

Other Minds® *presents*
in cooperation with the
Center for Contemporary Music,
Northeastern University
and **Mills Performing Arts**

FORWARD



← PAST FORWARD →

An Outréduction Charles Amirkhanian

➔ Welcome to the Jeannik Mēquet Littlefield Concert Hall, fully renovated on the occasion of its 80th anniversary in 2009. The frescoes were painted by Ronald Boynton—mythological scenes on the sides walls and, in front, a depiction of the California Mother Lode. You might not find gold nuggets under your seats, but tonight you have reached the end of a musical rainbow.

Other Minds, in cooperation with Mills Music Now, inaugurates a new series of piano concerts in this elegant space with two contrasting programs that revive rarely-performed classics of the recent keyboard repertoire. And yes, we've adopted a curious name for our project: PastForward.

The name says we'll be looking back at the recent past hoping to further the appreciation, going forward, of the evolving breadth and depth of the repertoire of this centuries-old musical contraption—the pianoforte. But what's a name, these days, without a double entendre?

Those with long memories will recall the experimental English composer Paul Wilson, better-known as "Fast Forward," once was a central figure at Mills during his work here with composer Robert Ashley in the late Seventies. So please allow us a soupçon of tongue-in-cheekiness as we join Mills Music Now in keeping alive the flame of contemporary music on this hallowed ground—home base for many years to composer John Cage (1930s), composer Darius Milhaud (1940s–60s), his student Dave Brubeck (1940s), and a seemingly endless roster of distinguished innovators who have urged us forward into the present. We value this partnership with Northeastern University in nodding to that legacy as our own kind of "land acknowledgement" in keeping with a recent fashion (now probably headed toward outlaw status).

Our first event, programmed by Los Angeles pianist Gloria Cheng and Amsterdam-based Ralph van Raat, celebrates the legacy of French composer Pierre Boulez (1925–2016) on the day of his centenary. Notoriously thorny in the intricacy of his compositional procedures, Boulez' music presents challenges that perhaps keep it from being performed more frequently. Combining excerpts from his famous work for two pianos, *Structures*, with music of John Cage and Morton Feldman, Magnus Lindberg and Frank Zappa, makes for an arresting evening. The final reward for listeners will be the elegant *Sonata for Two Pianos* by Igor Stravinsky. Although the composer was fond of playing this with friends in private, he did give one public performance of the piece. Interestingly, it was with Nadia Boulanger in this very concert hall. This work

has long been a particular favorite of mine and one with significance for the forthcoming second concert in this series.

Pianist Geoffrey Burleson of New York, who has recorded the complete piano works of Camille Saint-Saëns, Roy Harris, and all the piano sonatas of Vincent Persichetti, has generously collaborated with me on a selection of largely mid-century American music, with an emphasis on neoclassical works influenced by the middle period of Stravinsky's music exemplified by the aforementioned Sonata. These pieces evince such satisfaction that I'm mystified by how abruptly they've been abandoned by concert pianists. Rarely heard are the stirring *Music for Piano* of Irving Fine, Sonata No. 3 by Norman Dello Joio, and *Four Excursions* by Samuel Barber. Though I hadn't known Persichetti's intriguing "Mirror Sonata" before hearing Burleson's excellent rendering on CD, I have for years wanted to program Gerald Strang's dissonant counterpoint etude "Mirrororrorm," published in 1932 in Henry Cowell's *New Music Edition*, and this occasion presented the perfect path to pairing pianistic palindromes.

The piano has been a talisman of American life since our pioneer days, when log cabins often had pianos but no bathtubs or indoor plumbing. In his encyclopedic book *Men, Women & Pianos: A Social History* (1954), Arthur Loesser surveys the history of the piano from the days of the virginal and clavichord to the latest concert grand. Across its 650 pages, he gathers previously-untold stories of the instrument arranged into chapters on Germany, Austria, England, France, and the USA, amassing 30 pages of indexed names and subjects and 11 pages of bibliographical listings of sources.

One learns that the keyboard once was played with only four of the fingers on each hand—the thumb being considered unnecessary until composers thought of employing the octave; that it was not until about 1820 that iron and metals, previously thought to be too militaristic, were incorporated into the skeletons of pianos to stabilize the tuning of strings; and that the growing narrowness of Paris apartments at about the same time forced the Erard Company to invent smaller instruments called uprights.

I mention this fascinating book also because of its intriguing writing style. Written by the erudite chair of the piano department at the Cleveland Institute of Music, so fluent in Japanese that he was called upon in the mid-1940s to decode wartime documents, its style is witty and entertaining—at times even acerbic. So, if pianos are a significant point of reference for you in music, I have no doubt that you'll be amused by Arthur Loesser's elephantine compendium of keyboard capers.

