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## The Juilliard School presents

### **AXIOM**

**Jeffrey Milarsky,** Music Director and Conductor **Sophia Bacelar,** Cello

Thursday, February 27, 2020, 7:30pm Peter Jay Sharp Theater

TORU TAKEMITSU

(1930-96)

Rain Spell (1982)

MELINDA WAGNER

(b. 1957)

Wing and Prayer (1996)

Intermission

PIERRE BOULEZ

(1925-2016)

Messagesquisse (1976) Sophia Bacelar, Cello

THOMAS ADÈS

(b. 1971)

Living Toys (1993)

Angels Aurochs

BALETT Militiamen H.A.L.'s Death

BATTLE

Playing Funerals

**TABLET** 

Performance time: approximately 1 hour and 20 minutes, including an intermission

This performance is supported in part by the Muriel Gluck Production Fund.





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.

### Notes on the Program by Matthew Mendez

### Rain Spell (1982) TORU TAKEMITSU

### Toru Takemitsu

Born: October 8, 1930, Tokyo

Died: February 20, 1996, Tokyo

"My music is composed as if fragments were thrown together unstructured, as in dreams," Toru Takemitsu once mused. "You go to a far place and suddenly find yourself back home without having noticed the return." Japan's most successful compositional export in the years after 1945, Takemitsu was admired far and wide for the brand of rarefied, streamof-consciousness musical poetry so memorably described in these lines. In this, the resolutely nondevelopmental scores of Claude Debussy were—ironically—an early and enduring stimulus. After all, Debussy had been a product of French turn-of-the-century japonisme, with his formal approach borrowing from Japanese expressive principles as they were then understood in the West. However, Takemitsu long refused to engage with the "real thing"—the rich traditions of authentic Japanese classical music. For him, they evoked memories of the country's wartime past, when they had been pressed into service as nationalist propaganda, and for a number of years, Takemitsu instead inclined toward international avant-gardist models. Yet in a complex loop of exchange typical of cultural diffusion in a globalizing century, it was ultimately via Western precedents just like Debussy's—themselves projections of European fantasies about Japan—that Takemitsu came to a kind of rapprochement with the native traditions he had once rejected, thus "finding himself back home without having noticed the return" in a different sense.

While Takemitsu never tired of comparing his music to the experience of strolling through a Japanese garden, that was not the only kind of landscape that exerted a pull on his imagination. He was also drawn to water imagery, and by the late 1970s was even speaking of what he called a "sea of tonality." Mainly concentrated in the 1980s was a series of rain-themed works, among which was the quintet Rain Spell, which drew inspiration from the tendency for precipitation to "pass through various metamorphoses," as Takemitsu put it. Like its companion scores, though, Rain Spell is not exactly concerned with illustrating watery phenomena as such, though its fluid instrumental gestures certainly do invoke the sounds of splashing and lapping. More significant is the way Takemitsu used rain as a metaphor for the pensive flux and impermanence of being, notions expressed in the Japanese principle of mono no aware, often translated as an "awareness of transience" or "the pathos of things." Hence Rain Spell eschews climaxes and rhetorical demonstration, unfolding instead as a series of episodes or sonic objects, offered up for contemplation before their inevitable passage back into silence.

Rain Spell also offers a good illustration of the rapprochement with classical Japanese sonorities that sometimes characterized Takemitsu's mature music. Most notably, he asks the harpist to detune five of the instrument's strings by a quarter tone; this, in conjunction with nontraditional plucking techniques, calls to mind the timbre of the Japanese koto. Likewise, the music given to the flute and clarinet often features extended instrumental techniques (multiphonics, coloristic fingerings). Though such techniques were initially associated with the international avant-garde of the 1960s, in Rain Spell they are re-traditionalized, incorporated into melodic shapes whose character alludes to traditional Japanese wind instruments, like the shakuhachi.

