

The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth

presents

Sounds Modern

performing

Impure Music

in celebration of Robert Motherwell: Pure Painting

Saturday, September 9, 2023, 2:00 pm. Modern Art Museum auditorium

Dieter Schnebel (1930 - 2018) - ***Pan*** (1978)

1. awakening
2. longing and temptation
3. urging - hunting - frightening
4. fulfillment (ecstasy)
5. fatigue
6. dreams
7. falling asleep

Three miniatures for Amorsima's celebration of Beethoven's 250th birthday:

Dorothy Hindman (b. 1966) - ***Ulterior Motives*** (2020)

Andrew May (b. 1968) - ***Flutter, Swoop, and Wheel*** (2021)

Joseph Klein (b. 1962) - ***Verklärte Einblicke*** (2020)

Stefan Wolpe (1902 - 1972) - ***Musik zu Hamlet*** (1929)

— *intermission* —

Morton Feldman (1926 - 1987) - ***The King of Denmark*** (1964)

John Cage (1912 - 1992) - from ***Six Short Inventions*** (1934 / 1958)

2. mm. 88
3. mm. 58
6. mm. 116

Erik Ulman (b. 1969) - ***The Golden Fleece*** (2023 - world premiere)

Mike Capone, viola

Kathleen Crabtree, violin

Mia Detwiler, violin

Jeff Lankov, piano

Andrew May, conductor (Sounds Modern assistant director)

Elizabeth McNutt, flutes (Sounds Modern director)

Kourtney Newton, cello

Alex Ravitz, clarinet

Christopher Teal, percussion

Impure Music

Robert Motherwell greatly appreciated music, and had close friendships with composers including John Cage and Arthur Krieger. Motherwell, Cage, Stefan Wolpe, Morton Feldman and others met regularly at The Club in New York City, and later worked together at Black Mountain College. Motherwell wrote:

Music and painting are structures, that is, relations among elements. It is structure that provides meaning, whether it is in music or painting or poetry. In this sense, the arts are analogous.

Music is for me a positive and direct reaffirmation of the human spirit, that it exists indestructible and real, despite the horrors of history, of historical institutions, whether clumsy or malign. Words denote things and pictures present images; music is not burdened by such external references: instead, hurt by them.

Music is the human soul without excess baggage.

“Pure music,” also called “absolute music,” is (supposedly) devoid of outside influences. Motherwell’s challenge that music is hurt by external references was too good to resist: all of the works on today’s program are, in one way or another, *Impure Music*.

We are delighted to welcome composer-in-residence **Erik Ulman**, whose new work *The Golden Fleece* will be premiered today (see program note below). Ulman is an Advanced Lecturer in Music at Stanford University. He studied composition at UCSD with Brian Ferneyhough, and with Helmut Lachenmann at the Stuttgart Musikhochschule; he has taught at UCSD and at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Among his distinctions are a commission from the Fromm Foundation at Harvard, a Hewlett Fellowship at the Djerassi Program, and a portrait concert at the Museo Jumex in Mexico City in conjunction with its Cy Twombly retrospective (over several years of friendship with Twombly, who was a student of Robert Motherwell, Ulman has composed a number of works inspired by Twombly’s paintings); and he was the featured composer in the 2016-17 wasteLAND concert series in Los Angeles. Ulman is also an experienced violinist, notably as a member of the sfSoundGroup, and co-organizer of fourteen interdisciplinary Poto Festivals (potoweb.org), a forum for artists in diverse media.

Program Notes

The ancient but universal human myth of *Pan* is depicted in **Dieter Schnebel**’s composition: the myth of the early god or – rather – the early fertility demon whose Ancient Greek name also simply means “everything.” The psychological sequence in seven parts, ranging from awakening to going (back) to sleep, treads the general path of the ancient myth of Pan and is symbolic of the course of human life both in general and in each individual existence. The underlying principle of construction is the greatest possible abundance of intervallic relationships so that the music becomes more ‘modal,’ ‘whole-tone,’ or ‘atonal’ in manner, according to which extract has been selected, and its corresponding psychological function. This produces a variety of melodic contexts ranging from almost mediaeval Gregorian style, right down to the context of contemporary music. - Dieter Schnebel, transl. Lindsay Chamers-Gerbracht / Andrew May

The **Amorsima Trio** (Mia Detwiler, Mike Capone, Kourtney Newton) commissioned several composers to write miniatures inspired by music of Ludwig Van Beethoven, planning to celebrate his 250th birthday with a 2020 premiere of the program. The pandemic altered plans somewhat, but the trio premiered all the commissioned works in 2021.

