

NEC New Music Ensemble

Stefan Asbury, guest conductor

with

Sangwon Lee '20 GD, clarinet

Monday, December 9, 2024

8:00 p.m.

Burnes Hall

PROGRAM

Brett Dean
(b. 1961)

Carlo (1997)

Binna Kim '21 DMA
(b. 1983)

stacked emotions (2019)
stacked emotions
evanescent+eternal (i)
lullaby
evanescent+eternal (ii)
a haunted dream (Sisyphus' infinite loops)

Intermission

Sarah Gibson
(1986–2024)

Soak Stain (2023)

Michael Gandolfi
(b. 1956)

The Nature of Light (2012),
for clarinet and string orchestra
Waves (Anthem)
Particles (Shape Shifter)

Sangwon Lee '20 GD, clarinet

Dean Carlo

Carlo was commissioned by the Australian Chamber Orchestra for the 1997 Huntington Festival and is scored for 15 solo strings, sampler and pre-recorded tape. The title refers to Carlo Gesualdo (1560–1613), Prince of Venosa, esteemed composer of idiosyncratic and highly accomplished vocal music of the Mannerist style and perpetrator of one of the most heinous and widely publicized criminal acts of Italian society in the 16th Century, namely the murder in 1590 of his own wife Maria d'Avolos and her lover, Don Fabrizio Carafa, Duke of Andria.

Not surprisingly, this Carlo character has been regarded as a fairly notorious figure ever since. Historians to the present day still seem undecided as to the true merits of Gesualdo the composer, unable to separate the characteristics of his compositions, with their harmonic extremities and surprises and their textural complexities, from the infamy of Gesualdo the murderer. There are, no doubt, numerous contemporaries of his whose music would be just as worthy of the kind of attention now given to Gesualdo, composers such as Marenzio and Luzzaschi who didn't fan the flame by butchering their spouses. But I believe that with Carlo Gesualdo one shouldn't try to separate his music from his life and times. They are intrinsically interrelated. The texts of his later madrigals, thought to be written by Gesualdo himself, abound with references to love, death, guilt and self-pity. Combine this with the fact that I've always found Gesualdo's vocal works in any case to be one of music's great and most fascinating listening experiences and you have the premise of my piece.

Carlo starts with pure Gesualdo... From a tape, one hears the opening chorale from *Moro lasso*, one of his most famous compositions, taken from his 6th Book of Madrigals. Following the tragically sinking chromatic line of this opening, a pre-recorded vocal collage unfolds, the various quotes from the madrigal initially linking harmonically; then going their own way, sometimes brighter and faster, at other points slower and more solemn. Gradually the orchestra becomes involved in this process, at first displacing the taped quotes from *Moro lasso* with other Gesualdo motives, and eventually leading us to altogether more 20th century realms of sound. Occasionally the sampler or tape transport us momentarily back into the world of Gesualdo, only for the orchestra to embark on their own interpretation and re-working of this material. Throughout this journey between these two different time-zones, Gesualdo's madrigals are eventually reduced to mere whisperings of his texts and nervous breathing sounds. These eventually also grow in dramatic intensity into what may be seen as an orchestral echo of that fateful night in Naples on the 26th October 1590.

This composition would not have been possible without the help of Marcus Creed and soloists from his RIAS Chamber Choir in Berlin, as well as Peter Groß, recording engineer at the Berlin Philharmonie. For their contribution towards the production of the taped and sampled vocal passages, my sincerest thanks. Also thanks to Simon Hunt for his programming and realisation of the sampler part.

Carlo is dedicated to Richard Tognetti and the Australian Chamber Orchestra.

Kim *stacked emotions*

I have always been fascinated by the idea of “reconstructing” masterworks by famous artists. I discovered this reconstruction in Picasso’s “Las Meninas”, which he modeled after Velázquez’s work of the same name. It is re-assembled, reconstructed, presented again to suit Picasso’s vision, yet still glorifying the original work by Velázquez. Seeing how Picasso investigated all aspects of Velázquez’s work, and then extended it with his own ideas to create a new work inspired me to think about not only external references, but also internal ones—how a piece might refer to itself, and how the listener would experience that over the course of the work.

In my piece, *stacked emotions*, I created short passages that become distorted and reprocessed as the piece develops. Using my own ideas, I reconstructed a new idea from which I used to create a mirror image of itself. The five short pieces that make up the work have their own distinctive characteristics yet are in a way connected throughout the whole piece. I was also greatly inspired by the writings of Louise Bourgeois, who is best known for her deeply personal art in sculptures, installations and drawings. As she was a prolific visual artist, her words are just as painfully beautiful and honest. Her carefully composed poems deal with loneliness, longing, anger and many other personal emotions. I used text from her writings in four of the movements, where I sought to capture the ambience and emotions of the selected works for this piece.

stacked emotions

The first movement is a short passage that repeats and transforms throughout the movement. Transformations are created by subtly manipulating pitch, rhythm and timbre as well as the tempo. As the name suggests, I attempt to play with the idea of memory, how when we hear something more than once, it can trigger a feeling of familiarity, even if it’s through a distorted lens.