Thank you for attending this concert and supporting our artists who have worked so hard to give you an experience fit for an Other Mind.

And please mark your calendar now for our third presentation on September 7, 2025, as Sarah Cahill and Joseph Kubera present a recital here of music by former Mills faculty members and lifelong collaborators Robert Ashley and "Blue" Gene Tyranny.

→ PIERRE BOULEZ AT 100

Gloria Cheng and Ralph van Raat, pianos

Wednesday, March 26, 2025, 7:00 pm
Littlefield Concert Hall, Mills College
at Northeastern University
Richards Rd, Oakland, CA 94613



Vern Evans



Heather Pinkham

P R O G R A M

Pierre Boulez (1925–2016)

Structures Livre 1, 1a (1952)

John Cage (1912–1992)

Music for Piano 4, 12, 19 (1953)

Experiences No. 1 (1945)

Gloria Cheng and Ralph van Raat, pianos

Pierre Boulez

Scherzo (1945)

Ralph van Raat, piano

Morton Feldman (1926–1987)

Two Pianos (1957)

Magnus Lindberg (b. 1958)

Play I (1979)

Gloria Cheng and Ralph van Raat, pianos

Intermission

Pierre Boulez

Structures Livre 2, Chapitre 2 (1961)

Gloria Cheng and Ralph van Raat, pianos

Pierre Boulez

Courtes dérives à partir d'Éclat (1996)

Gloria Cheng, piano

Frank Zappa (1940–1993)

Ruth Is Sleeping (1992)

Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971)

Sonata for Two Pianos (1943–44)

Moderato

Theme with Variations

Allegretto

Gloria Cheng and Ralph van Raat, pianos

Program Notes

Born in Montbrison, Loire, France on March 26, 1925, **Pierre Boulez** was a composer, conductor, thinker, a motor of international musical life, an emblematic figure in post-war European, indeed, world culture.

He was a living classic. Ever since the 1950s, composers around the world followed with curiosity what he was writing, to see if they could adapt his ideas in their own music or to reject them in their search for an idiom they could call their own. In 1957, György Kurtág arrived in Paris with the goal to compose something he could show to Boulez (in the end, he left without a work worthy of being presented). The music the French composer has written ever since the late 1940s was a conscious act of rebellion against tradition as represented by Schönberg or Stravinsky but also his teacher, Messiaen, whose influence has nevertheless left its mark on Boulez' music.

In his compositions but also in his writings, Boulez was initially an angry and rebellious young man (see his scathing obituary *Schönberg est mort*). With the passage of time as he became an established figure, with France inviting him back to found IRCAM and the Ensemble intercontemporain and his career as a conductor also taking off, there has probably been less to rebel against and Boulez has mellowed and broadened his horizons to conduct a wide range of repertoire including Bruckner and Mahler.

Boulez also was a highly influential teacher. In Lucerne, he passed on his immense knowledge to fledgling conductors at the Festival Academy.

Pierre Boulez died on January 5, 2016, in Baden-Baden, Germany.

Structures Livre 1 was, in part, inspired by the French writer Antonin Artaud. Dissatisfied with the restrictive rational thought of the West, he was not content with simply describing a feeling—he wanted to communicate the feeling itself. During his involvement with the Surrealist movement, Artaud tried to renew the power of language by applying the technique of 'automatism,' breaking with conventional forms and ignoring the rules of grammar and aesthetics. Turning to the theater, where his poetry could be given an extra-verbal dimension, he proposed a 'Theatre of Cruelty' involving a complete experience, possibly resulting in death, possibly rebirth.

In 1951–52, **Boulez** began *Structures Livre 1*, composing the first piece very rapidly in a single night, "because I wanted to use the potential of a given material to find out how far automatism in musical relationships would go, with individual invention appearing only in some really very simple forms of disposition—in the matter of densities for example." The result truly is a theater of cruelty for performers. There are extremes of every sort: dynamics from *ffff* to *pppp*; extremes of rhythmic complexity; and extremes of textures, from the single note melodic line to almost indecipherable note

complexes; and wild rhythms..."I think that music should be collective hysteria and enchantment, violently modern—following the direction of Artaud."

The music of **Structures Livre 2** (1956–61) was inspired by literary influences from Joyce and Mallarmé. The music is improvisatory in style. Passages are often marked *libre* and are subject to constant fluctuations of tempo, while pauses and *appoggiaturas* serve to obscure the sense of meter. There is a clear contrast between the first and second chapters of *Livre 2*: in the first chapter, the style sounds improvisatory although everything is notated; in the second chapter, performer decisions are called for.

