Sunday, January 25, 2015, 7pm
Hertz Hall

San Francisco Contemporary Music Players
Steven Schick, Artistic Director

Project TenFourteen

PROGRAM

Agata Zubel (b. 1978)  where to* (2014)
World Première

Steven Schick, conductor
Agata Zubel, soprano
Tod Brody, flute
Peter Josheff, clarinet
Dale Wolford, saxophone
Brad Hogarth, trumpet
Dave Ridge, trombone
Peter Wahrhaftig, tuba
Nick Woodbury, percussion
Richard Worn, double bass

Harrison Birtwistle (b. 1934)  Variations from the Golden Mountain (2014)
United States Première

Nicolas Hodges, piano


Nicolas Hodges, piano
Steven Schick, percussion

INTERMISSION
Birtwistle  Gigue Machine (2011)
Nicolas Hodges, piano

Du Yun (b. 1977)  Quatrain: Slow Portraits iii* (2014)
World Première
Kyle Bruckmann, oboe
Alicia Telford, horn
William Winant, percussion
David Tanenbaum, guitar
Meredith Clark, harp
Jennifer Curtis, violin
Stephen Harrison, cello

* Project TenFourteen commission

Project TenFourteen is series of four programs featuring world premières simultaneously commissioned from ten distinctive composers, all challenged to reflect upon and address the human condition, common to us all.

Project TenFourteen is dedicated to the memory and celebration of Lee Hyla.

Agata Zubel’s participation in this concert is supported, in part, by the Polish Cultural Institute.

Audio streams of the TenFourteen commissioned works will be available on www.sfcmp.org approximately two weeks after the concert. Visit tenfourteen.com for further exploration of archival content and evolving commentary stimulated by Project TenFourteen.

Cal Performances’ 2014–2015 season is sponsored by Wells Fargo.
SAN FRANCISCO CONTEMPORARY MUSIC PLAYERS

Tod Brody       flute
Kyle Bruckmann  oboe
Sarah Rathke   oboe
Jeff Anderle   clarinet
Peter Josheff  clarinet
Bill Kalinkos  clarinet
Lawrence Ragent horn
Hall Goff     trombone
Peter Wahrhaftig tuba
Karen Gottlieb harp
David Tanenbaum guitar
Kate Campbell  piano
William Winant percussion
Daniel Kennedy percussion
Christopher Froh percussion
Roy Malan      violin
Graeme Jennings violin
Susan Freier   violin
Nanci Severance viola
Stephen Harrison cello
Richard Worn   bass

Steven Schick  Artistic Director
Rozella Kennedy Executive Director

Adam Fong  Project Manager
Luis Escareño Administrative Manager
Jon Yu  Production Manager
Brenna Noonan Media Coordinator
Travis Andrews & Andrew Meyerson Ministers of Fun
WHY SHOULD WE MAKE NEW MUSIC WHEN THERE IS SO MUCH GREAT OLDER MUSIC?

I have been asked this question more than once, usually following the première of a challenging new work. The knee-jerk response is that exploration is good in any field, so why not also in music?. However, that answer rings false. With every innovation in technology, commerce, or transportation, the future is created and the past is jettisoned. But as we musicians make new music, we hang on to the past. Doctors no longer use leeches, but art lovers still gain much from Beethoven.

At the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, we acknowledge the unique historical power of music by weaving important works from the recent past among the premières of our TenFourteen season. In our season-opening concert, we heard an early piano piece of George Crumb, and later in the year, we will present modernist masterpieces by Berio, Nono, and Varèse. In tonight’s concert, we will hear three recent works by the masterful Harrison Birstwistle. Birtwistle’s strong sense of ritual and his fascination with slowly morphing rhythmic ostinatos, often makes his music sound more recent than it really is. I hope his music will provide a meaningful frame for the premières by Du Yun and Agata Zubel.

At best, the present evocatively folds evocatively back on the past. Perhaps Birtwistle’s pioneering ideas will still sound current, and maybe Du Yun and Agata Zubel, to the extent that they are rooted in fertile history, will carry with them traces of past lives. This brings us to one reason I care about new music: The past is vivid and alive in my life. Therefore, it seems like the least we can do for future generations is to make, today, the music that will become the historically powerful art of the future.