evanescent+eternal (i) and *evanescent+eternal (ii)*

Both movements are inspired by words of Bourgeois.

closed world of which I see the boundaries and which I can control - I am at ease in it.
Is life passing me by?
that is what fear does -
establish the distance between
the immediate + the eternal
the evanescent + the eternal

I imagined one being created in an alternate universe. Both movements start with small ripple-like gestures that gradually increase in size and become more distorted as they are interrupted by musical events. The basic idea of the opposing piece is similar, though the reactions after each interruption are different — hence the “alternate universe.”

lullaby

The iterative aspect of this looping piece made me think of another quote by Bourgeois:

Never let me be free from this burden that will never let me be free.

a haunted dream (Sisyphus' infinite loops)

A bell-like signal from the vibraphone initiates a musical descent across the orchestra. Each time the signal reoccurs, the process starts again, which each descending passage getting longer and faster.

– Binna Kim

Gibson *Soak Stain*

An innovative technique created by American abstract expressionist painter Helen Frankenthaler, “soak stain” involves diluting acrylic paint until it is fluid enough to pour onto a raw canvas from a coffee can. In Frankenthaler’s paintings, this technique allows one to see a color compete and blend with its contiguous rival. I love this approach and the way it provides both structured blocks of color in Frankenthaler’s works and leaves amoebalike and uneven edges as various colors meet. In my piece, I try to play with this idea by evoking clear formal structures defined by liquid melodies and melting textures.

– Sarah Gibson

Gandolfi *The Nature of Light*

The Nature of Light is a two-movement work for clarinet and string orchestra. It was commissioned by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and premiered by them in January 2013, with Robert Spano, conductor, and Laura Ardan, clarinet soloist. The impetus for the piece arose while I was composing *Q.E.D.: Engaging Richard Feynman* for the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and chorus in 2010. I was immediately impressed by two potential paths implied by the opening material that I composed for the first movement of that work. One path was a good match for the overall context of *Q.E.D.: Engaging Richard Feynman* and its specific, opening text. The other path was far more complex and better suited for a purely instrumental work. I felt that a work for clarinet and string orchestra would best realize this alternate route. Upon reading this clarinet and string orchestra movement, Robert Spano supported my interest in developing the movement into a large-scale concerto, and pledged to commission and premier the completed piece. The present work is the result of this effort.

The title of the work (suggested by Boston-based writer Dana Bonstrom), refers to the dual nature of light (particle and wave), and its metaphorical connection to the two-movement structure of my piece: the first movement being a musical expression of wave shapes and the second movement being suggestive of particles, both in its segmented formal design and the short, staccato figures that comprise its main theme.

The first movement of *The Nature of Light*, subtitled *Waves (Anthem)*, is a lyrical piece, mostly devoted to displaying the expressive character of the clarinet and string

orchestra. Its overall design takes the form of a chaconne: a repeating harmonic progression that serves as the basis for variation. After a string orchestra introduction, the clarinet enters, leading the chaconne progression, which is presented in two different tempi successively; a moderately paced tempo followed by one that is faster. Once these differing tempi have been established, the chaconne is sounded in both tempi simultaneously, forming a type of canon known as a mensural canon. Following this elaborate exposition, a series of variations ensue, the total of which serves as a development section. Next is a grand return of the chaconne in its pure form, adorned by cascading lines that have been gathering momentum. The movement concludes with the return of the introduction, this time joined by the clarinet as if poised to retrace its steps.

The second movement, *Particles (Shape Shifter)* is an overall, fast-paced movement which serves to highlight the clarinet's virtuosity. The form is a hybrid rondo: AABA'C B' cadenza A'' Coda, featuring a middle section (C) that is characterized by extremely fast and facile figures for all parties. This section is followed by the B-section material, reinterpreted to fit the hyper-speed tempo and metrical schemes of the C-section and serves as the most overt reference to the title 'Shape Shifter,' (i.e., the 'shapes' of the B-section material are adjusted or 'shifted' to fit into the temporal and metrical design of the fast-paced C-section). This virtuosic portion of the piece leads to an extended cadenza for the clarinet, followed by a return of the opening material.

Light speed, and its resultant, time-dilation effects, well defined in the field of physics, finds its musical allegory in each movement of *The Nature of Light*: the first movement with its mensural canons, the second movement with its reinterpretation of material in a new, faster-paced 'time-frame.'

– Michael Gandolfi

Sangwon Lee joined the Hartford Symphony as Principal Clarinet in 2023. He has performed with orchestras all over New England, which include the Boston Philharmonic, Berkshire Opera Festival, Vermont Symphony, Dartmouth Symphony, New Bedford Symphony, Symphony New Hampshire, etc. As a chamber musician, Sangwon has shared the stage with the late Peter Serkin - performing the Beethoven and the Mozart Quintets for Piano with Winds in multiple performances in 2018.

In addition to performing, Sangwon is passionate about music education. He has coached wind sectionals at Yale University, Boston Youth Symphony Orchestra, Boston Latin School, etc. He has taught clarinet and saxophone at the Bard Music Camp in the summers since 2016 and was an instructor of clarinet and saxophone at the Simon's Rock College in Great Barrington, MA.

