Guided by the use of extended harmonies, these microtones are meant to open up space in the ear, the mind and the aural horizon.

By contrast, the second movement, “A finite island in the infinite ocean,” draws the listener in with its focus on beautiful sounds and harmonies aided by electronic effects. As in the first movement, every tenuto, sul pont. indication, microtone, and other details are carefully notated to create a unique atmosphere. However, the electronic effects bring the listener to a new place: while the first movement explores the unknown (infinite), the second is about arriving at the known, the “finite island” where the listener is welcomed and emerged in this seabed of new musical harmonies, entranced by both the limits and the limitless of harmonic explorations.

As Lee indicates in his score, the work’s title comes from Einstein’s Relativity: “...and that as we proceed outwards from this centre the group-density of the stars should diminish, until finally, at great distances, it is succeeded by an infinite region of emptiness. The stellar universe ought to be a finite island in the infinite ocean of space.”

-Hana Wakamatsu and Juan Rivera

**Composer Dongryul Lee** orients his music around acoustical phenomena and virtuosic classical performance practice. His music has been performed by ensembles such as the Grossman and Illinois Modern Ensemble, and he has been awarded the Kate Neal Kinley Memorial Fellowship and Presser Foundation Award. Lee, who was born in South Korea, currently serves as a Postdoctoral Researcher in the University of Chicago’s Center for Contemporary Composition.
English-born composer Natasha Barrett uses the title of her piece, *Allure and Hoodwink*, to inform the audience of her two main goals. The composition, for violin, piano, and electronics, requires the instrumentalists and electronics to play an equal role in the music making process. Incorporating both synchronous electronic sound processing and a pre-recorded musical track, the composer challenges the audience to differentiate between live sound manipulation and the fixed media. In doing so, Barrett calls for the listener to question what is real and what is not. The virtuosic instrumental performance interacts with the electronics in novel and unexpected ways. The extended techniques and electronic interactions are visibly demanding but also contribute to the showcasing of a wide range of instrumental timbral qualities. Preconceived notions of what a violin sounds like are shattered by the contrasting sonorities produced within this work. From stratospheric keening sounds to gliding leaps, the violin and electronic sounds weave in and out of each other until the listener is unable to identify the source of the sound.

Like Morton Feldman, whom Barrett acknowledges as an important influence, Barrett embraces sound stasis in music: “the ability of the sound to exist in isolation before gradually transforming into another sound,” as she put it in her interview accompanying this concert. By manipulating time and space, the work fluctuates between single, seemingly stagnant drones to the layering of complex, fragmented melodies. Fixed recordings of the bustling city mixed with the reminiscences of Maurice Ravel’s *Gaspard de la Nuit* (1908) present an ingenious coexistence of past and present. The motifs included from *Gaspard de la Nuit* are elongated to fill larger portions of the work, thereby contributing to Barrett’s desire to alter our sense of time and space. First featured at the Borealis festival for experimental music in Bergen, Norway, *Allure and Hoodwink* premiered on March 19, 2014, and was commissioned for the pianist Heloisa Amaral and violinist Karin Hellqvist.

- Eloy Ramirez

Composer Natasha Barrett is active within the ambisonics and 3-D sound space, composing acousmatic and live electroacoustic concert works, as well as sound and multimedia installations. Barrett has received a number of awards, including the Nordic Council Music Prize, Giga-Hertz Award, and Edvard Prize. She also co-founded and co-directs EAU (Electric Audio Unit) and 3DA (Norwegian society for 3-D sound-art). Originally from the U.K., Barrett lives and works in Norway.
Conclusion

Since their debut season in 1998, the Fromm Players at Harvard have been an integral part of the Fromm Music Foundation at Harvard. Their active showcasing of contemporary music represents the spirit of the Fromm Foundation’s purpose by supporting the creativity of contemporary musicians. The 2021 season would have marked the twenty-third consecutive concert season for the Fromm Players at Harvard. Unfortunately, the Fromm concert season was not spared the widespread effects of the COVID-19 virus, effectively cancelling the 2020 concert season.

Thankfully, the contemporary music community was able to adapt. Last year, many performers had to figure out new ways to present their art under new guidelines and parameters. Voyages into live streaming from the homes of performers and in front of empty concert halls were undertaken in order to fulfill the need for music in both performers and listeners. This year, the Fromm Players at Harvard are using their newfound knowledge to present us with this first concert consisting of four beautiful pieces from four outstanding composers, two pieces of which are world premieres.

The pieces have been wonderfully curated to present you, the listener, with an evocative, aural experience that captivates the senses through illustrious tension and release. Miranda Cuckson’s performance is as visceral a visual experience as it is aural, an extension of the raw emotion evoked in each stroke and pluck of the violin. Together with Conor Hanick, the duo portrays a unique conversation between violin and piano that is both compelling and thought-provoking. As a whole, the concert itself seems to embody the feelings of the entire music community. A beautiful expression of sound that seems to scream out to the universe like a bastion of joyous defiance against all that the world has felt this past year: we are still here, and we are magnificent!

-Richard Martinez
Lauded for her wide stylistic range and probing interpretations, violinist and violist Miranda Cuckson explores new creations and music of older eras. She is one of the most acclaimed performers of contemporary music, performing in prestigious venues including the Library of Congress, Berlin Philharmonie, and Guggenheim Museum.

Among her many activities, Cuckson is part of the interdisciplinary collective American Modern Opera Company (AMOC), and is an artistic advisor and performer at National Sawdust. She is on the faculty at the Mannes School of Music/New School University, college and prep divisions.

Cuckson studied at The Juilliard School and has received a variety of recognitions; she was a Starr Fellow and has also received awards including the Presser Award and Richard French Prize. Cuckson has also released ten acclaimed albums, including Luigi Nono’s La lontananza nostalgica utopica futura (with Christopher Burns), which the New York Times named a Best Recording of 2012.
As a passionate advocate for contemporary music, pianist Conor Hanick has premiered over 200 works, including over a dozen solo piano works dedicated to him. He has received wide acclaim for his performances of Cage’s Sonatas and Interludes, as well as of Ligeti’s Piano Concerto and Matthew Aucoin’s Piano Concerto.

He collaborates regularly with leading new music groups, including the International Contemporary Ensemble and the Talea Ensemble, and plays as a duo with cellist Jay Campbell. Hanick is a founding member of the American Modern Opera Company and will serve as co-artistic director for the Ojai Festival in 2022.

Hanick has been a faculty artist at the Music Academy of the West since 2014 and currently serves as its Solo Piano Director. He has also delivered lectures and masterclasses throughout the United States and internationally, at institutions including Northwestern University, New England Conservatory, and The Juilliard School, where he is a member of the chamber music and keyboard faculty.
Coming soon:
Fromm Players 2021, Concert 2

Legendary pianist, composer, and Harvard professor Vijay Iyer is the curator for the second concert, on April 30 at 8pm (EDT). The bill includes works by Yvette Janine Jackson, a composer, sound artist, and Harvard professor renowned for her innovative radio operas, Roscoe Mitchell, the virtuosic saxophonist and founder of the Art Ensemble of Chicago, and vocalist and social justice activist Imani Uzuri.
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