



College of Fine Arts

presents

NEXTET

The New Music Ensemble for the 21st Century

Virko Baley, music director and conductor

Dan Welcher, composer-in-residence

An Evening of String Quartets

Nextet String Quartet:

Lenka Sanchez, violin I

Crystal Yuan, violin II

Hanna Suk, viola

Andrew Smith, cello

PROGRAM

Travis Bernau
(b. 1989)

String Quartet No. 1, *Arcane Terrene* (2014)
Lento
Lento

Richard Belgard
(b. 1971)

Danza España (2014)

Maxwell R. Lanfontant
(b. 1990)

String Quartet No. 1 (2013)
Largo – Allegro: 1930
Largo: 1955

Justin Marquis
(b. 1989)

String Quartet No. 1 (2013)
Verse 2

INTERMISSION

Dan Welcher
(b. 1948)

String Quartet No. 3, "Cassatt" (2007)
The Bacchante (1876)
At the Opera (1880)
Young Woman in Green, Outdoors in the Sun (1909)

Tuesday, April 8, 2014

7:30 p.m.

**Dr. Arturo Rando-Grill Recital Hall
Lee and Thomas Beam Music Center
University of Nevada, Las Vegas**

PROGRAM NOTES AND BIOGRAPHIES

Dan Welcher, composer-in-residence

Critic Royal S. Brown, writing in High Fidelity magazine in 1974, called **Dan Welcher** "one of the most promising American composers I have heard". Welcher has been steadily fulfilling that promise ever since. With over one hundred works to his credit, more than half of which are published and recorded, Welcher has written in virtually every medium, including opera, concerto, symphony, wind ensemble, vocal literature, piano solos, and various kinds of chamber music.

Dan Welcher has won numerous awards and prizes from institutions such as the Guggenheim Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, The Reader's Digest/Lila Wallace foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, Meet The Composer, the MacDowell Colony, The Camargo Foundation (Cassis, France), the Liguria Study Center (Bogliasco, Italy) the Bellagio Center (Bellagio, Italy), The Corporation at Yaddo, The Atlantic Center for the Arts, the American Music Center, and ASCAP. From 1990 to 1993, he was Composer in Residence with the Honolulu Symphony Orchestra (Donald Johanos, Music Director). His orchestral music has been performed by more than sixty orchestras, including the BBC Symphony, the Chicago Symphony, the St. Louis Symphony, the Atlanta Symphony, and the Dallas Symphony. Recent works include **The Yellow Wallpaper**, an opera in one act to which Welcher wrote the libretto himself, based on the famous short story by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, for mezzo-soprano Lucy Schauer, **Upriver**, the latest in a series of popular works for band inspired by the American West, and his third String Quartet (written for the Cassatt Quartet and premiered in Chicago in March of 2008). His **Symphony No. 5**, commissioned for the Austin Symphony Orchestra to inaugurate its new concert hall, premiered on May 1 and 2 of 2009; it received the Austin Critics Table Award 1st Prize for Outstanding Original Composition for that season.

A much sought-after speaker who is known for making contemporary music intelligible to lay listeners, Welcher hosted a weekly radio program called "Knowing The Score" on KMFA-FM in Austin from 1999 to 2009. This program won the ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award for Excellence in Classical Broadcasting. He now hosts the weekly program "From The Butler School of Music" on Saturday evenings at 8:00 on KMFA. Dan Welcher holds the Lee Hage Jemail Regents Professorship in Fine Arts at the Butler School of Music (The University of Texas at Austin), where he directs the New Music Ensemble.

Travis Bernau: String Quartet No. 1, Arcane Terrene

Arcane Terrene (är-'kän, te-'rēn), written for string quartet, is in three movements. The first movement was premiered by the same performing string quartet in spring of 2013, but since then the piece has undergone revisions. As the title suggests, the music strives to depict a world that is foreign and ancient. A place that is otherworldly, dark, and mysterious, yet beautiful. As one explores the environment of this ancient land and traverses the ruins, one can feel a sort of presence that whispers, breathes, and aspirates the words from old stories. Seeing the derelict cracked marble columns and catacombs, one can be taken back countless centuries to relive the tragedies told in legends. The first movement was inspired from the music of the role-playing video game called Arcanum, whose composer was Ben Houge. The piece is mostly in the Aeolian mode. The second movement grew from improvisations from experiments with the harmonic minor scale as well as the octatonic scale.

Richard Belgard: Danza Espana

Danza Española is an imagining of a flamenco gypsy dance. The lines represent each of the dancers as they build momentum and wind around to a climax.

Maxwell R. Lanfontant: String Quartet No. 1 (2013)

Maxwell R. Lafontant's *String Quartet #1* is an essay on the aesthetics of twentieth century music. Each movement corresponds to a period in time and attempts to capture both what was important conceptually to the composers writing then, as well as the pure aural world that is tied to those concepts. However, all four movements use the same basic motive. The first movement focuses on the angst of Expressionism, with non-tonal harmonies, motivic saturation, ties to old forms, and harsh, gestural emotionalism. The second movement is a fusion of the integral serialism of the European avant-garde of the fifties, and the contemporary chance music of John Cage and the New York School. The music embraces a lack of real form, putting process over product, and an apparent arbitrariness, which is built on a systematic compositional technique, yet is still sometimes genuinely arbitrary. The third movement, at this time incomplete, will focus on Minimalism, and the fourth will act as a synthesis and filter of all the ideas presented in the previous three movements.