Notes on *Structures* with thanks to author Peter F. Stacey, *Boulez and the Modern Concept*, U. of Nebraska Press, 1987.

John Cage's Music for Piano 4–19 and Experiences No. 1

were both composed for dance works choreographed by Merce Cunningham. The 16-part score of *Music for Piano 4–19*, which may be performed separately or continuously as one piece, was created using chance operations. The notated pitches were determined by imperfections found on the paper on which the piece was written. *Experiences No. 1* was written at Black Mountain College in North Carolina in 1945. Form and material in the piece are simple and show the influence of French composer Erik Satie.

Pierre Boulez' Scherzo is the third movement from his student composition *Prélude, Toccata et Scherzo* which was composed between 1944–1945. At this time, Boulez was studying harmony with Olivier Messiaen and counterpoint with Andrée Vaurabourg, the wife of composer Arthur Honegger, in Paris. In this piece, one can hear Boulez' shift from a late romantic style into a free atonality of his own devising—though it would not be until one year later that he would begin exploring 12-tone or serial techniques.

Morton Feldman's 1957 piece **Two Pianos** follows a compositional procedure Feldman began experimenting with earlier that year in his *Piece for Four Pianos*. The score, which consists of one part for both pianists, indicates pitches but not rhythms. Both pianists move through the same music at the same time, but at their own paces. The result is a shimmering series of chords with unexpected correspondences, echoes, and anticipations. *Two Pianos* was premiered by John Cage and David Tudor on December 15, 1957.

Magnus Lindberg is a Finnish composer known especially for his orchestral works. Born in Helsinki in 1958, he studied at the Sibelius Academy with the composers Einojuhani Rautavaara and Paavo Heininen. He went on to co-found the Toimii Ensemble in 1982, which proved to be a fruitful avenue for compositional experimentation throughout the 1980s and 90s. Lindberg, himself a pianist, has composed many works for the piano, including **Play I** in 1979.

In May of 1984, **Pierre Boulez** began an ongoing association with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, marking his first return to the U.S. since ending his music directorship (1971–77) of the New York Philharmonic. I had become a frequent second keyboard “extra” with the LA Philharmonic during those years, playing alongside Zita Carno, the orchestra’s then-Principal Keyboard. Over the course of twenty years, I worked with Mr. Boulez each time he came to conduct the LA Phil, both in L.A. and at the Ojai Festival. Last-minute changes in programming seemed to greatly impact me in particular, specifically in 1984, 1992, 1996, and 2003, each episode requiring me to learn many new notes in very few days. Despite the anxiety that accompanied these challenges, my memories of these experiences are among my most cherished. It was after navigating the third such shakeup in 1996 that Mr. Boulez, upon learning that I was soon to be married, returned to Paris and sent ***courtes dérivés à partir d’Éclat*** via fax a few weeks later. It is an open-form piece with just a few gestures on each page, recurrent reharmonizations of the pitch A-flat, and 7 mid-range pitches held by the sostenuto pedal throughout. Aside from the *citation initiale* and *citation finale*, the pages can be rearranged with every performance. —Gloria Cheng

Frank Zappa's *Ruth Is Sleeping* was first performed by Jeffery Burns in Berlin in 1992, although the pianist notes that Zappa had written the piece many years earlier but not been able to find a performer. It exists in many forms: solo piano, piano duo, Synclavier, and an orchestral arrangement which can be heard on *The Yellow Shark*, the last album produced during the composer’s lifetime. The title is a reference to percussionist and Mothers of Invention bandmate Ruth Underwood’s habit of taking naps under her marimba during breaks. About the work, Jeffery Burns writes, “I also found that Zappa, by not indicating any dynamics or tempo changes, stimulated the performer to improvise the interpretation, as it were, evoking sometimes dreamy, sometimes tempestuous moments of Ruth’s sleep.”

Igor Stravinsky's *Sonata for Two Pianos* was premiered on August 2, 1944, by Nadia Boulanger and Richard Johnston at Edgewood College of the Dominican Sisters in Madison, Wisconsin. Written during his neoclassical period when the Russian-born composer was living in the United States, the three movements of the Sonata for Two Pianos are tuneful and refer to archaic formal structures such as sonata form and theme and variations.

