



New England
Conservatory

Concert Program

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Arthur Berger Memorial Concert

curated by Sid Richardson

Thursday, February 22, 2024
7:30 p.m.
NEC's Jordan Hall

Arthur Berger was an influential composer, critic and teacher for more than half a century. Born in 1912 in New York City, he received his musical education at New York and Harvard Universities, pursuing further studies in Paris with Nadia Boulanger and at the Sorbonne. By his early twenties he was accepted into the circle of avant-garde New York composers and became a member of the Young Composers Group that revolved around Aaron Copland as its mentor. In his capacity as critic, Berger became one of the chief spokesmen of American music for that period.

Although Berger has made notable contributions to the orchestral repertory, he devoted the major share of his compositional activities to chamber and solo piano music. Virgil Thomson called his *Quartet in C Major for Strings* "one of the most satisfactory pieces for winds in the whole modern repertory"; and his String Quartet received a New York Music Critics Circle Citation in 1962. Among his orchestral works are *Serenade Concertante*, written for the CBS Orchestra; *Polyphony*, a Louisville Orchestra commission; and *Ideas of Order*, commissioned by Dimitri Mitropoulos for the New York Philharmonic--a work that received a full page story in *Time* magazine following its premiere.

Among Berger's numerous published critical and analytical articles, his seminal study *Problems of Pitch Organization in Stravinsky* applied the expression "octatonic" to the 8-note scale that has since become conventionally known by that term. At a time when Stravinsky's so-called neoclassicism was under attack, Berger wrote extensively and cogently in its defense. He was one of the first to write about Charles Ives and the first to write a book on the music of Aaron Copland. This study, which had occupied him since the early 1930s, was published by the Oxford University Press at a time (1953) when there was no precedent for books on American composers dealing as he did with their musical technique. In August 1990, *Aaron Copland* was reprinted by Da Capo Press.

When Berger received an award from the Council of Learned Societies in 1933, it turned out to be but the first in a long series of honors bestowed on him by prestigious organizations over the years: Guggenheim, Fromm, Coolidge, Naumburg and Fulbright Foundations; the NEA, League of Composers, Massachusetts Council on the Arts & Humanities to name a few. He is a Fellow of both the American Academy's Institute of Arts and Letters and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Berger started his college teaching career in 1939 at Mills College where the following year Darius Milhaud joined the faculty. (It was he who persuaded Pierre Monteux, conductor of the San Francisco Symphony, to ask Berger to write a woodwind quartet for first-desk players of that orchestra.) In 1943 Berger became a music critic for the *New York Sun* and in 1946 accepted Virgil Thomson's invitation to join the *New York Herald Tribune*. After a decade as a full-time daily music reviewer in New York City, he resumed teaching in 1953 at Brandeis University during the formation of its graduate music program. Following his retirement from Brandeis in 1980 as the Irving Fine Professor of Music Emeritus, Berger taught at New England Conservatory of Music until 1999. Coinciding with his 90th birthday in 2002 the

University of California Press published Berger’s memoir, *Reflections of an American Composer*, which won a 2003 ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award.

Mr. Berger died in Boston on October 7, 2003. Mr. Berger’s Archives are located at the N.Y. Public Library for Performing Arts in Lincoln Center.

PROGRAM

Ran Blake/John Mallia
(b. 1935) (b. 1968)

The Quiet That I Can Give You (2024)
a rescoring of a scene from “The Spiral Staircase”
(1946)
World premiere

Ran Blake, piano

Kati Agócs
(b. 1975)

FOMO (2023)
U. S. premiere

Parker Olson, percussion

Efstratios Minakakis
(b. 1979)

Afes (2021)
World premiere

Gabriela Díaz, amplified violin

Arthur Berger
(1912–2003)

Duo for Cello and Piano (1951)
I.
II.

