Juilliard Percussion Ensemble

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The Juilliard School
presents

Juilliard Percussion Ensemble

Daniel Druckman, Music Director

Monday, October 21, 2024, 8pm
Peter Jay Sharp Theater

AMY BETH KIRSTEN
(b. 1972)

may the devil take me (2019)
Arnor Chu
Boldizsár Kovács
Chu Wen Ong
Hanna Piao

JOHN LIBERATORE
(b. 1984)

Three Disclaimers (2023)
I. the active ingredient is a question
II. to dwell is to leave a trace
III. if some of you are also bots, bot can't tell
Anthony Chan, Violin
Arnor Chu
Minwoo Jeong
Justin Melvin
Hanna Piao
Daniel Druckman, Conductor

ANDY AKIHO
(b. 1979)

Pillar IV (2014)
Heeyeon Kim
Parker Meek
Chu Wen Ong
Guoer Pang

Intermission

Braille

Large Print

Please make certain that all electronic devices are turned off during the performance. The taking of photographs and the use of recording equipment are not permitted in this auditorium.

JO KONDO
(b. 1947)

Under the Umbrella (1976)
Doyeon Kim
Jonas Koh
Chaerim Park
Sean Swenson

Performance time: approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes, including an intermission

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AMY BETH KIRSTEN
may the devil take me

Amy Beth Kirsten

Born:
1972, in Belleville, Illinois

"When I compose, I'm thinking of a character and a story, and how approaches to music and the expression of sound actually mean something for a character and a story," Juilliard composition faculty member Amy Beth Kirsten says. Kirsten's fiercely distinctive approach to her craft is rooted in the circumstances of her early musical development. A comparatively late bloomer as a composer of concert music, Kirsten first honed her craft as a singer-songwriter and jazz vocalist. It was only when she was around 30 that she enrolled in a master's program in composition, and it was at that point that she discovered the envelope-pushing tradition of 20th-century "composed theater," as epitomized by Peter Maxwell Davies' *Eight Songs for a Mad King* and George Crumb's *Vox Balaenae*—texted and nontexted works in which the instrumentalists play active roles in the unfolding dramaturgy. These scores suggested new possibilities for integrated multimedia expression, and in Kirsten's work over the past 15 years, she has been interested in finding fresh ways to "fuse music, language, voice, and theater." Frequently, she's done this by treating "musicians' instruments, bodies, and voices as equal vehicles of expression." And because Kirsten's musical ideas tend to be inseparable from her theatrical inspirations, her evening-length scores like her Joan of Arc-inspired piece *Savior* have seen her fulfilling the duties of composer, librettist, and director-dramaturg, in ways that reimagine Wagner's concept of the "total work of art" for the 21st century.

Kirsten's theatrical mindset shines through even in a short, purely instrumental piece like *may the devil take me*, which was conceived for the unlikely complement of four triangles, each of a different size and tone quality. The title comes from one of the best-loved passages in Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, in which the eponymous knight-errant attacks a flock of sheep that he has mistaken for an army of fearless warriors. Kirsten's title is a translation of words spoken by Don Quixote's squire, Sancho Panza, in response to the farcical scene. What drew Kirsten to the passage was "the idea that one character's reality is so at odds with another's" that they seem to inhabit entirely different worlds. Kirsten's piece translates the idea into musical terms by radically reimaging the way triangles are played, shepherding them out of the familiar, commonplace existence associated with Sancho Panza and bringing them, instead, into the unlikely, fairy-tale realm of Don Quixote. More specifically, Kirsten sidesteps triangles' traditional role as instruments for resonant, bell-like punctuation and re-envisions them as jangling, raucous beat-makers with "impure" sonorities. She does this by instructing the performers to dampen or choke the triangles' ringing, something that produces a subtle percussive effect that the score is very much concerned to exploit, most obviously in a slower middle section. Kirsten also compounds the spectacle by instructing the players to strike the triangles with a variety of nontraditional, "found"

beaters, from kitchen spoons and a glass straw to a rock and the rubber handles on electricians' pliers. If, as Kirsten says, *may the devil take m*e "converts triangles into objects that are contrary to their true nature," and then her miniature instrumental drama asks whether "this makes them untrue somehow."

