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# XENAKIS

CONDUCTED BY STEVEN SCHICK  
TONY ARNOLD, SOPRANO  
BENNY SLUCHIN, TROMBONE



Wednesdays @7 Concert Series



Iannis Xenakis  
1922-2001

## **International Contemporary Ensemble**

January 13, 2010, 7 PM  
Conrad Prebys Concert Hall  
UCSD Dept of Music

Tony Arnold, Soprano  
Benny Sluchin, Trombone  
red fish blue fish  
Steven Schick, conductor and solo percussion

**Zythos** (1997) Iannis Xenakis  
Benny Sluchin, trombone  
red fish blue fish

**Akanthos** (1977) Iannis Xenakis  
Tony Arnold, Soprano

**Echange** (1989) Iannis Xenakis  
Joshua Rubin, Bass Clarinet

### *Intermission*

**Palimpsest** (1979) Iannis Xenakis  
Cory Smythe, piano

**Thallein** (1984) Iannis Xenakis

**Omega** (1997/2000) Iannis Xenakis  
Steven Schick, percussion

### **International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE)**

Claire Chase, Executive Director

David Bowlin, Violin  
Erik Carlson, Violin  
Wendy Richman, Viola  
Kivie Cahn-Lipman, Cello  
Randall Zigler, Double Bass  
Eric Lamb, Flutes  
James Austin Smith, Oboe  
Joshua Rubin, Clarinets  
Benjamin Fingland, Clarinets  
Rebekah Heller, Bassoon

David Byrd-Marrow, Horn  
Peter Evans, Trumpet  
David Nelson, Trombone  
Dan Peck, Tuba  
Nathan Davis, Percussion  
Justin DeHart, Percussion  
Cory Smythe, Piano

### **red fish blue fish**

Brian Archinal     Justin DeHart  
Dustin Donahue     Ross Karre  
Stephen Solook     Bonnie Whiting-Smith

I WAS OFTEN FRUSTRATED when I played Xenakis's music for him. Everything *seemed* right – he was engaged, friendly, and grateful to performers who took on the enormous challenges in his scores. It was just that I wanted a certain kind of input from him. I wanted to know if my triplets were too fast, or if he wanted a phrase to end in a certain way. In short I wanted to follow the predominating model of interpretation in classical music; I wanted a reading from him. A reading in music is a simulacrum, an embodiment of a score. But what Xenakis offered was not embodiment, but the body itself. He did not deal primarily in signs but in constructions, in the palpability and complexity of interrelated structures. As a result the music of Xenakis has a refreshing concreteness: here one finds the structures of ritual, the nuts and bolts of rhythm, and above all a fascination with the musical object. In Xenakis the questions always seem to be about things: how many are there, how are they related to each other, and how do we as musicians and listeners move among them? The need to find one's path among and around structures rather than within the more ambiguous plasma of language, marks Xenakis as one of the first truly post-19th century composers.

The concreteness of Xenakis's music often translates as a visceral experience in performance. And indeed the music is often right in your face: loud, sometimes strident, always engaging. But the deeper poetry of his music goes beyond the concrete. It derives its strength not from the fixity of structures, but from the fluidity of relationships. These relationships — among musical objects, and between music and people — comprise the



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critical catalyst that makes all the difference. Without them what might be blunt or even banal music becomes complex and vital; performances that could seem violent become instead passionate.

Tonight's concert looks inside the mind of Iannis Xenakis through pairs of works designed to illuminate the interplay between complex musical structures and the people who play and listen to them. From the percussive bookends of *Zyθος* for trombone and marimbas and the percussion concerto *Omega*, through *Akanthos* and *Echange*, two pieces for soloist and ensemble, and finally to *Palimpsest* and *Thallein* for small chamber group, the questions tonight are about the dynamic force of relationships.

*Zyθος* and its partner piece *Omega* are among Xenakis's final compositions. In the Xenakis oeuvre these constitute a new and plaintive percussion music. Unlike Xenakis's sonically rich works of the 1970s and '80s these pieces reveal a lonely landscape. Here the percussion writing does not make use of Xenakis's earlier polyphonic strategies or spectrally rich orchestrations. And the relationship between the percussion writing and the non-percussion sounds often seems alienated, strained. Yet there is a strange power in these stark landscapes. In *Zyθος*, long trombone lines are wound round the threading of six marimba parts. *Omega*, a fitting name for Xenakis's final work, is a short offering for percussion soloist and chamber group. Absent the vivid interplay of sounds and colors found in *Psappha*, the soloist in *Omega* speaks in mono-chromatic tones in a final muted utterance.

*Akanthos* (thorns) belies its name by providing us with some of the most approachable harmonies and welcoming musical spaces in all of the composer's output. The ensemble music of the piece encircles the solo soprano line, rarely allowing her to occupy a registrally distinct and privileged position. As a result the voice usually comes from within the field of sound and thus transforms the whole ensemble into voice. The open sounds of the strings and winds sing in a literal way, but the vocal mapping also extends to the clicks of consonants (as polyrhythmic piano writing) and the noises of breath and tongue (as the hiss of a bowed cello bridge or the grinding squeaks of over-pressured string playing that Xenakis calls *en grinçant*).

