

CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL
SACRED SPACE FOR THE CITY

Arts



ALIAS Chamber Ensemble

September 30, 2018
4:00 p.m.

Christ Church Cathedral
900 Broadway, Nashville, Tennessee 37203
christcathedral.org

Program Notes

Written by J. Thomas Howald

Byron House's **"Trio (Expanded)"** is electronic music augmented by winds: bass clarinet, bassoon, flute, and English horn. The composition was begun in 1988 and completed in 2018. 20th/21st-century art music often explores the exotic, the surprising, the unconventional, opening itself to the sometimes confrontational challenge: "But is it really music?" Defining music is indeed tricky. But suppose we try, provisionally: Music is sound, organized for the purpose of encountering/enjoying organized sound. Is there anything you call music that this definition misses? Is there anything you reject as music that this definition includes? The definition is very broad: It doesn't eliminate other purposes ("Happy Birthday"). It accepts all genres (none of this "bluegrass is not real music"). It doesn't discriminate by taste (no room for "Bach will never be surpassed") or by quality. And it certainly accommodates electronica. The music of Byron House's "Trio (Expanded)" is in three movements. The first begins with a rush of sound, which becomes the background for a variety of chiming and mechanical clapping in multiple rhythms. It ends, as it began, with the rush of sound. The second movement comprises a series of broken chords in rapid succession, a self-conscious reference to the work of Philip Glass. But like the music of Glass, it is potentially deceptive. It sounds like endless repetition at first, but careful listening discloses minute but cumulatively significant variation. This portion of the piece contains the only "melody," a series of short musical phrases in a very low tone. The third movement is a fuller, more assertive version of the first and includes interesting stereophonic effects.

Nico Muhly's **"Beaming Music"** (2013) is for marimba and organ. This contemporary piece has deep roots. In the 1889 Paris Universal Exposition, Vietnamese, Balinese, and Javanese musicians, among others, performed. It was eye-opening for many noted musicians and Debussy, in particular, was fascinated by "gamelan," traditional Indonesian music played on tuned percussion instruments. He saw it as, among other things, one more way to challenge the dominant German classical heritage. The marimba is, of course, a tuned percussion instrument. Its name is African (Bantu) but its origins are disputed: African? Asian? Gamelan interest grew after the Expo, and marimbas were produced in the United States as early as 1910. In this piece, the marimba is paired with an organ, the score for which is occasionally reminiscent of the work of Philip Glass. According to the composer's website, the piece is "about small rhythmic cells transforming themselves into large open chords...[an effect]... most evident following the marimba solo 2/3 of the way through." In addition to some sparkling runs on the marimba, the marimba organ combination produces many interesting rhythmic variations.

Rene Orth's **"Stripped"** (2015) was commissioned for the Aizuri Quartet by the Barnes Foundation/Curtis Institute of Music. The piece requires, and rewards, careful attention, but, helpfully, it cultivates our attention as we go. One way (of many) in which it might be heard is as a conversation. As in most conversations, the piece must attract our attention at the outset, which it does with some low irregular growls from the cello. The higher register strings reply, somewhat tentatively, and the dialogue begins, the parties occasionally interrupting one another. There are "thoughtful" pauses; the cello softens its assertions; irregularities of cadence and intriguing dissonances keep us alert. The interaction becomes more complex, somewhat more harmonious. Eventually the lower register is pacified. There is a stately, quiet resolution, fading to silence. A word of caution: There is a pause of a couple of beats near the end, and it may seem that the piece is over. But the high notes get the last word, and then silence. But, in the silence, the attention persists.

"Chimers" (2012) by Phyllis Chen employs toy piano, toy glockenspiel, tuning forks, clarinet, and violin. Clearly recalling Mozart's "Magic Flute," with its foreground of lighthearted, even frivolous, play barely concealing an underlying serious purpose, Chen's "Chimers" uses tuning forks and an array of tuned rods from a toy piano to generate a cascade of glittering sound. (Will there ever be an end to new instruments? Certainly not yet, as this composition attests.) The piece artfully carries us along, beginning with a pulsating dance of tuning forks on rods. Then, about halfway through, the tuning forks begin to use the toy piano sound box to create a reflective mood, which ends in a single sustained note and silence: a metaphor for our lives perhaps—barely managed busyness that achieves meaning and calm after subsequent "recollection in tranquility" (the phrase is Wordsworth's). The International Contemporary Ensemble asked Chen to write a piece for the 2011 Mostly Mozart Festival. They were surely gratified by this outcome.

Christopher Walters' **"Mikromechanische Momente"** (2018) is for jazz trio and percussive machine. In this piece, the composer acknowledges a sense of disturbing, perhaps melancholic recollection of the machine age. The piece is in three movements but may be played without pauses. The first movement has a short introduction and quickly becomes a jazzy trio into which the percussive machine intrudes, eventually dominantly enough that the other instruments fall into line with its distinctive rhythms. The parties begin to coordinate their efforts and move briefly into a waltz tempo. A short coda and a sustained single note end the movement. The clarinet states a slow (almost lullaby) theme for the second movement, and the piano and cello echo it. The trio develops the theme in an improvisatory fashion, and eventually the machine again imposes itself, quickening the pace, with the piano succeeding in slowing it again. The clarinet takes up the theme at the outset of the third movement, giving it a rather Latin tempo, echoing and "accentuating the rhythmic pulse and absurdities of the machine" (composer's notes). The piano and cello then collaborate in this. As the pace slows, the machine becomes repetitive and insistent, seeking to dominate. "The machine, and the musicians, eventually bring this odd excursion to a close." (composer's notes) "Odd excursion," ambiguous conclusion, indefinite resolution to the tension between musicians and machine—an apt metaphor, perhaps, for the relation between humans and our creations, including some of our music.

