

# The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth

presents

## Sounds Modern

performing

### *Modern Subjects, Classic Forms*

Saturday, October 17, 2015, 2:00 pm

Modern Art Museum auditorium

#### Program

*First Concerto for flute and percussion* (1939)

Lou Harrison (1917-2003)

*La Folia* (2007)

Giovanni Sollima (b. 1962)

*presto* (1997)

Beat Furrer (b. 1954)

– intermission –

*unsettled questions (shadow and shape)* (2015)

Andrew May (b. 1968)

*Fratres* (1980)

Arvo Pärt (b. 1935)

*L'Aube enchantée sur le Raga Todi* (1976)

Ravi Shankar (1920-2012)

#### Performers

Christopher Deane, percussion

Jaymee Haefner, harp

Andrew May (Assistant Director, Sounds Modern), violin

Elizabeth McNutt (Director, Sounds Modern), flute

Kourtney Newton, cello

Shannon Wettstein, piano

## Notes

Kehinde Wiley's works put modern American figures into compositions, contexts, and frames that invoke the European tradition; the cognitive dissonance of these juxtapositions is central to his artistic statements. Composers confront this dissonance daily: expressing the experience of our own time and place through the medium of concert music means framing one's ideas in the written language, instrumental practice, and stylistic expectations of classical musicians steeped in the European past. *Modern Subjects, Classic Forms* – how can they be reconciled?

The iconic forms presented on this program include the concerto, the ground bass, and theme and variations: staples of western classical music, as is the *raga* in Hindustani classical music. Here they are reinvented with new perspectives and novel (sometimes cross-cultural) instrumentations and illuminations.

American composer Lou Harrison dedicated his *First Concerto* to his teacher Henry Cowell. Harrison is well known for his compositions written in alternate tuning systems, containing micro-intervals. This early work foreshadows his interest in unusual tunings as he de-tunes the otherwise traditional flute melody very slightly. In the 1930's Harrison (along with Colin McPhee and John Cage) was a pioneer in writing percussion music that drew upon influences from Asian music. His love of the gamelan (for which he later composed works and even built instruments) seems evident both in the choice of instruments in this work and in the relationship between *ostinato* rhythmic cycles in the percussion and the flute part which dances over it. Originally written for flute with two percussionists, in this version both parts are performed by Christopher Deane!

*La Folia* for solo cello, by Italian composer Giovanni Sollima, is a theme and variations on one of the oldest remembered European musical themes (in English, "folly"). This important theme - in essence, a repeating bass line with some traditional elements of melody and harmony attached - has been used by hundreds of composers ranging from Vivaldi, Handel, Marais, and Corelli, to Liszt, Rachmaninoff, Andrew May and Harvey Sollberger. The composer asks for an unusual *scordatura*, or alternate tuning, in which the cello's lowest string, C, is tuned down to G. This creates an interesting resonance while also extending the range of the cello to sound more like a bass.

Swiss-born composer Beat Furrer lives in Austria and is founder and conductor of the renowned ensemble *Klangforum Wien*. The title of his *presto* invokes a long line of fast, intense European classical showpieces - and the work is indeed fast and virtuosic. However, extended techniques (including toneless and overblown playing in the flute part), a sparse and percussive piano part, a constantly shifting meter, and irregular alternation between flute and piano create an unpredictable and uncontrolled-sounding surface. Instead of heroic exultation in mastery of the instruments, the performance celebrates an intense, exposed physicality of sound production.

*unsettled questions (shadow and shape)* for flute and computer is an exploration and expansion of John Dowland's air "Come Heavy Sleep"; its parenthetical title is taken from Dowland's second verse: "Come, shadow of my end and shape of rest." Dowland's harmonies are played by the computer, slowed down so that a beat turns into a measure, and tuned to the overtone series (just intonation, with the tuning base shifting as the harmony changes). The solo flute line itself treats Dowland's melody somewhat after the manner of the *alap* in traditional performance of an Indian *raag*: a slow, free, heavily ornamented exploration of the mode and melody. The piece is intended for performance with an ESCAPE Unit, an electronic system of the composer's devising, essentially a portable all-in-one "boom box" for live interactive computer music.

Estonian composer Arvo Pärt has composed many versions of *Fratres* ("brothers," in Latin), dating back to 1977. It is based on a simple chord progression of expanding phrases, always returning to the dominant and followed by a percussive refrain. This variation on the "ground bass" technique of the Baroque (found in *La Folia* among many other works) creates a traditional frame for the Pärt's meditative musical vision, influenced by Russian Orthodox church music and the resonance of bells; Pärt himself has used the term "tintinnabuli" to describe this practice.

*L'Aube enchantée* (the enchanted dawn) was the result of a long collaboration between sitar and composition master Ravi Shankar with European virtuosi Jean-Pierre Rampal and Martine Geliot. *Raga todi* is considered a late morning raga, typically creating a mournful mood which is gradually uplifted. While in the Indian music tradition much of the materials would be improvised, this composition is fully notated. Traditional ornamentation is approximated in Western notation. The result is a carefully conceived composition for performers in the European tradition that follows the form and construction of a traditional *raag* performance; the instruments and performers stand in delightful contrast to the musical frame, much like the central figures in Kehinde Wiley's paintings.

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. We also thank the University of North Texas College of Music, and Saint Cloud State University for their support. The next Sounds Modern event at the Modern will be on Saturday, May 21, at 2 pm. Please like us on Facebook, and stay tuned for upcoming events in Denton and Dallas in early 2016.

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