

4-10-2019 8:00 PM

Guest Recital, Still, James Romig, Composer, April 11, 2019

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Guest Recital

Still

James Romig, composer

Ashlee Mack, piano

Thursday, April 11, 2019

8:00 p.m.

Harper Hall

Still, for solo piano

James Romig
(b. 1971)

Ashlee Mack, piano

PROGRAM NOTE

Still, for solo piano, inspired by the paintings of Clyfford Still, was commissioned in 2016 by Ashlee Mack, Carl Patrick Bolleia, Louis Goldstein, Paola Savvidou, and Michiko Saiki, with additional support provided by the Clyfford Still Museum (Denver, Colorado). The work comprises 43 individual “Iterations” that may be performed in a continuous unbroken strand of music that lasts approximately 55 minutes, or it may be divided into smaller segments or suites. As the work unfolds, a strand of 24 notes (a contiguous string of 8 unique trichords) is gradually revealed in groups of three, four, five, or six pitches at a time. This results in a slow-moving alternation of sparse and dense textures over the course of the entire work. On a smaller scale, similar progressions from sparse to dense (and back again) inform each of the 43 individual iterations, resulting in a faster fluctuation of moment-to-moment density that interacts with the work’s large-scale background structure.

Music exists in time, and time moves in only one direction. A listener’s attention is temporally directed by the composer, and one is only able to revisit moments of music as much and as often as memory allows. Because of this, many works of music provide a listener with a relatively narrow aesthetic path, and the intention is for all listeners to have more or less the same experience. A viewer of visual art, on the other hand, is usually free to choose which artwork to observe, where to stand in relation to that artwork, where to look within the boundaries of the image, and for how long. When visiting the Clyfford Still Museum, one wanders intuitively from work to work, making connections between different paintings. Each visitor has a unique experience, but because all the works come from a single creator a Big Picture eventually emerges. The goal of this piano piece is to create a “museum of sound,” allowing a listener to develop a notion of the work’s entirety by listening to multiple iterative variations of harmony (color) and rhythm (form). Though an audience will of course be bound by temporality as the music unfolds over the course of an hour or

so, it is hoped that the inner repetitions and variations within the 43 sections of music might provide each listener with a unique experience, determined by whichever musical features are noted and remembered from iteration to iteration.

A recording of *Still*, performed by Ashlee Mack, is available from New World Records.

BIOGRAPHIES

James Romig endeavors to create music that reflects the intricate complexity of the natural world, where fundamental structures exert influence on both small-scale iteration and large-scale design, obscuring boundaries between form and content. His work has been described as “a complex quilt of sound” (Moline Dispatch), “the musical equivalent of fractal geometry” (Classical New Jersey), and “rapturous... sparse, slow-moving beauty” (San Francisco Chronicle). Early collegiate study in percussion performance led to an interest in minimalism, while doctoral study in composition with Charles Wuorinen and Milton Babbitt engendered a passion for serial structure and rigorous formal design. His music is further inspired by abstract expressionist painting, post-modern literature, doom/drone metal, and progressive rock. Notable performers of his work include the JACK Quartet, Talujon, Chronophonie, Collide-O-Scope, Due East, Duo Contour, Helix, Khasma Duo, New Muse Duo, Zodiac Trio, Duo Harpverk, Suono Mobile, the Quad City Symphony, pianists Ashlee Mack and Taka Kigawa, flutists John McMurtery and Harvey Sollberger, and many others. His music has been performed in 49 states and 33 countries, and his compositions for percussion have received hundreds of performances around the world. Recordings of his music have been released by New World, Navona, Blue Griffin, and Perspectives of New Music/Open Space. Guest-composer visits include Eastman, Buffalo, Cincinnati, Bowling Green, Minnesota, Tennessee, Colorado, Illinois, Northwestern, and the American Academy in Rome. Artist residencies include Copland House, Centrum, and National Parks (Everglades, Grand Canyon, Petrified Forest). He holds degrees from the University of Iowa (BM, MM) and Rutgers University (PhD), and has been on faculty at Western Illinois University since 2002. His music is published exclusively by Parallax Music Press (ASCAP).

Pianist **Ashlee Mack** has given recitals in Germany, Italy, and across the United States. Specializing in contemporary music, she has premiered works by many notable composers including Christian Carey, Matthew Heap, David Maki, Robert Morris, Lawrence Moss, Paul Paccione, Bruce Quaglia, James Romig, Edward Taylor, and David Vayo. In 2012, she and Katherine Palumbo founded the Khasma Piano Duo, an ensemble dedicated to performing music from the 20th and 21st centuries. Their albums are available on CD Baby, Amazon, and iTunes. Other solo and chamber recordings by Mack can be heard on Navona Records, Parallax Music Press, Perspectives of New Music/Open Space, and New World Records, with upcoming releases on Innova and Parma. An avid hiker and nature enthusiast, she has been an artist-in-residence at Wupatki National Monument, Everglades National Park, Grand Canyon National Park, Petrified Forest National Park, and Centrum in Fort Worden State Park, WA. In 2017, she premiered James Romig's 55-minute piano solo, *Still*, and has since presented the work more than twenty times, including performances at the Clyfford Still Museum, the Milwaukee Art Museum, and Frank Lloyd Wright's historic Cedar Rock estate in Quasqueton, IA. Mack is Director of Piano Studies at Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois. For more information, please visit www.khasmapianoduo.com/ashlee-mack.