JOHN LIBERATORE
Three Disclaimers

John Liberatore

Born:
1984, in Auburn, New York

John Liberatore's music is driven by an unusually wide-ranging set of creative preoccupations. One of them is the deceptively simple compositional question of how and why one musical note or event follows another. Liberatore describes the earliest stages of composing this way: "The first impulse for a new piece is practically nothing—just a bead of sound that can be turned in any direction. As I put the sound in motion, it makes its potential known. Composition, then, is about listening for that potential." In part, Liberatore's close attention to sound's potential—to the possible ramifications of any musical event—reflects the distinctive influence of composer Jo Kondo, with whom Liberatore studied in Japan, and whose work is also featured on this program. Another important stimulus for Liberatore's work has been poetry. Liberatore is a voracious reader of recent as well as classic poetry, and in addition to composing a substantial amount of texted music, he has frequently drawn on verse as a kind of framing device—as a source for metaphors and images that listeners may use as entry points into the soundworlds of his non-texted pieces.

Both preoccupations are in evidence in *Three Disclaimers*, a kind of pocket concerto for violin soloist and percussion quartet that was written in response to *Fast*, a 2014 text by the celebrated poet Jorie Graham. Among other things, *Fast* is a meditation on the rapid pace of technological change in contemporary life and on the speed with which our smartphones and computational devices now process information. Graham's poem pursues these themes through a focus on chatbots—programs that use machine learning and other kinds of algorithmic programming to simulate interactive conversation.

Liberatore was especially drawn to the following passage in Graham's poem:

> Disclaimer: Bot uses a growing database of all your conversations
> to learn how to talk with you. If some of you
> are also bots, bot can't tell. Disclaimer:
> you have no secret memories,
> talking to cleverbot may provide companionship,
> the active ingredient is a question,
> the active ingredient is entirely natural.

Liberatore was particularly attracted to Graham's suggestion that the boundary between human and computer may be more porous than we tend to assume ("If some of you are also bots, bot can't tell"). For this reason, says Liberatore, Graham's poem also puts its finger on something important about the nature of creativity. In a thoughtful reflection on *Three Disclaimers*, Liberatore confesses that

> composing a piece, or perhaps any creative activity, often feels like the work of a chatbot. An inscrutable, unseeable process predicts the next word, then the next one, and so forth, until it produces a whole with only the illusion of continuity and intention. The process seems intuitive, but is surely governed by a vast "dataset" of habit, context, convention, and so forth. Still, the piece begins with a question. The output must remain in contact with this question, this humanizing impulse, in order to pass as "human."

For Liberatore, the active ingredient that distinguishes a human-composed score from one produced by a computer is that the former is driven by an unresolved question or all-too-human urge. How, *Three Disclaimers*, seems to ask, do we know whether that human musical question is present or not?

Each of *Three Disclaimers*' three movements takes its title from a line from *Fast*. The first, "The active ingredient is a question," alternates between two kinds of textures: mechanical, moto perpetuo passages led by the violin, in which pitched, metallic percussion instruments try to keep up with it in a kind of "imitation game," and dreamy, long-breathed passages in which the violinist seems almost to "think aloud." The second-to-last line of Graham's poem is "To dwell is to leave a trace," which Liberatore adopts as his second movement's title. Graham's words suggest an opposition between the physical nature of human "dwelling" and the supposedly ethereal, bodiless character of the electronic data that passes through our information circuits. The slow, contemplative movement plays on this theme, with the violinist pulling melodic threads out of the sonic "traces" and decaying resonances left behind by the percussion's tolling. At times, Liberatore reverses the roles, so that bowed vibraphone or crotales instead halo or extend the violin's "traces." In the movement's latter stages, Liberatore also introduces the otherworldly, robotic sonority of the melodica, a blown harmonica-like instrument with a small keyboard. Last, the scherzo-finale "If some of you are also bots, bot can't tell" reprises the opening movement's rapid-fire "imitation game" textures, but now in a more playful key.

