

Saturday, December 14, 2019, 8pm
Zellerbach Playhouse

Eighth Blackbird

Nathalie Joachim, *flutes*
Nick Photinos, *cello*
Zachary Good, *clarinets**
Matthew Duvall, *percussion*
Matthew Albert, *violin**
Lisa Kaplan, *piano*

Guest Artist

Pamela Z, *electronics and vocals*

PROGRAM

Nina SHEKHAR *ice 'n' SPICE* (2018, Bay Area Premiere)
Viet CUONG *Electric Aroma* (2017, Bay Area Premiere)
Fjóra EVANS *Eroding* (2017, Bay Area Premiere)
Holly HARRISON *Lobster Tales and Turtle Soup*
(2016, Bay Area Premiere)

INTERMISSION

Andy AKIHO *Karakurenai* (2007)
Jonathan Bailey HOLLAND *The Clarity of Cold Air* (2013)
Pamela Z *Quatre Couches and Badagada*
Pamela Z *Ways of Looking* (2019, Bay Area Premiere)
Looking – Name – Um – Very

Ice 'n' SPICE, Electric Aroma, and Eroding were commissioned by Justus and Elizabeth Schlichting for the Blackbird Creative Lab. *Lobster Tales and Turtle Soup* was commissioned for Eighth Blackbird by Musica Viva Australia with support from Geo6 Stearn and the Hildegard Project. *Ways of Looking* was commissioned for Eighth Blackbird by the Los Angeles Philharmonic Association, Gustavo Dudamel, Music and Artistic Director, with additional support from Elizabeth and Justus Schlichting.

* For this performance, clarinetist Zachary Good and violinist Matthew Albert perform with Eighth Blackbird during vacancies in those positions.

Eighth Blackbird is Ensemble-in-Residence at the University of Richmond. Matthew Duvall proudly endorses Pearl Drums and Adams Musical Instruments, Vic Firth Sticks and Mallets, Zildjian Cymbals, and Black Swamp Percussion Accessories. Lisa Kaplan is a Steinway Artist.

Cal Performances' 2019–20 season is sponsored by Wells Fargo.



Nina Shekhar***ice 'n' SPICE* (2018, Bay Area Premiere)**

Nina Shekhar (b. 1995) is a Michigan-based composer whose music explores the intersection of identity, vulnerability, love, and laughter. Her works have been performed by leading artists such as ETHEL, soprano Tony Arnold, Kaleidoscope Chamber Orchestra, and saxophonist Jan Berry Baker and have been featured by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, National Flute Association, North American Saxophone Alliance, I Care if You Listen, TUTTI Festival, Bowdoin International Music Festival, and New Music on the Point. She has also previously collaborated with the JACK Quartet, and her piece *Quirkhead*, about O.C.D. and mental illness, is scheduled to be featured in an upcoming PBS documentary. Current projects include a choral commission for the New York Virtuoso Singers, an electroacoustic commission for Third Angle New Music, and a piece for Vanguard Reed Quintet, as well as performances at Carnegie Hall and National Sawdust. Shekhar is a recipient of the 2015 ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composer Award and a finalist in the 2017 and 2018 Morton Gould Awards. She was a composer fellow at the 2018 Blackbird Creative Lab. Aside from composing, Shekhar is also an accomplished flutist and pianist, including performances at the Poland International Piano Festival as a soloist with the Lublin Philharmonic and the Detroit International Jazz Festival as lead alto saxophonist with her jazz band. Shekhar completed her undergraduate studies at the University of Michigan, graduating *summa cum laude* with dual degrees in music composition and chemical engineering.

About *ice 'n' SPICE*, Shekhar writes: “When I was younger, I remember eating my dad’s chicken patties, which were loaded with green chilies and garam masala. My brother and I would then run to the freezer to fill our mouths with ice in a rash attempt to cool down the fire on our tongues. *ice 'n' SPICE* captures both the before and after aspects of this memory, contrasting fiery and explosive sections with frigid, sparse, and glassy textures. May everyone enjoy the spice of life, so long as we also remember to keep things cool! Many thanks to Eighth

Blackbird, Justus and Elizabeth Schlichting, and everyone at the Blackbird Creative Lab for commissioning this piece.”

