

JENNIFER BEWERSE, CELLO

DMA RECITAL

Sept Papillons

Kaija Saariaho

- I.
- II.
- III.
- IV.
- V.
- VI.
- VII.

Pression

Helmut Lachenmann

Songs of the Mouse People, Volume 1, Book 1 Martin Bresnick

1. Common Squeaking
(made apparent by its delicacy)
2. That Peace We Yearn For
3. Every Disturbance Is an Opportunity
4. A Thousand Pairs of Shoulders Tremble
(under a burden actually meant for one)
5. Laughter Stops (When We See Josephine)

featuring Steve Solook, percussion

It rains when you're here and it rains when you're gone

Jay Mikelman

1. At first she listens. She plays only to hear herself, to make sure she's there, there alone. As she plays, she stops listening and starts speaking.
2. She sits in a recording studio with her cello. She's hidden her eyes behind glasses, but only out of habit. She's not afraid or nervous, her entire world is there.
3. ♩ = 44
4. She sits next to her happiness and it desolves her.

Asymmetry 94
Asymmetry 409

Jackson Mac Low

each Asymmetry will be performed twice

In a society where music often exists simultaneously as a document – for example a score or recording – and as a potential live performance, the performing artist is confronted with a question: what are the unique offerings of live performance? Tonight's concert offers five pieces and their diverse answers to this question.

Moving from the physical manifestation of sound to the emotional motivation behind it, the full realization of these works is only available in the moments they are exchanged between the performer and audience. A case for live performance is made not with the risk for failure or presentation of the performer as hero, but with compositional ideas that live fully only within the moment of performance.

Kaija Saariaho's *Sept Papillons*, or “seven butterflies,” explores transformation and ephemerality, ideals the butterfly symbolizes. Saariaho layers traditional but competing techniques that purposely subvert the stability of *Sept Papillon's* sound world. As colors move in and out of conflict, they create a dynamic fragility; the performer's physical actions invite unexpected sound artifacts unique to each performance. The audience, surrounded by a momentary phenomenon, is invited to embrace the performance's fleeting singularity.

As much as *Sept Papillons'* namesake is realized by the temporality of its sounds, its physical movements also embody the frenetic, swooping, and fluttering nature of butterflies. As compelling as the sounds are, the piece's experience isn't whole without its accompanying visual theater.

Like *Sept Papillon*, Helmut Lachenmann's *Pression* is a score that gives instruction for physical movement more than sound result. In fact, in his first note to the performer, Lachenmann points out that “except where pitches are notated in the traditional manner, the notation of this piece does not indicate the sounds, but the player's actions.” Followers of his work might recognize this as a reference to his *musique concrète instrumentale*, which he describes more completely as a style “in which the sound events are chosen and organized so that the manner in which they are generated is at

least as important as the resultant acoustic qualities themselves. Consequently those qualities, such as timbre, volume, etc., do not produce sounds for their own sake, but describe or denote the concrete situation: listening, you hear the conditions under which a sound- or noise-action is carried out, you hear what materials and energies are involved and what resistance is encountered.”

Whereas *Sept Papillons*' sounds - an innovative layering of traditional techniques - are mysterious and fleeting, *Pression* presents the entire frontier of the instrument as a sound palette existing in complete transparency. As the cellist rubs and strikes the bow and both hands on traditionally untouched areas of the cello, the audience is given full access to the performer essentially rediscovering the sound potential of their instrument.

With Martin Bresnick's ***Songs of the Mouse People***, the concert transitions from physical motivations for sound to conceptual ones.

“Songs of the Mouse People is based on a Franz Kafka's last short work "Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse People." In that remarkable valedictory story Kafka meditates on a mouse diva, Josephine, and her relationship to both her art and her audience.” In my composition I have translated sentences from the original that suggested (to me, at least) titles in the mouse people's multi-volume treasury of songs.” – Martin Bresnick

Drawing on the imaginary world these songs inhabit, Bresnick's work evokes an entire culture in the space of the concert hall. But, more than the realization of a space, *Songs of the Mouse People* is an opportunity for its performers to inhabit the central question of “Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse People”: what distinguishes an artist's voice? From the narrator's account, Josephine's singing sounds no different from the common whistling of the Mouse people. If anything, her whistling isn't as good as the average mouse person; “Yet if you are directly before her, it is no mere piping. For a full understanding of her art it is necessary to see her as well as hear her.” And so, the performers are called to summon that delicate, tenuous, and unnamable voice and create an environment for musical exchange.

If Bresnick's *Songs of the Mouse People* touches on the abstract nature of an artist's voice, Jay Mikelman's ***It rains when you're here and it rains when you're gone*** gives that voice directive, parameters to inhabit. While the specificity of many modern scores precisely controls the acoustic outcome of a performance (as much as is possible), Mikelman provides specific emotional scenarios to shape the realization of an otherwise sparsely managed score. This “method acting” means of emotionally summoning the sound content of a performance depends on the performer's presence of mind and ability to genuinely live in a manufactured emotional world at any given moment. Both the audience and performer experience the acoustic result of something intangible but deeply felt.

“Asymmetries are poems of which the words, punctuation, typography and spacing on the page are determined by chance operations... They may be performed by 7 different methods – singly or several poems simultaneously. A basic method underlies the others and is the one to be followed when all or most of the others are ruled out by circumstances. ... BASIC METHOD: Blank spaces before, after and between words or parts of words, between lines of words, and before whole poems are rendered as silences equal in duration to the time it wd take to read aloud the words printed anywhere above or below them.”
– Jackson Mac Low

And so the concert ends with a work entirely ruled by inner dialogue, which creates an undercurrent that is known but inaccessible. Unlike John Cage's 4'33”, which creates a “silent” space to invite spontaneous sound, Jackson Mac Low's *Asymmetries* hold directed silence, silence in which the audience experiences the absence of the performer's inner dialogue. By chance methods, the internal content is fleetingly accompanied by tones or made present by speech. Beyond sound, the audience experiences knowing the presence of the unavailable.

More than a score or stereo speakers can demonstrate, the audience's window for access is the performer, a performer controlled by chance and held captive by the circumstances of the moment.