Steven Schick

THE MUSIC

Agata Zubel (b. 1978)

where to (2014)

Polish composer Agata Zubel was a percussionist before concentrating, as a performer, on voice. Both have led her to infuse her compositions with exoticsms of sound that could emerge only from the experience of its creation. The colorful world of the percussion battery opened Zubel’s imagination to extended possibilities of traditionally constrained instruments, allowing her to conceive an extended range of acoustic imagery for, for example, violin, flute, chamber ensemble, orchestra.

In where to, a contrabass aria establishes a rhythmic profile and articulative range (from unpitched to pitched, percussive to melodic) that informs the music for the ensemble. This coalesces into asymmetrical, nervous rhythmic unisons, leavened by silence. Aggressive music broadly alternates with sustained contrapuntal passages. Both come together in chaotic intensity, or dissipate into near silence. The end of the piece—a new beginning—is a deus ex machina, a melismatic wordless soprano luring the wind instruments back to mysterious lyricism.

About her work, Zubel writes: “Culture developed at various paces on different continents, in different periods and directions. People met other people, and after that their world—knowledge, emotions, and music—could never be the same. Man’s return to the origins has never been possible, and yet those origins are something that man has always hoped to understand. In this way, synergy gives rise to deconstruction, and development makes it possible to look sideways…and back. This is also the case with my music, which, as it develops in time, adds new seconds while hoping to understand the minutes that came before.”
Harrison Birtwistle (b. 1934)
Variations on the Golden Mountain (2014)
Gigue Machine (2011)

One of the world’s great composers, Sir Harrison Birtwistle is known for his unparalleled dramatic sense, not only in his acclaimed, innovative operatic works but also in his instrumental music. A major preoccupation of his aesthetic philosophy is the possibility of reversing, deleting, foreshortening, lengthening, and otherwise manipulating our perception of passing time. Several solo piano works, from Précis (1960) through the significant Harrison’s Clocks (1998) and Gigue Machine (2011), explore this with special focus. Gigue Machine and Variations from the Golden Mountain (2014) were both composed for the phenomenal English pianist Nicolas Hodges.

The Axe Manual (2000) was composed for pianist Emanuel Ax and percussionist Evelyn Glennie. Composed in a fast–slow–fast arch form, it combines percussion and piano into a metainstrument. Phrases and passages for piano with vibraphone or marimba fuse into new tone colors unavailable from the individual instruments; the piano’s essentially percussive nature is enhanced in combination with unpitched drums; and the complex overtones of pitched metallic percussion amplifies the piano’s metallic strings and frame.

Gigue Machine’s title—like many of Birtwistle’s—refers to the friction between inexorable mechanical time versus human, flexible, dance-oriented time. Correspondences and divergences can be heard on several levels: concurrent contrasting tempos locally, but also stylistically different swaths of music that can be apprehended by mentally “zooming out,” taking in the large picture. Hodges premiered Variations from the Golden Mountain just this past September at Wigmore Hall in London. The “Golden Mountain” is that Parnassus of keyboard works, Bach’s “Goldberg” Variations. Although, at nine minutes, Birtwistle’s piece doesn’t pretend to the comprehensive scope of Bach’s, its alternation of contrasting episodes and its unhurried, but compressed and focused, exploration of highly constrained musical material are philosophically modeled on Bach’s approach. In its layering of independent (but related) lines in different speeds, we can readily hear in Golden Mountain (note in particular its concluding episode) a kinship with Gigue Machine.

