

The Mills College Music Department and the
Center for Contemporary Music present

Mills Music Now 2014-2015

In Celebration of Robert Ashley

Jeannik Méquet Littlefield Concert Hall
November 1, 2014 8:00 pm

In Celebration of Robert Ashley

Soundtrack Selections Composed by ROBERT ASHLEY with “BLUE” GENE TYRANNY and COSTANZO from *SHOOT THE WHALE* (1971), a Film by Philip Makanna

in memoriam ... CRAZY HORSE (symphony) (1963) for twenty or more wind or string or other sustaining instruments

Fred Frith: conductor; Music Improvisation Ensemble II, and guests

She Was A Visitor (1966-1967) for speaker and chorus

Steed Cowart: speaker; Contemporary Performance Ensemble, with members of the Cornelius Cardew Choir and other guests

Intermission

Title Withdrawn (1976) excerpt, Music theater on video tape

Robert Ashley: voice, electronics, and Polymoog; Mimi Johnson: voice;
David Peterson and Donald Renzulli: signers; Philip Makanna: Director and Camera;
Jerry Pearsall: Video Recordist and Technical Director

String Quartet Describing the Motions of Large Real Bodies (1971-1972) for string quartet with electronics

Katharine Austin (Kathy Morton) and Wendy Reid: violins; Chris Brown: viola;
Maggi Payne: cello; John Bischoff and James Fei: electronics

The Wolfman (1964) for amplified voice, tape and electronics

Laetitia Sonami: voice; James Fei: electronics

Please turn off cell phones, electronic pagers, and alarm watches. No unauthorized recording or photography. Seating only during breaks in the performance. Please take a moment to look around for the nearest available emergency exit.

Pre-concert Events

Ensemble Room 5:00pm-8:00pm

Perfect Lives (1976-1983), an opera for television in seven episodes

Video by John Sanborn. Robert Ashley: solo voice; Jill Kroesen and David Van Tieghem: chorus; "Blue" Gene Tyranny: keyboards; David Van Tieghem: non-keyboard percussion; Peter Gordon: music producer; Paul Shorr: soundtrack producer; Dean Winkler: video synthesis and video tape editor; Mary Perillo: associate director/producer; Jacqueline Humbert: costumes; Mary Ashley: design collaborator; Carlota Schoolman: producer for The Kitchen

Room 271 (Classroom 1) 7:15pm-8:00pm

In Sara Mencken Christ and Beethoven There Were Men and Women (1972-1973) for tape, voice and electronics

by Robert Ashley and Paul DeMarinis; text by John Barton Wolgamot

Foyer 7:00pm-10:00pm

Slideshow: archive photographs of **That Morning Thing**: 1969 performance photography by Dennis Galloway; **Music with Roots in the Aether**: 1976 production photography by Patricia Kelley; **Perfect Lives**: 1981 performance photography and slideshow by Maggi Payne

Special thanks to Mimi Johnson, Paul DeMarinis, Patricia Kelley, Philip Makanna, Katharine Austin, and Patrice Scanlon

Robert Ashley (1930-2014), one of the leading American composers of the post-Cage generation, is particularly known for his work in new forms of opera. In the 1960s, during his tenure as its director, the ONCE Festival in Ann Arbor presented most of the decade's pioneers of the performing arts. With the legendary ONCE Group, he developed his first large-scale operas. Along with Alvin Lucier, Gordon Mumma, and David Behrman, he formed the Sonic Arts Union, a group that turned conceptualism toward electronics. Throughout the 1970s, he directed the Center for Contemporary Music at Mills College, and produced his first opera for television, the 14-hour *Music with Roots in the Aether*, based on the work and ideas of seven influential American composers. In the early 1980s the Kitchen commissioned Ashley's *Perfect Lives*, the opera for television that is widely considered the precursor of "music-television." Stage versions of *Perfect Lives*, as well as his following operas, *Atalanta (Acts of God)*, *Improvement (Don Leaves Linda)*, *Foreign Experiences*, *eL/Aficionado* and *Now Eleanor's Idea* toured throughout the US and Canada, Europe and Asia during the 1980s and 1990s. A new group of operas was begun in 1999 when Kanagawa Arts Foundation (Japan) commissioned *Dust*, which was quickly followed by *Celestial Excursions* and *The Old Man Lives in Concrete*. He wrote and recorded his performance-novel, *Quicksand* (released in novel form by Burning Books). And his final opera, *Crash*, was completed in December 2013 for premiere at the 2014 Whitney Biennial Exhibition.