ARTIST BIOS

Over a distinguished and varied career, GRAMMY- and Emmy Award-winning pianist **Gloria Cheng** has been described by the *New York Times* as “an invaluable new-music advocate and a preferred collaborator of composers like Pierre Boulez and Esa-Pekka Salonen.” She has been a concerto soloist with the Los Angeles Philharmonic under Zubin Mehta and Pierre Boulez, and on its acclaimed Green Umbrella series with Salonen and Oliver Knussen. As a recitalist she has appeared at the Ojai Music Festival (where her long association with Boulez began), Chicago Humanities Festival, William Kapell Festival, Tanglewood Festival of Contemporary Music, and Mendocino and Chautauqua Music Festivals. Her countless premieres and dedications include John Williams’ *Prelude and Scherzo for Piano and Orchestra* (dedicated to her and pianist Lang Lang), Esa-Pekka Salonen’s *Dichotomie*, and Pierre Boulez’ *courtes dérivés à partir d’Éclat*. She commissioned the two-piano arrangement of *Concert Paraphrase on Powder Her Face* from Thomas Adès and premiered it with the composer on the Piano Spheres series. Winner of the Best Instrumental Soloist Performance (without orchestra) GRAMMY for her 2008 recording, *Piano Music of Salonen, Stucky, and Lutoslawski*, she received a second nomination for her 2013 disc, *The Edge of Light: Messiaen/Saariaho*. Her film-composer documentary, *MONTAGE: Great Film Composers and the Piano*, aired on PBS SoCal and captured a 2018 Los Angeles Area Emmy. Based in Los Angeles, her education includes a B.A. in Economics from Stanford University, a Woolley Scholarship for study in Paris, and graduate degrees in performance from UCLA and the University of Southern California, where her teachers included Aube Tzerko and John Perry. Her much sought-after classes and programs at the UCLA Herb Alpert School of Music bring students together with noted performers, composers, and scholars.



Leften's

Pianist and musicologist **Ralph van Raat** (b. 1978) appears as a recitalist in Europe, the Middle East, Asia, Australia, and the United States. Augmenting traditional repertoire, he takes special interest in the performance of contemporary classical music. He has worked closely with many composers on the interpretation of their piano works, with John Adams, Louis Andriessen, Tan Dun, György Kurtág, Magnus Lindberg, Arvo Pärt, Frederic Rzewski, and Sir John Tavener. Many composers have dedicated their piano compositions to van Raat. Ralph van Raat performs regularly as a soloist with orchestras including London Sinfonietta, the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the Shanghai Philharmonic, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Guangzhou Symphony Orchestra and the Dortmunder Philharmoniker. He has worked closely with conductors including Tan Dun, Valery Gergiev, JoAnn Falletta, David Robertson, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Susanna Mälkki, Stefan Asbury, and John Adams. He has performed as a soloist at important festivals including the Gergiev Festival, the BBC Proms, the Festival International de Musique de Besançon, Holland Festival, the Time of Music festival in Viitasaari, Finland, Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival in the UK, the Berliner Festspiele, the Hong Kong Festival of the Arts and Tanglewood Summer Festival in the United States. He has been given his own concert series at both the Concertgebouw and Muziekgebouw of Amsterdam, and Rotterdam's De Doelen. Ralph van Raat graduated with honors from both the Conservatory and the University of Amsterdam (musicology). He teaches contemporary piano interpretation at the Conservatory of Amsterdam and the Accademia di Musica Pinerolo (Turin). He also regularly gives masterclasses and lectures at several European conservatories and for many foundations and universities. Van Raat is a Jury member of the Orléans Concours International.



Heather Pinkham

UPCOMING OTHER MINDS EVENTS

Sunday, September 7, 2025

**Music of “Blue” Gene Tyranny
and Robert Ashley**

Sarah Cahill and Joseph Kubera, pianos
Littlefield Concert Hall, Mills College at
Northeastern University, Oakland

October 16–19, 2025

Other Minds Festival 29

With music from Pamela Z, Samuel Adams,
Kristine Tjøgersen, Putu Septa, Hamid Drake,
Ingram Marshall, and James Tenney
Brava Theater, San Francisco
Tickets on sale June 1, 2025



→ FROM ANTHEIL TO ZAPPA

Geoffrey Burleson, piano

Saturday, April 5, 2025, 7:30 pm
Littlefield Concert Hall, Mills College
at Northeastern University
Richards Rd, Oakland, CA 94613



Jazmin Filion

P R O G R A M

George Antheil (1900–1959)

Piano Sonata No. 2, “The Airplane” (1921)
Lent—To be played as fast as possible
Andante moderato

Samuel Barber (1910–1981)

Four Excursions, Op. 20 (1944)
Un poco allegro
In slow blues tempo
Allegretto (variations)
Allegro molto