ANDY AHIKO
Pillar IV

Composing for percussion poses a special set of challenges, from the bewildering variety of instruments and techniques available to the modern percussionist (is a tam-tam played with a superball mallet as loud as one played with a conventional beater?) to the physical logistics of performance (can the performer get from instrument A to instrument B in time?). For this reason, it is not by chance that many of the 20th century's most accomplished percussion composers had hands-on performing experience, and that this has continued to be true in the 21st century thanks to the work of musicians like Andy Akiho. A percussionist by training, Akiho had some of his earliest formative musical experiences playing in a South Carolina high school drumline; the influence can still be heard in some of his work. After receiving his undergraduate percussion degree, Akiho spent time in Trinidad, where he devoted himself to learning that island's native instrument, the steelpan drum. It soon became his instrument, and in the decade and a half since, one of Akiho's principal artistic preoccupations has been developing a repertoire of works for it—a task that would be difficult for someone not fully immersed in the world of steelpan performance, given the instrument's unique pitch layout. But whether or not he is composing for forces with steel drums, Akiho has a unique flair for reimagining the possibilities of all the percussive "phones" and "spiels," and when writing for nonpercussion instruments, for also imbuing their music with a drummer's sensibility.

Andy Ahiko

Born:
February 7, 1979,
in Columbia,
South Carolina

Akiho's virtuosic, propulsive *Pillar IV* is the central panel of *Seven Pillars*, an 11-movement, evening-length cycle for percussion quartet that was first performed live in its entirety in 2021 and was honored as one of the finalists for the 2022 Pulitzer Prize in music. In *Pillar IV*, Akiho uses found instruments like glass bottles and metal pipes alongside a range of techniques aimed at defamiliarizing the sounds of conventional percussion instruments. For instance, Akiho instructs the performers to play on the "wrong" parts of the instruments—to scrape drum shells and the vibraphone's resonating tubes—as well as to strike the mallet percussion's keys using drumsticks rather than the usual metal and yarn mallets. The latter technique gives the pitched sonorities of glockenspiel and vibraphone a degree of noise and buzz that is not typically sought in formal Western concert percussion practice. With those complex, "impure" timbres and its energetic, multilayered drumline-flavored rhythms, *Pillar IV* introduces something of the vigor, play, and aplomb of "trashcan percussion," as is sometimes encountered in New York's subways, into the rather different environs of the concert hall.

JO KONDO
Under the Umbrella

Jo Kondo

Born:
October 28, 1947,
in Tokyo

One of the leading members of the generation of Japanese composers born after the end of the Second World War, Jo Kondo has occupied a quietly distinctive position on the global new music stage for more than a half century. Kondo's compositional agenda has revolved around a set of creative concepts—among them, what he refers to as "negative music," but also *Sen no Ongaku*, which can be translated as "linear music." Kondo's idea of "negative music" involves a rejection of traditional beliefs about the composer's inner self and its expression through music in favor of a deep sensitivity to individual sounds that Kondo associates with John Cage's quest to respect "sounds in themselves." This is no coincidence—from a very early stage in his creative development, Kondo found himself drawn to the New York School experimentalism of Cage and his similarly minded colleague Morton Feldman. When Kondo had the opportunity to spend a year in New York in the late 1970s, he met both men—an experience that he has described as confirmation that he should continue along the creative path he had already begun to stake out.

