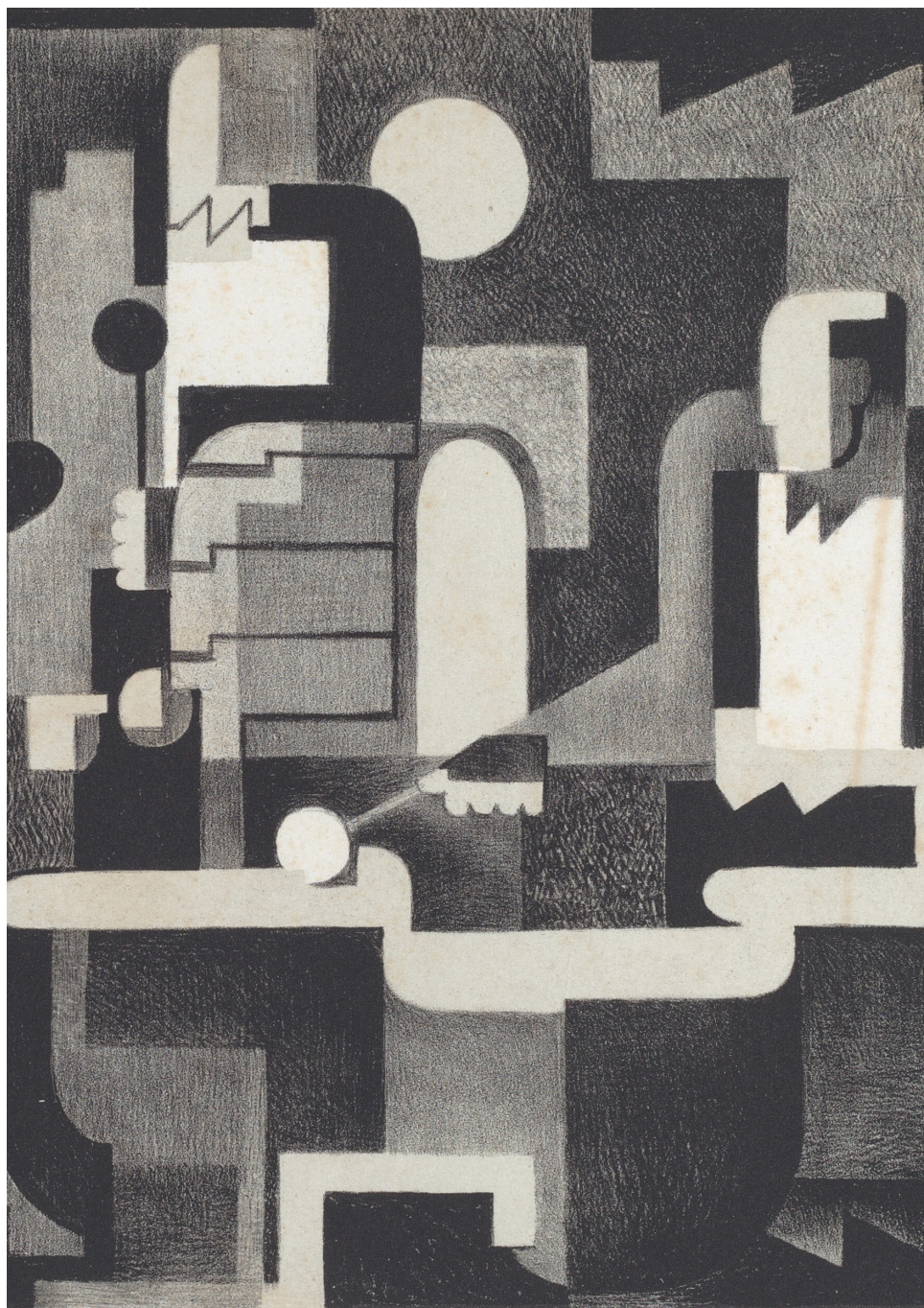


78TH SEASON OF

CONCERTS

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART | FEBRUARY 16, 2020



PROGRAM

Eighth Blackbird

Ice 'n' SPICE

February 16, 2020 | 3:30 p.m.

