

74TH SEASON OF CONCERTS

MAY 1, 2016 • NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART



PROGRAM

3:30 • West Building, West Garden Court

PostClassical Ensemble

Angel Gil-Ordóñez, music director

Min Xiao-fen, pipa, ruan, voice

David Taylor, bass trombone

Daniel Schnyder, saxophone

Matt Herskowitz, piano

Part One: Trans-Atlantic

Daniel Schnyder (b. 1961)

Aladin: Tales from Another Time (2002)

Schnyder

Worlds Beyond (1999)

Schnyder

Blues for Schubert (1999)

Schnyder / Kurt Weill (1900 – 1950)

Zuhaelter Ballade from *Threepenny Opera*

Schnyder / George Gershwin (1898 – 1937)

The Half of It Deary Blues

Schnyder

Trio for soprano saxophone, bass trombone, and piano (1996)

Schnyder / Robert Stolz (1880 - 1975)
Zwei Herzen im Dreivierteltakt

Schnyder / George Gershwin
Let Them Eat Cake

Schnyder / Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 - 1827)
Around the World (Seid umschlungen, Millionen) (2006)*

Intermission

Part Two: Trans-Pacific

Min Xiao-fen / Thelonious Monk (1917 - 1982)
Misterioso

Schnyder
*Concerto for Pipa and Orchestra** (2016)*

*American premiere

**World premiere performance, and co-commissioned by
PostClassical Ensemble and the Pacific Symphony

The Musicians

PostClassical Ensemble, called “one of the country’s most innovative music groups” (Philip Kennicott) and “wildly ambitious” (Anne Midgette), was founded in 2003 by Angel Gil-Ordóñez and Joseph Horowitz as an experimental orchestral laboratory. PostClassical Ensemble programming is thematic and cross-disciplinary, typically incorporating art, film, dance, or theater, exploring unfamiliar works and composers, or recontextualizing standard repertoire. The topic of music and film has long been a PostClassical Ensemble specialty. With the National Gallery of Art Film Division, PostClassical Ensemble has produced a festival of films scored by Shostakovich (with the participation of Tony Palmer and Solomon Volkov), a full day of “Stravinsky on Film” (including the American premiere of Richard Leacock’s *A Stravinsky Portrait*), and many other such events.

Daniel Schnyder and David Taylor are both artists long associated with PostClassical Ensemble. Schnyder was born in Zurich in 1961 and now lives in Harlem (Manhattan). He grew up “in a family that listened to only classical music.” He also acquired a passion for jazz. His vast catalog of compositions includes commissions from New York’s Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, the Milwaukee Symphony, the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, the Berlin Philharmonic, Vienna’s Tonkünstler Orchestra, the Radio Symphony Orchestra in Berlin (for which he was composer-in-residence), Zurich’s Tonhalle Orchestra, and the Bern Opera. His Charlie Parker opera, *Yardbird*, was premiered by Opera Philadelphia last season; this summer, it is presented by the Lincoln Center Festival at the Apollo Theatre. A saxophonist, Schnyder tours with a trio that includes David Taylor and Matt Herskowitz; their repertoire includes Bach, Wagner, Gershwin, and Ellington.

Min Xiao-fen has expanded her instrument’s possibilities as an element in contemporary composition, exploring extended techniques for free improvisation and full-on noise. On her latest solo set, *Mao, Monk and Me*, she investigates deep and unexpected connections between the jazz standards of Thelonious Monk and Chinese music. In 2013–2014, she blended the work of Buck Clayton, a leading member of Count Basie’s Old Testament orchestra, and Li Jinhui, the father of Chinese popular music; the result was her composition *From Harlem to Shanghai and Back*, performed by her Blue Pipa Trio. Born in Nanjing, Xiao-fen learned to play the pipa from her father, a respected professor and pipa master. At the age seventeen, she was selected by the Nanjing Traditional Music Orchestra and spent over ten years as its principal pipa soloist. She moved to the United States in 1992. Her previous appearances with PostClassical Ensemble have included a world premiere of Zhou Long’s *Abschied*, in 2007. Xiao-fen has also performed as a soloist with the Brooklyn Philharmonic, Pacific Symphony, San Diego Symphony, New Haven Symphony, Amiens Chamber Orchestra (France), and Nieuw Ensemble (Holland).