Aliaxandr Yasinski's **"Peace"** is for accordion and string quartet. The use of accordion-type instruments in art music, while somewhat unusual, is by no means unprecedented. One might cite Piazzolla's jaunty tangos or the technical angst of Gubaidulina's concertos. Yasinski's "Peace" shows yet more of the instrument's versatility. Listening to this music, we might reasonably conclude that peace is vulnerable and requires vigilance. Specifically, this music reflects on and the episodic warfare in Ukraine. From a quiet, meditative beginning, gradually instrumental voices are added. Then tempo and volume begin to increase, as does a sense of agitation: peace, then struggle. This pattern—peace, then struggle—recurs, with variations: another slow section followed by a another nervous one. During the second portion of struggle, there is a vocalization calling, "Peace. Peace"—a plea we all understand. And peace returns. The music trails off in monotone, reflecting its beginning. Musical responses to warfare are not rare, nor are artistic ones. Following World War I, many visual artists deliberately chose to make stark, even ugly, art, since the world had grown ugly and the pretense of light hearted beauty seemed to trivialize the suffering that had occurred. Yasinski's "Peace" is by no means ugly: Indeed, it is stirring. But the edge is there. The peaceful passages, alternating with the turbulent ones, remind us that perpetual peace is a hope, not an accomplishment. The music is by no means unguardedly optimistic; it is sobering.

About ALIAS

Founded in 2002, ALIAS is a nonprofit chamber ensemble dedicated to an innovative repertoire, artistic excellence, and a desire to give back to the community. Its wide-ranging repertoire brings Nashville audiences a mix of chamber music that cannot be heard anywhere else. ALIAS also enriches the lives of Nashville's students, families, and diverse communities with its ALIAS in the Community programs. Musicians bring both new and ageless classical music to the community in a variety of imaginative educational programs — ALIAS knows no boundaries in the ways music can change lives.

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ALIAS CHAMBER ENSEMBLE

PROGRAM

Trio (Expanded)

Byron House

- I. Pro spanse
- II. Interior
- III. Epi-spansion

Celine Thackston, flute; Titus Underwood, English horn; Gil Perel, bassoon; Lee Levine, bass clarinet

Beaming Music

Nico Muhly

Alan Fey, marimba; Michael Velting, organ

Stripped

Rene Orth

Alicia Enstrom and Jeremy Williams, violin; Christopher Farrell, viola; Christopher Stemstrom, cello

Chimers

Phyllis Chen

Jun Inasaki, violin; Lee Levine, clarinet; Sari Reist, tuning forks; Melissa Rose, toy piano; Alan Fey, toy glockenspiel

Mikromechanische Momente

Chris Walters

- I.
- II.
- III.

Lee Levine, clarinet; Matt Walker, cello; Alan Fey, percussion; Chris Walters, piano/ keyboard instrument

Peace

Aliaksandr Yasinski

Jeff Lisenby, accordion; David Davidson and Alicia Enstrom, violin; Christopher Farrel, viola; Sari De Leon Reist, cello

This program will be performed with no intermission.

Artist and composer bios can be accessed at aliasmusic.org/novelnoise



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Donna Nicely
Ophelia & George Paine
Annette S. Pilcher
Wade Punch
Bobby & Kay Reynolds
Susie & Russell Ries
Victoria O. Ross
Gene A. Russell
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As a Cathedral, we are a **Sacred Space for the City** in the center of Nashville reaching out to embrace the entire city. We believe that the Cathedral should be a place where all citizens of Nashville, along with visitors to our city, can deepen their faith through the experience of music, drama, special liturgies, and other presentations.

Friends of Christ Church Cathedral was conceived for anyone who would like to support these events with a financial contribution. We hope you will join us by becoming a Friend so the entire city may continue to see the glorious beauty of God in artistic expression at the Cathedral.

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UPCOMING EVENTS AND PROGRAMS AT CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL OCTOBER—DECEMBER 2018

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 28

Suggested donation at the door:

\$15, \$5 students

Childcare provided

Reception following

4:00 p.m.

ORGAN CONCERT: THOMAS OSPITAL

Chief organist at the Church of St. Eustache in Paris, home of the largest pipe organ in France, 28-year-old Thomas Ospital is a top international concert organist. His scintillating program will include a demonstration of his remarkable skill at improvisation.



Co-sponsored by the Nashville Chapter of the American Guild of Organists.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 4

Free and open to the public

Childcare provided

Reception following

3:30 p.m.

ORGAN CONCERT/ALL SAINTS SOLEMN CHORAL
EVENSONG WITH BENEDICTION



Pre-Evensong Concert by Joseph O'Berry, Cathedral's Assistant Organist and Choirmaster. Choral Evensong sung by the Cathedral Choir under the direction of Dr. Michael Velting, Canon for Music; Joseph O'Berry, Assistant Organist and Choirmaster, organ.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 11

Suggested donation at the door: \$20

7:00 p.m.

NASHVILLE UNLIMITED

At this popular annual event, Nashville musicians and surprise guest artist lend their talents to benefit Room In The Inn—and get the audience in the holiday spirit in the process!



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 16

Free and open to the public

Childcare provided

Reception following

4:00 p.m.

ANNUAL FESTIVAL OF LESSONS & CAROLS



Readers from the Christ Church Cathedral congregation join the Choir and Senior Choristers to trace in music and scripture the story of prophecy and fulfillment, from the foretelling of the coming of Christ through Advent and the Annunciation to the Incarnation of God's promise in the birth of our Savior.