West Building, West Garden Court

Nina Shekhar (b. 1995)

Ice 'n' SPICE (2018)

Fjóla Evans (b. 1987)

Eroding (2017)

Andy Akiho (b. 1979)

Karakurenai (2007)

Holly Harrison (b. 1988)

Lobster Tales and Turtle Soup (2016)

Intermission

David Lang (b. 1957)

wed from memory pieces

Viet Cuong (b. 1990)

Electric Aroma (2017)

Jonathan Bailey Holland (b. 1974)

The Clarity of Cold Air (2013)

Julius Eastman (1940–1990)

Stay On It (1973)

Ice 'n' SPICE, *Electric Aroma*, and *Eroding* were commissioned by Elizabeth and Justus Schlichting for the Blackbird Creative Lab. *Lobster Tales and Turtle Soup* was commissioned for Eighth Blackbird by Musica Viva Australia, with support from Geo6 Stearn and the Hildegard Project.



Eighth Blackbird, photo by Saverio Truglia

THE MUSICIANS

Eighth Blackbird, hailed as “one of the smartest, most dynamic ensembles on the planet” (*Chicago Tribune*), began in 1996 as a group of six entrepreneurial Oberlin Conservatory students and continues today under the leadership of founding members Lisa Kaplan (executive director) and Matthew Duvall (artistic director).

Eighth Blackbird has won four Grammy Awards for Best Small Ensemble/Chamber Music Performance over its twenty-three-year history and has become “a brand-name defined by adventure, vibrancy, and quality” (*Detroit Free Press*). The group has commissioned and premiered hundreds of works by established and emerging composers, including Steve Reich’s Pulitzer Prize-winning *Double Sextet* and pieces by Andy Akiho, Bryce Dessner, Michael Gordon, Jennifer Higdon, Amy Beth Kirsten, David Lang, David T. Little, Nico Muhly, Carlos Sanchez-Gutierrez, Julia Wolfe, and Pamela Z. Through performances in its Chicago home base and at venues across the United States and around the world, Eighth Blackbird has brought innovative presentations of works by living composers to tens of thousands of music lovers.

The ensemble’s extensive recording history, primarily with Chicago’s Cedille Records, encompasses more than a dozen acclaimed albums. Its most recent release, *When We Are Inhuman*, is a collaboration with The National’s Bryce Dessner and Will Oldham (aka Bonnie “Prince” Billy) that features new arrangements by Lisa Kaplan, who also coproduced the album with Dessner. The album *Singing in the Dead of Night*, written for Eighth Blackbird by Michael Gordon and Pulitzer Prize winners David Lang and Julia Wolfe, releases in June 2020. Other collaborations with some of today’s most well-regarded artists include the heralded performers Dawn Upshaw and Jeremy Denk, the seminal composers Philip Glass and Nico Muhly, and the genre-fluid composers and performers Dessner, Oldham, Arcade Fire’s Richard Reed Parry, Justin Vernon of Bon Iver, My Brightest Diamond’s frontwoman Shara Nova, and Iarla Ó Lionáird of The Gloaming.

In addition to its Grammy Awards, Eighth Blackbird’s many honors include winning the 1998 Concert Artists Guild Competition; pioneering a year-long residency at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago in 2016, during which the ensemble served as a living installation with open rehearsals, performances, guest artists, and public talks; receiving the prestigious MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions and Chamber Music America’s inaugural Visionary Award; and being named Musical America’s 2017 Ensemble of the Year.

The members of Eighth Blackbird value their roles as curators, educators, and mentors. The ensemble was named music director of the 2009 Ojai Music Festival, has held residencies at the Curtis Institute of Music and at the University of Chicago, and serves as ensemble-in-residence at the University of Richmond. In 2017 and 2018, Eighth Blackbird led its boldest initiative yet, the Blackbird Creative Lab, an inclusive,

two-week summer workshop and performance festival for performers and composers in Ojai, California. During the 2018–2019 season, some of the Lab’s network of sixty alumni presented regional events and side-by-side concerts across the United States and in Melbourne, Australia, with members of Eighth Blackbird. In the 2019–2020 season, Eighth Blackbird performs works by Lab alumni Fjóra Evans, Nina Shekhar, and Viet Cuong. In 2020, it offers the world premiere of Cuong’s new work for sextet and the U.S. Navy Band, in conjunction with Chicago’s Year of Music.