As for "linear music," it refers to the methods Kondo has used to approach his "negative music" ideal. Kondo has stated that he composes one note at a time, without any structural preplanning. His aim, he says, is to listen carefully to each sound to determine which should follow it. This is a process he has characterized in terms of inspecting what he calls sounds' "shadows"—a task that involves investigating the relationships each sound suggests rather than imposing a series of arbitrarily selected formal relationships on them. Focusing on the middle ground between individual sounds and the larger linear (i.e., melodic) groupings that they suggest to the listener's perception, Kondo delights in the ambiguously double-edged quality of the music that can be produced by composing in this manner. Kondo says of his "linear music" pieces that even if they may "sound to most people like an endless row of tones flowing without interruption, tones that keep on unfolding with artless simplicity," by the same token, "an artless appearance can often conceal great sophistication" and "extreme complexity can sometimes be disguised under a very simple surface."

Kondo's four-movement *Under the Umbrella* was commissioned by the composer's elder colleague and countryman Toru Takemitsu for the Canadian percussion ensemble Nexus. Although *Under the Umbrella* was written according to "linear music" principles, its instrumentation—25 untuned cowbells and a single low gong, distributed among a quintet of percussionists—makes it unique in Kondo's output. While carefully tuned cowbells exist that approximate Western concert music's 12-tone

equal temperament, Nexus founder Bob Becker recalls that Kondo was unenthusiastic about them, preferring a more disorderly array of pitches and sonorities. As a result, when the percussionists set their cowbells resonating at the same time, the composite timbre strongly recalls Cage's prepared piano, which employed coins, screws, and other everyday objects to unpredictably transform the sounds produced by the piano's 88 keys. Kondo describes the prepared piano as another tool for exploring the "shadow" of sounds, by "dissolving a single tone into an ambiguous arrangement of harmonics that breaks up its self-sufficient existence."

The quick rhythmic patterning of *Under the Umbrella*'s first movement aims at something similar—"dissolving" the five-part sonority with which the piece begins, by dissecting it into its constituent parts. As in many of Kondo's pieces, the musical texture relies on hocketing—the staggered, pointillistic distribution of each of the notes of a melodic line among multiple performers. In keeping with his "linear music" philosophy, Kondo is interested in the degree to which listeners will perceive individual percussive attacks as building blocks for larger musical patterns.

While the first movement dissected the composite sounds of multiple cowbells, the spare, stately second instead focuses upon isolated cowbell timbres, and on stringing them into more extended phrases. In the extended third movement, Kondo uses mallet rolls to transform the bells into quasi-sustaining instruments. It is an example of "linear music" on a microscale, since each attack in a roll occurs too quickly to be perceived as a separate event; the point is that each is experienced as part of a larger continuity. In addition, the movement sometimes fragments the sustained texture with contrasting sounds, in a way that was atypical for Kondo's music during this period.

The final movement, which is similar in character to the first, reserves the low gong for its last note, making it the only time it is heard in the piece. The subtle gesture is reminiscent of the use of low gongs in Indonesian gamelan (percussion orchestras), as punctuation at the ends of important structural moments. Perhaps the message is that in a global, interconnected world, Kondo's music falls under a pan-Asian musical umbrella including gamelan, no less than it does the umbrella of New York-style experimentalism.

Matthew Mendez is a Palo Alto, California-based musicologist and critic who specializes in 20th- and 21st-century repertoire. He received a PhD in music history from Yale University and is a postdoctoral fellow and lecturer at Stanford University. Mendez was the recipient of a 2016 ASCAP Foundation Deems Taylor/Virgil Thomson Award for outstanding music journalism.

