

"This Is America"

Sunday, September 18th, 2022 at Cove Street Arts

Program Notes

J.S. Bach (1685-1750)

Cello Suite No. 3 in C Major, BWV 1009 (1717-1723)

Johann Sebastian Bach was a German composer and musician of the Baroque period, and is generally regarded as one of the greatest composers of the Western art musical canon. His solo cello suites are some of the most frequently performed and recognizable solo compositions ever written for cello. They have been transcribed for numerous other instruments (including Gandelman's own transcription for violin on tonight's program) and are considered some of Bach's greatest musical achievements. Gandelman's arrangements of these suites, inspired by the historical-performance cellist Anner Bylisma and Irish folk fiddler Martin Hayes, emphasize dance rhythms and embody a vital, improvisatory feel.

Tomeka Reid (b. 1977)

***Rhapsody* (2021)**

Described as a "New Jazz Power Source" by the New York Times, cellist and composer Tomeka Reid is one of the most original, versatile, and curious musicians in Chicago's bustling jazz and improvised music community.

Rhapsody opens with an emotionally reflective yet lyrical statement that returns in various forms throughout the composition. Initially, the statement seems to ask a question. It repeats itself higher yet, there is still no response. Continuing, the theme becomes a bit manic and anxious. Throughout, there is a sensation of "wheels spinning while stuck in place" and the piece ends with a sort of resolve that is neither sad nor without hope.

– Tomeka Reid

Rhapsody was jointly commissioned by the Portland Chamber Music Festival; Philadelphia Chamber Music Society; and Laura & David Freid in loving memory of Christopher Marrion.

Christina Courtin (b. 1984)
***Stroon* (2021)**

Christina Courtin is a New York-based singer, violinist, and songwriter who occupies the middle ground between contemporary folk, vocal jazz, and alternative pop/rock.

When I was given the task to write Stroon, the reflection period was a heavy one. I was on a journey to find a path that would somehow lead me to another. Needless to say, I hit many dead ends. For me the piece has landed in two worlds of mine, the lyrical and the searching. The flowing sixteenth notes are just a vehicle for the endless searching and questioning of what anything/everything means, not unlike so many other pieces of music out there today. The last year and a half have been absolutely devastating for so many reasons, and for me personally it made me very quiet. I did not write, I did not sing, I just read the news with an anxious mind. I was so grateful for the opportunity from the Vail Dance Festival because it forced me to get into music again, to try and reconnect with myself, and to try and put music to the madness that is still our reality.

– Christina Courtin

Stroon was generously commissioned by the Vail Dance Festival.

Tyshawn Sorey (b. 1980)
***For Courtney Bryan* (2021)**

Newark-born composer and multi-instrumentalist Tyshawn Sorey is celebrated for his mind-blowing virtuosity, effortless mastery and memorization of highly complex scores, and an extraordinary ability to blend composition and improvisation in his work.

For Courtney Bryan is the latest entry in what the New York Times has called “[Sorey’s] catalog of prismatic tributes to his musical contemporaries.” Born in 1982 in New Orleans, Bryan’s music explores human emotions through sound, confronting the challenge of notating the feeling of improvisation.

For Courtney Bryan was generously commissioned by the Vail Dance Festival.

Ebun Oguntola (b. 2006)
Reflections (2021)

Ebun Oguntola is a composer, conductor, violinist, and pianist from Syracuse, New York.

Reflections is a solo violin piece that reflects upon our emotions and reactions to the multi-faceted and chaotic introduction of the new decade in 2020 onward. The piece starts off with the music illustrating the vision of someone standing and staring out at vast rubble and debris. In the second section, the flashback begins. Fourths in the music shift to tritones, one of the most dissonant intervals, to show how our prior anticipation was woefully misled. In the third section, the climactic moment of chaos has declined just enough for us to slightly ease our hyperventilations, slow down, and reflect upon what happened. The fourth section is the recapitulation of the beginning to signal an end to this flashback. Although similar, slight subtleties allude to details previously overlooked, but brought back to our attention after deep reflection. There is no grounded resolution of the piece to show our story isn't necessarily finished yet. We are still being affected by these events, but we will take steps to resolve them.

– Ebun Oguntola

Reflections was generously commissioned by Chamber Music Pittsburgh.

Justin Messina (b. 1980)
Music For Solitude (2021)

Brooklyn-based composer Justin Messina works with both acoustic and electronic means to create works that explore the expressive nature of sound. These works range from large orchestral compositions to electronically created sound installations.

Is music conceived for aloneness different than that intended for public performance? This work was born out of the extended lockdowns and tumult of 2020 and 2021. Music in solitude became a form of therapy, bolstering me against the outside world. This freed me to consider a piece less from an audience's perspective and more from that of a person alone with their instrument. I hoped any eventual performance would seem an act of witnessing an artist in a personal moment and not a public declaration.

As the piece neared completion I began to realize it was strongly rooted in an earlier large-scale series I had been unable to complete to my satisfaction. In 2014, I embarked on a field recording project at the Channel Islands in Southern California, which is the site of one of the largest sea caves in the world. The unique acoustics and sounds of the cave contribute to a sacred atmosphere and, at the time, proved too daunting for my own music. Instead, I recorded a violist playing excerpts of Bach's cello suites in the cave. Music for Solitude is the piece I was unable to write then, and as such, completes the series. I'm indebted to my close friend Johnny Gandelsman for commissioning the work and allowing me to finish this journey.

– Justin Messina

Music For Solitude was generously commissioned by Linda Burrows.

Rhiannon Giddens (b. 1977)

***New To The Session* (2021)**

Rhiannon Giddens is widely recognized as an accomplished singer, banjoist, and fiddle player. Named Artistic Director of Silkroad in 2020, her lifelong mission is to lift up people whose contributions to American musical history have previously been erased, and to work toward a more accurate understanding of the country's musical origins.

*I began my fiddling journey as an apprentice to a dance musician—and pretty late in life, as violinists go—so my repertoire and style is rhythmic and melodically simple, and always with a dancer in mind. They say “write what you know,” so when this opportunity came to create a piece for Johnny Gandelsman, I was thrilled to see what came out of my strings and off my bow. It's called *New To The Session* because as a beginner fiddler I would sit in on Irish sessions sometimes and feel like I was in a whirlwind. No more than twice through each tune and it seemed like everybody knew everything but me; I wanted to capture a bit of that feel with the journey through the melodies.*

– Rhiannon Giddens

New To The Session was generously commissioned by the Vail Dance Festival.