The name “Eighth Blackbird” derives from the eighth stanza of Wallace Stevens’s evocative, imagistic poem, *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird*: “I know noble accents / And lucid, inescapable rhythms; / But I know, too, / That the blackbird is involved / In what I know.”

Molly Barth, flutes

Zachary Good, clarinets

Elly Toyoda, violin

Nick Photinos, cello

Matthew Duvall, percussion

Lisa Kaplan, piano

For this concert, flutist Molly Barth, clarinetist Zachary Good, and violinist Elly Toyoda perform with Eighth Blackbird.

PROGRAM NOTES

Ice ‘n’ SPICE

Nina Shekhar is a Michigan-based composer whose music explores the intersection of identity, vulnerability, love, and laughter. Her works have been performed by leading artists such as ETHEL, soprano Tony Arnold, Kaleidoscope Chamber Orchestra, and saxophonist Jan Berry Baker and have been featured by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the National Flute Association, the North American Saxophone Alliance, I Care if You Listen, the TUTTI Festival, the Bowdoin International Music Festival, and New Music on the Point. Shekhar has also previously collaborated with the JACK Quartet, and her piece *Quirkhead*, about Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder and mental illness, is scheduled to be featured in an upcoming PBS documentary. Current projects include a choral commission for The New York Virtuoso Singers, an electroacoustic commission for Third Angle New Music, and a piece for Vanguard Reed Quintet, as well as performances at Carnegie Hall and National Sawdust. Shekhar is a recipient of the 2015 ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composer Award and a finalist in the 2017 and 2018 Morton Gould Awards. She was a composer fellow at the 2018 Blackbird Creative Lab. Aside from composing, Shekhar is also an accomplished flutist and pianist, including performances at the Poland International Piano Festival as a soloist with the Lublin Philharmonic and at the Detroit International Jazz Festival as lead alto saxophonist with her jazz band. Shekhar completed her undergraduate studies at the University of Michigan, graduating *summa cum laude* with dual degrees in music composition and chemical engineering. About *Ice ‘n’ SPICE*, Shekhar writes:

When I was younger, I remember eating my dad’s chicken patties, which were loaded with green chilies and garam masala. My brother and I would then run to the freezer to fill our mouths with ice in a rash attempt to cool down the fire on our tongues. *Ice ‘n’ SPICE* captures both the before and the after aspects of this memory, contrasting fiery and explosive sections with frigid, sparse, and glassy textures. May everyone enjoy the spice of life, so long as we also remember to keep things cool! Many thanks to Eighth Blackbird, Elizabeth and Justus Schlichting, and everyone at the Blackbird Creative Lab for commissioning this piece.

Eroding

Fjóla Evans is a Canadian/Icelandic composer and cellist. Her work explores the visceral physicality of sound while drawing inspiration from patterns of natural phenomena. Commissions and performances have come from musicians such as Bang on a Can All-Stars pianist Vicky Chow, Quince Contemporary Vocal Ensemble, and the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra. Her work has been featured on the Music at the Anthology

(MATA) Festival, Bang on a Can Marathon, Ung Nordisk Musik, and the American Composers Orchestra’s SONiC Festival. She studied composition with Julia Wolfe and cello performance with Matt Haimovitz and completed a graduate degree in composition at the Yale School of Music in 2018. Evans is the 2017 winner of the Robert Fleming Prize, an annual award given to one composer by the Canada Council for the Arts.

About *Eroding*, Evans writes:

Over thousands of years, the glacial river Hvítá in Iceland has carved a deep gorge into the surrounding landscape. At one particular twist in the river, the erosion has left several huge pillars of hyaloclastite rock, which look as if they had been flung haphazardly into the riverbed. In fact, they were revealed slowly over time from the process of the river carving away their surroundings. In *Eroding*, the players create a dense mass that gets worn down over time in order to reveal the spiky formations beneath the surface.