Shannon Ross, cello
Rodney Lister, piano

Intermission

Arthur Berger

Garlands (1945)

Julia Cavallaro, mezzo-soprano
Rodney Lister, piano

Rodney Lister
(b. 1951)

Only the Lemon of Desire (2006)

Julia Cavallaro, mezzo-soprano
Klaudia Szlachta, violin
Rodney Lister, piano

Sid Richardson
(b. 1987)

which was the dream, which was the veil? (2023)
World premiere

I. the lotus flower unfurled
II. taut sinews quiver
III. a catafalque, a bier
IV. night wings or vermillion of the day-
butterfly
V. a taper, a candle, a blaze of splendor

Lamnth
Lilit Hartunian, violin
Nicholas Tolle, cimbalom

Agócs *FOMO*

FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) is a work for solo percussion nine minutes in duration. Scored for a modified drum set with metal plates replacing the cymbals, it has an instrumentation of solo snare drum, kick drum, and two large metal plates. The piece is designed to feature solo snare drum playing while extending the timbres around it. In *FOMO* the soloist enacts a kind of stream-of-conscious pantomime, searching for something inchoate, elusive, and potentially unreachable. Musically, a dialectic of elements keeps shifting; visceral contrasts in timbre and mercurial changes in mood are contrasted with more spacious, mysterious areas. The overall form is a continuous, if circuitous, zigzag buildup to the end, where things finally lock in and activate. *FOMO* was commissioned by Ryan Scott (Toronto, Canada) for his 21st C Canadian Snare Drum Project, with support from the Canada Council for the Arts.

– Kati Agócs

Minakakis *Afes*

The work *Afes*, Greek for touches, explores particularly fine and fragile timbral gradations that result from different nuances of touch. Throughout the work, aspects of the instrument's tactility that are usually submerged in the normal mode of playing are given protagonistic roles: the sounds of the left hand against the fingerboard, nuances of different pressure, and the drawing of the bow hair and stick against different parts of the instrument's body are ever-present. In this respect, *Afes* reverses the normal hierarchies of violin sound production, highlighting esoteric aspects of the physicality of playing and inventing a new mode of viscosity in engaging with the instrument.

Afes is dedicated to the Greek violinist and composer Tania Sikelianou, who commissioned the work.

– Stratis Minakakis

Berger *Duo for Cello and Piano*

Arthur Berger's *Duo for Cello and Piano* was once hailed as "diatonic Webern" by Milton Babbitt, an apt and humorous appraisal. It was written for cellist Bernard Greenhouse and was commissioned by the Ladies Auxiliary of the Doctor's Orchestra in New York City. The acronym of this organization's name gave rise to the opening theme—La-Do, or the pitches A-C.

The work unfolds in two movements that exhibit exquisitely detailed writing for both instruments. The harmonic trajectory of the first movement follows the key areas extolled in initial thematic material: A minor moves to the relative major, C, over the course of the movement. The second movement projects a scherzo character whose pointillism provides a wonderful contrast to the soaring lyricism of the first movement. It unfolds in sonata form, but with some interesting twists. The first theme is presented in the mediant and the second theme in the expected dominant key area. The recapitulation features the first theme heard in the subdominant and, surprisingly, the second theme in the key of the Neapolitan, D-flat. The tonic C major is only truly established in the coda. The rhythmic character here is striking, too. The first movement projects a rhapsodic quality, which is followed by lilting dance

rhythms in the second.

Rodney Lister has a fabulous analysis that can be read in his article “Arthur Berger: The Progress of a Method,” which was published in the journal *American Music*.

– Sid Richardson

Berger *Garlands*

Garlands sets a poem by Asklepiades of Samos (born ca. 320 BC), an ancient Greek poet who was fond of inventing new words and of using old ones in new contexts. He is most well-known for his lyric, and erotic, epigrams. Berger sets this evocative poetry over tender, cantabile piano lines that open with a tinge of the Lydian mode. The composer prepares the entrance of the lover with heavier, tenuto chords accompanied by a hint of chromaticism. This short, but gorgeous, song ends with an effusion of ascending, consonant harmonies that perhaps suggest that the poet’s falling tears are more joyous than bittersweet.

– Sid Richardson

Garlands

Garlands hang there above the door.
Don’t shed too soon leaves drenched with tears
(Love’s eyes are always wet).
When he comes to the door drip on his head,
my private show’r of rain,
so that his yellow hair will drink my tears.

Asklepiades of Samos; translation © C. G. Wallis, used with permission.