Something similar happens in *Echange* where the solo bass clarinet maps a spectrum of sonic possibility from the liquid tones of its low register to the percussive jolt of slap tonguing and key clicks. Following suit, the tempo spans a gamut from a metronome marking of 15 (!) to the quarter-note to pulsations as fast as 480 beats per minute. And as a mirror of tempo there are similar explorations of texture, density, and articulation. The pace of the "exchanges" of tempo and timbre seem unpredictable; landmarks which at first seem never to arrive later whiz by at frightening speeds. Here as is often the case with Xenakis, we are asked to find our place but the map doesn't always make sense. We search for a grid, but are given a landscape.

*Palimpsest* explodes the rhythmic map altogether. Here plurality is evident in rhythm and rhythms. Single lines splinter into as many as eleven different individual polyrhythmic threads at a time. In the traditional practice of palimpsest, parchments were used and then scraped for re-use. The overwriting of texts left traces

so that everything new continued to carry forward something of the old. Or, seen from the other vantage point, the old was consumed in service of the new. So in *Palimpsest* rhythms are layered one on another, sonorities are stacked and even the stage set-up reflects the idea that some instruments are visible and audible only by looking through and beyond others. *Thallein*, perhaps the evening's most ambitious work, echoes the theme of newness. The title means "budding," and the piece features the composer's trademark arborescent structures. From a basic rhythmic substrate multiple and complex layers of sound issue forth – each an elaboration of the previous one until the sounding space is saturated. Then Xenakis plants a new seed and the process flowers again, and again. If the sounding space is saturated in *Thallein* it is essentially shattered in *Omega*, the brief, percussive appendix to Xenakis's oeuvre. The scoring is not unusual for Xenakis, but it seems more open, more outward looking than his earlier music. The music might seem more permeable but hasn't the openness that always attends the unknown always been there?

So how are we to make sense of it all, this unknown, enormous and often alarming world of Iannis Xenakis? What is our place here? I imagine now that it is this vastness of possibility that led me to want concrete and practical input from Xenakis when I played for him. But the simple answer, the "reading" I was after in my sessions with Xenakis, continues to elude. In the end what is there instead is so much more: his mystery, the fearlessness of his invention, and a baptism by noise and power that awaits every listener.

--Steven Schick

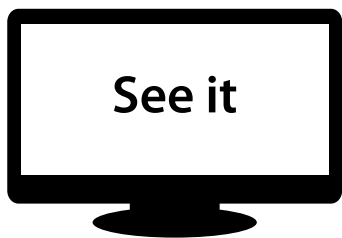
## FEATURED PERFORMERS

Clarinetist **Joshua Rubin** is a founding member and the Program Director of ICE. He graduated from Oberlin College and Conservatory and has lived in New York since 2000. Recent and upcoming performances include appearances at the new EMPAC Center in Troy (NY), the Mostly Mozart Festival at Alice Tully Hall, the Velvet Lounge and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, on WFMT radio in Chicago, and in San Francisco, Poland, Norway, Mexico, Finland and Darmstadt, Germany. He has recorded for Tzadik, Cedille, Naxos, Bridge and New Focus and is collaborating with pianist Corey Smythe on an album of Brahms' chamber music. Rubin has also worked closely with composers George Crumb, David Lang, John Adams, Philippe Hurel, Kaija Saariaho, Magnus Lindberg, Steve Lehman, Philippe Manoury, and Mario Davidovsky. In 2011, he will perform a new piece by George Aperghis, commissioned by ICE and conducted by Ludovic Morlot. Joshua is a member of the percussion/clarinet duo Breekbaar, the New York Miniaturist Ensemble, and the bass clarinet duo, The Lowfirm.

**Benny Sluchin** studied music at the conservatory of his native city, Tel Aviv, and in the Academy of Music in Jerusalem. Simultaneously, he studied mathematics and philosophy at the university of Tel Aviv and received his "Master of Science". He played in the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, and for four years was co-soloist in the Symphony Orchestra of Jerusalem (Radio Orchestra). With a scholarship from the German government, Sluchin studied with Globokar, receiving his Artist's diploma with distinction. Since 1976, he has been a member of the Ensemble InterContemporain (directed by Pierre Boulez), performing premières of solo works by Iannis Xenakis, Vinko Globokar, Gérard Grisey, Pascal Dusapin, Frédéric Martin, Elliott Carter, Luca Francesconi, Marco Stroppa, and James Woods. Sluchin participates in research projects in brass acoustics at IRCAM. He finished his doctoral thesis and is the author of many articles and pedagogical books. He earned the SACEM prize in 1996 for his Introduction to contemporary trombone techniques, simultaneously singing and playing brass instruments. His recordings include *Le Trombone Contemporain*, *French Bel canto Trombone*, and *Xenakis-Keren*.

