

ABOUT

WEDNESDAYS@7

Wednesdays@7 continues the mission of experimentation and innovation set forth in 1967 by music department founders Will Ogdon, Robert Erickson and Thomas Nee.

Showcasing some of the department's most compelling music, Wednesdays@7 opened its 2013-2014 season with an October concert curated by Charles Curtis. The series runs through the academic year, closing May 28, 2014 with a Palimpsest ensemble performance directed by Steven Schick. Through 13 concerts, Wednesdays@7 runs the gamut from solo acoustic performance to multi-textured concerts incorporating video, computer music, and performers from realms beyond music.

Aleck Karis curates the November 6 performance by the department's Palimpsest ensemble. Karis has selected works by Second Viennese School composers Schoenberg and Webern along with a new composition by UC San Diego composer Ori Talmon. The following week, we celebrate the 70th birthday of UC San Diego composer Chinary Ung, whose latest project is aimed at developing young composers in his native Cambodia.

Directed by Steven Schick, percussion ensemble red fish blue fish performs Luciano Berio's *Linea* and other works on November 20. At the invitation of UC San Diego composer Lei Liang, the Radnofsky Saxophone Quartet takes the stage on January 15 (the quartet appears on the CD *Lei Liang: Milou*).

UC San Diego contrabassist Mark Dresser - an innovative improviser and pioneer of "telematic" performances that use next-gen internet to connect musicians in different cities for live concerts - showcases his work on February 12, followed by Palimpsest ensemble on February 19 in a program curated by Susan Narucki.

Harpichordist Takae Ohnishi is joined by San Diego Symphony violist Che-Yen "Brian" Chen on February 26, followed on April 16 by Shackle: flutist-composer Anne La Barge with computer musician Robert van Heumen.

Pianist Aleck Karis performs a solo concert of Poulenc on April 23, there's a new chamber opera directed by Susan Narucki on May 7, red fish blue fish percussion ensemble takes the stage on May 14, and the season closes with Steven Schick leading Palimpsest ensemble on May 28.

Don't miss the chance to hear San Diego's most innovative music in one of the region's most prestigious concert series.

Through the generosity of Dean Seth Lerer, 2013-2014 Wednesdays@7 events are free to the UCSD Community.



2013-2014 SEASON

Will Ogdon Memorial Concert

April 26, 2014
4pm

Kartik Seshadri

May 3, 2014
8pm

Chamber Opera

May 7, 9, & 10, 2014
7pm

red fish blue fish

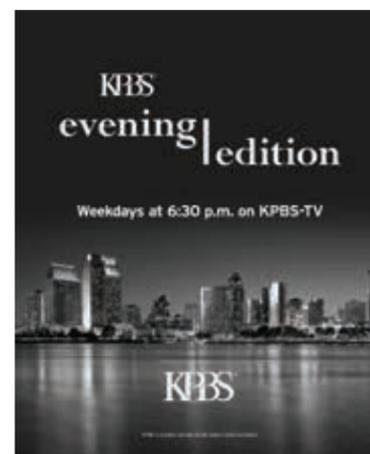
May 14, 2014
7pm

Palimpsest

May 28, 2014
7pm

CONTACT US

For information on upcoming concerts:
Music Box Office: (858) 534-3448
<http://music.ucsd.edu/concerts>



DEAN'S NIGHT AT THE PREBYS

Francis Poulenc

ALECK KARIS, PIANO

April 23, 7:00 pm, 2014 | CPMC Concert Hall



WEDNESDAYS@7

Audience members are reminded to please silence all phones and noise generating devices before the performance. As a matter of courtesy and copyright law, no unauthorized recording or photographing is allowed in the hall. The Conrad Prebys Music Center is a non-smoking facility.

Music by Francis Poulenc**Aleck Karis, piano****Trois Mouvements Perpétuels** (1918)

- Asez modéré (*En général, sans nuances*)
- Très modéré (*indifférent*)
- Alerte

Intermède (1952)**Valse-improvisation sur le nom de BACH** (1932)**Mélancolie** (1940)**Thème Varié** (1951)

- Thème
- I. *Joyeuse*
- II. *Noble*
- III. *Pastorale*
- IV. *Sarcastique*
- V. *Mélancolique*
- VI. *Ironique*
- VII. *Elégiaque*
- VIII. *Volubile*
- IX. *Fantastique*
- X. *Sybilline*
- XI. *Finale*

*intermission***15 Improvisations** (1933-59)

- Presto ritmico
- Assez animé
- Presto très sec
- Presto con fuoco
- Modéré mais sans lenteur
- A toute vitesse
- Modéré sans lenteur
- Presto
- Presto possible
- Modéré, sans trainer (*Éloge des gammes*)
- Assez animé
- Mouvement de Valse (*Hommage à Schubert*)
- Allegretto commodo
- Allegretto
- Très vite (*Hommage a Edith Piaf*)

Trois Pièces (1918-1928)

- Pastorale
- Hymne
- Toccatà

Notes by Aleck Karis

My first experience with Poulenc was in high school student, when I played his Sonata for piano four-hands. Though I was composing music and fascinated by the Second Viennese School and more recent figures like Elliott Carter and Iannis Xenakis, my piano teacher suggested tonal composers like Barber and Poulenc for 20th repertoire. While at the Manhattan School of Music my musical life continued on separate tracks: as a composition student of Charles Wuorinen, composers like Poulenc were completely off the radar, and as a piano student of Artur Balsam the focus was entirely on standard repertoire from Bach to Debussy. Meanwhile, I was very excited to play new music in the school's contemporary ensemble, tackling the rhythmic and other challenges in complex music by composers like Wolpe, Wuorinen and their many students. I played no Poulenc, with exception of the flute sonata. The memory of that enjoyable first high school encounter stayed with me, however.

