

# The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth

presents

Sounds Modern

## ***Blues Unions***

music to celebrate the art of Sean Scully

Saturday, October 9, 2021, 2:00 pm

Modern Art Museum auditorium

### **Program**

***Merce and Baby*** (2012)

flute, violin, cello, percussion

George Lewis (b. 1952)

***“Nostalgia in Times Square”*** from ***Mingus Gold*** (1988)

string quartet

Julius Hemphill (1938-1995)

***bb*** (1999)

solo flute

Rand Steiger (b. 1957)

***Music for the Gift part I*** (1963)

stereo recording

Terry Riley (b. 1935)

***In This House of Blues (no longer very clear)*** (1994)

soprano, clarinet, piano

Anthony Davis (b. 1951); text by John Ashbery (1927-2017)

***Klatka Still*** (2007)

I.

II.

flute and piano

David Sanford (b. 1963)

### **Performers**

Kathleen Crabtree, viola

Mia Detwiler and Andrew May, violins

Molly Fillmore, soprano

Joseph Klein, conductor

Kimberly Cole Luevano, clarinet

Elizabeth McNutt, flute (Sounds Modern director)

Kourtney Newton, cello

Willem van Schalkwyk, piano

Christopher Teal, percussion

## Notes

Dedicated to abstract visual art, Sean Scully was also deeply involved with the tropes of American blues music: he owned and ran a blues club in London, and was in a blues band with his brother. Discussing his artwork, Scully described his use of “insets” and other disruptions of the traditional frame of a painting as “pictorial ... but it also completely vandalizes the idea of the picture plane ... so everything's getting cannibalized and remade into something else. It's in constant movement.” His words also capture the spirit of composers George Lewis, Rand Steiger, Anthony Davis, David Sanford, Terry Riley, and Julius Hemphill, who have vandalized the musical plane of the blues, creating inventions and perspectives that lead listeners into unexpected worlds of possibility. Sounds Modern is especially excited to present works by two of our teachers from UC San Diego, George Lewis and Rand Steiger.

### ***Merce and Baby***

*Merce and Baby* was inspired, in part, by a conversation between George Lewis and Merce Cunningham, the dancer and choreographer who was John Cage's partner and frequent collaborator. Cunningham commented that he didn't feel the same way about improvisation that Cage did, and went on to describe his 1946 collaboration with drummer Baby Dodds, *Fast Blues*. By then Cunningham and Cage were already collaborating on works in which the dialogue connecting music and dance was deliberately removed, letting them be simply pure music and pure movement. Dodds described the collaboration with Cunningham very differently: “We did that one number with only drums and the dance. It was something like my solo work but, of course, here was someone else I had to keep up with. Sometimes I'd have to hit the cymbal on the jumps and on the turns I would make a roll. Of course the dance was all his idea and I didn't know exactly what he would do next ... I had to be versatile enough to change with them.” In the conversation with Cunningham, Lewis asked how the performance went, and was struck by the answer: “Basically, Merce recalled that he tried suggesting to Baby that he did not need to accompany or shadow the dance; but at the performance, Baby felt compelled to do so.” In Lewis's *Merce and Baby*, the drum set is the central element: Lewis comments that “since ... *Fast Blues* featured Dodds as the only musical performer, I used the computer to help transcribe Dodds-created drum solos ... into musical notation. Where the transcription seemed poor, I recorded myself scat-singing an imitation of what I was hearing as I listened to a Dodds solo, then had the computer transcribe that recording.” These deliberately imperfect computer transcriptions connect with another inspiration for the piece, Cage's *Cheap Imitation*, itself a reworking of Erik Satie's *Socrate* for voice and ensemble into a piano solo with many of the original notes missing. Lewis describes the flute, violin, and cello parts in *Merce and Baby* as being “created with particular reference to Paul Zukofsky's performance of *Cheap Imitation* as a violin solo,” filtered through a variety of retunings and recombinations. The seemingly abstract processes of Lewis's “cheap imitations” of Dodds and Cage paradoxically lead back to (in Lewis's words) “depiction and representation: what is being depicted is an imagined parallel universe, another *Fast Blues*, in which the relation between the drums and the choreography (represented by the strings and winds) is sometimes explicitly dialogic, sometimes explicitly nondialogic, and sometimes difficult to parse along that binary.”

