



AXIS MUNDI:
NEW WORKS
FOR BASSOON

BEN
ROIDL-
WARD

SIDEBAND RECORDS

Alban Wesly visited me in 2012 to demonstrate the bassoon: The instrument is a long wooden tube that doubles back on itself, punctuated by a great number of holes and keys. The keys might be thought of as a quite complex “management system” to resolve a natural out-of-tuneness, but it was precisely the irregularities of intonation and color in the bassoon that attracted my attention. Alban and I found a way of organizing sounds which takes an “inside-out” view of the instrument: In thinking about each hole as a venting point governing the cycles of vibration and then subtly changing the interaction of these vibrations by opening and closing parts of the acoustic chamber below the open hole, we arrived at a series of irregular scales. These scales are made up of differently sized microtonal intervals and changing “behaviors.” There are tones expressed in distinct timbres from bright to dark to fuzzy, and complex multiphonics ranging from highly dissonant rolling tones and roaring frictions to consonant harmonies. Some of the sounds are highly localized, gloriously emerging from the bell at the top of the bassoon or circulating in quite specific regions of the tube. These sonic “knots” inside the vibrating hollow tube of the instrument form the musical material of *Axis Mundi*. The breath of the musician traveling the hidden pathways across and through these knots activates the many voices of a “singing tree.”

Axis Mundi

Liza Lim

Liza Lim's music focuses on collaborative and transcultural practices. Ideas of beauty, ecological connection, and ritual transformation are ongoing concerns in her compositional work. Her four operas: *The Orestea* (1993), *Moon Spirit Feasting* (2000), *The Navigator* (2007), and *Tree of Codes* (2016), and the major ensemble work *Extinction Events and Dawn Chorus* (2018) explore themes of desire, memory, and the uncanny. Widely commissioned by some of the world's preeminent orchestras and ensembles, Lim is Sculthorpe Chair of Australian Music at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and is a Fellow of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin in 2021-22. Her music is published by Casa Ricordi Berlin.

Pregunta No.4:

Quimera

Luis Fernando Amaya

The works that belong to the series *Preguntas (Questions)* have in common only one thing: Their composition process is a chain of slow-paced explorations of a concept or a sound. In every *pregunta*, the composition process is like walking in complete darkness with a dim light—I can see only the next meter ahead of me.

Pregunta No.4: Quimera was written for and with Ben Roidl-Ward in a close collaboration that lasted three years. It was not until the last months of our collaboration that we understood that we had created some sort of imaginary topography—a map of sounds and paths to move through them. This piece is but one of the many paths that one could take through this sonic territory whose constraints are the bassoonist's fingers, mouth, and breath.

Born in Aguascalientes, México, **Luis Fernando Amaya** is a composer and percussionist currently based in Barcelona. Topics such as collective memory and the relationship between humans and non-humans (plants, animals, environments, objects) are commonly present in his work. He studied composition and music theory at the Centro de Investigación y Estudios de la Música (CIEM) and holds a PhD in composition and music technology from Northwestern University. As a performer, Amaya is a member of the collective composition and free improvisation trio Fat Pigeon. His scores are published by BabelScores.

Pinceladas was written for Peter Kolkay in 2016. The title translates as “brush strokes” and is an evocative image for the fleeting lines and fluid interplay of the bassoon and the piano. At times rhapsodic, at times skittish, the music unfolds through a number of short episodes punctuated by multiphonics in the bassoon. The two instruments play cat-and-mouse for much of the piece, sometimes dovetailing seamlessly and other times rudely interrupting one another. Moments of clarity are brief and fleeting: Rhythmic grooves are offset and obscured by jarring rests, rhythmic displacement, and playful grace notes.

Pinceladas

Tania León

Tania León (b. Havana, Cuba) is highly regarded as a composer, conductor, educator, and advisor to arts organizations. Her orchestral work *Stride*, commissioned by the New York Philharmonic, was awarded the 2021 Pulitzer Prize in Music.

Honors include the New York Governor's Lifetime Achievement, inductions into the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and fellowship awards from ASCAP Victor Herbert Award and The Koussevitzky Music and Guggenheim Foundations, among others. She also received a proclamation for Composers Now by New York City Mayor, and the MadWoman Festival Award in Music (Spain).

León has received Honorary Doctorate Degrees from Colgate University, Oberlin, SUNY Purchase College, and The Curtis Institute of Music, and served as U.S. Artistic Ambassador of American Culture in Madrid, Spain. A CUNY Professor Emerita, she was awarded a 2018 United States Artists Fellowship, and Chamber Music America's 2022 National Service Award.

Still/Alive is a piece that explores the tension between sudden juxtapositions and gradual change. Alternations between the highest register and gravelly multiphonics mediated by volatile bass lines create a sense of disarray. As the piece evolves, obsessive loops are formed and cells of materials are repeated and degraded through violent accelerations towards untenable speeds. The piece gradually shifts in emphasis from this highly gestural material to beating dyads nearly frozen in time, which trigger a different mode of listening. The title comes from the experience of these different kinds of time, times of overwhelming stimulation and activity, when there never seems to be a break, and times of meditation, stillness, and self-reflexiveness. This piece could not have been written without Ben, who was an invaluable collaborator and who graciously lent me his high school bassoon to experiment with.