Ten years after graduating, I found myself playing in the pit orchestra of the Paul Taylor dance company, back when they still used live musicians. It was a great band, and part of the pleasure of the job was playing harpsichord in the many Baroque pieces that Taylor set to dance. The exception was a great work of Taylor's called "Dust", set to Poulenc's *Concert Champêtre* for harpsichord and small orchestra. Returning to Poulenc was a delightful experience, and I appreciated having multiple opportunities to play the piece. I only regretted never getting to see the dance, which is evidently wonderfully weird.

Flash forward another 25 years, I was casting about for programming and recording ideas in a conversation with my friend and teacher, William Daghlian. He suggested I consider Poulenc, "praised by Arnold Schoenberg as a great lyric voice, one of the most under-appreciated 20th century composers." Later that week I emerged from the UCSD library with a tall pile of scores, which I took a few weeks to read through. Poulenc was a pianist himself and wrote a great deal of piano music. On perusal, not all of it appealed to me, but the pieces I will play tonight all captured my attention from the start. They are concise, original, lyrical, and cover a wide range of emotions. They also span his whole career, from the *Three Perpetual Motions* written at age 19 to the final Improvisations, written four years before his death.

Stravinsky's influence is always strong in Poulenc, including his instructions to performers, for example, "without nuances" - "play at the exact tempo from the first bar to the last." He often writes reminders not to slow down in places where a self-indulgent performer might be tempted to allow "expressivity" to trump rhythmic pulse and formal coherence. Yet the music is in fact highly expressive, so the performer's challenge is to bring that out through color, tone and voicing while avoiding exaggerated rubato.

Trois Mouvements Perpétuels, written in 1918, already sounds unmistakably like Poulenc, though the influence of Stravinsky and Satie is clear. This work, along with the Sonata for Piano four-hands and the *Rhapsodie Nègre*, impressed Stravinsky so much that he introduced them to his English publisher. Poulenc and Stravinsky remained close friends all their lives.

In *Intermède*, from 1952, Poulenc is no longer trying to tweak the sensibilities of the musical establishment. He no longer aims to shock, but continues to charm with his melodic and harmonic inventiveness.

In *Valse-improvisation sur le nom de BACH* the traditional German conversion of BACH to B-flat, A, C, B-natural is used, but instead of the solemnity of his predecessors who have set the name of the master, Poulenc writes an irreverent, excitable miniature that brings to mind the soundtrack of an early Truffaut movie. The four note theme appears forward, in retrograde (H-C-A-B) and vertically.

The definition of "Melancolie" in my French dictionary is "tristesse vague, sans cause définie" - vague sadness, without definite cause. Poulenc, generally an exuberant bon vivant, suffered from depression, at times serious, throughout his life. It is tempting to consider the year of composition, 1940, as an influence, but Poulenc in his letters denies any connection between current events and the content of his compositions.

Thème Varié is a very compact set of eleven short variations. Variations titled "Sarcastique" and "Ironique" are clearly playful, whereas "Elégiaque" and "Mélancolique" are heartfelt and meant to be taken seriously.

The Fifteen Improvisations are not often played as a set, but I think that they work beautifully together and contain some of Poulenc's most memorable pieces. The first ten were written in the early 30's, no. XI and XII are from 1941, XIII and XIV are from 1958, and XV is from 1959. Despite the 26-year span of composition, the pieces hold together stylistically. The sometimes startling key changes between movements is consistent with Poulenc's quirky chromatic harmony, and the dramatic arc of the set is pleasingly unconventional.

The final set of the evening, Pastoral, Hymne and Toccatà, finished in the late 20's, contain some of Poulenc's most brilliant writing: virtuosous pianism with melancholy just beneath the surface.

Taken together, I like to think that these pieces create a portrait of the artist, a man of many contradictions: a composer of tonal music with a great admiration for Webern, a devout Catholic whose hedonistic lifestyle was clearly not acceptable to the Church, a successful and wealthy composer with a talent for friendship who suffered from sometimes debilitating depression. From the earliest pieces to the last works, his sincerity, depth of feeling, lively exuberance, and very Gallic charm and wit shine through.

BIOGRAPHY

Aleck Karis has performed recitals, chamber music, and concertos across the United States, Europe and South America. As the pianist of the new music ensemble Speculum Musicae he has participated in over a hundred premieres and performed at major American and European festivals. His appearances with orchestra have ranged from concertos by Mozart, Beethoven and Chopin to those of Stravinsky, Messiaen and Carter. His five solo discs on Bridge Records include music by Chopin, Carter and Schumann, Mozart, Stravinsky, Cage and Feldman, Webern and Wolpe. His two discs on Roméo Records are Music of Philip Glass, and Late Chopin. He has studied with William Daghlian, Artur Balsam and Beveridge Webster. He is currently a professor of music at the University of California, San Diego, and Associate Dean of the Division of Arts and Humanities.