Lister *Only the Lemon of Desire*

Only the Lemon of Desire

a love letter won’t get you anywhere
because it talks from the wrong part of the body the love letter has no idea
never heard one
sticky as it should be
a violin says
the name ‘Clara’
you are frightened and moved
to rest your heads
but this poem makes no efforts
to love you
and the cold air outside
is not a letter
does not care to hold you

as if this were not about to break
as if from the cracked pitcher
birds did not fly out

as if across the window they seldom cast their shadow
as if not the goose
than who
would last this
winter in which there is too much
already
as if this winter would have us walk across
as if not once cast a single
shadow as if a shadow were not
allowed as if the new snow wouldn't have it
sound of pitcher about to break
sound of a headache

found a piano
colored blue
some yellow
sounded same
as plastic as
a hurt circus
with it wrote
six whole operas
key of g
key of junkyard
dear videogames
i lost you
on level six
all piano plays
that losing tune

the story of lemon meringue
the diner out of pie
he's had little sleep
she says, remember the photo
indian summer, october fair
the one with the wind in it
someone i never met
a man in a felt hat
carried a browning copy
in his wallet, these are the children
i never met, he said
banana cream
along his moustache
the city is real but not real sadness
only the lemon of desire is

this poem is being operated
by a student driver
normally during class
he steers the sedan

not in the direction red wants him to
but parallel parks his longing
between a convertible and a minivan
the red of the poem wedges him in
steers and commands his little idiot hopes
doesn't bother to give lessons
the speedometer out of control
the gearshift threatening
to race away the trainee's
only sense of ownership

borders broken
weight of secrets
documents
forged
i am not i am not
who i was
yesterday
nor the day after
nor tomorrow
won't recall

a single detail
of me to speak
of not a trace

weathervane
knows more poetry
than thermometer
tells when bones hurt
frosted window
who just took a shower
wind directs
weathervane
to language
but not the ghost
of my bath foggy glass
knows more
me than soaps
shampoo too
measure how clean the sentence is

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Richardson *which was the dream, which was the veil?*

which was the dream, which was the veil? for violin and cimbalom was born out of research that I was doing for another piece, *Eidolon*, a chamber opera based on Hilda Doolittle's epic poem *Helen in Egypt*. H.D.'s poem revisits and rewrites the myth of Helen of Troy. I am drawn to her poetry because of its relation to themes that interest

me in my own work, namely multiple identity, mysticism, memory, dream states, and Greek drama. In *Helen in Egypt*, Helen and Achilles find themselves transported to the magical dreamland of Egypt after the events of the Trojan War. Throughout the cerebral, circuitous events of the poem they ask one another a recurring question in an effort to test their new reality, “which was the dream, which was the veil?” The veil in question alludes to many things: the veil between worlds, the veil of Cytheraea, or Aphrodite, the cloud of spirits of the dead Greek and Trojan warriors that surround the protagonists, among other things.

The piece is laid out in five movements that examine the musical materials therein from various angles, much like Helen and Achilles attempt to discern the nature of their reality in the H.D poem by posing the recurring question to one another. The first movement, *the lotus flower unfurled*, meditates on a small collection of contrasting musical ideas. The second movement, *taut sinews quiver*, is a muscular violin solo that serves as a prelude to the funereal, introspective third movement, *a catafalque, a bier*. The fourth movement, *night wings or vermillion of the day-butterfly*, is a music-box-like solo for the cimbalom, which segues directly into the finale, *a taper, a candle, a blaze of splendor*. Here, the violin and cimbalom engage in an energetic, cathartic dance that channels the energy of one of H.D.’s primary inspirations, the Eleusinian Mysteries. These were the most famous secret religious rites of Ancient Greece, which allegedly featured potent symbols, mystical visions, and revelations to devotees of Demeter and Persephone.

which was the dream, which was the veil? was made possible in part with the support of The Virginia Center for the Creative Arts and the Oberpfälzer Künstlerhaus. It is dedicated to Lamnth, Lilit Hartunian and Nick Tolle, who commissioned it.

– Sid Richardson

Julia Soojin Cavallaro, mezzo-soprano, is a professional choral artist and oratorio soloist based in Boston. Praised by *New York Classical Review* for her “warm mezzo, perfect diction, and easy phrasing,” she sings with leading ensembles in New England and beyond, including the Handel and Haydn Society, Ensemble Altera, Upper Valley Baroque, and GRAMMY-nominated groups Skylark Vocal Ensemble and True Concord Voices & Orchestra. Recent oratorio solos include Bach’s *St. John Passion* with Ashmont Hill Chamber Music, Handel’s *Messiah* with the Kent Singers, and Vivaldi’s *Gloria* with the New England Classical Singers. Julia is currently a member of the Choir of the Church of the Advent and was previously a staff singer at Trinity Church in the City of Boston, with whom she toured England twice. She collaborates frequently with composer-pianists Rodney Lister at Boston University and John McDonald at Tufts University. Her own songs for voice, piano, and chamber ensemble have been premiered at Tufts and as part of Art Song Lab in Vancouver, BC. In addition to her performing career, Julia is Vice President of Marketing and User Experience for Artusi: Interactive Music Theory & Aural Skills, an online learning platform. She holds degrees in music and vocal performance from Harvard College and the Boston University College of Fine Arts. Julia lives in Cambridge with her husband, Dan, and two cats, Bun and Gin.