### Wing and Prayer (1996) MELINDA WAGNER

"Honesty": that single word best encapsulates the creative and expressive values that inform the work of Juilliard faculty member Melinda Wagner. Winner of the 1999 Pulitzer Prize for her Concerto for Flute, Strings, and Percussion, Wagner studied (among others) under Shulamit Ran and Richard Wernick, both of whom had been mentored in their turn by Leonard Bernstein. This makes her one of Bernstein's grand-pupils, and while Wagner's music certainly shares only surface resemblances with his, the comparison is nevertheless instructive. After all, her idiom, with its scintillatingly bold, electrifying textures, has a positively Lenny-like propensity for the grand gesture. At the same time, though, Wagner has always striven for the utmost in expressive immediacy—a crystal-clear sonic narrative, as she refers to it, a term she intends neither in the usual sense of program music, nor in reference to the resolution of instrumental conflicts. For Wagner, music's power resides in its ability to stir and rouse the listener on the level of purely abstract sound—something that cannot be achieved, she insists, without a deep sense of responsibility for details of structure and craftsmanship. As she once put it:

That's really the core of composer's work, to make sure that the parts of the piece link up in a most honest way. For instance, it's awfully easy to write very loud and dramatic music, but I would feel dishonest if I hadn't done a lot of preparation compositionally for a big climax in a piece. It's easy to "wow" listeners by using a lot of cymbals and timpani and a lot of brass, but you have to make that inevitable compositionally.

Melinda Wagner

Born: February 25, 1957, in Philadelphia

Lives in New York City The care and dogged persistence with which Wagner shapes her music is very much in evidence in Wing and Prayer, written for the nonstandard combination of clarinet, cello, percussion, and piano, and honored with first prize in the League of Composers/ISCM 1998 national competition. Like a number of other Wagner scores, Wing and Prayer begins with a melody whose ramifications will be felt throughout the succeeding narrative. Thus the germinal melody, first offered unaccompanied in the cello, is marked "like a lullaby; but also reverent, prayerlike." Characteristically for Wagner, though, a more rhapsodic, lyrical note is latent even in this first presentation of the melody. As the music becomes more animated and the other instruments increasingly have their say, this rhapsodic, demonstrative quality comes to the fore, "taking wing," as it were, in "a fast and furious scherzo" (Wagner's characterization). As for the score's central expressive polarity—the contrast between ideas of "wing" versus "prayer"—it seems to receive a tentative synthesis in a final section described by Wagner as "a kind of prolonged 'winding down'." A hushed passage built upon slowly rising chords in the piano and keyboard percussion, it is as if the music were striving to take flight one last time—this time for good. However, the subsequent return of the cello melody, now interlaced by the clarinet and marimba, ends the music on an uncertain note, with piano arabesques marked "an apparition" suggesting that whatever flight was achieved may have been but a dream.

### *Messagesquisse* (1976) PIERRE BOULEZ

Pierre Boulez

Born: March 26, 1925, in Montbrison, France

Died: January 5, 2016, Baden-Baden, Germany An idealistic trailblazer in the eyes of some, an authoritarian figure for others: Either way, Pierre Boulez long cast an inescapable shadow over the international avant-garde, as "the omnipresent conscience of post-war music," in the words of one prominent critic. Boulez first came to fame in 1940s Paris, as a 20-something firebrand stripping the rubble of the musical tradition down to "degree zero." Though Boulez very much searched in those years for a compositional language whose internal logic and autonomy would liberate it from the taint of historical associations, his less militant mature idiom came to aspire to an ideal of "organized delirium," with roots in the sensuous precedents of Debussy and Alban Berg. Boulez's formidable intellect and charismatic leadership later served him well in his conducting career, to say nothing of the running of IRCAM (Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique), the interdisciplinary electroacoustic music atelier he founded at the French government's behest. Although Boulez's death in January 2016 marked the close of the final chapter in the postwar modernist venture, his music—at once rigorously constructed and feverishly ornate—seems poised to endure.

In 1976, to mark the occasion of the Swiss pharmaceutical magnate and music patron Paul Sacher's 70th birthday, cellist Mstislav Rostropovich commissioned tributes from 12 composers of international stature. Though Rostropovich's initial conceit was that each composer would write a single variation on a theme for unaccompanied cello, such was Sacher's track record of support for new music that most of the contributors responded with offerings that went well beyond the envisioned miniature scale. Such was the case with Boulez's contribution, Messagesquisse (literally, "Message-Sketch"). Though a veritable jeu d'esprit by Boulez's standards (as one early reviewer characterized it), Messagesguisse was unique among the dozen homages in that it was written for not for cello alone, but for a soloist accompanied by six further cellos. Though this was also surely a function of the irreducibly harmonic nature of Boulez's idiom, the instrumental overabundance, not to mention the score's explicit poetic associations and its unusually straightforward compositional genesis, do seem to betray his deep fondness for Sacher.