Viet Cuong***Electric Aroma* (2017, Bay Area Premiere)**

Described as “alluring” and “wildly inventive” by the *New York Times*, Viet Cuong’s music has been performed on six continents by soloists and ensembles including Sō Percussion, the PRISM Quartet, JACK Quartet, Sandbox Percussion, Cabrillo Festival Orchestra, Jacksonville Symphony, Albany Symphony, Gregory Oakes, and Mimi Stillman, in venues such as Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, International Double Reed Society Conference, US Navy Band International Saxophone Symposium, and Midwest Clinic. Cuong’s awards include the ASCAP Morton Gould Award, Suzanne and Lee Ettelson Award, Theodore Presser Foundation Music Award, Cortona Prize, Walter Beeler Memorial Prize, Boston Guitarfest Competition, Dolce Suono Ensemble Competition, and Prix d’Été Competition. He also received honorable mentions in the Harvey Gaul Memorial Competition and two consecutive ASCAP/CBDNA Frederick Fennell Prizes. Cuong has held artist residencies at Yaddo, Ucross, and the Atlantic Center for the Arts, and was a scholarship student at the Mizzou International Composers Festival, Blackbird Creative Lab, Copland House’s CULTIVATE Institute, and the Aspen and Bowdoin music festivals. Currently a Naumburg and Roger Sessions doctoral fellow at Princeton, he holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the Peabody Conservatory, and a DMA from the Curtis Institute. The US Navy Band has commissioned a new work by Cuong for Eighth Blackbird and Winds Band to premiere in December 2020 at the Midwest Clinic in Chicago.

About *Electric Aroma*, the composer writes: “Between painting, sculpting, and printmaking, Pablo Picasso found the time to write some very intriguing poetry. *Electric Aroma* was creatively sparked by a line he wrote on October 10, 1936 which reads “an electric aroma a most disagreeable noise.” By using electronic-

inspired sounds such as buzzy snare drum and vibraphone effects, glitch-like flutter tonguing, and raucous multiphonics, the piece forces some disagreeable sounds to agree with each other as they are woven into a distorted tango-like romp. This piece was commissioned by Elizabeth and Justus Schlichting for the 2017 Blackbird Creative Laboratory.”

Fjólá Evans

Eroding (2017, Bay Area Premiere)

Fjólá Evans is a Canadian/Icelandic composer and cellist. Her work explores the visceral physicality of sound while drawing inspiration from patterns of natural phenomena. Commissions and performances have come from musicians such as Bang on a Can All-Stars pianist Vicky Chow, Quince Contemporary Vocal Ensemble, and the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra. Her work has been featured at the MATA Festival, Bang on a Can Marathon, Ung Nordisk Musik, and the American Composers Orchestra’s SONic Festival. Evans has studied composition with Julia Wolfe and cello performance with Matt Haimovitz, and completed a graduate degree in composition at the Yale School of Music in 2018. She is the 2017 winner of the Robert Fleming Prize—an award given by the Canada Council for the Arts to one composer annually—and was one of six inaugural composer fellows at the 2017 Blackbird Creative Lab.

About *Eroding*, Evans writes: “Over thousands of years, the glacial river Hvítá in Iceland has carved a deep gorge into the surrounding landscape. At one particular twist in the river, the erosion has left several huge pillars of hyaloclastite rock, which look as they were flung haphazardly into the riverbed. In fact they were revealed slowly over time from the process of the river carving away their surroundings. In *Eroding*, the players create a dense mass that gets worn down over time in order to reveal the spiky formations beneath the surface.”