I have always been intrigued and mystified by the oboe solo just before the recapitulation in the first movement of Beethoven’s *Symphony #5 "Schicksals-Sinfonie"* (Fate Symphony). Here, in the middle of the most famous example of brilliant, rigorous motivic development, is music that doesn’t belong. This outsider material, this brief,

plaintive solo interjection, has always lingered in my imagination and memory, ineffable and somehow romantically epic, suggestive of Beethoven's innermost secrets. In *Ulterior Motives*, I stretched this moment into a version that tries to capture these impressions. The result is still mysterious but no longer solitary or reedlike. It has become a new, rich tapestry of a retransition that will remain brief and unresolved, trailing off into the ether rather than ending. When the work was nearly complete, I researched the word "Amorsima," the name of the trio that commissioned the work in 2020. In an uncanny synchronicity, I discovered that Amorsima was defined by Iannis Xenakis in the notes to his work *Morsima-Amorsima* as "that which does not come from Fate." – **Dorothy Hindman**

Flutter, Swoop, and Wheel is a phantasy upon the first 20 bars (first theme and transition) of Beethoven's String Trio in c minor, Op. 9 No. 3. The focus is shifted from meter, harmony, and rhythm to timbre, density and dynamics, which entailed the sort of kaleidoscopic blurring I associate with the music of Ligeti (who also loved Beethoven). The score extends traditional notation somewhat, with the aim of giving the ensemble great freedom to shape the piece. – **Andrew May**

The concept behind *Verklärte Einblicke* (Transfigured Glimpses) was inspired by a note that artist Jasper Johns (b. 1930) scrawled in one of his sketchbooks, which subsequently became a maxim invoked by contemporary artists, critics, and art historians: *Take an Object. Do something to it. Do something else to it. [Repeat.]* The "object" in this case is Beethoven's String Trio, Op. 9 No. 3 — specifically, 11 fragments from this work, which are recast through a variety of transformational processes. These modified fragments are presented as a series of brief episodes, each framed by silence—evoking, in a somewhat exaggerated manner, Beethoven's notable use of the Grand Pause in many of his own works. – **Joseph Klein**

The short trio *Musik zu Hamlet* was composed for a Berlin production of Shakespeare's play, before **Stefan Wolpe** fled Nazi Germany (first to Vienna, then Jerusalem, and finally New York City). This early work displays many of Wolpe's signatures: counterpoint, chromaticism/atonality/serialism, and especially complex expressive beaming of rhythms. – Elizabeth McNutt

Percussionist Steven Schick has written that "in many ways, *The King of Denmark* is an anti-percussion piece. It is to be played very softly using only the hand and fingers - no sticks or mallets. Its notation on a graph indicates how many sounds are to be played per beat and whether they are to be in high, medium, or low registers. Even though a tempo runs throughout, no rhythmic coherence emerges. Sounds simply float out, detached and weightless. ... [reflecting] **Morton Feldman's** love of the pulsating but rhythmically directionless canvases of Mark Rothko and other American Abstract Expressionists." The title (unlike Wolpe's) does not invoke Shakespeare's play, but rather the story of King Christian X of Denmark and non-Jewish Danes wearing armbands with yellow stars in solidarity with Jewish citizens forced to wear them during the Nazi occupation. The story is apocryphal, but the heroic efforts of the Danish government to thwart Nazi policy and protect Jewish citizens were real. – Andrew May

Like many of his friend Robert Motherwell's paintings, **John Cage's** *Six Short Inventions* are reworkings of earlier versions: he wrote the set in 1958, revising and combining material from his *Solo with Obligato Accompaniment of Two Voices in Canon*, and *Six Short Inventions on the Subjects of the Solo* (1934). These highly chromatic miniatures use strict imitation, but maintain distance between repetitions of material; none of the twenty-five pitches used is repeated until all have been played. This resembles the principle of Arnold Schoenberg's 12-tone serial technique, and Henry Cowell, who was Cage's teacher when he wrote these works, recommended Cage study with Schoenberg. Cage excelled in Schoenberg's classes in theory, counterpoint, and compositional techniques, though his mature works took a decidedly different direction. – Andrew May

Erik Ulman took inspiration for *The Golden Fleece* from Robert Motherwell's painting of the same title, and dedicated the work to flutist Elizabeth McNutt. In this work, gestures unfold irregularly from the downbeats of each bar, as if strokes of the painter's brush - at first brief and tentative, gradually twining together into more extended musical discourse. Even the "white space" of stillness around these gestures is eventually brought to life (especially by the stringed instruments), much as apparently static regions of color on the canvas, viewed more closely, reveal subtly shifting impurities of color and marks of the tools that made them. – Andrew May

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 Nova Ensemble, the University of North Texas College of Music, and John Nuckels for contributing to this performance. Thanks also to Tina Gorski and John Nuckels for collaborating with us since 2007 to bring new sounds to the Modern. Our next concert is tentatively scheduled for January 20, 2024 (be sure and check themodern.org). Keep up with the latest Sounds Modern news at www.soundsmodern.org, www.facebook.com/SoundsModern, and Instagram [@soundsmodern](https://www.instagram.com/soundsmodern).