Klaudia Szlachta is an award-winning violinist from Poland, who attended Boston Conservatory on a scholarship where she earned her Bachelor of Music degree, graduating summa cum laude. Her master's and Doctor of Musical Arts degrees were achieved at Boston University, where she won both the Bach Prize and the Concerto Competition. Upon graduation, Ms. Szlachta was invited by the Institute and Festival of Contemporary Performance in New York City to perform Luciano Berio's *Sequenza* and Elliott Carter's *Triple Duo*. She has also had the privilege of collaborating on stage with Menahem Pressler, Joseph Silverstein and Lucia Lin. Recently, she showcased a new composition by Ketty Nez at the Festival of New Music in Florida. Locally, she performs on a regular basis with the Cantata Singers, Bach, Beethoven and Brahms Society, the Odyssey Opera, Alea III and the Boston Modern Orchestra Project, the latter of which recently invited her to perform as concertmaster when they played at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. Currently, Ms. Szlachta is on the faculty of Boston University's School of Music, New England Conservatory's Preparatory School, the Intensive Community Program, Rivers School Conservatory and BUTI's summer program at Tanglewood, where she is the Director of the Violin Workshop.

Lamnth—a new violin and cimbalom duo founded by Lilit Hartunian and Nicholas Tolle—presents their first full season of concerts in 2023-2024, with newly commissioned works by Maya Bennardo, Darcy Copeland, Marti Epstein, Erin Graham, Sid Richardson, Golnaz Shariatzadeh, and Niloufar Shiri. Selected for a 2023 Avaloch Farm Music Institute residency, Hartunian and Tolle rehearsed and workshopped their first commissioned work, Mischa Salkind-Pearl's *Lines and Traces of Desire*, for a recording to be released in 2024.

Hartunian and Tolle, long established members of the Boston new music community, are frequent performers with the Boston Modern Orchestra Project, A Far Cry, Emmanuel Music, and Sound Icon, among other groups. They also frequently perform together with The Ludovico Ensemble, founded by Tolle, including a duo concert in March 2022 which led to the launch of this project.

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CORETTA SCOTT KING TRIBUTE CONCERT: "Life. Love. Legacy."

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Monday, February 26, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

PIANO DEPARTMENT CONCERT: IVES 150

Bruce Brubaker, curator of piano programming

The first in a two concert series featuring the piano works of Charles Ives;

NEC piano students perform his shorter and early works

Tuesday, February 27, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

NEC CHAMBER ORCHESTRA, Donald Palma, artistic director

Herbert *Elegy*; Mozart *Divertimento for Oboe, Two Horns and Strings*;

Bartók *Divertimento*

Wednesday, February 28, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

A CELEBRATION OF SONG AND VERSE, Brett Hodgdon, director

Wednesday, February 28, 2024 at 8:00 p.m., Burnes Hall

NEC JAZZ ORCHESTRA, Ken Schaphorst, conductor

"The Music of Anna Webber and Angela Morris"

Thursday, February 29, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

"CONNECTIONS" CHAMBER MUSIC SERIES, Max Levinson, director

"Bach Re-Imagined"

Thursday, February 29, 2024 at 8:00 p.m., Burnes Hall

FIRST MONDAY IN JORDAN HALL, Laurence Lesser, artistic director

Ives Songs, Laura Choi Stuart and Tanya Blaich; Brahms *Trio in B Major, op. 8*,

Isabelle Durrenberger, violin; Laurence Lesser, cello; George Li, piano

Monday, March 4, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

NEC PHILHARMONIA, Shiyeon Sung, guest conductor

Gubaidulina *Fairytale Poem*; Hindemith *Violin Concerto*, Yebin Yoo '24 MM, soloist;

Dvořák *Symphony No. 6 in D Major, op. 60*

Wednesday, March 6, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

PERKIN OPERA SCENES

Performances by graduate students in the NEC Opera Department

Tuesday, March 5, 2024 at 7:30 p.m. & Wednesday, March 6, 2024 at 6:00 p.m.

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