Karakurenai

Described as “mold-breaking,” “alert and alive,” “dramatic,” and “vital” (*New York Times*), Andy Akiho is an eclectic composer and performer of contemporary classical music. Recent engagements include commissioned premieres by the New York Philharmonic, the National Symphony Orchestra, the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra, and Carnegie Hall’s Ensemble ACJW, as well as performances with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC. Akiho has been recognized with numerous awards, including the 2014–2015 Luciano Berio Rome Prize. Additionally, his compositions have been featured on PBS’s *News Hour with Jim Lehrer* and by organizations such as Bang on a Can, American Composers Forum, and the Society for New Music. He is currently pursuing a PhD in composition at Princeton University and is composer-in-residence at the Avaloch Farm Music Institute. Akiho’s debut CD *No One to Know One* features brilliantly crafted compositions that pose intricate rhythms and exotic timbres around his primary instrument, the steel pan. About *Karakurenai*, Akiho writes:

Karakurenai (Japanese for “foreign crimson”) was originally written for solo prepared steel pan during a visit to Rochester, New York, in June 2007, as part of the *Synesthesia Suite*; however, this piece can be performed on any combination of instruments and can include elements of improvisation if the performer desires.

Lobster Tales and Turtle Soup

Holly Harrison is a young Australian composer whose music is driven by the nonsense literature of Lewis Carroll, embracing stylistic juxtapositions, the visceral energy of rock, and whimsical humor. Her work has been played extensively throughout Australia and the world by ensembles and artists that include the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, the Cabrillo Festival Orchestra, orkest de ereprijs, Alarm Will Sound, and the Riot Ensemble. Harrison was the inaugural winner of both the Pyeongchon Arts Hall

International Chamber Music Composition Competition with *Red Queen*, *White Queen*, *Alice* and the 2017 Sue W Chamber Music Composition Prize for her work for Eighth Blackbird's *Lobster Tales and Turtle Soup*, which was featured on Eighth Blackbird's Australian tour as part of Musica Viva's 2017 International Concert Season. Harrison currently teaches composition at MLC School, Burwood, Australia, and completed a Doctor of Creative Arts under the supervision of Bruce Crossman and John Encarnacao at Western Sydney University, where she is currently a sessional academic. About the work, Harrison writes:

The piece is inspired by chapters nine and ten of Lewis Carroll's nonsense book *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), "The Mock Turtle's Story" and "The Lobster Quadrille." Along with Alice, the main characters in these chapters are the Gryphon and the Mock Turtle. Both creatures are composites of two animals: the Gryphon an amalgam of an eagle and a lion, the Mock Turtle a cow and a turtle. I see these chimera characters as a type of metaphor for the amalgam of musical styles in the piece: rock, jazz, metal, hip-hop, pop, blues, and funk. The Gryphon and Mock Turtle scold Alice for imagined slights, tell long stories and sing long songs that never quite end, order her to recite poetry (which comes out all muddled), and insist on her taking part in an unusual dance: the "Lobster Quadrille." In capturing these happenings, I've set the piece with a type of stop-start momentum and spattering of rhythmic hiccups. The piece is split into four main sections, and there are four main melodic/rhythmic threads that continue throughout. These threads are woven across each other, intertwining at times, as well as appearing as discrete sound blocks, positioned side-by-side, and/or careening off into another direction/thread at the last possible moment. These threads include: a bluesy piano and slap cello refrain—Alice's hurrah!; lyrical string lines and long glissandi, mirroring the exaggerated and "mock" emotion of the Turtle's sad story and heavy sobs; funky bass lines with flashes of disco—a reimagining of the "Lobster's Quadrille"; and metal-inspired bursts of sounds with trashy cymbal stacks—the continual "little arguments" and misunderstandings that take place. At the same time, these four ideas draw influence from the branches of arithmetic studied by the Mock Turtle: "Ambition, Distraction, Uglification, and Derision." These titles are, of course, a parody of the traditional branches, and together inform how I have approached the four sections in the way of tempo changes, time signature shifts, and the warping of phrases—though I won't say in which order they appear or to which musical thread they relate!

