



The Essence of Life

March 1st, 2021 7:00pm

Allen Recital Hall, Holtschneider Performance Center, DePaul University

Program

Astor Piazzolla | *Libertango*

Jonathon Kirk | *Crossing Field*

Valerie Coleman | *Freedmen of the Five Civilized Tribes*

Florence Price | *Adoration*

Reena Esmail | *Saans*

Heitor Villa-Lobos | *The Jet Whistle*

I. Allegro non troppo

II. Adagio

III. Vivo

Shawn Okpebholo | *CryptOlogiE*

Astor Piazzolla | *Libertango*

The Argentinian composer Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992) is best known as an integrator of 20th century classical modernism with the varied styles of one his nation's most beloved national cultures—the tango. His music however represents a much more varied mixture of folk stylings, jazz, and a unique personal reflection of music of the Americas than a composer who would simply mix things together. This *tango nuevo* of Piazzolla's creation would eventually make him one of the more influential and commercially successful classical composers of the last 75 years—with a slate of rich collaborations and recordings firmly cemented in culture as part of his legacy.

The sound and techniques of his signature instrument (and the central heating system of the tango repertoire) the *bandoneón*, is the primary generator of material in many of Piazzolla's works. *Libertango*, one of his most popular compositions, is no exception to this; the frolicking rhythmic patterns and tango ostinato of the *bandoneón* are unmistakable in the countless transcriptions that exist of this piece. The transcription heard in this concert brings out the clarity of his melodic writing while at the same time never loses its rhythmic intensity. Piazzolla's gift of combining lyrical and melancholic melodies above such an energetic rhythmic backdrop are part of what makes his music so rich and enjoyable.

-Jonathon Kirk

Jonathon Kirk | *Crossing Field*

Crossing Field is a musical composition that focuses on layering, density, and redundancy. During the creation of this work I was inspired by the work of American sculptor and printmaker Sue Fuller (1914-2006) who's hypnotic string compositions twist your perception by embedding delicate threads into plastic. Her stunning work has natural musical analogues—counterpoint, dense layering, and repeating forms—she was able to create elegant complexity with very limited material. The title's meaning is simply my way of understanding how she used techniques of strings crossing one another to create an entirely unique play on the idea of depth of field.

The work allows for any number of performers interpreting a graphic score (notation using textures, lines, objects, and other abstract visual elements) and several electronic layers both produced in real-time and in a pre-existing fixed form. Besides taking direct inspiration from Fuller's work, my approach to the graphic notation in this piece draws a strong influence from the graphic scores of the mid-20th century experimental music tradition. Many of the graphic scores of Earle Brown can serve as point of departure—where “a built-in factor of flexibility in the notation and scoring” allows for the performers to let go of ideas of metric and note accuracy. The graphic score allows performers to approach something like improvisation, but still read notated material that allows for the creation of many inherent modifications during a performance.

—Jonathon Kirk

Valerie Coleman | *Freedmen of the Five Civilized Tribes*

Freedmen of the Five Civilized Tribes honors the legacy of Native Americans and former African slaves (adopted into Native American tribal membership through emancipation or marriage), who traversed the Trail of Tears. African-American descendants with Native American ancestry were later cast out of the government's National Registry, denying their right for land and other benefits. Still, they fight for their rights even today. The history of what is referred to as the Five Civilized tribes (the Chickasaw, Cherokee, Creek, Seminole and Choctaw nations) and their relationship with the Freedmen resonates within me as it is a true merging of cultures, sometimes clashing with aggression, but more than often melding into a soulful exchange.

—Valerie Coleman

Florence Price | *Adoration*

Florence Price (1887-1953) was born in Little Rock, Arkansas and received her first musical training from her mother. In her late teens she moved to Boston to continue her formal music study at the New England Conservatory focusing on piano and organ. After returning to the south to briefly teach at various music academies and colleges in Atlanta and Little Rock, the Price family was impelled to escape the racial oppression and hostilities of their community and made Chicago their new home. It was in Chicago that Price would first

gain attention and be recognized much later on as being the first prominent black American woman composer. In the late 1920s and 30s Price would begin to receive commissions as a composer, had works performed by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and would eventually win first prize in the prestigious Wanamaker composition competition. As her career continued she worked hard for other opportunities despite challenging obstacles and was largely forgotten after she died in 1953. A surprising and inexplicable discovery in 2009 in a dilapidated house in St. Anne, Illinois prompted a rediscovery of Price's music and brought much of her music, that was thought to be lost, back to the repertoires of orchestras, soloists, and chamber ensembles.

