UNLV
Department of Music
College of Fine Arts

presents

NEXTET

John Harbison, Composer-in-Residence
1987 Pulitzer Prize Winner
Virko Baley, music director and conductor

PROGRAM

Diego Vega
(b. 1968)
Piano Quartet (2011)
I. (attacca)
II.
III.

Yuri Cho, violin
Tianna Heppner-Harjo, viola
Andrew Smith, cello
Lisa Maresch, piano

John Harbison
(b. 1938)
Suite for Solo Cello (1993)
Preludio
Fuga – Burletta
Sarabanda
Giga

David Warner, cello

San Antonio: Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano (1994)
I. The Summons
II. Line Dance
III. Couples Dance

Mark McArthur, alto saxophone
Lisa Maresch, piano

John Harbison
Abu Ghraib for Violincello and Piano (2006)
Scene I: Prayer I
Scene II: Prayer II

Andrew Smith, cello
Lisa Maresch, piano

Tuesday, March 13, 2012 7:30 p.m.
Dr. Arturo Rando-Grillot Recital Hall
Lee and Thomas Beam Music Center
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
The next NEXTET concert will be on April 9, 2012 with composer-in-residence Jed Distler. The program will consist of ten string quartets, nine by our student composers and the tenth by Jed Distler, Mr. Softee Variations.

Biographies and Program Notes

Composer John Harbison is among America's most prominent artistic figures. He has received numerous awards and distinctions, including the prestigious MacArthur Foundation's "genius" award, the Pulitzer Prize, and the Heinz Award in the Arts and Humanities. Harbison has composed music for most of this country's premiere musical institutions, including the Metropolitan Opera (for whom he wrote The Great Gatsby), the Chicago Lyric Opera, the New York Philharmonic, the Chicago Symphony, the Boston Symphony, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, and the Santa Fe and Aspen festivals. His works include four string quartets, five symphonies, a ballet, three operas, and numerous chamber and choral works. Harbison's music is distinguished by its exceptional resourcefulness and expressive range. He is considered to be "original, varied, and absorbing — relatively easy for audiences to grasp and yet formal and complex enough to hold our interest through repeated hearings — his style boasts both lucidity and logic" (Fanfare). Harbison is also a gifted commentator on the art and craft of composition and was recognized in his student years as an outstanding poet (he wrote his own libretto for Gatsby).

Diego Vega: Piano Quartet

The first movement is a toccata that introduces all the musical materials of the piece and leads without interruption to the second movement, slow and lyrical. The third movement is in general fast and virtuosic, but includes memories of the slow and lyrical music from the II movement. Some of its fast rhythms are reminiscent of folk rhythmic structures from Colombia, which I have used in my compositions for many years.

Three pieces by John Harbison

Suite for Solo Cello

My Suite for Solo Cello was composed at Nervi, near Genoa, Italy in 1993 shortly after completing my Concerto for Cello and Orchestra. I wanted to do a short piece of a very different character for the instrument that had held my attention over many months. The concerto is in many ways a discovered form, improvised to fit the material, and of a very demonstrative, public type. The solo piece is baroque in origins, more private, and very compact. The cello was the instrument my sister played. I heard most of its standard literature, repeatedly, while still in high school, and always think of the sound of the cello as her sound.— John Harbison

San Antonio, Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano

I. The traveler has a free afternoon in San Antonio. It is August, 105 degrees. Expecting to start with the cool promenade along the river, he is instead lured by a sound. He follows it up a long stairway and finds himself in a little fiesta: a hot square, many people, no shade, a few people dancing to a fast beat, the band playing and singing in Spanish.

II. The first dancers finish, exhausted. Then, as if on cue, the whole crowd gets into a line of people of all ages, nine to ninety. They all know the steps, which change with the phrases.

III. The music changes again becoming slower. The people continue on in couples. No one seems to feel the heat and the band hardly stops. Everyone, the traveler included, sinks into it. Towards the end, a young girl asks the traveler to dance. He declines.

But a year later, when the tourist puts down the memory of the sounds, something about a saxophone, and a few rhythms in his distorted memory, he accepts.— John Harbison

Abu Ghrabib for cello and piano

The title of this piece refers to an important episode in our country's history. Abu Ghrabib, while inscribed on our nation's consciousness by photographs and reports, has been absorbed into the nation's bloodstream, its long term effects yet to be known.

[My piece is not a protest or moral lesson. These would require little bravery. Instead it seeks music in a moment when words can fail.]

There are two movements, separated by a pause: Scene I. Prayer I; Scene II., Prayer II. Each Prayer begins with the violoncello playing alone.

Scene I, in its harmonic details, investigates infection and wrongness. Then, in a less rebarbative language, Prayer I begins a tentative plea for help beyond ourselves.

Scene II is based on an Iraqi song which I was hired to transcribe back in 1962, for a collection called Lullabies of the World (I was asked to transform its bent pitches and asymmetrical rhythms into "American family-sing form."). This song is shown to have connections to two of our well-known hymns. Prayer II again suggests that by entering a difficult meditative world we may find courage to face our own Shadow.

This piece was composed for performance by Rhonda Rider and David Deveau.— John Harbison