He holds a BM in Clarinet Performance and a BA in Economics from the University of Michigan, an MM in Critical, Curatorial, and Performance Studies from Bard College, and a Graduate Diploma from the New England Conservatory. His teachers include Daniel Gilbert and Thomas Martin.

A regular guest with leading orchestras worldwide, recent seasons have seen **Stefan Asbury** working with orchestras throughout the world, including in North America the Indianapolis, Milwaukee, Montreal, Seattle and Vancouver Symphony orchestras, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra. Internationally he has been with the Copenhagen Philharmonic, Pacific Philharmonia (Tokyo), Auckland Philharmonia, China National Symphony Orchestra, Norrköpings Symfoniorkester, Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra, the National Symphony Orchestra of Taiwan and the NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra. He conducted the MDR Sinfonieorchester Leipzig as part of Beethovenfest Bonn and Orquesta Sinfonica de Bilbao during Bilbao's Musika-Musica 2019 festival. Stefan has also served as the Chief Conductor of the Noord Nederland Orkest, Chief Guest Conductor for the Tapiola Sinfonietta (Finland), and was the founder and Music Director of the Remix Ensemble (Portugal).

Stefan Asbury maintains strong relationships with many living composers including Steve Reich, Wolfgang Rihm, Unsuk Chin and Mark-Anthony Turnage. He conducted the world and US premieres of Sir Harrison Birtwistle's Piano Concerto with Pierre-Laurent Aimard and Sinfonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Following Sir Harrison's passing, he conducted a performance, in memoriam, of *Earth Dances* with the HR Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra in January, 2023. As a recording artist, Stefan's album with works by Jonathan Harvey with Ensemble Intercontemporain was awarded a Monde de la Musique CHOC award, and his complete cycle of Gerard Grisey's *Les Espaces Acoustiques* with WDR Sinfonieorchester Köln won a Deutschen Schallplattenkritik award.

Opera and musical theatre forms an important part of his musical life and he has travelled widely, with highlights including John Adams' *A Flowering Tree* for the Perth International Arts Festival, a performance which won the 'Best Symphony Orchestra Concert' Helpmann Award; *Porgy and Bess* at the Spoleto Festival USA; Wolfgang Rihm's *Jakob Lenz* for the Wiener Festwochen; Britten's *Owen Wingrave* with Tapiola Sinfonietta, and Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* in Poland. Mr. Asbury conducted a production of *A Quiet Place* as part of the centenary celebrations of Leonard Bernstein at Tanglewood. For dance projects, he has collaborated with Copenhagen Phil and the Danish Dance Theatre on a new production of *The Firebird*, the Mark Morris Dance Group in productions of Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*, and Virgil Thomson's *Four Saints in Three Acts* with performances at the Lincoln Center in New York, London's Barbican, and the Brooklyn Academy of Music, amongst other venues.

Since 1995 Stefan Asbury has served on the faculty of the Tanglewood Music Center and has been Head of Conducting at the Tanglewood Music Center for many years. In addition to his regular summer teaching, he has given masterclasses at the Hochschule der Künste (Zürich), Ensemble Modern International Academy, and Venice and Geneva Conservatoires.

New Music Ensemble

<i>First Violin</i>	<i>Cello</i>	<i>Saxophone</i>
Jeremiah Jung ‡	Zachary Keum ‡	Zhikang Chen
Mitsuru Yonezaki *	Gayeon Kim *	
Yeji Hwang	Austin Topper	<i>French horn</i>
Kearston Gonzales		Sage Silé
Jiaxin Lin	<i>Bass</i>	
Sarah McGuire	Dennis McIntyre	<i>Trumpet</i>
Céline Bethoux	Luisa Brown-Hernandez *	Maxwell DeForest
<i>Second Violin</i>	<i>Sampler</i>	<i>Trombone</i>
Kitty Amaral ‡	Jordan Lau	David Casazza
Ravani Loushy Kay *		
Maxwell Fairman	<i>Flute</i>	<i>Percussion</i>
Sungin Cho	Anne Chao	Jakob Schoenfeld
<i>Viola</i>	<i>Oboe</i>	<i>Harp</i>
Charlie Picone ‡	Kearsen Erwin	JT Zhang
Yu-Heng Wang *		
Ru-Yao Van der Ploeg	<i>Clarinet</i>	<i>Piano</i>
	Chasity Thompson	Yoni Senik
* <i>Kim strings</i>	<i>Bassoon</i>	
‡ <i>Gibson strings</i>	Valerie Curd	

Support the future of music at NEC!

Your gift to The NEC Fund has a direct and immediate impact on student scholarships, NEC's world-class faculty, and a collaborative and innovative learning environment rooted in the highest level of musical excellence.

Please consider making a gift to support NEC at necmusic.edu/givenow

Food and drink are not allowed in the concert hall,
and photography and audio or video recording are prohibited.

Assistive listening devices are available for all Jordan Hall concerts;
contact the head usher or house manager on duty or inquire at the Coat Room.

Latecomers will be seated at the discretion of management.

Stay connected



necmusic.edu/tonight