Du Yun (b. 1977)
Quatrain: Slow Portraits iii (2014)

All of Du Yun’s work connects to an operatic, theatrical sensibility. Her Quatrain: Slow Portraits iii, commissioned for Project TenFourteen, continues a series that began as a sound installation accompanying visual artist David Michalek’s Portraits in Dramatic Time for the 2011 Lincoln Center Festival. Du Yun’s Slow Portraits pieces, which can be performed with or without film, are musical analogs of Michalek’s high-resolution, cinema-sized projections of super slow motion images in which actors’ small physical gestures are amplified by their extension in time. The composer’s aim in Quatrain is “to investigate how each rhyme of the aural phrase translates to a physical gesture; and how a group of microscopic kinesics form their larger-than-life impact…. The creator, the performers, the narrative, and the scenery have become seductress, to lure the audience into another world.”

Quatrain is essentially four “stanzas,” each preceded by an interlude, the stanzas suggesting a series of variations. The sonic reality of the musical gestures requires the ensemble to react as one vibrant organism, even beyond traditional chamber music. Individual virtuosity is required to create phrases of clear rhythm and pitch, and also to negotiate glissandi, microtones, and semi-improvised music that blurs and defamiliarizes, like a well-known visual image, taken via technology out of its wonted context, destabilized and strange. With a coming-together of the ensemble near the end of the piece, marked “As if a wave,” comes a shock, like recognition.

Robert Kirzinger
The San Francisco Contemporary Music Players (SFCMP), an ensemble of highly skilled musicians, performs innovative new music. We nourish the creation and dissemination of new work through high-quality musical performances, commissions, and community outreach. We promote the music of composers from across cultures and stylistic traditions who are creating a vast and vital 21st-century musical language. We seek to share these experiences with as many people as possible, both in and outside of traditional concert settings.

SFCMP was founded by Jean-Louis LeRoux, Marcella DeCray, and Charles Boone as “Bring Your Own Pillow” on March 25, 1971, and incorporated as a nonprofit on August 14, 1974. Throughout its history, SFCMP has been led by six Artistic Directors and six Executive Directors with continuous authorization, support and fiscal oversight by a board of directors.

In addition to programmatic innovation, our performances are rooted in artistic virtuosity. Our 22 core SF Contemporary Music Players are among the Bay Area’s leading musicians and educators. They are active as soloists and chamber musicians and leaders of several dynamic performance groups in California and beyond.

SFCMP is the longest standing, continuously performing new music ensemble outside the East Coast. Over its 43 seasons, SFCMP’s work has greatly contributed to the art form and the new music sector. We have performed more than 1,200 new works by 560 composers. Nearly 150 of these have been premières, and we have commissioned more than 80 new works by composers from around the world. SFCMP has been presented by leading cultural festivals and concert series in the San Francisco Bay Area and around the country.

Agata Zubel, born 1978 in Wrocław, Poland, is a Polish composer and singer. Zubel is a graduate of Wrocław’s Karol Szymanowski High School of Music, where she studied percussion and music theory, and the Karol Lipiński University of Music, where she studied composition with Jan Wichrowski. She is a member of the Youth Circle of the Polish Composers’ Union and a recipient of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage scholarship. In 2013, she was honored by the International Music Council International Rostrum of Composers with Best Composition Title for Not I, which she wrote for soprano, instrumental ensemble, and electronics. Currently, she teaches at the Academy of Music in Wrocław, where she received her Ph.D. in musical arts.

Harrison Birtwistle was born in Accrington in the north of England in 1934, and studied clarinet and composition at the Royal Manchester College of Music, making contact with a highly talented group of contemporaries, including Peter Maxwell Davies, Alexander Goehr, John Ogdon, and Elgar Howarth. In the mid-1960s, his opera Punch and Judy, together with Verses for Ensembles and The Triumph of Time, firmly established Birtwistle as a leading voice in British music. His lyric tragedy The Mask of Orpheus was staged by English National Opera in 1986. Large-scale works in the following
decade included the operas *Gawain* and *The Second Mrs. Kong*, the concertos *Endless Parade* for trumpet and *Antiphonies* for piano, and the orchestral score *Earth Dances*. Works that premièred in the past decade include *The Minotaur*, written for the Royal Opera, Covent Garden, and his violin concerto for Christian Tetzlaff and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Birtwistle’s 80th birthday year in 2014 saw the première of *Responses* for piano and orchestra, touring internationally with Pierre-Laurent Aimard as soloist. His many honors include the Grutemeyer Award for *The Mask of Orpheus*, the Siemens Prize, and being made a Chevalier de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. He was knighted in 1988 and was made a Companion of Honour in 2001. He was Henry Purcell Professor of Music at King’s College London and is currently Director of Composition at the Royal Academy of Music in London. Harrison Birtwistle is published by Boosey & Hawkes.