wed from memory pieces

David Lang is one of the most highly esteemed and performed American composers writing today. His works have been performed around the world in most of the great concert halls. Lang's *simple song #3*, written as part of his score for Paolo Sorrentino's acclaimed film *Youth*, received many honors in 2016, including nominations for an

Academy Award, a Golden Globe, and a Critics Choice. Lang's *the little match girl passion* won the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for Music, and the recording was awarded a 2010 Grammy Award for Best Small Ensemble Performance. Lang has also been the recipient of the Rome Prize, Le Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres, and Musical America's 2013 Composer of the Year. Recent premieres include his opera *the loser*, which opened the 2016 Next Wave Festival at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and for which Lang served as composer, librettist, and stage director; *the public domain* for one thousand singers at the Lincoln Center's Mostly Mozart Festival; his chamber opera *anatomy theater* at the Los Angeles Opera and at the Prototype Festival in New York; and the concerto *man made* for the ensemble Sō Percussion and a consortium of orchestras, including the BBC Symphony and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. In addition to his work as a composer, Lang is artist-in-residence at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, and is a professor of composition at the Yale School of Music. Lang is cofounder and coartistic director of New York's legendary music collective Bang on a Can. About *wed*, the composer writes:

My piece *wed* is from a larger series of piano works, called *memory pieces*, each work written after the death of someone close to me, someone with whom I had a relationship that I wanted a way to hold on to. Kate Ericson, to whose memory *wed* is dedicated, was a young conceptual artist and a close friend of my wife. In her hospital bed, just before she died, she was married to her boyfriend and longtime collaborator, Mel Ziegler. A wedding is usually a joyful event, full of hope and optimism, but this wedding, of course, had something much darker hovering around the joyfulness. In my piece, the four independent lines of the piano part are made of small changes—a half step up, a whole step down, and each line by itself is not that interesting. Put together, however, they allow the music to rock oddly back and forth between major and minor, between consonance and dissonance, between hope and despair.

Electric Aroma

Called "alluring" and "wildly inventive" by the *New York Times*, Viet Cuong's music has been performed on six continents by a number of soloists and ensembles including Sō Percussion, the PRISM Quartet, JACK Quartet, Sandbox Percussion, and Mimi Stillman, and in venues such as Carnegie Hall, the Lincoln Center, and the Kennedy Center. Cuong's awards include the ASCAP Morton Gould Award, the Theodore Presser Foundation Music Award, the Cortona Prize, the Walter Beeler Memorial Prize, the Boston GuitarFest Competition, and the Prix d'Été Competition. Cuong has held artist residencies at Yaddo, Ucross, and the Atlantic Center for the Arts and was a scholarship student at the Mizzou International Composers Festival, the inaugural Blackbird Creative Lab, Copland House's CULTIVATE Institute, and the Aspen and Bowdoin music festivals. Currently a Naumburg

and Roger Sessions Doctoral Fellow at Princeton, he holds bachelor's and master's degrees from the Peabody Institute of Music, and his Doctor of Musical Arts from the Curtis Institute of Music. About *Electric Aroma*, Cuong writes:

Between painting, sculpting, and printmaking, Pablo Picasso found the time to write some very intriguing poetry. *Electric Aroma* was creatively sparked by a line Picasso wrote on October 10, 1936: “an electric aroma a most disagreeable noise.” By using electronic-inspired sounds such as buzzy snare drum and vibraphone effects, glitch-like flutter tonguing, and raucous multiphonics, the piece forces some disagreeable sounds to agree with each other as they are woven into a distorted tango-like romp.