Norman Dello Joio (1913–2008)

Piano Sonata No. 3 (1947–48)
Theme and Five Variations
Presto e leggiero
Adagio
Allegro vivo e ritmico

Herbert Horatio “Herbie” Nichols (1919–1963), arr. Burleson

The Gig (1955, arr. 1998)

Intermission

Irving Fine (1914–1962)

Music for Piano (1947)
Prelude
Waltz-Gavotte
Variations
Interlude-Finale

Vincent Persichetti (1915–1987)

Piano Sonata No. 12, “Mirror Sonata” (1982)
Sostenuto-Risoluto
Amabile
Scherzoso
Brioso

Mary Kouyoumdjian (b. 1983)

Aghavni [Doves] (2009)
1910
1915
1986

Gerald Strang (1908–1983)

“Mirrorrorrim,” palindrome for piano (1931)

Frank Zappa (1940–1993), arr. Burleson

Be Bop Tango (1973, arr. 1995)

Geoffrey Burleson, piano

Program Notes

By Geoffrey Burleson

According to **George Antheil** (1900–1959), the *Airplane Sonata's* title is not a direct reference to the work's mechanistic motorhythms, glissandi, or sense of floating evoked by the second movement, but rather deals with the frustration the young composer was feeling with musical life in America just after World War I, "...as a symbol, the airplane seemed most indicative of that future into which I wanted to escape." Within a year, he was touring Europe as a concert pianist and composer, rapidly becoming one of the most infamous *enfant terribles* on the scene. This certainly had as much to do with his personal eccentricities as his music, which was rife with tone clusters, additive rhythms, and unpredictable juxtapositions of tonal material with jarring dissonances. At his European debut at Wigmore Hall in 1922, an elderly lady seated in the first row began to violently shake her ear trumpet, imagining it to be defective, when Antheil began to play his and Schoenberg's music. This was just the beginning of adverse audience reaction; soon, Antheil was touring with a small thirty-two automatic pistol, which he wore in a holster wherever he performed.

His early compositions were not merely novelties, laden with effects for shock value. There is a great deal beneath the surface; a sense of disorientation and inquietude that is also directed inward, as well as the dadaist anarchy and exuberance that marks much of the immediate sense evoked by the music. The compositions progress in intriguing, unpredictable, and finally inevitable ways. Those who themselves were intrigued by Antheil in his early years included Copland, Stravinsky, Stokowski, James Joyce, and Ezra Pound, who even wrote a book about the composer. But his work often seemed to be overshadowed by his personal eccentricities. Eventually settling in Hollywood, he wrote film scores for a few years, but found that it interfered with the energy required for serious composition. He began then to write an "advice to the lovelorn" column for pure mercenary purposes. In his autobiography, *Bad Boy of Music*, he talks of writing endocrine criminology textbooks (one of which was published by Stackpole Books), and inventing a torpedo control device he designed with the actress Hedy Lamarr that was actually patented. Serious consideration of his music has resurfaced, and is beginning to flourish.

The *Airplane Sonata* is in two movements; the first juxtaposes sections built on dissonant stride jazz figures with more lyrical music. The second movement projects a sense of placid stillness with seemingly wandering bitonal melodies, isorhythms, and purely textural passages.

The opus number of **Samuel Barber's *Excursions***, Op. 20, somewhat belies its status as Barber's very first solo piano composition. With this work, Barber (1910–1981) was very much attempting to write an overtly "American" suite, with melodic,

rhythmic, and textural sources emanating from American folk music, blues, and jazz. Each of the four movements is relatively compact, and very distinctive. The first Excursion finds its inspiration in boogie-woogie, via the omnipresent ostinato in the bass that keeps capriciously jumping registers. The ostinato itself is very much unlike a typical boogie-woogie bass line, though, via its stark modality and lack of blues elements, sounding more like modal jazz figures that were ascendant 20 years later. Above, below, and around the line, strong rhythmic figures and scurrying phrases make for an infectious and driving movement. The second Excursion is more or less a traditional blues homage. The third movement is based on the folk tune "Streets of Laredo," cast in a continuous variation format of sorts, with much of the virtuosity stemming from an omnipresent and unsettling casting into elasticized divided rhythms, such as the 7 against 8 per measure with which the movement begins. The fourth movement evokes a hoedown, with repeated notes and other figurations representing fiddle, harmonica, and accordion players.

Vladimir Horowitz premiered Movements I, II, and IV of *Excursions* in 1944 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music and he continued to champion the work. Movement III was completed later that year; the entire set was finally premiered by Jeanne Behrend in 1948. Rudolf Firkušný also performed *Excursions* often in the 1940s and beyond.

