

Celebrating New Music: Crossing Boundaries

February 20, 2025

7:30pm

Purple Masque Theatre, Kansas State University

PROGRAM

Vanitas (2022) Pierre Jodlowski

Neil Dunn, Kurt Gartner; percussion
Amanda Arrington, Jacob Morgan; piano

Take 13 (2013) Texu Kim

Craig Parker, trumpet

Histoire du Tango (1985) Astor Piazzolla
Café, 1930 arr. Claude Vuiry
Bordel, 1900

Kansas State University Saxophone Quartet
Mason Ringer, soprano saxophone
Diego Umaña Conejo, alto saxophone
Jordan Somers, tenor saxophone
Craig Brinkman, baritone saxophone

The ocean inside (2007) Frances White

Colleen White, alto flute
Amy Guffey, clarinet
Madeleine Jansen, violin
Syneva Colle, cello
Jacob Morgan, percussion
Amanda Arrington, piano

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Notes

Crossing boundaries...

Each piece on this program crosses boundaries that were once regarded as uncrossable in concert music. Is *Vanitas* an audio piece with video, or a video installation with audio? (Yes). Is *Take 13* jazz or chamber music? (Yes. And no.) Is *Histoire du Tango* concert music or tango? (Good question.) Is *The ocean inside* Japanese *honkyoku* music? (That's one way to look at it.)

Would you like to see "classical" music be broader reaching and more collaborative with other musical traditions? It turns out there's something you can do: it's easy, and you're doing it right now! Help classical music be a little more focused on the incredibly rich and diverse music of the present, composed by the living (of all sorts), boldly crossing boundaries. Don't worry, we can still love Bach, Mozart, et al.!

***Vanitas*: Pierre Jodkowski and the Immersion Imperative**

(Program note by Kurt Gartner) In his recent and insightful article, "Séminaire de musique contemporaine: *Vanitas* de Pierre Jodkowski," author Nathanaël Bergèse uses the works of Pierre Jodkowski (b. 1971) as a study in the contrasting philosophies of composers Iannis Xénakis and Michel Chion. The former argued that music and visual components are distinct and from "different couriers," while the latter posed that the components are "one and the same" as perceived by audiences. Clearly, Jodkowski is a composer who seeks the path of "one and the same" in his thoughtfully constructed immersive works. *Vanitas*, a work for two pianists, two percussionists, and immersive electronic audio and visual components, represents an ideal exemplar of the immersive imperative. In *Vanitas*, Jodkowski explores the opposing realities of the organic and the artificial in our world, juxtaposing images and sounds and confronting the dystopian results of relentless industrialization. Notably, Jodkowski created both the score and the electronic media (aural and visual). Thus, the piece does not comprise music written for a visual design or vice versa. Rather, Jodkowski conceived and designed all facets of the work, elements of a single construct.

The use of a table, integral to *Vanitas*, is a factor in many of his works. Jodkowski explains:

"The table is an extremely important element in my compositions. If you review my catalog, you will find many projects that include tables. I developed the project called *Ghostland* that includes percussion. In the first part of the piece, there are four characters who are moving with tables. I started to become a little bit obsessed with the table. After all, the table is the environment where I'm spending the biggest amount of my time, and I like the table as a symbol of the writing process. For me, the white table refers to the blank page.

Also, I want to expose this to say how fragile art is. In *Vanitas*, I involve the table in a reflection about ecology. I like to deal with the problems that are linked with society, like everyday problems that we are all facing. For me, it was very interesting in this project to make the film to confront the two realities of organic and plastic objects. It was absolutely fascinating."

In *Vanitas*, Jodkowski puts the organic and artificial objects in stark relief by projecting video images of them being dropped on white tables, then cleared off by tilting the tables. as he explains:

"When you take a real plant, your hands are dirty, the table is dirty, and there are drops of water. When you take a plastic plant and slide it down from the table, the table comes back completely clean. It was very interesting in the process of making this video to realize also that it's a very big difference. When we work on the tables with organic objects, they are dirty and it's good that they are dirty—we need to clean them to make something new. But with plastic, we never need to clean. So maybe plastic is not that good."

