

Jacob Morgan Senior Recital

Saturday, April 26, 2025

3:00 PM

Kirmser Hall (McCain 204), Kansas State University

PROGRAM

BeWaa Song Cycle..... Trad. Ghanaian

Devon Autry, *gyil*

*Neil Dunn, *kuor*

Credo In US (1942)..... John Cage (1912-1992)

Devon Autry, *radio*

Connor Jones, *piano*

Mark McKinley, *percussion*

Coming Together (1971)..... Frederic Rzewski (1938-2021)

Devon Autry, *drumset*

Houston Fleischmann, *synthesizer*

Logan Herring, *trombone*

Gabriella Phillips, *clarinet*

Lucas Reed, *oboe*

Mason Ringer, *alto saxophone*

From My Little Island (1988)..... Robert Aldridge (b. 1954)

I. Theme

II. Tango

III. Dance of Passion

VII. Folk Song

Stay On It (1973)..... Julius Eastman (1940-1990)

*indicates K-State MTD Faculty

KANSAS STATE
UNIVERSITY

School of Music,
Theatre, and Dance

Program Notes

BeWaa Song Cycle

Bewaa represents the recreational music of the Dagara people and is commonly heard in almost any festival setting. Primarily associated with the harvest, Bewaa is often performed at a variety of occasions such as official matters of the chieftaincy, naming ceremonies, weddings, or simply played while relaxing on a hot afternoon drinking pito, the local millet beer. As the nature of the repertoire is often playful and humorous, Dagara funerals are perhaps the only ceremony where Bewaa is not commonly heard, instead replaced by the complex and mournful funeral repertoire of Binne. However, if the deceased was known as a Bewaa musician or dancer, an impromptu performance may be arranged at the end of the funeral ceremony.

-Notes by Michael Vercelli

Credo In US

Credo in US was written for choreographers Merce Cunningham and Jean Erdman for a joint dance concert of work by Cunningham, Erdman and Nina Fonaroff. Written in the wake of pearl harbor, the piece is a satirical take on contemporary American music, or at least its portrayal in academic circles. At the time, Cage was displeased by the overly nationalist compositional tendencies of his contemporaries, and used the piece to juxtapose this against what he believed to be the true spirit of American music. This is heard in the two piano solos, referred to by Cage as the "Cowboy Song" and "Blues Pop Song", as well as in the so-called "junk instruments" played by the two percussionists. The use of the radio also provides a wider view of American media, punctuating the texture with an array of advertisements, popular music, and political speech.

John Cage (1912–1992) was a composer whose importance extends beyond the field of music. Artists working today in film, literature, dance, theater, and the visual and performance art fields point to Cage as a formative figure. A pioneer of indeterminacy in music, electroacoustic music, and non-standard use of musical instruments, Cage was one a leading figure of the post-war avant-garde. Cage is largely credited with the establishment of experimentalism as a style in the 1950s, though he did not approve of the term itself. He was a great inspiration for conceptualist artists in the 1960s, and his music and pedagogical methods were central to the emergence of minimalism in the decades to follow. His impact is partially due his collaboration with influential figures in these various fields such as Merce Cunningham and Arnold Schoenberg. He is also renowned to many as an author, poet, and visual artist, in addition to his significance as a composer.

Coming Together

"I think the combination of age and the greater coming together is responsible for the speed of the passing time. It's six months now and I can tell you truthfully few periods in my life have passed so quickly. I am in excellent physical and emotional health. There are doubtless subtle surprises ahead but I feel secure and ready.

As lovers will contrast their emotions in times of crisis, so am I dealing with my environment. In the indifferent brutality, incessant noise, the experimental chemistry of food, the ravings of lost hysterical men, I can act with clarity and meaning. I am deliberate-- sometimes even calculating-- seldom employing histrionics except as a test of the reactions of others. I read much, exercise, talk to guards and inmates, feeling for the inevitable direction of my life."

These are the words of Sam Melville, an inmate at the Attica State Prison in New York who wrote the letter above in the Spring of 1971. In September of the next year, he would die from a gunshot wound sustained during the most lethal prison riot in American history. The riot, which Melville helped in orchestrating, saw four men die in the initial seizure of the prison by the inmates. Four days later 39 prisoners and correctional officers would be killed by law enforcement gunfire in retaking the prison, bringing the death toll of the riot to 43.

On the letter written by Melville, composer Frederic Rzewski stated "As I read it I was impressed both by the poetic quality of the text and by its cryptic irony. I read it over and over again. It seemed that I was trying both to capture a sense of the physical presence of the writer, and at the same time to unlock a hidden meaning from the simple but ambiguous language. The act of reading and rereading finally led me to the idea of a musical treatment." In *Coming Together*, Rzewski forces the reader to focus intently on the text of the letter, analyzing each line multiple times in multiple different musical contexts. Throughout the piece, there are elements of both composition and improvisation. The never-resting bassline, consisting of an endless, inevitable, inexorable string of 16th notes, is limited to only 5 pitches—an intentionally simple collection. These pitches are repeatedly combined and permuted, subjected to rigorous yet slow-moving processes, such that the bassline remains familiar yet unpredictable. At the same time, instructions are given to the players that grant them certain freedoms in their playing, while at the same time constricting their choices.