Pianist **Cory Smythe** is a graduate of the music schools at Indiana University and the University of Southern California. As a member of ICE, he has contributed to many premieres, worked with composers Philippe Hurel and David Lang among others, and performed in many venues across the U.S. and abroad. A frequent collaborator with other artists, Cory recently made his Carnegie Weill Hall debut with violinist Sung-Ju Lee. As an improviser and jazz musician, Cory has performed with the Greg Osby Four, with Pete Robbins Centric, and in drummer/composer Tyshawn Sorey's quartet, whose album "That/Not" (Firehouse 12) was named the 2007 best debut album in the *Village Voice* jazz critics poll. Cory's principal teachers have included Luba Edlina-Dubinsky and Stewart Gordon.

Internationally recognized for her interpretation of styles from new vocalism to the new complexity, soprano **Tony Arnold** has performed and recorded music by Webern, Berio, Kurtag, Crumb (the Grammy-nominated *Ancient Voices of Children*), and many others. In 2001, she became the first vocalist to win first prize in the Gaudeamus International Interpreters Competition, and she claimed first prize in the Louise D. McMahon International Music Competition. She has received critical acclaim for her performances with ICE, Chicago Symphony Orchestra MusicNOW, L.A. Philharmonic New Music Group, New York New Music Ensemble, eighth blackbird, Boston Modern Orchestra Project, and many others. In 2003 Ms. Arnold joined the faculty of the University at Buffalo, and in 2009 she was the Hanson Visiting Professor of American Music at the Eastman School of Music.



**Talk about it**

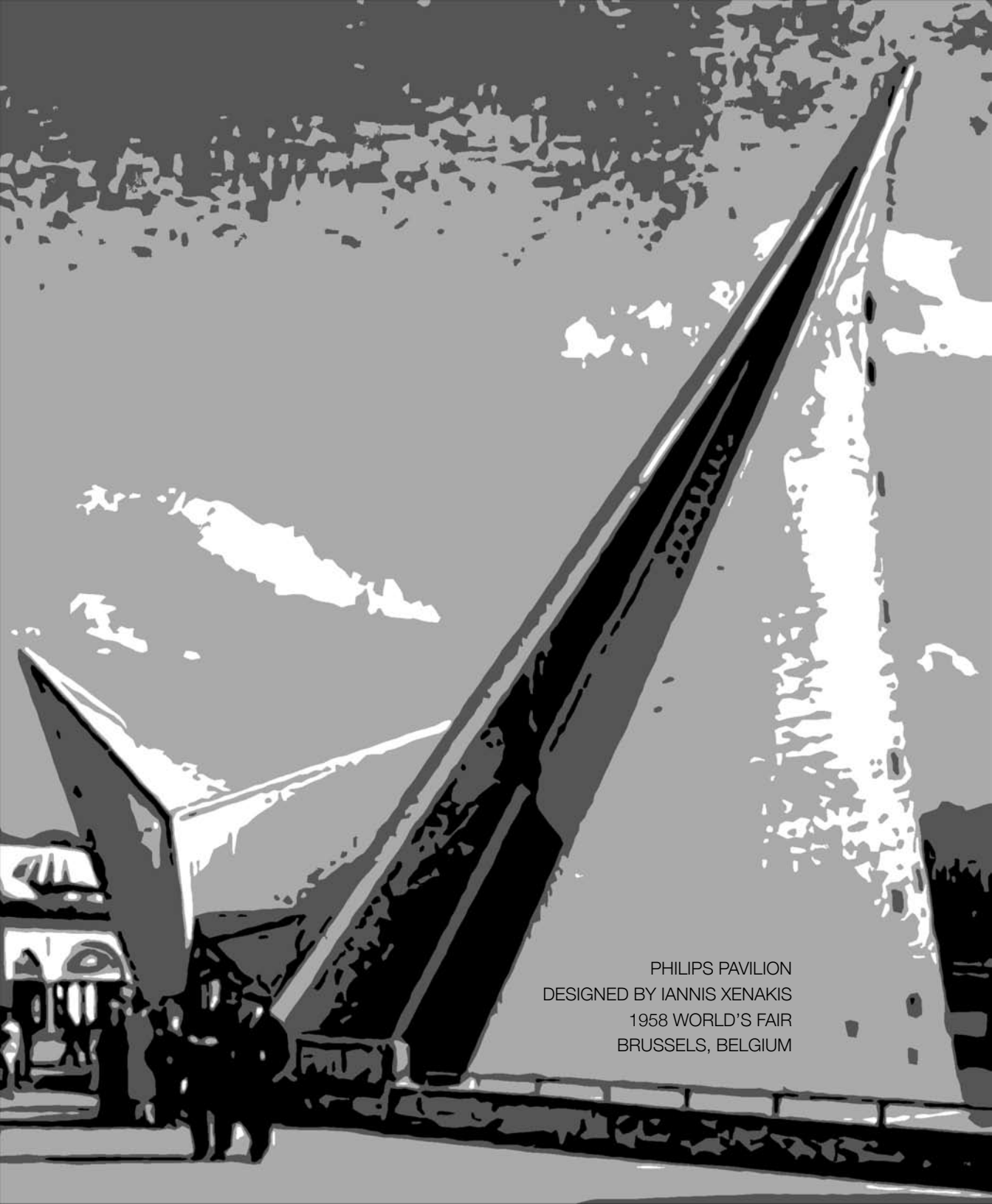
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