Justin Marquis: String Quartet No. 1

Verse II is the second movement of an entire quartet piece; the piece will have four movements total. Beginning with a simple motif that focuses on the minor third, the mood of the piece develops and follows in a very dark manner. The motif of the piece originates from an old cartoon I used to watch growing up, it would play in every episode a character was alone in a dark area and scared. I've developed this motif in a way that puts the character through the worst possible things that can happen to them. This can be interpreted in multiple ways such as death, madness, deep depression or whatever the listener finds most disturbing to them. After every tragic event, there is always a struggle to push past it that I show with the short marching pizzicato passage in the cello and viola while approaching the end. This piece ends with the minor third being focused again and fading quickly to nothing.

Dan Welcher: String Quartet No. 3, "Cassatt"

My third quartet is laid out in a three-movement structure, with each movement based on an early, middle, and late work of the great American impressionist painter Mary Cassatt. Although the movements are separate, with full-stop endings, the music is connected by a common scale-form, derived from the name MARY CASSATT, and by a recurring theme that introduces all three movements. I see this theme as Mary's Theme, a personality that stays intact while undergoing gradual change.

I. *The Bacchante* (1876), Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia

The painting shows a young girl of Italian or Spanish origin, playing a tambourine. Since Cassatt was trying very hard to fit in at the French Academy at the time, she painted a lot of these subjects, which were considered typical and universal. The style of the painting doesn't yet show Cassatt's originality, except perhaps for certain details in the face. Accordingly the music for this movement is Spanish/Italian, in a similar period-style but using the musical signature described above. The music begins with Mary's Theme, ruminative and slow, then abruptly changes to an "alla Spagnola"-type fast 3/4- 6/8 meter. It evokes the Spanish-influenced music of Ravel and Falla.

Midway through, there's an accompanied recitative for the viola, which figures large in this particular movement, then back to a truncated recapitulation of the fast music. The overall feeling is of a well-made, rather conventional movement in a contemporary Spanish/Italian style. Cassatt's painting, too, is rather conventional.

II. *"At The Opera"*, 1880. This painting is one of Cassatt's most well known works, and it hangs in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. The painting shows a woman alone in a box at the opera house, completely dressed (including gloves) and looking through opera glasses at someone or

something that is NOT on the stage. Across the auditorium from her, but exactly at eye level, is a gentleman with opera glasses intently watching her---though it is not him at whom she looks. It's an intriguing picture.

This movement is far less conventional than the first movement, as the painting is far less conventional. The music begins with a rapid, Shostakovich-type "mini-overture" lasting less than a minute, based on Mary's Theme. My conjecture is that the woman in the painting has arrived late to the opera. What happens next is a kind of collage, a kind of surrealistic overlaying of two different elements: the foreground music, at first, is a direct quotation of the "Soldier's Chorus" from Gounod's FAUST (an opera Cassatt would certainly have heard in the brand-new Paris Opera House at that time), played by Violin II, Viola, and Cello. This music is played *sul ponticello* in the melody and *col legno* in the marching accompaniment. On top of this, the first violin hovers at first on a high harmonic, then descends into a slow melody, completely separate from the Gounod. It's as if the woman in the painting is hearing the opera onstage but is not really interested in it. Then the cello joins the first violin in a kind of love-duet (just the two of them, at first). This music isn't at all Gounod-derived; it's entirely from the same scale patterns as the first movement and derives from Mary's Theme and its scale. The music stays in a kind of dichotomy feeling, usually three-against-one, until the end of the movement, when another Gounod melody, Valentin's aria "Avant de quitter ce lieux" reappears in a kind of coda for all four players. It ends atmospheric and disconnected, though. The overall feeling is a kind of schizophrenic, opera-inspired dream.

III. *Young Woman in Green, Outdoors in the Sun* (1909) Worcester Art Museum, Massachusetts
The painting, one of Cassatt's last, is very simple: just a figure, looking sideways out of the picture. The colors are pastel and yet bold---and the woman is likewise very self-assured and not in the least demure. It is eight minutes long, and is all about melody---three melodies, to be exact ("Young Woman", "Green", and "Sunlight"). No angst, no choppy rhythms, just ever-unfolding melody and lush harmonies. I quote one other French composer here, too: Debussy's song "Green", from *Ariettes Oubliées*. 1909 would have been Debussy's heyday in Paris, and it makes perfect sense musically as well as visually to do this.

The last several years of Mary Cassatt's life were lived in near-total blindness, and as she lost visual acuity, her work became less sharply defined---something akin to the late water lilies of Monet, who suffered similar vision loss. My idea of making this movement entirely melodic was compounded by having each of the three melodies appear twice, once in a "pure" form, and the second time in a more diffuse setting. This makes an interesting "two ways" form: A-B-C-A1-B1-C1.

STRING QUARTET #3 ("Cassatt") is dedicated, with great affection and respect, to the Cassatt String Quartet, whose members have dedicated themselves in large measure to the furthering of the contemporary repertoire for quartet.

The final NEXTET concert of the season will be on May 4 at 7:30 PM and will include works by our composer-in-residence, Arthur Gottschalk (Rice University), world renown tenor John Duykers, violin virtuoso Kenneth Goldsmith (performing Gottschalk's delightful *Fantasy Variations* with Taras Krysa conducting UNLV Chamber Orchestra), New York based composer Max Duykers, a work by Diego and others. A true gala event!