Ashley's book *Outside of Time: Ideas About Music* (2009), was published by MusikTexte (available from Lovely Music) and Kyle Gann's biography of Ashley (2012) was published by the University of Illinois Press. Burning Books has published several of his librettos and a large part of his recorded work is available from Lovely Music.

www.robertashley.org

www.lovely.com

www.burningbooks.org

Soundtrack Selections Composed by ROBERT ASHLEY with “BLUE” GENE TYRANNY and COSTANZO from **SHOOT THE WHALE** (1971), a Film by Philip Makanna

Robert Ashley appeared at Mills College in 1969. We met immediately. Bob needed performers for *That Morning Thing* and, in desperation, he tagged me. Big mistake. He soon learned that I couldn't keep time and could barely count, but he had a sense of humor and he kept me on. Despite my abilities, we became close friends.

I began work on **SHOOT THE WHALE** later that year and Bob followed the film from its very beginnings. In 1970 I staggered in from Death Valley with 28 hours of raw footage. Bob and I screened all of it non-stop in my apartment with two projectors running side by side. It must have taken a full day. No one slept. I cut film for a year, then I asked Bob if he would compose a track. Bob said OK, but “good movie music is never heard ... it lurks behind the film, like a ghost.”

Bob and "Blue" Gene and Nick Bertoni had discovered a Chamberlin in a dark closet at Mills. The Chamberlin was a keyboard hooked to tape loops ... dogs barking, doors slamming, wind blowing. It had a sense of humor that matched Bob's. It became a key instrument in Bob's compositions for **SHOOT THE WHALE**.

Robert Ashley had a wonderful sense of humor that meshed gracefully with his sense of beauty. Humor and Beauty are the essence of the elusive compositions that he made for **SHOOT THE WHALE**.

—Philip Makanna (2014)

in memoriam ... CRAZY HORSE (symphony) (1963) for twenty or more wind or string or other sustaining instruments is scored for 20 (or more) wind, string or other sustaining instruments in five (or more) groups of four (or more) instruments per group. The score is notated in the form of a circle with 64 numbered radii. There is a juxtaposition throughout the piece of even and odd, regular and irregular, with the durations of sound and silence given in the notation—especially of different "states of ensemble [e.g., as noisy/dissonant as possible, as pure/harmonious as possible]" (Ashley). An orchestra of "organic groups" is created: "The purpose is, perhaps, not just a new 'freedom' for the individual performer" (a performer chooses the sounds he/she makes) "but a contemporary 'freedom-obligation' that can bring the performer back into the orchestra with a more imaginative role;" the sound is contributed to the overall ensemble sound-density of that performer's particular instrumental group. The resultant massed orchestral sound is one of a constantly fascinating field of extremes of sound in motion.

in memoriam ... CRAZY HORSE (symphony) is one of four pieces written at this same time which describes in musical dynamics both societal and musical forms.

—“Blue” Gene Tyranny,
AllMusic.com

She Was A Visitor (1966-1967) for speaker and chorus, from *That Morning Thing*, is intended to be understood as a form of rumor. The chorus is divided into groups, each headed by a leader. A lone speaker repeats the title sentence throughout the entire performance. The separate phonemes of this sentence are picked up freely by the group leaders and are relayed to the group members, who sustain them softly and for the duration of one natural breath. The time lag between the group leaders' phoneme choices and those phonemes being picked up by members of the group produces a staggered, chant-like effect, with the sounds moving outward from the nearest performer to the farthest.

—Robert Ashley

Title Withdrawn (1976) is an opera for television that was composed in recorded form over a period of five years. *Automatic Writing*, which comprises the audio portion of *Title Withdrawn*, is the result of Robert Ashley's fascination with involuntary speech. He recorded and analyzed the repeated lines of his own mantra and extracted four musical characters. The result is quiet, mysterious, melancholy and an early form of ambient music.

—Lovely Music, Ltd.

The video is of David Peterson and Donald Renzulli from the California School of the Deaf signing the involuntary speech heard in *Automatic Writing* while being guided by David Behrman pointing to the words written on cue cards.

String Quartet Describing the Motions of Large Real Bodies (1971-1972) for string quartet with electronics was composed as the potential orchestra for an opera based on the text of *In Sara Mencken Christ and Beethoven There Were Men and Women*. When the work was composed, in 1972, it was clear that a huge change in electronic instrumentation was just beginning, a change that would involve computers and sound producing devices as yet undreamed of. The piece consists of an electronic orchestra of [up to] 42 sound producing modules. The technique of the string quartet is for each player to make a stream of intentional but unpremeditated (that is, random) very short sounds, pulses, somewhat like pitched clicks, but with the formats and overtones of a string instrument (this idea came from the rumor of a performance by Takehisa Kosugi). These sounds go directly to a set of four loudspeakers, but at the same time they are delayed electronically, and those delayed sounds are sent to a series of seven networks of sound producing modules activated by the very brief coincidence of an original sound and a delayed sound. The operation of the networks as a result of the coincidence can, in the theoretical world of electronics, produce almost any sound imaginable.

