

The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth

presents

Sounds Modern

performing

How Far to 14th?

New York new music in the 1980's, uptown and downtown

Saturday, December 13, 2:00 pm

Modern Art Museum auditorium

Program

<i>The Memory Palace</i> (1990)	Elizabeth Brown (b. 1953)
<i>Vent</i> (1990)	David Lang (b. 1957)
<i>None But the Lonely Flute</i> (1991)	Milton Babbitt (1916-2011)
<i>Industry</i> (1992) (adapted for electric violin by Andrew May)	Michael Gordon (b. 1956)

-- intermission --

<i>Shadowgraph 5</i> (1977/2012)	George Lewis (b. 1952)
<i>Insieme</i> (1994)	Claudio Spies (b. 1925)
<i>Esprit Rude/Esprit Doux</i> (1984)	Elliott Carter (1908-2012)
<i>Vermont Counterpoint</i> (1982) (recorded flutes: Jacob Berg, recorded by Tom Hamilton)	Steve Reich (b. 1936)

Performers

Kimberly Cole Luevano, clarinet; Joseph Klein, percussion;
Stephen Lucas, live electronics; Jolene Masone, bassoon;
Andrew May (Assistant Director, Sounds Modern), violins;
Elizabeth McNutt (Director, Sounds Modern), flutes;
Kourtney Newton, cello; Eva Polgar, piano;
Kyle Stec, saxophones

Notes

By the early 1980s, New York's music scene was deeply divided between two visions of the future of music: those who sought a rigorous, challenging, intense, abstract approach to musical language and those who saw engagement with rock, folk, avant-garde jazz, and music of other cultures as the key to reviving a concert music culture that had turned dangerously inward. Major concert halls uptown hosted the former group, including such luminaries as Elliott Carter and Milton Babbitt; the latter infiltrated nightclubs and arts venues like the Kitchen and forged their own festivals like Bang on a Can. The official dividing line between uptown and downtown was 14th Street – but then the Kitchen moved uptown and the NEA started giving grants to downtown composers - the uptown mainstream became more of a fringe, with hardcore interpreters of avant-garde music creating their own scene and establishing their own venues – and aspects of both styles infused younger composers' work. It was a time of turmoil, reversal, and reinvention, and it was not always clear who belonged above or below 14th Street. This program travels both uptown and downtown to reveal the concert music scene between 1977-1994 in New York, in conjunction with the exhibition *Urban Theater: New York Art in the 1980's* at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth.

Elizabeth Brown was born in Alabama and studied music at the Juilliard School in the 1970's. A very active performer of classical and modern music on flute, shakuhachi, and theremin in the New York area, her home is in Brooklyn. Her music is widely performed and reflects a wide range of influences, from the natural world to Japanese traditional music to the inventions of Harry Partch. *The Memory Palace* was inspired by Jonathan Spence's book on the life of Matteo Ricci, a sixteenth-century Jesuit missionary to who was quite successful in popularizing European mnemonic techniques in China, though less successful in converting his Chinese acquaintances to Christianity.

David Lang and **Michael Gordon** are co-founders and co-artistic directors of Bang on a Can, a celebrated and influential downtown music collective; both were students of Martin Bresnick at Yale University, where Lang is now on faculty. Both collaborated closely with performers to develop new types of virtuosity. Lang's *Vent* was written for multi-instrumentalist and composer Andrew Sterman, who premiered the work. Gordon's *Industry* was written for BOAC cellist Maya Beiser with an Ibanez Tube Screamer distortion box, and will be heard today in an adaptation for electric violin and computer by Andrew May; Gordon describes his guiding vision for the piece as "a 100-foot cello made out of steel suspended from the sky."

Milton Babbitt, celebrated (and sometimes reviled) for his passion for advanced serial techniques of composition, taught at Princeton University and the Juilliard Conservatory, and was one of the most influential uptown composers. *None But the Lonely Flute* was written for composer and flutist Dorothy Stone, who co-founded the California EAR Unit – an ensemble commonly associated with "downtown" compositional styles.

George Lewis, a member of long standing of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Music and the Art Ensemble of Chicago, moved to New York in the 1970's and was an important part of the downtown scene, especially as music director of the Kitchen; he is now on faculty at Columbia University (far uptown). In between, he was in residence in Paris at IRCAM and at UC San Diego, where both Elizabeth McNutt and Andrew May studied with him.

Claudio Spies was born in Santiago, Chile and moved to Boston at age 17, where he studied composition with Nadia Boulanger, Harold Shapero, and Irving Fine; his mature career centered around the New York area. He was a close friend (and, as conductor, a collaborator) of Stravinsky, but from the 1960's onward his strongest influences were Schönberg, whom he never met, and Babbitt, who was his friend and colleague at Princeton University. He wrote *Insieme* for Elizabeth McNutt and Andrew May at a summer festival in Arcosanti, Arizona – as far away from the political intrigues of New York as one could wish.

Elliott Carter was a life-long New Yorker (other than studies in Paris and Boston and a few brief teaching appointments), who lived in the same apartment downtown (Greenwich Village) from 1945 onward. His early works were neoclassical, influenced by his studies with Nadia Boulanger; though never a serial composer, his works made a sharp turn toward rhythmic and harmonic complexity around 1950, and were considered part of the “uptown” milieu *Esprit rude/Esprit doux* (“rough breathing / smooth breathing”) was composed for Pierre Boulez’s 60th birthday, and it begins and ends with a melody derived from the letters of Boulez’s name.

Steve Reich was one of the pioneers of American Minimalism, and is one of the country’s most influential composers; fellow Pulitzer prizewinning composer John Adams has commented, “He didn’t reinvent the wheel so much as he showed us a new way to ride.” Tape loops, phase shifting, Ghanaian drumming techniques, digital samples, and instrumental transcription of speech rhythms are among the innovative features of his music. The score of *Vermont Counterpoint* consists of 11 flute parts, but is intended for solo performance with the other ten parts on recording. In this performance, the recorded flutist is Jacob Berg, the late principal flute of the St. Louis Symphony and Elizabeth McNutt’s former mentor. Canons, phase shifts, and gradual substitutions and elaborations of material create a shifting, fluid counterpoint – and the technique of metric modulation, strongly associated with “uptown” composer Elliott Carter, is very much in evidence.

Flutist **Elizabeth McNutt** conceived the **Sounds Modern** series as an invitation for modern art lovers to enjoy the best innovative modern music. Sounds Modern explores the sonic dimensions of the ideas represented in the galleries, bringing the artwork to life in the concert hall. Sounds Modern also presents concerts at the Chinati Foundation in Marfa, Texas. In addition to directing Sounds Modern, McNutt is director of the Nova new music ensemble at the University of North Texas, where she teaches in the flute and composition areas. Sounds Modern assistant director **Andrew May** is on the UNT composition faculty.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Tina Gorski and John Nuckels of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth for their collaboration and inspiration in bringing our sounds to the Modern. The next Sounds Modern event will be on Saturday, May 16, at 2 pm.

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