Shedding some light on Boulez's intentions is a note he appended to the score, and which includes the following lines:

Messages are often secretly hidden Music has this advantage: It dispenses with words, The messages are essentially personal, decoded by everyone according to the time.

This notion of an indeterminate, private communication that listeners must decode, according to their individual inclinations, gets at the heart of what Messagesquisse is about, as are themes of encryption and decryption. Each of Rostropovich's 12 composers was instructed to draw on a six-note pitch cipher based on Sacher's family name—a translation into musical notes of the six letters of his name. For Boulez's part, so taken was he with the compositional possibilities afforded by the Sacher hexachord (as it has come to be known), that not only does it absolutely pervade Messagesquisse, with each of its tones being slowly sounded at the start, in cello harmonics—it would continue to furnish the essential musical DNA for some of the most ambitious music of his final years, including his scores Répons and sur Incises. In the case of Messagesquisse, Boulez also doubled down on these associations by keying each of the six notes of the Sacher hexachord to its rhythmic equivalent in Morse code. Yet notwithstanding the meticulous planning that informed Boulez's message, the overall impression produced by *Messagesquisse* is of a largely unpremeditated, almost rhapsodic sketch. Boulez seems particularly to revel in the rich timbre of massed cellos, and though the soloist very much takes the lead role, the six other players simulate some of the computer-assisted effects IRCAM would soon make

### Notes on the Program by Matthew Mendez (Continued)

possible: not only echo-chamber and amplification sonorities, but timbral transformations and electronic memorization (i.e., real-time recording with subsequent automatic playback).

A postscript: Boulez's papers are now housed at the Paul Sacher Stiftung in Basel, Switzerland, probably the world's most important repository devoted solely to composers' letters and sketches. Characterizing *Messagesquisse's* title as "unintentionally premonitory," Boulez expert Robert Piencikowski writes of how it was "as if [Boulez] was unconsciously sensing the role Sacher would soon play in the preservation of his own manuscripts."

### Living Toys (1993) THOMAS ADÈS

Thomas Adès

Born: March 1, 1971 in London

Lives in London

What happens to prodigies when they enter middle age? That is one of the questions posed by the recent work of Thomas Adès: Though he is now approaching 50, it can be difficult to think of him as anything other than a lavishly gifted enfant terrible who shot to international fame in the mid-1990s, armed with an inimitable compositional voice that seemed fully formed almost from the start. After making a name for himself while still an undergraduate at the University of Cambridge, Adès put the music world on notice with a series of improbably wide-ranging scores, each more scintillating than the last, and all overflowing with devastating, effortless invention and high-powered, rapid-fire wit. In more recent years, the Mozartian élan run riot that was the stock-in-trade of Adès while in his 20s has at times been tempered with a generous seam of expressivity—a shift signaled by his second opera, The Tempest, whose 2004 Covent Garden premiere confirmed once and for all that the composer-pianist-conductor was here to stay. Still, the defining attribute of Adès' music remains its sheer virtuoso wizardry, and as he put it in 2011, "virtuosity is our victory over time, over extinction, in its purest form."

"Almost too exuberantly brilliant": that was what one of Adès' composition teachers reportedly had to say about Living Toys, one of the most dazzling achievements of his breakthrough years. Whether or not there exists such a thing as "excessive" brilliance, there is something apt about this characterization—as if Living Toys had been walking a dangerous tightrope, so that the display of compositional virtuosity involved consisted precisely in courting, and yet always averting, the danger. Adès' more recent evaluation of Living Toys, as "written on the nerves," is telling in this respect, as is the fact that the score is prefaced with a "folktale"—allegedly "from the Spanish," but actually of Adès' own devising—in which bullfighting figures. Son of the eminent art historian Dawn Adès, an expert in Spanish surrealism, Thomas Adès grew up with considerable exposure to the culture of Spain

and the Hispanic world. Though this part of Adès' cultural formation has come to the fore in a few of his projects, perhaps most notably in *The Exterminating Angel*, his 2016 opera based on the film by Spanish director Luis Buñuel, *Living Toys* was his first score to really address it. Among other things, the music refracts the sounds of flamenco—castanets, handclaps, mournful arabesques—through the wild lens of Adès' youthful imagination.