Daniel Druckman

Daniel Druckman (Pre-College '76; BM and MM '80, percussion; faculty, 1991–present) is active as a soloist, chamber and orchestral musician, and recording artist. He has appeared in concert throughout the U.S., Europe, and Japan; in recital in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Tokyo; and as a soloist with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, American Composers Orchestra, the New York Philharmonic's Horizons concerts, and the San Francisco Symphony's New and Unusual Music series. He has been a member of the New York Philharmonic since 1991, serving as associate principal percussionist, and has made numerous guest appearances with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Da Capo Chamber Players, American Brass Quintet, Orpheus, Steve Reich and Musicians, and the Group for Contemporary Music. Druckman has also participated in chamber music festivals in Santa Fe, Ravinia, Saratoga, Caramoor, Bridgehampton, Tanglewood, and Aspen. An integral part of New York's new music community, both as soloist and as a member of the New York New Music Ensemble, he has premiered works by Steve Reich, Elliott Carter, Jacob Druckman, Aaron Jay Kernis, Oliver Knussen, Poul Ruders, Milton Babbitt, Ralph Shapey, and Charles Wuorinen, among many others. He has also collaborated with Gilbert Kalish and Wu Han at the Chamber Music Society, Leif Ove Andsnes at Zankel Hall, and Colin Currie at Carnegie Hall. Druckman is chair of Juilliard's percussion department and director of the Juilliard Percussion Ensemble. After studying at Juilliard, Druckman undertook additional studies at the Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood. Born and raised in New York City, he is the son of composer Jacob Druckman.

Anthony Chan

With a repertoire spanning solo, chamber, and orchestra performances, Australian violinist Anthony Chan—a second-year master's student studying with Daniel Phillips and Ronald Copes—has performed at the Sydney Opera House and Hamer Hall in Melbourne. He has attended festivals including the Music Academy of the West, Aspen Music Festival, Vivace International Music Festival, and Keshet Eilon Summer Mastercourse Series. He also plays regularly with the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra and Canberra Symphony Orchestra and was a member of the Australian Youth Orchestra, which he joined on its 2019 international Tour. Chan cofounded the Prometheus Quartet, which has performed at Juilliard's ChamberFest, The New Series' *The Mad King*, and Terry Riley's *The Holy Liftoff* with flutist Claire Chase at the Juilliard Fall Festival. The quartet's Gluck Community Engagement Fellowship enabling its members to lead interactive performances in health-care facilities around New York. He has also collaborated in chamber performances with Joshua Bell, Steven Isserlis, Jeremy Denk, and Richard O'Neill. Chan has received chamber music coachings by members of the Borromeo, Pacifica, and Juilliard quartets and mentorship from Merry Peckham, Joseph Lin, and Jerome Löwenthal. An avid educator, Chan began teaching as a music scholar at Sydney Grammar School, mentoring students in chamber music during his senior year. As a Morse Fellow, he visits public school classrooms in New York on a weekly basis as an artist-educator. Alongside his studies, he maintains a small private studio. Chan holds a bachelor's from the New England Conservatory of Music, where he studied with Nicholas Kitchen and Ayano Ninomiya. Chan performs on a 1775 GB Guadagnini violin on generous loan from Juilliard alongside a bow crafted by Charles Peccatte.

Juilliard Percussion Ensemble

The Juilliard Percussion Ensemble was founded in the late 1960s by Saul Goodman and has since been led by Roland Kohloff and its current music director, Daniel Druckman. The ensemble appears annually at Alice Tully Hall and the Peter Jay Sharp Theater, where it has performed percussion music from China; explored works by Gerard Grisey, Beat Furrer, and Rolf Wallin; celebrated the 85th birthday of George Crumb; surveyed the works of the founders of Bang on a Can: Michael Gordon, David Lang, and Julia Wolfe; and honored the 50th anniversary of the influential percussion group Les Percussions de Strasbourg by performing three seminal works from its extensive repertoire. The ensemble has appeared in concert throughout the New York area, including guest appearances at the Danish Wave festival at Merkin Hall, New Works/October series at Miller Theatre, Cutting Edge series at Greenwich House, and at Carnegie Hall in several Perspectives performances curated by Maurizio Pollini and Leif Ove Andsnes. In 2014, the ensemble performed Steve Reich's *Drumming* with Colin Currie and, in 2016, joined forces with Juilliard's AXIOM ensemble for a celebration of Reich's 80th birthday, performing Double Sextet, Mallet Quartet, *City Life*, and Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organ.

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