Holly Harrison

Lobster Tales and Turtle Soup (2016, Bay Area Premiere)

Holly Harrison is a young Australian composer whose music is driven by the nonsense literature of Lewis Carroll, embracing stylistic juxtapositions, the visceral energy of rock, and whimsical humor. Her work has been played extensively throughout Australia and the world by ensembles and artists including the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, the Cabrillo Festival Orchestra, Orkest de Ereprijs, Alarm Will Sound, Ensemble Offspring, Michael Kieran Harvey and Timothy Phillips, Caroline Cartens, and the Riot Ensemble, among many others. Harrison was the inaugural winner of both the Pyeongchon Arts Hall International Chamber Music Composition Competition with *Red Queen*, *White Queen*, *Alice* and the 2017 Sue W Chamber Music Composition Prize for her work for Eighth Blackbird, *Lobster Tales and Turtle Soup*, which featured on Eighth Blackbird’s Australian tour as part of Musica Viva’s 2017 International Concert Season. Harrison currently teaches composition at MLC School, Burwood, Australia, and completed her doctorate in creative arts under the supervision of Bruce Crossman and John Encarnacao at Western Sydney University, where she is currently a sessional academic. *Lobster Tales and Turtle Soup* was commissioned for Eighth Blackbird by Musica Viva Australia with support from Geof Stearn and the Hildegard Project.

About the work, Harrison writes: “The piece is inspired by chapters 9 and 10 of Lewis Carroll’s nonsense book *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), ‘The Mock Turtle’s Story’ and ‘The Lobster Quadrille.’ Along with Alice, the main characters in these chapters are the Gryphon and the Mock Turtle. Both creatures are composites of two animals: the Gryphon an amalgam of an eagle and a lion, the Mock Turtle a cow and a turtle. I see these chimera characters as a type of metaphor for the amalgam of musical styles in the piece; rock, jazz, metal, hip-hop, pop, blues, and funk. The Gryphon and Mock Turtle scold Alice for imagined slights, tell long stories, and sing long songs that never quite end, order her to recite poetry

(which comes out all muddled!), and insist on her taking part in an unusual dance; the Lobster Quadrille. In capturing these happenings, I've set the piece with a type of stop-start momentum and spattering of rhythmic hiccups. The piece is split into four main sections, and there are four main melodic/rhythmic threads that continue throughout. These are woven across each other, intertwining at times, as well as appearing as discrete soundblocks, positioned side-by-side, and/or careening off into another direction/thread at the latest possible moment. These include: a blues-y piano and slap cello refrain—Alice's hurrah!; lyrical string lines and long glissandi, mirroring the exaggerated and 'mock' emotion of the Turtle's sad story and heavy sobs; funky bass lines with flashes of disco—a reimagining of the Lobster's Quadrille; and metal-inspired bursts of sounds with trashy cymbal stacks—the continual 'little arguments' and misunderstandings that take place. At the same time, these four ideas draw influence from the branches of arithmetic studied by the Mock Turtle: 'Ambition, Distraction, Uglification, and Derision.' These titles are, of course, a parody of the traditional branches, and together inform how I have approached the four sections in the way of tempo changes, time signature shifts, and the warping of phrases—though I won't say in which order they appear or which musical thread they relate to!"

Andy Akiho

Karakurenai (2007)

Described as “mold-breaking,” “alert and alive,” “dramatic,” and “vital” (*The New York Times*), Andy Akiho (b. 1979) is an eclectic composer and performer of contemporary classical music. Recent engagements include commissioned premieres by the New York Philharmonic, National Symphony Orchestra, Shanghai Symphony Orchestra, and Carnegie Hall's Ensemble ACJW, as well as performances with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and at the Kennedy Center in Washington (DC). Akiho has been recognized with numerous awards, including the 2014–15 Luciano Berio Rome Prize. Additionally, his compositions have been featured on PBS's *News Hour with Jim Lehrer*

and by organizations such as Bang on a Can, American Composers Forum, and the Society for New Music. He is currently pursuing a PhD in composition at Princeton University and is Composer-in-Residence at Avaloch Farm Music Institute. Akiho's debut CD, *No One To Know One*, on Innova Recordings, features brilliantly crafted compositions that pose intricate rhythms and exotic timbres around his primary instrument, the steel pan. To read more about Akiho and listen to his music, please visit andyakiho.com.