Adès the matador, his audience the bull: In retrospect, *Living Toys'* ersatz Spanish folktale seems designed to "toy" with its readers, raising the question of its own "trustworthiness" as a guide to the programmatic intentions and expressive associations present—or not—in the music. It reads:

When the men asked him what he wanted to be, the child did not name any of their own occupations, as they had all hoped he would, but replied: "I am going to be a hero, and dance with angels and bulls, and fight with bulls and soldiers, and die a hero in outer space, and be buried a hero." Seeing him standing there, the men felt small, understanding that they were not heroes, and that their lives were less substantial than the dreams which surrounded the child like toys.

As Adès now indicates, these words were assembled after the fact, as a way of making sense of the music he had written. Tellingly, novelist Vladimir Nabokov was on his mind when writing *Living Toys*; indeed, the titles of its first two movements, "Angels" and "Aurochs" (i.e., the bulls featured in Paleolithic cave paintings), refer directly to the penultimate sentence of the Russian émigré's infamous *Lolita*. The young Adès seems to have shared something of Nabokov's love of puzzles and puns, to say nothing of his breathtaking range and density of historical reference. As for *Living Toys*' delusions of intergalactic grandeur, its music could be productively understood as belonging to an "unreliable narrator," just like *Lolita*'s Humbert Humbert.

Unfurling in one continuous span, *Living Toys* consists of five movements interleaved with three anagrammatically titled "paragraphs" (Adès' label). The high treble sonorities of "Angels" set the stage, introducing the heroic perspective of the protagonist-child whose exploits may or may not have any basis in reality, embodied here by the French horn. The sudden intrusion of the bass register signals the onset of "Aurochs," with its menacing fanfares, distorted flamenco touches, and piccolo trumpet pyrotechnics. Here the whiff of the bullring is at its strongest, though there are also dashes of the cabaret sleaze of Alban Berg, one of Adès' compositional role models. After the first anagrammatic section, "BALETT," which seemingly shifts

### Notes on the Program by Matthew Mendez (Continued)

the musical lens angle, "Militiamen" follows—"a bad dream," Adès says, featuring "a grotesque army, led by a pair of virtuosi (one is a maniacal drummer, the other has a nightmarish talking bugle)."

Very different is the fragile, zero-gravity "H.A.L.'s Death," which notably contains a misshapen version of "Daisy Bell" (also known as "A Bicycle Built for Two"), the tune that accompanies the deactivation of the computer HAL 9000 in Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey. The taunting bugle returns in "BATTLE," which culminates in the ostensible hero's death and a threnody, "Playing Funerals," again with shades of Berg. With its simple, even tender chordal textures, the closing "TABLET" comes almost as a shock to the system, though this is in turn interrupted by a loud "three-gun salute, or three cheers, or three rockets, or three big puffs of dust," Adès says, "as the story book is slammed shut"—the multiplicity of programmatic objects cited here only further casting into question the "reliability" of the entire saga that has just unfolded.

Matthew Mendez is a New Haven-based critic and musicologist whose specialization is 20th- and 21st-century repertoire. A graduate of Harvard and a PhD student at Yale, Mendez was the recipient of a 2016 ASCAP Foundation Deems Taylor/Virgil Thomson Award for outstanding music journalism.

### Meet the Artists

### Jeffrey Milarsky

American conductor Jeffrey Milarsky (BM '88, MM '90, percussion) is music director of Juilliard's AXIOM ensemble and senior lecturer in music at Columbia University, where he is music director and conductor of the Columbia University Orchestra. While studying at Juilliard, he was awarded the Peter Mennin Prize for outstanding leadership and achievement in the arts. In recent seasons, he has worked with ensembles including the New York Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Milwaukee Symphony, American Composers Orchestra, MET Chamber Ensemble, Bergen Philharmonic, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, New World Symphony, and Tanglewood Festival Orchestra. In the U.S. and abroad, he has premiered and recorded works by many groundbreaking contemporary composers in Carnegie Hall, Zankel Hall, Davies Symphony Hall, Alice Tully Hall, Walt Disney Concert Hall, and Boston's Symphony Hall, and at IRCAM in Paris, among others. Milarsky has a long history of premiering, recording, and performing American composers and throughout his career has collaborated with John Adams, Milton Babbitt, John Cage, Elliott Carter, John Corigliano, George Crumb, Mario Davidovsky, Jacob Druckman, Michael Gordon, David Lang, Steven Mackey, Christopher Rouse, Ralph Shapey, Morton Subotnick, Charles Wuorinen, and an entire generation of young and developing composers. In 2013 he was awarded the Ditson Conductor's Award for his commitment to the performance of American music. Milarsky has been the principal timpanist for the Santa Fe Opera since 2005. He has performed and recorded with the New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, and Pittsburgh Symphony and has recorded extensively for Angel, Bridge, Teldec, Telarc, New World, CRI, MusicMasters, EMI, Koch, and London records.