For the first performance few of the technical resources were available. Now, of course, there are computer 'patching' programs that would make the job possible, but complicated. Such are dreams, when technology promises a 'new world.'

—Lovely Music, Ltd.

The Wolfman (1964) for amplified voice, tape and electronics, was composed in early 1964 and first performed on Charlotte Moorman's festival of the avant-garde in New York in the fall of the same year, gaining considerable reputation as a threat to the listener's health. In this performance, we are using an earlier (1960) tape composition entitled *The 4th of July* as the tape component. That composition changes gradually from a parabolic-microphone documentation of a backyard party into a layering of tape loops and tape-head feedback.

The idea of a tape composition, which is to come out of the same loudspeakers as the voice and the feedback (the main sound source for this composition), is to fill-in the ongoing performance sound and to transform the performance into an elaborate version of the 'drone' under the influence of electronics. The choice of what sounds should be on the tape is determined by the need to have the whole range of frequencies brought into the feedback, but to give those sounds a short duration—in other words, a blizzard of very short sounds across the whole frequency range—so that the illusion of the sounds coming from all parts of the room is preserved.

—Lovely Music, Ltd.

Pre-concert Events

Perfect Lives (1976-1983), an opera for television in seven episodes, has been called "the most influential music/theater/literary work of the 1980s." At its center is the hypnotic voice of Robert Ashley. His continuous song narrates the events of the story and describes a 1980's update of the mythology of small town America. *Perfect Lives* is populated with myriad characters revolving around two musicians—"R," the singer of myth and legend, and his friend, Buddy, "The World's Greatest Piano Player." They have come to a small town in the Midwest to entertain at the Perfect Lives Lounge. As Robert Ashley describes in the opera synopsis, "they fall in with two locals to commit the perfect crime, a metaphor for something philosophical: in this case, to remove a sizable amount of money from The Bank for one day (and one day only) and let the whole world know that it was missing."

The eloping couple, Ed and Gwyn, the old people at the home, the sheriff and his wife (Will and Ida) who finally unravel the mystery, and Isolde who watches the celebration of the changing of the light at sundown from the doorway of her mother's house are some of the characters who journey through the seven episodes of the opera.

Derived from a colloquial idiom, *Perfect Lives* transforms familiar material into an elaborate metaphor for the rebirth of the human soul. It has been called a comic opera about reincarnation.

—Lovely Music, Ltd.

In Sara Mencken Christ and Beethoven There Were Men and Women (1972-1973), for tape, voice and electronics is comprised of one long composition with Ashley reading a text by poet John Barton Wolgamot. The poem has 128 stanzas; each stanza is made up of the same phrase, into which are introduced four variables, three are names or groups of names or constructions of names, and the fourth variable is formed by the adverb of the active verb. The result is considered "one of the most unusual and difficult linguistic textures in the English language." The underlying music is supplied by Paul DeMarinis on Moog synthesizer. Ashley on DeMarinis: "{Paul} has elaborated seven different modular combinations, each of which can be controlled by programmed impulses. These derive from the sound of the reading of the poem passed through the regeneration high frequency filter and successively translated into a series of command impulses."

—Lovely Music, Ltd.

Slideshow: archive photographs of ***That Morning Thing***; 1969 performance; ***Music with Roots in the Aether***, 1976 production stills; and ***Perfect Lives***, 1981 performance

That Morning Thing, an opera for six male voices, eight female dancers, tape and electronics, was composed in 1967-1968. It consists of three sections: *Frogs*, *Purposeful Lady Slow Afternoon*, and *She Was A Visitor*. *She Was A Visitor* will be presented on tonight's program.

Music with Roots in the Aether: Video Portraits of Composers and their Music: David Behrman, Philip Glass, Alvin Lucier, Gordon Mumma, Pauline Oliveros, Terry Riley and Robert Ashley. Produced and directed by Robert Ashley. Philip Makanna, Director and Camera; Maggi Payne, Audio Recordist; Jerry Pearsall, Video Recordist and Technical Director.

Music with Roots in the Aether is a music-theater piece in color video. It is the final version of an idea that I had thought about and worked on for a few years: to make a very large collaborative piece with other composers whose music I like. The collaborative aspect of *Music with Roots in the Aether* is in the theater of the interviews, at least primarily, and I am indebted to all of the composers involved for their generosity in allowing me to portray them in this manner.