### ***Nostalgia in Times Square***

Composer and saxophonist Julius Hemphill, born and raised in Fort Worth, was a founder of the World Saxophone Quartet and an innovative composer for both jazz and classical ensembles. In *Mingus Gold*, commissioned by the Kronos Quartet and premiered by them in 1988, Hemphill reinvented music of Charles Mingus as edgy, virtuosic string quartet music. In the first movement, “Nostalgia in Times Square,” he takes what is in essence a 12-bar blues and redistributes the roles of rhythm, harmony, and solo unpredictably among the quartet, finishing with music that is as far from the original tune as Mingus's own wildly inventive bass solo at the end of his studio recording of the original work.

### ***bb***

The title “bb” is a reference to BB King, and some passages of the piece reference a blues scale. While he played the blues, he also played a kind of happy blues, with a smile on his face, and that kind of happy virtuosity seemed like an appropriate reference for a piece that was commissioned for a competition of young flutists. – Rand Steiger

### ***Music for the Gift, part I***

Terry Riley's *Music for the Gift* has been called the first remix, and a precursor to Riley's groundbreaking minimalist work *In C*. To create music for a Paris performance of Ken Dewey's experimental theater piece *The Gift* in 1963,

Riley recorded Chet Baker's quartet as well as assorted sounds from rehearsals; he used tape delay to loop, cut up, and manipulate those tracks to create tape pieces that were then recombined with live performances by Baker's quartet during the play. Apparently, when Baker heard the final product, he simply remarked "Far out, man. This is some far-out s\*\*t."

### ***In This House of Blues (no longer very clear)***

*In this house of blues the cold creeps stealthily upon us.  
In this house of blues the cold creeps stealthily upon us.  
I do not dare to do what I fantasize doing.  
It's true that I can no longer remember very well  
The time when we first began to know each other.  
However, I do remember very well  
The first time we met. You walked in sunlight,  
Holding a daisy. You said, "Children make unreliable witnesses."*

*Now, so long after that time,  
I keep the spirit of it throbbing still.  
The ideas are still the same, and they expand  
to fill vast, antique cubes.*

*With time the blue congeals into roomlike purple  
That takes the shape of alcoves, landings...  
Everything is like something else.  
I should have waited before I learned this.*

For the 50th anniversary of WNYC's FM station in June of 1994, the station decided to embark on a program of commissioning music from diverse American composers to celebrate the occasion. "Acting on a terrific idea from composer John Corigliano," they asked the noted poet John Ashbery for a poem, and then sent it to 12 composers. Their instructions were simple: write a piece based on the poem --it did not have to be a typical voice-with-piano setting; it could use some of the text, or none of the text. This work is Davis' contribution.

### ***Klatka Still***

The title "*Klatka Still*" refers to two of the composition's influences, the jazz trumpeter and composer/arranger Tony Klatka, and shot of a particular cross-section of Polish fans televised during the 2006 World Cup in Dortmund. The other primary inspiration was a memorably atmospheric outdoor concert in Rome by the jazz trumpeter Tomasz Stanko in 2002. Along with flutist Marya Martin, and Ed Harsh of Meet the Composer, the composer is most grateful to musicologist Piotr Wilk with whom he attended the Stanko performance." – David Sanford

### **Sounds Modern**

The most up-to-the-minute and least predictable concert music series in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, Sounds Modern has been exploring links between contemporary music and visual arts for over a decade. Conceived and directed by virtuoso flutist Elizabeth McNutt in collaboration with The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Sounds Modern adds a sonic dimension to the ideas represented in the galleries, and brings 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**

Thanks to the University of North Texas College of Music, to Steven Heffner, Nancy McNutt, Manuel Clancy, and Melinda Willmann for contributing to this performance. Thanks also to Tina Gorski and John Nuckels for their ongoing collaboration in bringing our sounds to the Modern. Keep up with the latest Sounds Modern news at [www.soundsmodern.org](http://www.soundsmodern.org), [www.facebook.com/SoundsModern](http://www.facebook.com/SoundsModern), and [@soundsmodern](https://twitter.com/soundsmodern).