### Sophia Bacelar

For Cuban-Chinese-American cellist Sophia Bacelar (Pre-College '12), her musical journey began three days into infancy: Upon arrival home from the hospital, her father—a violin maker and cellist himself—set her down in front of him and indoctrinated her to the sounds of the instrument. Soon she was begging for one of her own and, a mere two years later, her wishes were granted. Bacelar's infantile zeal has grown into a lifelong commitment to music that has led her from Carnegie Hall, Le Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, and the Berliner Philharmonie to Latin America and the Middle and Far East. Along with performing, she is dedicated to the advocacy of music and arts education, particularly in underserved areas of the U.S. and Latin America, and she works with several non-profits to support the cause. An avid reader, health and fitness enthusiast, and amateur biohacker, Bacelar studied at Juilliard Pre-College, Le Conservatoire de Paris, and Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler Berlin.



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### **AXIOM**

Jeffrey Milarsky, Music Director and Conductor

### **TAKEMITSU**

Rain Spell

Flute Percussion Piano

Yibiao Wang Tanner Tanyeri Benjamin Pawlak

Clarinet Harp Wonchan Will Doh Adam Phan

WAGNER Wing and Prayer

Clarinet Percussion Piano Cello Wonchan Will Doh Tanner Tanveri Benjamin Pawlak Mari Coetzee

**BOULEZ** Messagesquisse Sophia Bacelar, Cello

Cello 1 Cello 3 Cello 5

Mari Coetzee Erica Ogihara Isabella Palacpac

Cello 2 Cello 4 Cello 6

Jonah Krolik Sebastian Stöger Mark Prihodko

**ADÈS** Living Toys

Flute/Piccolo Bassoon/ Trombone Viola Yibiao Wang Contrabassoon Yaoji Giuseppe Fu Hannah Geisinger

Michael Lamar Oboe/English Horn/ Piano Cello

Recorder Mari Coetzee French Horn Benjamin Pawlak

Mia Fasanello Gabrielle Pho Double Bass Violin 1 Clarinet/E-flat Trumpet/Piccolo Sophia Szokolay Attila Kiss Clarinet/Bass Trumpet

Clarinet Robert Garrison Violin 2 Yaegy Park Bum Namkoong

### **AXIOM**

Jeffrey Milarsky, Music Director and Conductor Matt Wolford, Manager

AXIOM is dedicated to performing the masterworks of the 20th- and 21st-century repertoire. Since its debut in 2006, the group has established itself as a leading ensemble in New York City's contemporary music scene with performances throughout Lincoln Center, in addition to frequent appearances at Columbia University's Miller Theatre and Le Poisson Rouge in Greenwich Village. AXIOM is led by music director Jeffrey Milarsky and is grounded in Juilliard's curriculum. Students receive a credit in chamber music for performing in the ensemble, and during any four-year period, AXIOM members will have the opportunity to perform works by John Adams, Harrison Birtwistle, Magnus Lindberg, and Arnold Schoenberg, among other composers. Guest conductors of AXIOM have included Alan Gilbert, Susanna Mälkki, and David Robertson. This season AXIOM has performed works by Igor Stravinsky, Toru Takemitsu, Harrison Birtwistle, and—in an all-American concert—Elliott Carter, George Lewis, Morton Feldman, and Philip Glass. AXIOM opened the 2018-19 season with a concert that was part of the New York Philharmonic's The Art of Andriessen festival, followed by a performance celebrating both John Corigliano's 80th birthday and Nico Muhly on the occasion of the Metropolitan Opera's production of his opera Marnie and a season-closing concert of music by Iannis Xenakis, Caroline Shaw, and Steve Reich. The 2017-18 season comprised programs featuring the music of former Juilliard faculty members Jacob Druckman and Luciano Berio as well as Hans Abrahamsen's complete Schnee.

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