

THE 39TH ANNUAL BOWLING GREEN NEW MUSIC FESTIVAL

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 20

2:30 pm, Bryan Recital Hall

Air (1995).....**Aaron Jay Kernis**

Penny Thompson Kruse, violin – Laura Melton, piano

Now This (2017).....**Eric Moe**

Solungga Liu, piano

I Remember (2007).....**Ted Hearne**

Mickey Miller, and Caroline Kouma, sopranos – Hillary LaBonte, mezzo-soprano

- brief intermission -

Just, Seventeen (2018).....**Daniel Felsenfeld**

Brian Snow, cello

Desert Miniatures: Insects (2012).....**Robert McClure**

Joshua Hart, Kevin Daniel, and Mikaela Kroyer, bassoons

Two Movements (with Bells) (2007).....**Aaron Jay Kernis**

I. Poco adagio

II. A Song for My Father

Caroline Chin, violin – Laura Melton, piano

Program Notes

Air is a love letter to the violin. Songlike and lyrical, it opens up a full range of the instrument's expressive and poignant possibilities. Composed with two main themes and open in harmony, the first poses melodic questions and their response, while the second is very still, rising ever-upward into the highest range of the violin. Following a middle section of dramatic intensity it cycles back to the themes in reverse, developing each along the way, and ending quietly after a final plaintive ascent. *Air* is dedicated to pianist Evelyne Luest, the composer's wife, and was composed in 1995 for violinist Joshua Bell. Since its premiere it has been arranged in many versions with solo instrument and orchestra, chamber ensemble or piano.

Now This takes its title from a phrase used by TV newscasters to introduce a station break or commercial. I am intrigued by the way that formula sets up a radical change of tone (say, from gruesome tragedy to a hemorrhoid cream ad). The musical surprises of this piece are sometimes drastic but reveal themselves to be deeply connected to what comes before and after. *Now This* was commissioned by Solungga Liu, and is dedicated to her in recognition of her superlative artistry. Most of the composition was completed during a residency at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts; I am very grateful to VCCA for the gift of time and space. -EM

In February of this increasingly complicated year I took my daughter to the optometrist. As she was waiting for the doctor for an antic, uncomfortable hour, the television blazed images of terrified students streaming out of a school that had just been shot up by a White Supremacist. My daughter is seven, just a decade shy of those students, and the immediacy kicked me hard—her delightful innocence against the cruelest possible reality aglow on the screen—and it, along with the subsequent valiant crusade of the school's survivors against a seething impossible crew of monsters (actual monsters, as opposed to the more abstract monsters my daughter admits), has been difficult to shake. This piece is just a piece, a myopic reaction from a single source, but it goes out to them regardless. And to Bryan for asking, as well as the multiple cellists who helped with the consortium commission for *Just, Seventeen*.

Ted Hearne, *I Remember*

Text: Anne Sexton, *I Remember* (1962)

By the first of August
the invisible beetles began
to snore and the grass was
as tough as hemp and was
no color—no more than
the sand was a color and
we had worn our bare feet
bare since the twentieth
of June and there were times
we forgot to wind up your
alarm clock and some nights
we took our gin warm and neat
from old jelly glasses while
the sun blew out of sight
like a red picture hat and
one day I tied my hair back
with a ribbon and you said
that I looked almost like

a puritan lady and what
I remember best is that
the door to your room was
the door to mine.

Desert Miniatures: Insects was commissioned by Trio Sonora: Robert BeDont, Travis Jones, and Martin VonKlompberg. The piece reflects on my time living in Tucson, AZ and all of the different types of insects that thrive in the Sonoran Desert.

I. Many Hued Grasshopper

I encountered many of these grasshoppers while hiking in the late summer and early fall months. They are brightly colored with purple and red accents against green wings and powerful light-green legs. As I would walk through tall grasses in the mountains, the path would explode with many grasshoppers leaping all around me.

II. Cactus Bee

These bees are solitary and live underground. The bassoons combine to create a flurry of activity representing a particular bee going about her daily business of collecting nectar.

III. Arizona Red Spotted Purple

These butterflies employ an ingenious evolutionary tactic for survival: mimicry. They look very similar to the Pipevine Swallowtail, a blueish-black butterfly that is noxious for birds to eat. Even more, the caterpillar of the Arizona Red Spotted Purple employs mimicry through resembling bird droppings or other objectionable material.

IV. Fire Ant

Anyone who has ever accidentally stepped on a Fire Ant hill knows how painful the stings are. This unfortunately happened to me on my first day as an Arizona resident.

Desert Miniatures: Insects was a winner of the 2015 Bassoon Chamber Music Composition Competition.

Two Movements (with Bells) is a memory piece in honor of my father, Frank Kernis, who passed away in 2004. His favorite music was jazz and American popular song of the 40's and 50's, and although when I took up music I gravitated to classical and new classical music, as I was growing up there was a lot of music based in the blues and jazz playing around the house. After distancing myself from it for a number of years, since my father's death I've been surprised to see those musics seeping back into my work I'm becoming more aware of how jazz has implicitly marked my emotional and physical experience of music and what elements in my work can unexpectedly arise from improvisation, the soaring and emotional melodies of mid-20th-century ballad singers, and even the rawness of the blues.

I can also draw a direct line to this most recent of my works, *Two Movements (with Bells)*, all the way back to my *New Era Dance* from 1992. While *New Era Dance* is rambunctious and colored by the urban Manhattan cityscape (and influenced strongly by Latin salsa, the "cool" jazz of the '50s and even rap music), *Two Movements (with Bells)* is essentially introspective and personal in character. Notwithstanding all the virtuosic and rhythmic music in this new work, it varies a great deal in mood, from exuberance, intense lyricism, desolation, emotional distance to melancholy and mournfulness. Much more chromatic than much of my lyrical music, the two movements share a tendency toward frequent expressive shifts, contrasts in mood and speeds and an improvisatory impetuosity. This comes in part out of free jazz and an expressionistic take on the common variation form of standard-based jazz. Certainly there are other influences from classical and 20th-century music at the heart of this work, but I've been aware of their formative role in my compositional voice for longer.

While the first movement is marked "Presto," it is filled with restless, often uneasy lines and silences, which often break into wild figurations and speeds. It is more fast than slow, while the second movement, "A Song for my Father," is the opposite — mostly lyrical and song-like with outbursts of activity and intensity.

Bell sounds are not used so explicitly, but I was hearing them in my head during the entire time that I was writing the work, and their presence (especially in the piano part) should color how the performers approach its sound world. Are they funeral bells, bells of distant memory, bells made of dense clusters of overtones which fracture and fragment from the intensity of their physical attack?

Two Movements (with Bells) was commissioned expressly for James Ehnes — whose exceptional musicality and virtuosity has inspired this effort — and his fine duo partner Eduard Laurel — by the BBC Proms. It was written in the late spring and early summer of 2007.