Still/Alive

Mathew Arrellin

Mathew Arrellin is a composer and cellist based in Chicago. His music has been performed by the Mivos Quartet, Third Coast Percussion, Ensemble Dal Niente, ~Nois, the Low Frequency Trio, the Fonema Consort, and himself, among others. His music has been performed in festivals such as the Valencia International Performance Academy (VIPA), June in Buffalo, Foro Internacional de Música Nueva, and the SCI National Conference. Mathew holds a bachelor's degree in music theory, composition, and cello performance from the University of New Mexico. He received his PhD in Music Composition from Northwestern University, where he studied composition with Jay Alan Yim, Alex Mincek, and Hans Thomalla.

be still, mobius, be still marks a period of pressure and vulnerability, and having to remain focused and poised amid a challenging time. Multiphonics in the bassoon are a focal point of the piece, used as a foundation for maximizing timbral and harmonic complexity within the trio setting. Using related fingerings, the multiphonics morph to and from a returning A-flat, and circular breathing across long gestures is required given the slow tempo, resulting in a shifting yet sustained surface texture. Dyads in the cello make use of harmonics as a way to maximize range and work with the clarinet to harmonize, reinforce, and contextualize elements of the bassoon's multiphonic spectra. The performers are asked to think of home. I ask also: What does tension feel like, and how can I focus that energy as a conduit for creative expression?

be still, mobius, be still

Tom Kelly

Tom Kelly is a composer, performer, and field recordist from Chicago, IL. Tom's acoustic works have been performed regionally by members of International Contemporary Ensemble, Ensemble Dal Niente, Mocrept, and Cuarteto Q-Arte. He has performed in a diverse range of settings, including solo on modular synthesizer as accompanist for live dance (Merce Cunningham MinEvent, 2017), on laptop as a guest orchestra member (Chicago Sinfonietta, Chicago Symphony Center, 2018), and nationally as bassist for avant-prog trio Guzzlemug (2006-2016). As a field recordist, Tom explores both urban and remote spaces and is enriched by listening to the nuances of his immediate surroundings.

The Untitled 1B+ is the result of an intense performer-composer collaboration through the span of 16 months starting back in October 2019 until its virtual premiere on February 6, 2021.

The piece is part of a collection of pieces written for a variable type and number of instruments of the same family, in this particular case, for bassoons. It can take four different forms: as a solo, as a solo plus fixed media, as a duet, or as a trio. It is formed by five distinct modules whose order is fixed but different depending on the number of performers participating.

Although every single parameter and aspect of the piece is carefully and meticulously controlled, the score represents a series of open stimuli that must be permeated by the individual background, experience, and taste of the performer. Therefore, without being improvisatory, the piece can take varied shapes and trajectories. The aim is to build a kaleidoscopic texture of sounds and colors that result from the spontaneous and unique interactions of the momentum.

Winner of a 2020 John Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship, composer **José-Luis Hurtado's** music has been played across continents by ensembles such as BMOP, le NEM, JACK Quartet, Talea Ensemble, and the Arditti Quartet, among many others. He has been the recipient of composition prizes in Mexico, U.S., Austria, Argentina, Canada, and Italy. Hurtado holds a PhD from Harvard University, where he studied under Davidovsky, Czernowin, Ferneyhough, and Lachenmann.

The Untitled 1B+

José-Luis Hurtado

Ben Roidl-Ward is a bassoonist dedicated to working with and advocating for composers of his generation. He has commissioned and premiered numerous solo and chamber works featuring the bassoon with the goal of broadening the repertoire and expanding the possibilities of the instrument. Since 2021, Ben has served as Assistant Professor of Bassoon at the University of Northern Iowa. He is also the bassoonist of Ensemble Dal Niente, the second bassoonist of the Illinois Symphony, and a Contemporary Leader for the Lucerne Festival in Switzerland.

Ben received his DMA from Northwestern University, where he studied with David McGill. His previous teachers include Ben Kamins at Rice University, George Sakakeeny at the Oberlin Conservatory, and Francine Peterson in the Seattle area.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This album is dedicated to my wife, Isidora Nojkovic, who was with me every step of the way.

I would like to thank Liza, Luis, Tania, Mathew, Tom, and José-Luis, the composers whose extraordinary music inspired me to make this album and pushed me to be a better musician. Thank you, Daniel, Isidora, and Zach, for being such wonderful collaborators, and Dan for making this album sound as good as it can. Thank you to Chris and Hans for believing in the project, and for the extraordinary service you do to the Chicago new music community. I would also like to thank the Illinois Arts Council, the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, and the International Double Reed Society, all of whom helped to make this project possible. Finally, thank you to my teachers, my students, my colleagues, and my friends, for making it all worthwhile.

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Ben Roidl-Ward



PERFORMERS

Daniel Pesca is a composer, pianist, and improviser whose interpretations of the piano literature stand out for their creativity and dynamism. A fervent champion of contemporary music, Daniel is a member of several ensembles noted for their innovative approach to the development of new work, including the Grossman Ensemble and the Zohn Collective. Daniel has performed the premieres of over 100 pieces, many composed specifically for him. Formerly artist-in-residence at the University of Chicago, Daniel is now assistant professor at University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

Zachary Good is a Chicago-based clarinetist, Baroque recorder player, composer, arranger, improviser, and educator. Zachary is clarinetist of the sextet Eighth Blackbird, a founding Co-Artistic Director of the performance collective Mocrep, and one-third of the clarinet/percussion/cello trio ZRL.

Praised for her "great control" (*Chicago Classical Review*), cellist **Isidora Nojkovic** is an active soloist, chamber, and orchestral musician. She has a passion for contemporary music and commissioning, having premiered over 50 works, and is one half of the contemporary violin/cello duo Orbit ("the new cross-continental duo to pay attention to." – *Classical Post*).