Norman Dello Joio's Piano Sonata No. 3 (1947–48) is probably the most popular work within the composer's considerable output for solo piano. Although this is his final piano sonata, Dello Joio (1913–2008) continued to compose prolifically in other genres for another 55 years. In Sonata No. 3 we find distilled several important elements and influences emanating from the composer's background. He began his musical career as an organist, and it is perhaps those wellsprings that inform the opening theme and variations movement of this sonata, which he later expanded into a work for full orchestra entitled *Variations, Chaconne and Finale*. The theme itself derives from a Gregorian chant, and between this and the citation of the Chaconne in the subsequent reworking for orchestra, Dello Joio's love of medieval and Baroque music comes to the fore. In this sonata movement, we find the Chaconne itself in the final variation, occupying three staves. The second *Presto e leggero* movement is a lively and lithe scherzo, rife with syncopations and agile traversals of all keyboard registers. The slow third movement is weighty in emotional content and affect and includes several Baroque allusions, cast as it is in triple meter with an extended second beat, a motto rhythm in several famous Baroque Chaconnes. In the center of the movement, the writing on three staves reminiscent of the final variation of the first movement returns. The boisterous *Allegro vivo e ritmico* finale is very effective, full of jazzy syncopations, with tonal, modal, and bitonal elements. It has the effect of being a much more resonant version of the second movement. To this end, Dello Joio relates the first and third movements, as previously noted, and the second and fourth movements as well, beautifully unifying the work.

Herbie Nichols (1919–1963) is an archetype of the jazz figure who was almost surreally obscure even at the apex of his career, eventually “rediscovered” sometime after his death and eventually achieving a place of high reverence by the jazz world. His artistry as both composer and pianist, as well as his astounding originality and iconoclastic creations, were often imbued with a quirkiness and compelling eccentricity akin to Thelonious Monk, but wholly different and original at the same time. Amidst all of this, Nichols also composed some very accessible works in addition to more challenging fare, including one certifiable hit, the standard “Lady Sings the Blues.” In his relatively short life, he only recorded four albums as a leader, the first three on the venerated Blue Note label. My transcription of/improvising on **The Gig** is taken from his third Blue Note album, released in 1955. *The Gig* is mercurial, with unpredictable harmonic and textural shifts. It is essentially in a very compact rondo form (intro-A-B-A-C-A-D), an unusual format for the bebop era. Nichols died of leukemia at the young age of 44.

Like Herbie Nichols, **Irving Fine** (1914–1962) was a highly original talent who died tragically in his 40s. Fine was a very influential composer in the 1940s and 50s and was often perceived as the leader of the Boston Stravinsky School, which also included Leonard Bernstein, Lukas Foss, Arthur Berger, and Harold Shapero. All of these composers were particularly ensconced in the music of Stravinsky’s so-called middle period and its very distinctive, new-sounding, but still quite tonal harmonies, often rendered novel via spacing of individual notes as well as rhythmic verve and vitality. Along with Berger and Shapero, Fine taught at Brandeis University and built it into one of the most important music departments in the country. Infuriatingly, very recently the Brandeis administration indefinitely shuttered the music department’s graduate programs, allegedly as an essential budgetary measure, but at the additional cost of decimating an extremely important and historical institution of American music.

Fine’s **Music for Piano** is a four-movement suite that exemplifies the tenets of the Boston Stravinsky School and is dedicated to Nadia Boulanger, the French composition teacher and sage with whom the entire Boston Stravinsky School, as well as scores of other leading lights in American music studied. Like the Dello Joio Piano Sonata No. 3, it is neoclassical in orientation, but with its own striking musical personality. The opening Prelude kicks off with a modal fanfare motive that unifies this very rhythmically jaunty movement, full of unpredictable accents and varied, shifting articulations. The Waltz-Gavotte features the waltz itself in its outer sections, sandwiching the gavotte in the middle. The sweeping gestures of the waltz contrasts the compact elegance of the gavotte very effectively. The third movement comprises a theme and four variations. The lyrical theme features a rising third in a “snap” rhythm, with angularity compellingly undercutting its lyrical tendencies. One *Allegro* variation follows, and then two slow tempo

variations, in effect allowing the whole to serve the role of a slow movement and thwarting expectations that other fast variations will follow. The final movement begins with a brief, *sostenuto* interlude that quotes the first movement, followed by a propulsive finale alternating conjunct sections with phrases that include dramatic leaps and registral shifts.

