

**CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE
PROGRAM**

Margaret Kampmeier, Artistic Director and Chair

TACTUS

*Contemporary
Chamber Music*

Monday, February 21, 2022 | 7:30 PM
Livestreamed from Neidorff-Karpati Hall

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PROGRAM

Nina Young
(b. 1984)

Rising Tide (2015)

Steph Dressler, flute
Emmalie Tello, clarinet/bass clarinet
Madeline Hocking, violin
Teagan Faran, viola
Alan Hlozek, cello
Nicole Brancato, piano
Dániel Matei, percussion
Jeremy Gill, Conductor

Peter Maxwell Davies
(1934–2016)

Eight Songs for a Mad King (1969)

Savannah Gentry, flute/piccolo
Yu-Ting Cheng, clarinet
Madeline Hocking, violin
Alan Hlozek, cello
Nacho Ojeda, piano/harpsichord
Jon Collazo, percussion
Gabriel Garcia, voice
Jeremy Gill, Conductor

Julius Eastman
(1940–1990)

Stay On It (1973)

Gabriel Garcia, voice
Steph Dressler, flute
Savannah Gentry, flute/piccolo
Emmalie Tello, clarinet/bass clarinet
Yu-Ting Cheng, clarinet
Madeline Hocking, violin
Teagan Faran, violin/electric bass
Alan Hlozek, cello
Ihab Hamideh, trombone
Nicole Brancato, **Nacho Ojeda**, piano
Dániel Matei, **Jon Collazo**, percussion

Students in this performance are supported by scholarships provided by the estate of Marga King. We are grateful to the generous donors who made these scholarships possible. For information on establishing a named scholarship at Manhattan School of Music, please contact Susan Madden, Vice President for Advancement, at 917-493-4115 or smadden@msmny.edu.

PROGRAM NOTES

Nina Young

***Rising Tide* (2015)**

There is a tide in the affairs of men.
Which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat.
And we must take the current when it serves
Or lose our ventures.

—*William Shakespeare* (Julius Caesar, Act IV, Scene III)

Rising Tide was premiered by the Divertimento Ensemble on September 21, 2015 at the Milano EXPO Gates. The U.S. premiere was given by the Aspen Contemporary Ensemble on June 8, 2016 at the Whitney Museum of American Art as part of the NY Phil Biennial.

—*Nina Young*

Peter Maxwell Davies

***Eight Songs for a Mad King* (1969)**

The flute, clarinet, violin and cello, as well as having their usual accompanimental functions in this work, also represent on one level, the bullfinches the King was trying to teach to sing. The King has extended 'dialogues' with these players individually – in No. 3 with the flute, in No. 4 the cello, in No. 6 the clarinet, and in No. 7 the violin. The percussion player stands for the King's 'keeper'.

Just as the music of the players is always a comment upon an extension of the King's music, so the 'bullfinch' and 'keeper' aspects of the players' roles are physical extensions of this musical process – they are projections stemming from the King's words and music, becoming incarnations of facets of the King's own psyche.

The sounds made by human beings under extreme duress, physical and mental, will be at least in part familiar. With Roy Hart's extended vocal range, and his capacity for producing chords with his voice (like the clarinet and flute in this work), these poems present a unique opportunity to categorize and exploit these techniques to explore certain extreme regions of experience, already opened up in my *Revelation and Fall*, a setting of a German expressionist poem by Trakl.

Until quite recently 'madness' was regarded as something at which to laugh and jeer. The King's historically authentic quotations from the Messiah in the work evoke this sort of mocking response in the instrumental parts – the stylistic switch is unprepared, and arouse an aggressive reaction. I have, however, quoted far more than the Messiah – if not the notes at least aspects of the styles of many composers are referred to, from Handel to Birtwistle. In some ways, I regard the work as a collection of musical objects borrowed from many sources, functioning as musical 'stage props', around which the reciter's part weaves, lighting them from extraordinary angles, and throwing grotesque and distorted shadows from them, giving the musical 'objects' an unexpected and sometimes sinister significance. For instance, in No. 5, 'The Phantom Queen', an eighteenth-century suite is intermittently suggested in the instrumental parts, and in the Courante, at the words, 'Starve you, strike you', the flute part hurries ahead in a 7:6 rhythmic proportion, the clarinet's rhythms become dotted, and its part displaced by octaves, the effect being schizophrenic. In No. 7, the sense of 'Comfort Ye, My People' is turned inside out by the King's reference to Sin, and the 'Country Dance' of the title becomes a foxtrot. The written-down shape of the music of No. 3 becomes an object in fact – it forms a cage, of which the vertical bars are the King's line, and the flute (bullfinch) part moves between and inside these vertical parts.