About *Karakurenai*, Akiho writes: “*Karakurenai* (Japanese for “foreign crimson”) was originally written for solo prepared steel pan during a visit to Rochester (NY) in June 2007 as part of the *Synesthesia Suite*; however, this piece can be performed on any combination of instruments and can include elements of improvisation if the performer desires.”

Jonathan Bailey Holland

The Clarity of Cold Air (2013)

Jonathan Bailey Holland's works have been commissioned and performed by numerous orchestras, including those of Atlanta, Baltimore, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dallas, Detroit, Minnesota, and Philadelphia, as well as numerous chamber groups and soloists. A recipient of a 2015 Fromm Foundation Commission, he has received honors from, among others, the American Academy of Arts & Letters, American Music Center, ASCAP, and the Presser Foundation. He has served as Composer-in-Residence for the Plymouth Music Series of Minnesota, Ritz Chamber Players, Detroit and South Bend Symphony Orchestras, and the Radius Ensemble. Recent highlights include the premiere of *Equality* for narrator and orchestra for the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, and the premiere of *Forged Sanctuaries* by Curtis on Tour, commissioned to commemorate the centennial of the National Park Service. Holland is Chair of Composition, Theory, and History at Boston Conservatory at Berklee, and Faculty Chair of the Music Composition Low MFA program at Vermont College of Fine Arts. Previously he served as a professor of composition at the

Berklee College of Music.

About *The Clarity of Cold Air*, the composer writes: “Inspired by many a cold, Northern Midwest or New England day, this work is primarily atmospheric, focusing on the sonorities achieved by blending the instruments of the ensemble in various ways. There are many stark sounds—high, glassy harmonics from the strings, bowed metallic percussion instruments, harsh multiphonics from the winds, airy cymbal rolls.”

Pamela Z

Quatre Couches and Badagada

Pamela Z is a composer/performer and media artist who works primarily with voice, live electronic processing, sampled sound, and video. A pioneer of live digital looping techniques, she processes her voice in real time to create dense, complex sonic layers. Her solo works combine experimental extended vocal techniques, operatic *bel canto*, found objects, text, digital processing, and wireless MIDI controllers that allow her to manipulate sound with physical gestures. In addition to her solo work, she has been commissioned to compose scores for dance, theater, film, and chamber ensembles including Kronos Quartet, the Bang on a Can All Stars, Ethel, and the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players. Her interdisciplinary performance works have been presented at venues including The Kitchen (NY), Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (SF), REDCAT (LA), and MCA (Chicago), and her installations have been presented at such exhibition spaces as the Whitney (NY), the Diözesanmuseum (Cologne), and the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts (IL). Pamela Z has toured extensively throughout the US, Europe, and Japan. She has performed in numerous festivals, including Bang on a Can at Lincoln Center (New York), Interlink (Japan), Other Minds (San Francisco), La Biennale di Venezia (Italy), DakArt (Senegal), and Pina Bausch Tanztheater Festival (Wuppertal, Germany). She is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Rome Prize, a Robert Rauschenberg Foundation residency, a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Doris Duke Artist Impact Award, the Herb Alpert Award

in the Arts, an Ars Electronica honorable mention, and the NEA Japan/US Friendship Commission Fellowship. She holds a music degree from the University of Colorado, Boulder and was a guest artist at the inaugural Blackbird Creative Lab in 2017. For more info, go to www.pamelaz.com.

About *Quatre Couches* and *Badagada*, Pamela writes: “*Quatre Couches* is a sonic trifle, tiramisu, or mille-feuille—juxtaposing four contrasting layers and manually toying with them—mixing them and moving them around on the plate until they all melt away. In *Badagada*, one of my early digital delay pieces, the syllables “ba-da-ga-da-ga-da-ga-da-ga” are layered in multiple delay lines to form a harmonic, rhythmic accompaniment to a melody sung in English.”