Du Yun, born and raised in Shanghai, China, is a composer, performer and performance artist who practices her works at an artistic crossroads of orchestral, chamber music, opera, theater, cabaret, storytelling, pop music, visual arts, and noise. She has received commissions from the Seattle Symphony, Detroit Symphony, Mann Center for the Performing Arts, Whitney Museum, Berkeley Symphony, Fromm Foundation, Chamber Music America, Festivals für Neue Musik und aktuelle Kultur (Switzerland), and ICE, among others. Selected venues at which performances of her work have taken place include Festival d’Avignon, Ultima Norway, Salle Playel Paris, Darmstadt, Musica Nova Helsinki, Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, RedCat, Kimmel Center, Shanghai Symphony, Muzeikgebouw aan ’t IJ, and Philharmonie Luxembourg. Her visual artworks have been shown at the Guangzhou Art Triennial, National Academy Museum (United States), Sharjah Biennial (UAE), Auckland Triennial (New Zealand), and Ulens Art Center (Beijing).

Born in London and now based in Germany, where he is a professor at the Musikforschungshochschule Stuttgart, Nicolas Hodges approaches repertoire from the Classical era to the present with the same questing spirit. Mr. Hodges has performed as concerto soloist with the major orchestras of the United States and Europe, working with many of the world’s most acclaimed conductors. Closely associated with works of Elliott Carter, Beat Furrer, and Thomas Adès, he has premièred and recorded pieces written for him by many composers, including Georges Aperghis, Harrison Birtwistle, Pascal Dusapin, Luca Francesconi, Isabel Mundry, Wolfgang Rihm, Rebecca Saunders, and Salvatore Sciarrino. He has performed as a recitalist in such venues as Carnegie Hall, IRCAM, and Wigmore Hall, and at festivals including the BBC Proms, the Lucerne Festival, and Tanglewood. He collaborates regularly with the Arditti Quartet, Adrian Brendel, Colin Currie, Ilya Gringolts, Anssi Karttunen, and as a member of the Trio Accanto. Highlights of the 2014–2015 season are the world première of Birtwistle’s *Variations from the Golden Mountain*; an SWR commissioned work by Simon Steen-Andersen with SWR Sinfonieorchester Freiburg Baden-Baden; and a world première of a new Ivo Nilsson work with the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group.
Percussionist, conductor, and author Steven Schick was born in Iowa and raised in a farming family. For 40 years, he has championed contemporary music by commissioning or premièring more than 150 new works. He was the founding percussionist of the Bang on a Can All-Stars (1992–2002) and served as Artistic Director of the Centre International de Percussion de Genève (2000–2005). Mr. Schick is founder and Artistic Director of the percussion group red fish blue fish. Currently he is Music Director of the La Jolla Symphony and Chorus in addition to serving as SFCMP’s Artistic Director. In 2012, he became the first Artist-in-Residence with the International Contemporary Ensemble. Mr. Schick founded and is currently Artistic Director of “Roots and Rhizomes,” a summer course on contemporary percussion music held at the Banff Centre for the Arts. He maintains a lively schedule of guest conducting, including appearances this season with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, the Nova Chamber Ensemble, and the Asko/Schönberg Ensemble. Mr. Schick will be music director of the 2015 Ojai Festival. Among his acclaimed publications is a book, The Percussionist’s Art: Same Bed, Different Dreams, and numerous recordings of contemporary percussion music, including a three-CD set of the complete percussion music of Xenakis (Mode). Mode also released a companion recording on DVD of the early percussion music of Karlheinz Stockhausen in September 2014.

Mr. Schick is Distinguished Professor of Music at UC San Diego. He was named Artistic Director of SFCMP in 2011.