During the course of performing this work, each percussionist will transit from a multi-percussion setup to a drumset-oriented setup. In their multi-percussion setups, percussionists create distinctive sounds, including bowed carton and bowed tom head (bowing the edge of a circle cut from the center of the batter head), and well as wood chimes, cymbals, and snare drum. Implements include metal sponge, plastic comb, long needle, fingernails, and plastic ruler. For tonight's performance, both percussionists have opted to digitally sample all sounds, including extended percussion techniques and drumset sounds, each playing them from a single station on stage.

Aurally and visually, the work becomes increasingly dense with time. As author Nathanaël Bergèse notes in his recent article, "Séminaire de musique contemporaine: *Vanitas* de Pierre Jodkowski," the density's increase is gradual for a substantial portion of the piece, allowing time to clearly define the work's musical and visual vocabulary while insistently moving toward its dystopian conclusion with a sense of inevitability.

In many ways, Jodkowski's compositions challenge performers and audiences in different ways. And clearly, *Vanitas* is an immersive work from anyone's perspective.

Texu Kim, *Take 13*

Described in the *San Francisco Classical Voice* as "one of the most active and visible composers of his generation, writing music that's fun, sophisticated, and culturally connected," the music of Texu Kim (b. 1980) has been performed by countless major orchestras, chamber ensembles, and soloists in South Korea and in the U. S. Kim teaches at San Diego State University.

(Program note by the composer) *Take 13* is a B-flat Blues in 13/8, subdivided as 3+3+3+2+2. The relationship between its title and meter is modeled after *Take Five* by Paul Desmond. Though it may sound unreasonable, I chose the number 13 mainly because it was composed in 2013, and 13 is not the most prevalent number in music theory and history—in other words, "cool." To be more faithful to 13, I occasionally added an extra measure to the standard blues progression, to make it a 13-bar pattern.

Astor Piazzolla, *Histoire du Tango*

Astor Piazzolla (1921–1992) was a master of his native Argentina's most widely-known musical treasure, the tango. His experiences living and studying in New York and Paris, as well as Argentina, helped fuel his fusion of the vital tango language with elements of jazz and concert music. Piazzolla made a brilliant career crossing musical boundaries before crossing boundaries was cool!

Histoire du Tango is one of Piazzolla's most well-known works, originally written for flute and guitar, but also widely performed in other instrumentations. The multiple movement piece explores the story of tango by visiting different times/places in the development of the musical language. "Café, 1930" is slow and suave, with rich, romantic harmonies. "Bordel, 1900" is (predictably) a bit more bawdy and raucous form of tango, befitting its setting.

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Frances White, *The ocean inside*.

Frances White is a composer of instrumental, vocal, and electronic music. Her work has been called “so atmospheric and sensuous it is almost fragrant” (*Musicworks*). She is particularly known for her works combining live performers and electronic sound spaces. White’s music was featured as part of the soundtrack of three of Gus Van Sant’s award-winning films: *Elephant*, *Paranoid Park*, and *Milk*.

(Program note by the composer) I have always been interested in the technique of cantus firmus, where a pre-existing melody is used as the basis of a polyphonic composition. In early western music, this melody was traditionally a chant, and the other voices were composed in counterpoint to this melody. For the listener the cantus itself may not be clearly perceived, and yet it permeates the entire piece. I see cantus firmus as a way for a composer to engage a melody in an especially deep way.

I am a student of the shakuhachi (Japanese bamboo flute) and particularly love *honkyoku*, the traditional meditative music for this instrument. *Honkyoku* are quite similar in intent to Gregorian chant: like chant, they exist not so much as “pieces of music” but rather for the purpose of devotion. When I was commissioned by The Third Practice Festival to write a piece that somehow engaged a non-western music, I knew that I wanted to try to use a *honkyoku* as a cantus firmus. I turned to a piece called *Choshi*. It is said to refer to the essential harmony of the universe, or a state of mind where heaven, earth, and human are perceived as one. *Choshi* is a very simple piece, but very profound, and is used to settle the mind for spiritual practice.

In *The ocean inside*, *Choshi* is the cantus firmus around which all of the other parts were written. While it is perceived for the most part only obliquely, it is the hidden melodic heart out of which the entire piece grows— “the ocean inside.”