Pamela Z

Ways of Looking (2019, Bay Area Premiere)

About *Ways of Looking*, Pamela writes: “I have long been fascinated by the musicality of speech sounds, and have regularly incorporated them into my work in various ways—mining sampled fragments of spoken text for melodic, rhythmic, and textural content. To compose *Ways of Looking*, I began by interviewing all six members of Eighth Blackbird, and then I meticulously selected sentences, phrases, words, syllables, and phonemes to create sonic building blocks for the piece.

“This work is in four movements that each focus on sounds or concepts culled from those interviews. For the first movement, “Looking,” I chose to have the ensemble members speak their own words live. I pulled samples from their answers to a question about the origin of the ensemble’s name. They each answered that question by citing the Wallace Stevens poem that is their namesake. I built a text collage from fragments of that title, and then transcribed it and integrated it into their parts. The second movement, “Name,” is all about describing and identifying people. The tape part of that movement consists entirely of names and descriptions (often of teachers or mentors) mentioned in the interviews, and the instrumental parts are laced with melodic and rhyth-

mic transcriptions of those phrases. Movement three, “Um,” is a cloud of sound built around the sonorous, non-verbal, filler sounds we all make during speech. I find “ums” and “uhs” to be among the most musical spoken utterances, because they are more sustained and contain more focused pitches than most of the words we speak. The final movement, “Very,” celebrates the ubiquitous intensifier. I found so many descriptors that were modified by “very”

in the interview responses, that I thought they deserved a dedicated movement. The melodic material in this movement was inspired by a section of a score I composed a few years ago (for a dance piece by choreographer Stephan Koplowitz) that kept haunting me as I listened to my long list of Eighth Blackbird “verys.” I also choose to include a part for my own voice and electronics in this movement.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Eighth Blackbird, hailed as “one of the smartest, most dynamic contemporary classical ensembles on the planet” (*Chicago Tribune*), began in 1996 as a group of six entrepreneurial Oberlin Conservatory students and quickly became “a brand-name defined by adventure, vibrancy and quality” (*Detroit Free Press*). Over the course of more than two decades, Eighth Blackbird has continually pushed at the edges of what it means to be a contemporary chamber ensemble, presenting distinct programs in Chicago, nationally, and internationally, and reaching audiences totaling tens of thousands. The sextet has commissioned and premiered hundreds of works by composers both established and emerging, and has perpetuated the creation of music with profound impact, such as Steve Reich’s *Double Sextet*, which went on to win the 2009 Pulitzer Prize. The ensemble’s extensive recording history, primarily with Chicago’s Cedille Records, has produced more than a dozen acclaimed albums and four Grammy awards for Best Small Ensemble/Chamber Music Performance, most recently in 2016 for *Filament*. Longstanding collaborative relationships have led to performances with some of the most well-regarded classical artists of today, from heralded performers like Dawn Upshaw and Jeremy Denk, to seminal composers like Philip Glass and Nico Muhly. In recent projects, Eighth Blackbird has joined forces with composers and performers who defy the persistent distinction between classical and nonclassical music, including works by The National’s Bryce Dessner and Arcade Fire’s Richard Reed Perry, and performances

with Justin Vernon of Bon Iver, My Brightest Diamond frontwoman Shara Nova, Will Oldham aka Bonnie “Prince” Billy, and Iarla Ó Lionáird of The Gloaming.