It is difficult to overestimate the extent of **Vincent Persichetti’s** (1915–1987) influence on America’s musical landscape. As both composer and teacher, his effect is far-reaching, extending from public school ensembles to the most prominent soloists, orchestras, and concert halls. His composition students include such diverse musical figures as Thelonious Monk, Philip Glass, Steve Reich, Peter Schickele (a.k.a. P. D. Q. Bach), and Einojuhani Rautavaara. His extraordinary influence as an educator was garnered in part through four decades as a composition faculty member at the Juilliard School.

Persichetti was a prolific composer in many genres, but his twelve piano sonatas stand out among his most significant works. The piano was his instrument and he ensconced himself in the solo piano sonata genre throughout his compositional career. Persichetti’s twelve piano sonatas were written over a 43 year period. The first nine sonatas, written between 1939 and 1950, reflect various approaches to synthesizing a number of styles and idioms. Persichetti employs a wide stylistic palette within each of these works, embracing 12-tone writing, pandiatonicism, and polytonality. The success of these works was recognized by authoritative sources. Of the Fourth Sonata, Virgil Thomson wrote, “Persichetti delivers his music superbly, for he is a marvelous pianist, and the writing (in the 4th Sonata) is suited to the instrument better than almost anything written in America today.” The Tenth Sonata, written in 1955, is an expansive work that acts as a kind of culmination of the sonatas’ scope thus far, while also introducing some new orchestrational and formal elements. Sonata No. 11, written ten years later, is an ingenious piece written in a biting atonal idiom, the materials of which develop incisively through various episodes, all the while exploring dynamic possibilities of instrumental color.

In his final **Twelfth Piano Sonata** (1982), subtitled “Mirror,” Persichetti provides us with a culmination of his mirror technique. Although appearing fitfully in earlier sonatas, the Twelfth Sonata’s composition was preceded by a set of *Mirror Etudes*, wherein quite methodically, every note and sonority in one hand is simultaneously reflected intervallically by the other hand. Thus, a kind of constant, mirror-image symmetry is projected throughout the piece. With his final piano sonata, Persichetti finally applies the technique to the formal genre that he seemed to embrace most fully. The piece consists of four compact, contrasting movements. The first movement opens with lyrically arching block harmonies and is followed by a toccata-like *Risolto*. The second movement, *Amabile*, is very affecting, with a good deal of pandiatonic writing contrasted by a central chromatic section. The fleeting *Scherzoso*, like the second movement, is in ABA form, but in symmetrical contrast to the

second movement, the outer sections are quite chromatic and the middle section is tonal. The climactic Briso is highly propulsive and contains in its rondo form elements of all three previous movements.

Based on of the poem “Carpet Weavers” by Brenda Najimian Magarity, **Mary Kouyoumdjian’s *Aghavni*** [Doves] follows the lives of a group of women before and during the Armenian Genocide, closing with a retrospective look at those women and what they lost from a present day perspective. The first movement, 1910, features rhapsodic folk material in a quasi-improvisational, theme-and-variations format. II. 1915 begins with a *cri de cœur* produced via an alternately bitonal and acrid modal folk melody, played *fortissimo* in the extreme registers of the piano. This then settles into more ruminative, quasi-impressionistic material. Finally, III. 1986 serves as a kind of gentle peroration, with the melodic material from the first movement recalled as a kind of distant, faintly nostalgic yet defiant memory.

Kouyoumdjian is a composer and documentarian with projects ranging from concert works to multimedia collaborations and film scores. As a first generation Armenian-American and having come from a family directly affected by the Lebanese Civil War and Armenian Genocide, her compositional work often integrates recorded testimonies with resilient individuals and field recordings of place to invite empathy by humanizing complex experiences around social and political conflict. A finalist of the 2024 Pulitzer Prize for Music, Kouyoumdjian has received commissions from such organizations as the Kronos Quartet, New York Philharmonic, Carnegie Hall, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alarm Will Sound, Beth Morrison Projects, and Bang on a Can. Kouyoumdjian is a cofounder of the annual New Music Gathering and on faculty at The New School.

Brenda Najimian Magarity Carpet Weavers

I

It is 1910,
and I hear
the voices
of young women
as they weave.

One says,
“Let us read
Sayat Nova
at midday.”

“I, too, am a poet,”
another says,
“but tell no one,
the Turks despise
Armenian poets.”

And they giggle
with hearts
that flutter
like those of doves
in spring
believing
life will go on
like this forever

working, weaving
casting the dye
into a
deeper, deeper
purple
that they weave
around a sunburst design.

II

In 1915
everything changed;

a nation’s people
were lined up
and marched to sea.