The climax of the work is the end of No. 7, where the King snatches the violin through the bars of the player's cage and breaks it. This is not just the killing of a bullfinch – it is a giving-in to insanity, and a ritual murder by the King of a part of himself, after which, at the beginning of No. 8, he can announce his own death.

As well as their own instruments, the players have mechanical bird song devices operated by clockwork, and the percussion player has a collection of bird-call instruments. In No. 6 – the only number where a straight parody, rather than a distortion or a transformation, of Handel occurs, he operates a didjeridu, the simple hollow tubular instrument of the aboriginals of Arnhem Land in Australia, which functions as a downward extension of the timbre of the 'crow'.

The keyboard player moves between piano and harpsichord, sometimes acting as continuo, sometimes becoming a second percussion part, and sometimes adding independently developing musical commentary.

The work was written in February and March 1969.

—*Peter Maxwell Davies*

Julius Eastman *Stay On It* (1973)

Com' on now baby, stay on it.
Change this thread on which we move
from invisible to hardly tangible.

With you movin and grooving on it,
making me feel fine as wine,
I don't have to find the MEANING,
because you will have filled in his most invisible and intangible Majesty's place;
But only if you stay on it. You Dig
Although his majesty does stay with it,
he, can't stay on it. (Does that move you?)

Ties that move and break,
disappear, and return again, are not ties that stay on it.
They are sometimy bonds. These bonds cause
screens like the Edge of Night, with
Ivory snow liquid appear.

This is why baby cakes, I'm ringing you up
in order to relay this song message
so that you can get the feelin

O sweet boy

Because without the movin and the grooving,
the carin and the sharin,
the reelin and the feelin,

I mean really.

—Julius Eastman

Born in New York City, October 27, 1940; died in Buffalo, New York, May 28, 1990

Composer, pianist, singer, dancer, choreographer, improviser—and provocateur—Julius Eastman earned a reputation as a mesmerizing composer and performer in the late 1960s through the early 1980s. Of West-Indian descent, his parents settled in Ithaca, New York, to raise their two sons. Julius showed remarkable talent on the piano and also developed a resonant bass voice, singing in several choirs. After a year at Ithaca College he studied piano with Mieczysław Horszowski at the Curtis Institute of Music. He soon switched to studying composition with Constant Vauclain and his graduation recital consisted entirely of his own works.

In his breakthrough year of 1968, Eastman sang and toured extensively with the Gregg Smith Singers. He was also invited to perform four of his pieces by Lukas Foss, conductor of the Buffalo Philharmonic and founder of the Center of the Creative and Performing Arts at the University of Buffalo. Once he became a Creative Associates fellow there, the ensemble premiered many more of his works, including *Stay On It* and *If You're So Smart, Why Aren't You Rich?* Eastman also sang the iconic role in Peter Maxwell Davies's *Eight Songs for a Mad King* (1969) to great acclaim, leading to a memorable recording with the composer and the Fires of London. The musicians he encountered—Foss, Frederic Rzewski, Terry Riley, and Charles Gaye—exerted a lasting influence. Petr Kotik split off from the Creative Associates to form the S.E.M. Ensemble, which Eastman joined in 1971. Experimental music focusing on collaboration, improvisation, and controlled chance systems fit Eastman's interests, and his compositions *Creation*, *Joy Boy*, *That Boy*, and *Femenine*, among others, were written for that group.

Eastman taught at the University of Buffalo with a reduced load to accommodate his performing, but the faculty complained of his absences and commented that since much of his music was not written out, they could not evaluate it properly. He resigned and eventually relocated to New York City in 1976. He collaborated with many local luminaries and, with Tania León and Talib Hakim, organized the Brooklyn Community Concerts in 1978–79, a series focused on the music of African American composers and other underrepresented musicians.

Biographer Renée Levine Packer finds “an aesthetic of abjection” in his improvised works of this period—“Eastman's performances transformed societal refuse (excrement, homosexuality, drag performance) into something highly valued, ritualized, and sacred.” As a prime example, his multi-piano piece *Gay Guerrilla* (1979) reinterprets “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” as “the sound of gay martyrdom.” Eastman also showed his political activism by repurposing hate speech in the titles of his compositions to “glorify” the “basicness,” he said.

By the late 1970s, as drugs and alcohol began to take their toll, Eastman found it difficult to find work and pay rent. His brother Gerry, a respected jazz musician with whom Julius sometimes performed, tried to help but eventually had to turn his back on him, and Julius began living in homeless shelters. In 1989 Julius moved back to Ithaca and was utterly dejected when not even considered for a professorship at Cornell. He was again living in a shelter when he was admitted to Millard Fillmore Hospital where he died of “heart failure” at the age of forty-nine. Eastman's music then lay largely unheard until Mary Jane Leah, a colleague from 1981, put together the album *Unjust Malaise* (2005), which unleashed a wave of interest in his music.