Eighth Blackbird first gained wide recognition in 1998 as winner of the Concert Artists Guild Competition. Since 2000, the ensemble has made its home in Chicago, where it has been committed to serving as both importer and exporter of world-class artistic experiences. A recent year-long pioneering residency at the Museum of Contemporary Art—Chicago—during which the ensemble served as a living installation featuring open rehearsals, performances, guest artists, and public talks—exemplified the artists’ stature as community influencers. Receiving the prestigious MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions, Chamber Music America’s inaugural Visionary Award, and being named *Musical America*’s 2017 Ensemble of the Year have supported Eighth Blackbird’s position as a catalyst for innovation in the new-music ecosystem of Chicago and beyond.

Eighth Blackbird’s mission—moving music forward through innovative performance, advocating for new music by living composers, and creating a legacy of guiding an emerging generation of musicians—extends beyond recording and touring to curation and education. The ensemble served as the music director of the 2009 Ojai Music Festival, has held residencies at the Curtis Institute of Music and the University of Chicago, and holds an ongoing ensemble-in-residence position at the University of Richmond. In 2017, Eighth

Blackbird launched its boldest initiative to date with the creation of the Blackbird Creative Laboratory, an inclusive, two-week summer workshop and performance festival for performers and composers in Ojai (CA).

The members of Eighth Blackbird hail from the Great Lakes, Keystone, Golden, Empire, and Bay states. The name “Eighth Blackbird” derives from the eighth stanza of Wallace Stevens’s evocative, imagistic poem, “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird”: “I know noble accents / And lucid, inescapable rhythms; / But I know, too, / That the blackbird is involved / In what I know.”

Eighth Blackbird is managed by David Lieberman Artists.

Called “preposterously talented” by *Time Out Chicago*, violinist and violist **Matt Albert** is Chair of Chamber Music at the School of Music, Theatre & Dance at the University of Michigan. He previously served as the director of chamber music and SYZYGY at the Meadows School of the Arts, Southern Methodist University, and he was a founding member of Eighth Blackbird, with whom he received numerous awards, including first prizes at the Naumburg, Concert Artists Guild, and the Coleman and Fischoff competitions; and three Grammy awards for their recordings on Cedille Records. He has collaborated with Alarm Will Sound, Meredith Monk and Vocal Ensemble, Seraphic Fire, the International Contemporary Ensemble, and Wilco, and his orchestral playing has included work with the Shreveport Symphony (as concertmaster), Baltimore Symphony, Florida Orchestra, and in a tenured position as the principal second violinist of the Cabrillo Festival Orchestra. Other leadership roles include three years as artistic director of the M-Prize International Chamber Arts Competition and three years as artistic director

of the Music in the Mountains Conservatory in Durango, Colorado. Albert holds degrees from Oberlin College and Conservatory, the Cincinnati College–Conservatory of Music, and Northwestern University School of Music.

Zachary Good is an instrumentalist (clarinets and Baroque recorders) and performer from Pittsburgh (PA). Based in Chicago, he freelances as a musician, middle school band director, and founding member/co-artistic director of Mocrep. Good has performed with Eighth Blackbird, International Contemporary Ensemble, Third Coast Percussion, Lyric Opera Unlimited, members of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Manual Cinema, Ensemble Dal Niente, the Civic Orchestra of Chicago, and the New World Symphony. He has appeared as a soloist with the International Contemporary Ensemble and DePaul University’s new-music ensemble, 20+. Since 2016, Good has regularly toured with Eighth Blackbird and Third Coast Percussion, performing Steve Reich’s *Music for 18 Musicians*. In January 2018, he worked closely with cellist Yo-Yo Ma as one of six fellows at the second annual Youth Music Culture Guangdong festival in Guangzhou, China. While a fellow with the Civic Orchestra in 2015, he established the annual New Music Workshop, a local call for scores that includes performances, workshops, and recordings of selected works with Civic musicians. He regularly performs with the trio ZRL (with Ryan Packard and Lia Kohl); their albums are released on Chicago labels No Index and Homeroom. Good tours nationally and internationally with the puppet theater company Manual Cinema and the interdisciplinary performance ensemble Mocrep. He is also a band director at the Chicago Waldorf School. Good is a graduate of Oberlin Conservatory and DePaul University.