Hands,
that could write
rugs
in the language of color,
colors
derived from herb and root
and the earth itself,

hands, that could write rugs,
fell
limp
at their sides.

Most died crossing the desert,
bones bleached by the sun
left
sticking out of sand
pointing, pointing
to a God they had known.

One nation
jostled out of a sweet dream
and forced
to leave
their carpets sleeping,
one nation
caught in the Turk's jaw,
his iron teeth
clamped down
and opened
the grid of genocide.

And the breast of Armenia
ached
to suckle the children
who were gone.

III

It is present,
yet memory
makes the past
present too.

Somewhere
one
still collects
the wool
from the backs
of sheep,

and somewhere
one
still weaves
a double-headed eagle
that dreams of Eden's Garden
when it was new,

and somewhere
in a place
not unlike Mount Ararat
the nightingale
sings
of an angel
woven into an unfinished design.

An angel,
who patiently waits
for her weavers
who call themselves
Armenians.

Gerald Strang's "Mirrorrorrim" was suggested to me by Charles Amirkhanian as a companion piece to Persichetti's "Mirror" Sonata, employing, as it does, the exact same technique of intervallic mirroring between right and left hands, but in the case of "Mirrorrorrim," also being cast as a palindrome, so that the piece is exactly the same played forwards and backwards. It is a brief but striking number, most of it in a fast tempo and in a gigue-like rhythmic orientation, with one brief and more sustained contrasting section. "Mirrorrorrim" was written in 1932, predating Persichetti's *Mirror Etudes* and Sonata by decades, so although Persichetti allowed this technique to flourish through a body of work, Strang seems to have come by the idea a good deal earlier.

At the age of 14, **Frank Zappa** read an article in *Look* magazine that raved about the merchandising talents of record chain owner Sam Goody. The article boasted that Goody could sell anything, even an album comprising "nothing but drums—dissonant and terrible, and possibly the worst music in the world." The album featured Edgard Varèse's *Ionisation*, and Zappa's immediate reaction was to purchase the record at the Sam Goody outlet in La Mesa, CA. Zappa's variegated musical career thereafter would embrace the vanguard of European new music, modern jazz, and rock, the last influence informing his most notorious creations of satirical rock theater. Zappa's concert music has been performed and recorded by leading ensembles throughout Europe and the U.S., including the London Symphony Orchestra under Kent Nagano, Pierre Boulez and Ensemble intercontemporain, and Ensemble Modern. ***Be Bop Tango*** is what the name implies, a collision of two genres. After an introduction

in a tango rhythm, there is an A section with a melodic line that has the extreme angularity of a bebop solo, but with a great deal more dissonance. It is juxtaposed over an inexplicable tango ostinato and the whole is interrupted by satirically chaotic interludes that are emblematic of Zappa's style. *Be Bop Tango* was a mainstay of Zappa's touring bands and always served as a showcase for various improvisers in his groups. In keeping with that tradition, my version incorporates a good deal of improvisation.

Artist Bio

Equally active as a recitalist, concerto soloist, chamber musician, and jazz performer, **Geoffrey Burleson**, pianist, has performed to wide acclaim throughout Europe and North America. *The New York Times* has hailed Burleson's solo performances as "vibrant and compelling," praising his "rhythmic brio, projection of rhapsodic qualities, appropriate sense of spontaneity, and rich colorings." Current recording projects include *Camille Saint-Saëns: Complete Piano Works*, on 7 CDs, for the new Naxos Grand Piano label. The first 5 volumes have been released to high acclaim from *Gramophone*, *International Record Review*, *Diapason* (France), and elsewhere. Other noteworthy recordings include *Vincent Persichetti: Complete Piano Sonatas* (New World Records), which received a BBC Music Choice award from the *BBC Music Magazine*, and *AKOKA* (Oxingale Records), featuring Olivier Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time* as well as companion works, for which Burleson was nominated for a 2015 JUNO Award for Classical Album of the Year. Mr. Burleson's concerto appearances include the Buffalo Philharmonic, New England Philharmonic, Boston Musica Viva, and the Holland Symfonia in the Netherlands. He has also appeared as featured soloist at the Bard Music Festival, Mostly Modern Festival, Monadnock Music Festival, Santander Festival (Spain), and the Mänttä Music Festival (Finland). He is a core member of the American Modern Ensemble, Ensemble Ipse, IMPetus, and the David Sanford Big Band. Mr. Burleson teaches piano at Princeton University and is Professor of Music and Director of Piano Studies at Hunter College-City University of New York. He is also on the piano faculty of the CUNY Graduate Center. He resides in the picturesque and historic town of Roslyn, NY.



Daniel Potravio

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