Stay on It, composed in 1973, has become perhaps Eastman's most popular work—rather amazing considering no score exists and that the piece had to be reconstructed from several recordings and performers' reminiscences from some twenty performances, including a 1974 European tour. Owing to structured improvisation and varying possibilities of instrumentation, no two performances are alike, and the work is credited as one of the first to use pop tonal progressions and free improvisation in an “art” context. Eastman's program note for *Stay On It* consists of the following poem:

Com'on now baby, stay on it.
Change this thread on which we move
from invisible to hardly tangible.

* * *

This is why, baby cakes, I'm ringing you up
in order to relay this song message
so that you can get the feelin
O sweet boy
Because without the movin and the groovin,
the carin and the sharin,
the reelin and the feelin
I mean really.

Stay On It can be performed with a variety of instruments as long as voice, piano, and mallet percussion are included. It begins with an incessant syncopated riff and the vocalist repeating “Stay on it” in treble range. The ongoing “groove” is flexible, at times becoming cheerfully chaotic, only to be yanked back by the riff refrain in various guises. Many detect a hint of disco; others mention the influence of R&B and Diana Ross, particularly “Stop! In the Name of Love.” Eastman's poem's allusion to same sex love (“O sweet boy”) makes it worth noting that Ross was an icon of the gay community, and in June 1973 Eastman included the work in Buffalo's second Gay Pride Week.

Considered a genius by those who worked with him, Eastman is now championed as an innovator whose “organic music” shows directions that post-minimalism might have taken. After his styles had evolved, would Eastman have wanted his early work *Stay On It* to be revived? Considering his 1971 interview entitled “I Always Thought I Was Great but Why Does Making It Big Take So Long?” one can imagine he would have been pleased with the recent upsurge and influence of his music.

—©Jane Vial Jaffe

ABOUT THE CONDUCTOR

Jeremy Gill, Conductor

Recent collaborators of American composer, conductor, and pianist Jeremy Gill include conductors JoAnn Falletta, Stuart Malina, Steven Osgood, Gil Rose, and Jaap van Zweden; pianists Ching-Yun Hu, Orion Weiss, and Shai Wosner; the vocal sextet Variant 6, and the Grammy-winning Parker Quartet. Jeremy has written major works for flutist Mimi Stillman, oboist Erin Hannigan, clarinetist Chris Grymes, and pianist Peter Orth, and the Buffalo Philharmonic, Chautauqua Symphony, Dallas Symphony, Harrisburg Symphony, and New York Classical Players have each commissioned his music since 2016. Jeremy has received major composition awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, ASCAP, BMI, and the League of American Orchestras.

As a conductor, Jeremy has given world premieres of major works by, among others, Carlos Carrillo, Fang Man, Nico Muhly, and Maurice Wright, featuring the Dolce Suono Ensemble, Illinois Modern Ensemble, and Network for New Music, as well as under the auspices of Beth Morrison Projects. Since 2018, Jeremy has regularly appeared as a guest conductor of Tactus, with whom he has led works by David Del Tredici, Reiko Fütting, Marjorie Merryman, Olga Neuwirth, Kaija Saariaho, and Joan Tower.

ABOUT THE CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE PROGRAM

The Contemporary Performance Program (CPP) is a two-year graduate degree program at the Manhattan School of Music. The students of CPP form the core of Tactus, MSM's premier contemporary ensemble. As members of Tactus, CPP students perform works of the 20th and 21st centuries, work closely with living composers, and present works by MSM faculty and students.

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ABOUT MANHATTAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC

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The School is dedicated to the personal, artistic, and intellectual development of aspiring musicians, from its Precollege students through those pursuing doctoral studies. Offering classical, jazz, and musical theatre training, MSM grants a range of undergraduate and graduate degrees. True to MSM's origins as a music school for children, the Precollege program continues to offer superior music instruction to 475 young musicians between the ages of 5 and 18. The School also serves some 2,000 New York City schoolchildren through its Arts-in-Education Program, and another 2,000 students through its critically acclaimed Distance Learning Program.

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Land Acknowledgment

We want to acknowledge that we gather as Manhattan School of Music on the traditional land of the Lenape and Wappinger past and present, and honor with gratitude the land itself and the people who have stewarded it throughout the generations.

This calls us to commit to continuing to learn how to be better stewards of the land we inhabit as well.

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