Frederic Rzewski (1938-2021) was an American composer of mostly chamber, vocal and piano works that have been performed throughout the world. As a pianist, he frequently performed his own music throughout Belgium and Italy, where he spent the majority of the latter half of his life. His major works include his minimalist chamber work *Coming Together* and his collection of piano variations *The People United Will Never Be Defeated*, which has been often called a "modern classic."

From My Little Island

Robert Aldridge's one-of-a-kind perpetual-motion solo marimba exploration *From My Little Island* evolved over many years. Aldridge and I met in the early 1980's when I was setting out with the somewhat odd dream of establishing myself as a marimba specialist. Besides the fact of the instrument being unusual, my larger obstacle was the marimba's extremely meager repertoire. Aldridge soon brought me into his circle of friends, the Composers in Red Sneakers: a Boston-based consortium of mostly recent New England Conservatory graduates who presented an enormously successful concert series. He composed many chamber works including marimba, as did his friends, and so I found myself - and they found a marimba - a fairly regular fixture on their concert series. People have asked me what "island" the title refers to. It's nowhere tropical or otherwise but refers to the marimba as an island unto itself: complete and self-sustaining. The work's predominant texture is characterized by many fast notes. They are presented in a variety of ways, and present a variety of musical material. Some of the piece focuses on hand-to-hand alternations which lie extremely comfortably ("Folk Song"), while other sections present intricate technical patterns which are challenging yet very clever ("Dance of Passion"). The sweet, simple melody of the theme is treated somewhat freely throughout, yet provides a clear thread. Aldridge feels foremost that the work is "about melody." He frequently uses the device of a repeated melody note within a rhythmic pattern to provide the illusion that a melody note is sustained. He also adds many phrasing indications to emphasize the melodic lines. Amid so many notes, the musical challenge is for the performer to create richly melodic, singing lines (often achieved through rhythmic groupings (in the "Theme," "Tango," the development section of "Dance of Passion") alternately provide various "dance" qualities and a general sense of the music's direction by implying urgency or repose.

-Notes by Nancy Zeltsman

Robert Aldridge (born: 1954, Richmond, VA) has written over sixty works for orchestra, opera, music theater, dance, string quartet, solo instruments, and chamber ensembles. His music has been performed throughout the United States, Europe, and Japan. He has received numerous fellowships and awards for his music from the Guggenheim Foundation (2002), the American Academy of Arts and Letters (2000), National Endowment for the Arts, the New York Foundation for the Arts, the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, the Massachusetts Artist's Foundation, the Lila Wallace/Reader's Digest Fund, Meet the Composer, The American Symphony Orchestra League, the Oregon Arts Commission and the Portland Arts Council. In 1989, he was chosen to represent the New York Foundation for the Arts in a solo concert of his music at Lincoln Center. He was a founder of the Composers in Red Sneakers, a composer consortium which achieved international recognition in the 1980s. He received a Doctorate in Composition from the Yale School of Music, a Master's Degree in Composition from the New England Conservatory of Music, and a Bachelor's Degree in English Literature from the University of Wisconsin/Madison. He is Associate Professor of Music at Montclair State University where he teaches music composition and theory and is Chairman of the Music Department.

Stay On It

Stay On It is a structured improvisation that twists and manipulates a simple theme over the course of 20 minutes, slowly evolving towards its final form, where it is ended by a unison rhythm performed on tambourines and shakers by all performers. The work is punctuated by variations on the theme and small supporting melodies that are layered in and out of the texture ad libitum. Eventually the ensemble deconstructs the theme. We hear it briefly played before it devolves into an improvisation that I would describe as nothing short of anarchic and wrathful. From this chaos, emerges a new, simpler take on the theme. A single player freely improvises on this new idea, before the ensemble plays the finale in unison. Bradford Bialek mirrors my feelings on the piece nearly identically, stating that "Rarely have we heard such perfect balance of the composer's rage and joy".

Julius Eastman was a composer, vocalist, pianist, choreographer, and dancer. Born in Harlem Hospital in New York City, he trained as a pianist and choirboy while growing up in Ithaca, N.Y. After a year of piano study at Ithaca College, he was accepted at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia in 1959. Eastman's usage of provocative words and performances, notably his 1975 participation in a John Cage piece during the inaugural June in Buffalo Festival in which he made sexual comments about his male and female assistants on stage, was not only to rile audience members, but also make important comments on America's conservative social and economic stance during an era of non-inclusion and bigotry that plagued the African American and LGBTQ communities. Eastman died alone of cardiac arrest at the age of 49 in Millard Fillmore Hospital in Buffalo. Much of his work was lost or forgotten for decades until a renewed wave of interest brought him posthumous acclaim in the 21st century.

-Biography by Burchfield Penney Art Center