The piece turns out to be, in addition, a large-scale documentation of an important stylistic that came into American concert music in about 1960. These composers of the "post-serial"/"post-Cage" movement have all made international reputations for the originality of their work and for their contributions to this area of musical compositions.

The style of the video presentation comes from the need I felt to find a new way to show music being performed. The idea of the visual style of *Music with Roots in the Aether* is plain: to watch as closely as possible the action of the performers and to not "cut" the seen material in any way--that is, to not editorialize on the time domain of the music through arbitrary space-time substitutions.

The visual style for showing the music being made became the "theater" (the stage) for the interviews, and the portraits of the composers were designed to happen in that style."

— Robert Ashley

in memoriam ... CRAZY HORSE (symphony) performers

Music Improvisation Ensemble II and guests – Fred Frith: Director, Stephanie Neumann: Coordinator
Adam Adhiyatma, Jesse Austin, Rachel Austin, Alex Cohen, Khalil Doak-Anthony, gabby fluke-mogul,
Victor Grinenco, Julie Herndon, Sam Hertz, Adam Hirsch, Aurora Josephson, Honor Lacin, Julie Moon,
Kimberly Nucci, Erika Oba, Stephen Parris, Maggi Payne, Jakob Peck, Ana Recto, Eric Glick Rieman,
Adriana M. Rueda, Ben Salomon, Paul Sinclair

She Was A Visitor performers

The Contemporary Performance Ensemble and guests – Steed Cowart: Director, Stephanie Neumann:
Teaching Assistant, Adam Adhiyatma, Alex Cohen, Benjamin Salomon, Chris Douthitt, David Cummings,
Derek Drudge, Erika Oba, Jacob Lane, Jacob Peck, Owen Cannon, Eric Glick Rieman, Adriano M Rueda,
Jesse Austin; and guests – Victoria Kelly, Anna Wolfe-Pauly, James Perley, Aurora Josephson, Stephen
Parris, Sharmi Basu, Rachel Herrington, Daniel Markham, Kathleen Walkup, Victor Grinenco, Julie
Herndon, Ben Cooper, Adam Hirsch, Honor Lacin, Julie Moon, Maggi Payne, Alana Stevenson, Zachary
Mariano, Rachel Austin, Viv Corringham, Sarah Thompson, Adria Otte, Megan Meyer, Luciano Chessa,
Matt Driscoll; members of The Cornelius Cardew Choir – Joe Zitt, Eric Theise, David Samas, Laurie
Polster, Cathryn Hrudicka, Derek Drudge, Rae Diamond, Tom Bickley, Nancy Beckman, Dennis Aman,
Jaime Robles

Mills Music Now Fall 2014

Saturday, November 8, 2014 8:00 pm Littlefield Concert Hall

IMPROVISATION: TIM HODGKINSON AND DANS LES ARBRES

English clarinetist, composer, and improviser Tim Hodgkinson and the quartet Dan les arbres, Xavier Charles, Ivar Grydeland, Christian Wallumrød, Ingar Zach share a program of improvised music.

Sunday, November 16, 2014 3:00 pm Littlefield Concert Hall

LA DANSE DU CLEVES: LATE MEDIEVAL POP MUSIC FROM ENGLAND, FRANCE AND ITALY

A concert of Medieval music performed by Shira Kammen, Allison Zelles Lloyd, and Peter Maund.

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ABOUT MILLS COLLEGE

Mills College was founded in 1852 in Benicia, California, as a Young Ladies Seminary. Cyrus and Susan Mills purchased the site of the present 127-acre campus and built Mills Hall in 1871. Mills became a chartered college for women in 1885. Mills offers a bachelor's degree in music with emphasis on Performance, Composition, Electronic Media, or History/Theory as well as master's degrees in Composition, Electronic Music and Recording Media, and Performance and Literature. The Music Department includes the world-renowned Center for Contemporary Music. At Mills students can study traditional and contemporary music in a creative environment that fosters experimentalism. The Department's faculty includes composers Roscoe Mitchell, Pauline Oliveros, Fred Frith, John Bischoff, Chris Brown, Maggi Payne, James Fei; scholars David Bernstein and Nalini Ghuman; and performers William Winant, Molly Holm, Robert Schwartz, Belle Bulwinkle, Sara Ganz, Hank Dutt, India Cooke, Gianna Abondolo, Joan Jeanrenaud, Sandra Soderlund, and Paul Binkley. For information on studying music at Mills, phone (510) 430-2135 (Undergraduate Admission) or (510) 430-3309 (Graduate Studies), or contact the Music Department Administrative Assistant, Kathleen Baumgardner, at (510) 430-2171. Les Stuck (510) 430-2336 is Technical Director of the Center for Contemporary Music. The Concert Coordinator is Steed Cowart, (510) 430-2334.