

Concert in Honor of Vivian Perlis

Society for

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Friday, March 24, 2017

7:00 pm

Redpath Hall, McGill University

Programme

Aaron Copland (1900–1990)

Sonata for Violin and Piano (1943)

Axel Strauss, Violin
Wei-Tang Huang, Piano

Harold Meltzer (b. 1966)

Piano Quartet (2016)

Bryce Lansdell, Piano
Kimberly Duringer, Violin
Kevin Woo, Viola
Aiden Russell, Cello

Marc Mellits (b. 1966)

Splinter (2014)

Carly Gordon, Oboe
Chester Howard, Bass Clarinet
Ludovik Lesage-Hinse, Clarinet
Aaron Goler, Bassoon
Dustin Feiner, saxophone

PROGRAM NOTES

Aaron Copland (1900–1990)

Sonata for Violin and Piano

Composed in 1942 and premiered two years later, Copland's quick-witted, wartime Violin Sonata bears a heartfelt dedication to Lieutenant Harry H. Dunham, a close friend of Copland killed in action in the Pacific theatre shortly after the composer drew the Sonata's final barline. Dunham, a wealthy young Princeton alumnus, had been a member of Copland's elite artistic circle: composer David Diamond remembered him as "the most adorable, good-looking boy." At the time of the Lieutenant's death, Copland was residing in California, hard at work on the score to *North Star* alongside lyricist Ira Gershwin. Even his glamorous Hollywood work, however, was touched by war: *North Star*, depicting Ukrainian villagers' guerilla resistance to Nazi invasion, was originally conceived as a semi-documentary with input from President Roosevelt and the Russian embassy.

Copland's film work shines through in the prolonged, cinematic phrases of the Sonata's *semplice* introduction, as well as in his detailed attention to patterns of dialogue between the two instruments. A *lento* middle movement, elegiac and transparent, lends the work a sense of sobriety, coloured by Copland's characteristic preference for nebulous perfect fifths. Sparks fly in a rapid-fire finale, intricately contrapuntal yet bright and lightweight. Copland's folksy vocabulary takes centre stage, rhythmic and buoyant, until the work's final phrases plummet back toward a dark, deliberate *lento*, ending *al niente* as though with a cinematic fade-to-black. Virgil Thomson hailed the Violin Sonata as "one of the author's most satisfying pieces," while Canadian musicologist Colin McPhee

observed its “simplicity, understatement, and Stein-like syntax” as “both *recherché* and baffling.” With its context of war and loss, the Sonata’s opening instruction to the violinist—*freely singing*—conjures a wartime impetus toward peace, reflection, and the triumph of freedom.

—*Carly Gordon*

Harold Metzler (b. 1966)

Piano Quartet

This piano quartet emerges rather like a mosaic, a series of brightly colored sections with edges that are made to seem sharper through contrast. Two of my very favorite composers are Schumann (whose birthday I share) and Stravinsky; while I may not share their many strengths as composers, I do share one of their limitations: an imperfect understanding of transitions, or even of the value of transitions. So, like they, I simply avoid them. Part of the trick in writing music that eschews growth and change by degrees is to determine which pieces of the mosaic need to stand out by way of brightness or complexity or simplicity; the other part is to determine which contrasts make intuitive sense. The pieces I’ve written in this way usually responded to something or someplace: a poem, a park or skyscraper. This was the first time in years that I began to compose from abstraction.

As I became more involved in composing the quartet, though, the process was distressed by the illness, and on February 14, 2016 the passing, of composer Steven Stucky. Though almost twenty years older than I, he had become over the last decade one of my closest friends and colleagues; certainly he was a mentor, and I feel his loss keenly. Late in the writing of the piece I began to think about how I could memorialize him in music. He would not have liked a dirge, and I wanted the

relevant music to be about him rather than my feelings about him. One of his breakout pieces was an orchestral work called *Dreamwaltzes*, a piece that looks back fondly to the nineteenth century waltz tradition. So I composed a bit of waltz music and embedded it in the work; it sounds like suddenly a music box has opened. In my own backward look to the nineteenth century I overshot: *Dreamwaltzes* conjures Brahms and Strauss, while mine incorporates the briefest of references, without quotation, to mid-period Beethoven.