The Clarity of Cold Air

Jonathan Bailey Holland's works have been commissioned and performed by numerous orchestras, including the Atlanta, Baltimore, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dallas, Detroit, Minnesota, and Philadelphia Symphony Orchestras, as well as numerous chamber groups and soloists. A recipient of a 2015 Fromm Foundation Commission, Bailey has received honors from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the American Music Center, ASCAP, the Presser Foundation, and more. He has served as composer-in-residence for the Plymouth Music Series of Minnesota, the Ritz Chamber Players, the Detroit and South Bend Symphony Orchestras, and the Radius Ensemble. Recent highlights include the premiere of *Equality* for narrator and orchestra for the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and the premiere of *Forged Sanctuaries* by Curtis on Tour, commissioned to commemorate the centennial of the National Park Service. Holland is Chair of Composition, Theory, and History at Boston Conservatory at Berklee, as well as Faculty Chair of the Music Composition Low Residency Master of Fine Arts at Vermont College of Fine Arts. Previously he served as a composition professor at the Berklee College of Music. About *The Clarity of Cold Air*, Holland writes:

Inspired by many a cold, Northern Midwest or New England day, this work is primarily atmospheric, focusing on the sonorities achieved by blending the instruments of the ensemble in various ways. There are many stark sounds—high, glassy harmonics from the strings, bowed metallic percussion instruments, harsh multiphonics from the winds, and airy cymbal rolls.

Stay On It

Julius Eastman was a composer, singer, and pianist whose compositions drew from twentieth-century classical music, as well as from free jazz, improvisation, new wave rock, and disco. He grew up in Ithaca, New York, began piano lessons at fourteen, and later attended Ithaca College and the Curtis Institute of Music, where he graduated in 1963. In the late 1960s, Eastman was invited by composer-conductor Lukas Foss to join the Creative Associates, an ensemble based at SUNY Buffalo, where he also joined the music faculty. His time in Buffalo, until the mid-1970s, was incredibly fruitful and included

touring with the ensemble and composing many of his famous early works for them, such as *Thruway*, *Trumpet*, *Colors*, and *Stay On It*. He later moved to New York City, where he became part of the “downtown” New York scene through his own music and in collaboration with artists such as Meredith Monk, Arthur Russell, Peter Zunmo, and others. Eastman often wrote his music following what he called an “organic” principle, where each new section of a work contained all the information from previous sections, though sometimes removed. This principle is most evident in his three works for four pianos, *Evil Nigger*, *Crazy Nigger*, and *Gay Guerrilla*, all from around 1979. By the 1980s, he was touring internationally but struggled with a series of personal misfortunes that led to his premature death in 1990 at age forty-nine.

Stay On It, one of Eastman's best-known works, is among the first to presage postminimalism and one of the first art music compositions inspired by pop music progressions. The work features an upbeat riff heard at the very start that permeates the majority of the work. This riff stays constant while being layered upon by additional notes and rhythms, later being spliced with silence, and at times becomes buried under other riffs trying to assert dominance, or by howling glissandos trying to drown it out. After repeatedly reasserting itself, it eventually subsides, introducing another slower, gentler riff that grows and fades, ending the work.

Program notes by Eighth Blackbird

Upcoming Events of the Seventy-Eighth Season of The William Nelson Cromwell and F. Lammot Belin Concerts

Unless otherwise noted, concerts are held in the West Building, West Garden Court.

Third Coast Percussion

Music of Devonté Hynes (aka Blood Orange), Ryan Lott (aka Son Lux), and iconic composer Philip Glass.
February 23, 3:30 p.m.

Sound Sketch

Suspicious Cheeselords

From the Heavens

Music illuminating the Gallery's holdings of images of heavenly beings.
February 28, 12:10 p.m.
West Building Rotunda

McGill/McHale Trio

Music by Poulenc, Debussy, and contemporary composers Chris Rogerson, Valerie Coleman, Guillaume Connesson, and Paul Schoenfield.
March 1, 3:30 p.m.

Jennifer Johnson Cano, mezzo-soprano

A New Country

Together with a chamber ensemble consisting of piano, strings, and flute, Cano performs a program featuring American works.
March 8, 3:30 p.m.

General Information

Admission to the National Gallery of Art and all of its programs is free of charge, except as noted.

The use of cameras or recording equipment during the performance is not allowed.

Please be sure that all portable electronic devices are turned off.

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