While studying at Juilliard, David Taylor was a member of Leopold Stokowski's American Symphony, and occasionally played with the New York Philharmonic under Pierre Boulez. Shortly after, he joined the Thad Jones Jazz band. Taylor recorded with Duke Ellington and with the Rolling Stones. He has since been closely associated with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the Gil Evans Big Band, and the Charles Mingus Big Band. Taylor has performed chamber music with Wynton Marsalis, Yo-Yo Ma, and Itzhak Perlman. Alan Hovhaness, Charles Wuorinen, George Perle, and Frederic Rzewski — important composers from all points of the compass — have all composed for him. Daniel Schnyder's *Bass Trombone Concerto* — composed for Taylor and performed by PostClassical Ensemble in 2010 — is today the most performed concerto for that instrument.

Matt Herskowitz's newest release, for Justin Time Records, is *Matt Herskowitz Upstairs*, a solo outing ranging from Gershwin to Schumann, to Dave Brubeck and originals by Herskowitz, including *Bella's Lament* and *Bach à la Jazz*, his arrangement of Bach's *Prelude in C Minor*, which Herskowitz previously recorded for EMI's Grammy-nominated soundtrack to *The Triplets of Belleville*. In naming the release "Solo Album of the Year," *Le Devoir* declared: "Herskowitz deploys his art with a rare passion, but without ever sacrificing musicality. Exceptional technique, precise sense of nuance, Herskowitz here brilliantly fuses his mastery of jazz and classical." *Downbeat* magazine praised *Upstairs* in its Editor's Picks: "Throughout these eight tracks, [Herskowitz] displays touch, power, artistry and chops along with a firm grasp of the daring needed for a great performance."

Netanel Draiblate, *concertmaster*

Simon Gollo, *violin*

Philippe Chao, *viola*

Ben Capps, *cello*

Brent Edmondson, *bass*

Adria Foster, *flute*

Fatma Daglar, *oboe*

Joseph di Luccio, *English horn*

David Jones, *clarinet*

Noah Getz, *bass clarinet*

Sue Heineman, *bassoon*

Sam Blair, *contrabassoon*

Dan Wions, *horn*

Woodrow English, *trumpet*

Terry Bingham, *trumpet*

Lee Rogers, *trombone*

Bill Richards, *percussion*

John Spirtas, *percussion*

Audrey Andrist, *piano*

Program Notes

The term “classical music,” as used in the United States to distinguish concert music and opera from popular and vernacular genres, originated in the mid-nineteenth century with such writers as Boston’s John Sullivan Dwight, editor of *Dwight’s Journal of Music*. Dwight’s definition was value-laden — “classical music” designated the supreme stratum of musical expression. Dwight called Stephen Foster’s “Old Folks at Home” — the century’s most popular American composition — a “melodic itch.”

This understanding of “classical music” is impossible today. It penalizes non-Western music. And it penalizes the signature creative achievement of American music of the mid-twentieth century: jazz. Today’s musical landscape, which I call “PostClassical,” is wide, varied, and level; it does not rank one form of musical experience over another. In the concert hall, a lot of the most significant activity now occurs when different types of music interact. PostClassical Ensemble’s current American Music season presents music by Lou Harrison (who absorbed Javanese gamelan) — and also Daniel Schnyder, born in Switzerland in 1961 and now a resident of Harlem in New York City. The Schnyder music we hear today, moreover, celebrates Kurt Weill and George Gershwin — also uncategorizable.

Such between-the-cracks composers used to be viewed with suspicion in American classical music circles. Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess* was initially patronized as a dilettante stab. During his lifetime, Duke Ellington was denied the Pulitzer Prize because his music lacked a “classical” pedigree. But those days are done.

Daniel Schnyder, being European-born, came to American music without the prejudices once afflicting American classical musicians. His formal training in Zurich, in flute and composition, was rigorously “classical.” But he equally absorbed the influence of jazz. He says:

There’s a big change happening right now, a change leading back to where classical music began. Bach and Mozart were improvisers. If you wanted to get a job as a chamber musician in the eighteenth century, you had to improvise — otherwise, no job. So your creative potential was tested. Nowadays in classical music, people don’t even improvise their cadenzas anymore. We have now a separation between the performer and the composer; musicians *reproduce* music. I don’t want to put that down, it creates fantastic results. But the value of trying to combine these separate worlds that belong together — it’s enormous. For one thing, it increases the power to reach an audience — a kind of power we’ve lost to popular music and to sports. Look at someone like Mick Jagger or Michael Jackson — his music, his band, his sound had a combined power that absorbed and fascinated audiences because it emanated from one individual. I think we are going back to a time when music was something holistic.