The Boston Chamber Music Society Commissioning Club generously commissioned the quartet, and members of the society—violinist Harumi Rhodes, violist Dimitri Murrath, cellist Raman Ramakrishnan, as well as pianist Max Levinson, performed in the world premiere on March 13, 2016 at Sanders Theatre at Harvard University.

—*Harold Metzler*

Marc Mellits (b. 1966)

Splinter

“The music, for me, comes from the instruments themselves,” Marc Mellits told composer Samuel Adams in an interview for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. “You’re going to laugh, but I like imagining myself getting super small—this little tiny Marc—and I climb into the bassoon and just try and imagine what the resonance of the instrument is like.”

Mellits teaches as a composition professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and completed studies at the Eastman School of Music, Yale School of Music, and Cornell University. In *Splinter*, the imaginative work of “little tiny Marc” is apparent, as the reed quintet—oboe, clarinet, bass clarinet, alto saxophone, and bassoon—explores bold, resonant

harmonies, homogenizing in rich chords and clusters, or diverging in tightly woven hocket.

Composed in 2014 for the Bay Area-based Splinter Reed Quintet, *Splinter* comprises eight movements each depicting a species of tree, from regal Linden (movement III) to rugged Red Pine (movement VIII). Mellits' post-Minimalist aesthetic combines rhythmic drive with sophisticated tonal harmonies, while short, simple motives are repeated and interleaved in complex counterpoint. The rare instrumentation of the reed quintet allows for an enormous range of blend and colour. In the fourth movement, "Black Ash," interlocking cells allow the saxophone and oboe to emerge in alternation; in the seventh movement, "Weeping Willow," the melody materializes from five staggered entrances, each instrument mapping onto a larger phrase beneath the oboe's melodic arc. The work's eight movements might all be conceived of as "splinters"—miniature fragments, never more than two minutes in duration, but each packing a punch.

—*Carly Gordon*

German violinist **Axel Strauss**, equally passionate about teaching and performing, joined the faculty of the Schulich School of Music of McGill University in 2012. Prior to moving to Montreal he served as Professor of Violin and Chamber Music at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. Axel Strauss won the international Naumburg Violin Award in New York in 1998. Later that same year he made his American debut at the Library of Congress in Washington DC and his New York debut at Alice Tully Hall. Since then he has given recitals in major US cities, including Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Los Angeles and San Francisco. In 2007 he was the violinist in the world premiere of "Two Awakenings and a Double Lullaby" – written for him by Pulitzer Prize winning composer Aaron Jay Kernis. Mr. Strauss has performed as soloist with orchestras in Budapest, Hamburg, New York, Seoul, Shanghai, Bucharest, San Francisco and Cincinnati, among others. He has collaborated with conductors such as Maxim Shostakovich, Rico Saccani, Joseph Silverstein, and Alasdair Neale. Mr. Strauss has also served as guest concertmaster of the Berlin Philharmonic as well as the Montreal Symphony Orchestra. His recordings include the Brahms violin concerto (BPOlive), Mendelssohn's "Songs without Words", the 24 Caprices by Pierre Rode, the last three violin concertos by Rodolphe Kreutzer and the complete works for violin and piano by George Enescu (Naxos). Amadeus Press has issued a DVD featuring Axel Strauss in concert at Steinway Hall in New York City.

Ludovik Lesage-Hinse complète en mai 2016 une maîtrise du Conservatoire de musique et d'art dramatique du Québec tant en saxophone qu'en clarinette. Ayant étudié ces deux instruments au Conservatoire de musique de Trois-Rivières dans la classe de Claude Brisson pour le saxophone et de

Gilles Carpentier pour la clarinette, il obtient, à l'unanimité du jury, le Prix du Conservatoire en saxophone en 2015 et le Prix avec distinction en clarinette en 2016. Ludovik a également obtenu un Certificat de stage de perfectionnement en saxophone au Conservatoire de musique de Québec en 2016. Son cursus exceptionnel au Conservatoire lui mérite la bourse Développement de carrière offerte par la Fondation de l'institution d'une valeur de 10 000\$. Il poursuit présentement ses études dans la classe de clarinette d'Alain Desgagné à l'Université McGill.

Aaron Goler graduated with highest honors from the University of Minnesota in 2016, where he studied bassoon performance under Norbert Nielubowski and Charles Ullery. In addition to his work as a performer and arranger, he has done extensive research on the works of François Devienne and has published newly revised editions of Devienne's four bassoon concerti. Aaron is currently pursuing a Master's in bassoon performance at McGill with Stéphane Lévesque.