Adoration (1951), a work originally written for her primary instrument of the organ, has been transcribed for a number of different instrumental combinations. The work is a meditation that is simple in its texture and melody, but contains unexpected moments of harmonic tension and phrasing. Its sonic home will most likely be in a church, but its nostalgic character carries a message that seems to transcend time and place.

-Jonathon Kirk

Reena Esmail | *Saans* (violin/cello/piano)

In recent years, I've realized how deeply inspired I am to write music by the very people I write it for. I've always found the story of the Franck Violin Sonata as incredibly moving and romantic as the music itself: Franck wrote the sonata for Ysaye and his wife as a wedding present, and they premiered it at the wedding, sight reading through the score. It is one of my favorite pieces of all time, and the love and intention with which it was written resonates so deeply through the music.

As I was finishing my Clarinet Concerto for Albany Symphony in April, I was also planning my trip to Paris for one of my closest friends, Suzana Bartal's wedding. As the two women in our year of the Yale DMA program, we supported each other unconditionally through some of the toughest moments of our lives, celebrated our accomplishments with each other, and developed a deep and lasting friendship. As I wrote my last commission of the season, I saw that the slow movement of my Clarinet Concerto could actually be turned into a piano trio as a wedding gift to Suzana and her husband Eric. Suzana is a world class concert pianist, and one of her chamber music specialties is playing piano trios. Our story ended up a little differently from Cesar Frank's: as I was at Suzana and Eric's wedding, this trio, in an amazing coincidence, was actually being premiered in Los Angeles on the same day. Even though it was performed a world away, it made me so happy that was premiered by and for some of my dearest friends in Los Angeles.

A beautiful addendum to this story: two years later, Suzana played this trio for the first time in the United States at a concert at the Wallis Annenberg Performing Arts Center, in Beverly Hills, CA, with cellist Peter Myers and violinist Vijay Gupta. And the next day Vijay and I got married. I love that this one piece has played a central role in both of our weddings.

-Reena Esmail

Hector Villa-Lobos | *The Jet Whistle*

- I. Allegro non troppo
- II. Adagio
- III. Vivo

Hector Villa-Lobos (1887-1959) is one of Brazil's most well-known 20th century composers, and his chamber music shows how his numerous influences and rich musical interests are combined in compelling ways. *The Jet Whistle*, a whimsical musical conversation between flute and cello, was composed in 1950 while Villa-Lobos was actively traveling around the world as a prolific composer at the height of his success.

The piece was completed in New York and demonstrates Villa-Lobos's interest in mixing an array of compositional techniques that were used in much of his chamber music after 1945: operatic-like gestures, rhythmic ostinatos, folk-like melodies, and idiosyncratic modernist abstractions. The peculiar title gets its name from a specific technique where a flute player produces a dramatic sound by forcing air directly and quickly into the flute mouthpiece. The resultant sound is reminiscent of a jet airplane departing into the sky. The listener will have little trouble hearing the references to mechanical flight at the end of the composition—the droning engine and a quick take off are dramatized to almost humorous effect. The piece's expressive climax however, comes during the second movement. Here Villa-Lobos creates a stark and angular 'vocalise' that never seems to resolve—the interplay between the flute and cello is downcast and reflective.

-Jonathon Kirk

Shawn Okpebholo | *CryptOlogiE*

Everything I compose is about something—a response to, inspired by, a study in—not music for music's sake. *CryptOlogiE*, a quintet for flute, clarinet, violin, cello, and piano, is selfishly about what I treasure most in life: my wife and two daughters. Cryptology is the study of codes, or the art of writing and solving them. Full of confidence, color, and coded messages, the source material for this work is a calculated serial pitch set of our birthdays [3,2,8,11,1,7,10,9]; a Morse code rhythm [. ...- .- / --- -. -. --- .-. ---] that decodes my oldest daughter's name [EVA OKPEBHOLO]; and intentional repeated ostinato and recurring pitches of the first letters of my wife's and daughters' names (C, D, E). The mood of this work is an amalgamation of their personalities: highly energetic, sweet, and methodical.

-Shawn Okpebholo