

The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth

presents

Sounds Modern

Alone within the Herd

music to celebrate the art of Robyn O'Neil

Saturday, January 4, 2020, 2:00 pm

Modern Art Museum auditorium

Program

Trenody to the victims of Tōhoku Earthquake 3.11 (2011)

Toshiro Hosakawa (b. 1955)

The Last Leaf (2010, revised 2012)

Chaya Czernowin (b. 1957)

The Heaven of Animals (1999)

Harold Meltzer (b. 1966)

Charnel House (2010)

Andrew May (b. 1968)

— intermission —

Les Moutons de Panurge (1969)

Frederic Rzewski (b. 1938)

Performers

Sarah Ruth Alexander, percussion leader

Mike Capone, viola

Mia Detwiler, violin

Andrew May, violin, electronics (Sounds Modern assistant director)

Elizabeth McNutt, flutes (Sounds Modern director)

Kourtney Newton, cello

Alexander Richards, soprano saxophone

Jeremiah Stones, bass trombone

Shannon Wettstein, piano

... **AND YOU!** see the notes for Frederic Rzewski's *Les Moutons de Panurge* on the next page ...

Notes

The works of artist Robyn O'Neil explore themes of evolution, natural catastrophe, the apocalypse, primal herd mentality, and the beauty of nature. Like the solitary figures in many of O'Neil's works, the first half of the concert showcases the solitary struggle of musicians, performing alone, in solo works which relate to devastation, tragedy, struggle, and nature. After intermission, the Rzewski work invites the audience to join with (or deviate from) the herd.

Threnody

Central to Toshio Hosokawa's music is the silence, breath, and observation of sound within the context of the performer's (and audience's) experience. He likens it to Japanese calligraphy: "The Japanese calligrapher draws a line but he does not start on the paper; rather the beginning starts at some point in the air. And what you see on the white paper is the drawing, but it is only one part of the movement, not the whole experience. I have to say that those hidden air movements are essential to the drawing and without them there would be nothing to see." The 2011 Tōhoku earthquake was the most powerful recorded earthquake in Japan, measuring 9.0-9.1 on the Richter scale. The subsequent tsunami caused three reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant to melt down, leading to radioactive leaks in the Pacific Ocean and in food supplies. This was considered to be the greatest crisis that Japan faced since the end of the second World War. Hosokawa's *Threnody* is dedicated to the more than 15,000 victims of this disaster. Muted throughout, the music navigates timbral and rhythmic obfuscations of the primary melodic material, with large sections punctuated by silences "in the air." (notes by Mike Capone)

The Heaven of Animals

Through a series of chords (multiphonics), this work presents a simple tune, the kind someone might sing to combat fear while passing through a dangerous place. I took the title from a James Dickey poem about the endless descent of predators from trees unto "the bright backs of their prey" in the heaven of animals. There the reward for the weaker prey is meager: "to walk / Under such trees in full knowledge / Of what is in glory above them," to accept this cycle of victimization. (notes by Harold Meltzer)

The Last Leaf

According to Czernowin, "The title of the piece is taken from the short story 'The last leaf' by O. Henry. It was written for and inspired by the oboist Peter Veale, with whom I have been collaborating for many years. The score of the saxophone version differs a bit from the original oboe version. However, the different instrument interprets the piece in a very different way." While this piece is not intended to be programmatic, Czernowin gave this piece to Veale while he was in a difficult period, with a musical message. Not unlike the protagonist of the short story, who is initially dying but miraculously recovers through the support and sacrifice of those surrounding her, Czernowin demonstrates through this piece that even the most fragile leaf can weather and stand against the storm of life. (notes by Alexander Richards)

Charnel House

Amid a vast and growing global refugee crisis, war and displacement are much on my mind. Frédéric Chopin was an exile from a violent occupation of Poland and his music cries out for a free and independent motherland he never saw. Could he have imagined the brutality and dislocation of twentieth-century Europe? He described the opening of his *Scherzo #2* as like entering a "charnel house," the shock of walking among the bones of the dead; Schumann described the piece as "overflowing with tenderness, boldness, love, and contempt." In writing this work based on Chopin's *Scherzo*, I thought of wars and their ensuing displacements (including my forbears' during WWII) with all those emotions, and horror at the current wave of nativism. (notes by Andrew May)

Les Moutons de Panurge

PLEASE PARTICIPATE! *We will distribute percussion instruments during the intermission, and we encourage you to take one and join in. According to the composer's score, you "are invited to make sound, any sound, preferably very loud" as part of the piece. You will be led by Sarah Ruth Alexander, whom "you may follow or not, and who begins the music" with five drumbeats at the same speed as the group on stage ... after which, "any variations are possible." A suggested theme is "the left hand doesn't know what the right is doing."*

"Suddenly, I do not know how, it happened, I did not have time to think, Panurge, without another word, threw his sheep, crying and bleating, into the sea. All the other sheep, crying and bleating in the same intonation, started to throw themselves in the sea after it, all in a line. The herd was such that once one jumped, so jumped its companions. It was not possible to stop them, as you know, with sheep, it's natural to always follow the first one, wherever it may go." — Francois Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*

Sounds Modern

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. McNutt also directs 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

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