Carly Gordon is an American oboist based in Montreal. Lauded for her "warmly phrased" playing (Classical Voice of North Carolina), she completed her undergraduate degree in Oboe Performance at the Eastman School of Music under the tutelage of Richard Killmer, with additional Baroque oboe studies under Geoffrey Burgess. At the same time, she pursued a dual-degree in Brain & Cognitive Sciences at the University of Rochester, concentrating on psycholinguistics and graduating magna cum laude. Currently, she is a Master of Music candidate in Oboe Performance at the Schulich School of Music of McGill University, studying under Jacqueline Leclair and playing as a member of the McGill

Symphony Orchestra, Contemporary Music Ensemble, and Baroque Orchestra.

Dustin Feiner will complete a Bachelor of Music Performance this April. During his degree program at the Schulich School of Music, he has studied with Abe Kestenberg and Marie-Chantal Leclair. Justin is a specialist in both alto and soprano saxophone, and has performed in a wide variety of ensembles including the McGill Wind Ensemble, Contemporary Music Ensemble, and various Saxophone Quartets. Originally from Ottawa, Ontario, Justin graduated from the Arts Canterbury Music program with distinction in 2013 and received the Christine Hansen Music Scholarship to help him pursue his studies at McGill.

Violinist **Kimberly Durflinger** is currently a Masters student at the Schulich School of Music of McGill University where she studies with Andrew Wan. In 2016, she graduated from the Eastman School of Music with a Bachelor of Music in Violin Performance. Her former teachers include Mikhail Kopelman, Lynn Blakeslee, and Jing Yan. Her festival appearances include the Orford Académie de Musique, the Bowdoin International Music Festival, and the PRISMA International Music Festival in B.C. Canada, where in 2013 she won 3rd prize in the concerto competition.

Kevin Woo began studying music at the age of four. Starting on piano, he excelled at a variety of other instruments such as trombone, guitar, and most notably violin. After playing violin for eight years, he then switched to viola. Kevin is currently completing a Bachelor of Music at McGill University under the direction of André Roy.

Cellist **Aiden Russell** has collaborated with many orchestras including: the Ottawa Youth Orchestra, the Ottawa Symphony Orchestra, Thirteen Strings Chamber Orchestra, McGill Symphony Orchestra, and the National Youth Orchestra sitting principal or associate principal cello in every one. Musicians that Aiden has collaborated with include Yegor Dyachkov, Kyoko Hashimoto, André Roy, Wendy Warner, Philip Muller, Denise Djokic, the Gryphon Trio, and the Formosa Quartet. He currently attends the Schulich School of Music at McGill University studying with professor Matt Haimovitz.

Bryce Lansdell is an active pianist, collaborative musician, and community music educator in Montreal. Passionate about using music to foster healthy community, Bryce leads the Youth Music Network: a program that advocates for equal access to the arts by providing free music lessons and experienced mentors to young musicians in Little Burgundy. From 2014 to 2016, Bryce worked with Sanctuary London to develop relational connection and solidarity amongst homeless adults through group music making in London, Ontario. As a soloist, Bryce received first prize in the 2015 Fred Pattison Piano Competition. He has performed in recitals in Vancouver, Toronto, London, Montréal and Halifax. Bryce holds a Bachelor of Music, Honours Piano Performance degree from Western University, for which he received the Alumni Gold Medal. He is currently completing a Master of Music degree in piano performance

Chester Howard, native to Los Angeles, is currently a doctoral student at the Schulich School of Music in performance under the instruction of Simon Aldrich. He is the principal clarinetist of Pronto Musica, a Montreal-based chamber orchestra, as well as an avid chamber musician. During his time at McGill,

his trio participated in the Saltzburger Kammermusik Festival. Previously, Chester attended the Eastman School of Music (BM) and Stony Brook University (MM), studying with Jon Manasse and Alan Kay, respectively.

A native of Taiwan, **Wei-Tang Huang** enrolled in the Young Artist Program at the Cleveland Institute of Music at age 13, where he studied with Olga Radosavljevich. He continued his study in piano performance with Sara Laimon at Yale University while pursuing a degree in Computer Science. His interests span the information technology, law, and culinary experiments, music has always been the connecting thread.