A lot of the music I compose adapts the compositions of great artists of the past, trying to find ways to express myself through their music. This is nothing new. Schoenberg did it, Busoni did it, lots of important composers did it. But for many decades, this practice of adaptation and transcription was put down. When Stokowski transcribed Bach, it was denounced almost as a crime. Now, however, transcriptions are coming back.

My training as a composer was traditional, and included the contrapuntal practices of Renaissance composers. And my own music incorporates canons, canons in inversion, proportional canons. This aspect of composition — counterpoint — was central to the composer's art for a long time. Schubert was still studying counterpoint when he was already an accomplished great composer. In my opinion, today's concert music is often more about colors, rhythms, effects — there's a certain lack of contrapuntal interest. I also value enormously ethnomusicology. It's something I got involved in because of an opportunity to work with musicians in Lebanon and Jordan. I go to the source — African musicians, Chinese musicians. It's much easier than going to a library and looking for the right books.

Of the Schnyder works we hear this afternoon, the *Concerto for Pipa and Orchestra* was co-commissioned by PostClassical Ensemble and California's Pacific Symphony as a concerto vehicle for the remarkable pipa virtuoso Min Xiao-fen. Schnyder's 1999 *Bass Trombone Concerto*, for David Taylor, demonstrates an exceptional capacity to compose for an instrumentalist with specific gifts. Xiao-fen deserves such a vehicle. Hence the commission. Schnyder writes:

The concerto is in three continuous movements. The main first movement theme, played initially by the orchestra alone, has an exotic quality; you hear quarter tones and extended harmonies that do not have roots in Western music. At the same time, the thematic material develops in dramatic Western fashion, leading (after the entrance of the pipa) to a second, more meditative ideal. Here the pipa plays a singing, serpentine melody over an ever-changing 7/4 pattern. This leads to a feeling of suspense. The music hovers. Next, the percussion and pipa discuss the first theme, trying to find their way back to the movement's initial ideas. Finally we return to the main theme and explore it with soloist and orchestra playing together.

The first movement is followed by a cadenza, a transition that restores a calmer atmosphere, with different meters superimposed. The center of gravity is again not defined and we experience a feeling of suspense. After this section, we connect musically to the first half of today's program. There follows a homage to George Gershwin. American musical inventions, the new aesthetics of the twentieth century, can be heard mixed with exotic pipa colors.

The concerto's finale is dominated by the idea of combining rhythmic subdivisions in three and in two. The resulting rhythms have an African quality. This movement has a rondo character and incorporates a homage to Kurt Weill. Toward the end material from the first movement is superimposed, creating a polyrhythmic texture that intensifies and returns to the concerto's initial ideas.

Program notes by Joseph Horowitz

Upcoming Events of the Seventy-Fourth Season of The William Nelson Cromwell and F. Lamot Belin Concerts

Oran Etkin, clarinet

“Reimagining Benny Goodman”

Presented in honor of

In Celebration of Paul Mellon

May 8, Sunday, 3:00 and 4:15

West Building, West Garden Court

Ariel Quartet, with Alon Goldstein, piano

Music by Brahms and Mozart. Made

possible by the Gottesman Fund

in memory of Milton M. Gottesman

May 15, Sunday, 3:30

West Building, West Garden Court

Aphrodite Mitsopoulou, pianist

Music by Chopin, Liszt, Konstantinidis,

and Skalkottas. Cosponsored by the

Embassy of Greece for the European

Month of Culture

May 19, Thursday, 12:30

West Building, West Garden Court

Jenny Scheinman’s

Kannapolis: A Moving Portrait

Original score accompanying

a documentary

May 22, Sunday, 4:30

East Building Auditorium

Winners of the 2016 Joseph and Goldie

Feder Memorial String Competition

and Misbin Family Memorial Chamber

Music Competition

Presented in cooperation with

Washington Performing Arts

June 5, Sunday, 2:00 and 4:00

West Building, West Garden Court

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The use of cameras or recording equipment during the performance is not allowed.

Please be sure that all portable electronic devices are turned off.

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