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The Juilliard School
presents

Juilliard Percussion Ensemble
Daniel Druckman, Music Director

Monday, February 3, 2020, 7:30pm
Peter Jay Sharp Theater

JOHN CAGE
(1912–92)

Second Construction (1940)
Simon Herron
Euijin Jung
Yoon Jun Kim
Yibing Wang

CAGE

First Construction (in Metal) (1939)
Daniel Druckman, Conductor
Jacob Borden
Toby Grace
Simon Herron
Euijin Jung
Yoon Jun Kim
Jakob Schoenfeld
Leo Simon

CAGE

Third Construction (1941)
Omar El Abidin
Jacob Borden
Toby Grace
Simon Herron

Intermission

Additional support for this performance was provided, 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

JOHN CAGE

Composer, writer, lecturer, printmaker, performance artist, mushroom expert, macrobiotics enthusiast, and all-around agent provocateur, John Cage changed the face of international arts and letters like few Americans before or since. Best known for 4’33”, his controversial “silent piece,” Cage spent his career trying to rethink the very basis of music, broadening its definition to include everything from noise and accidental sounds to poetic recitation and theatrical actions. In this, Cage proved a vital inspiration to artistic practitioners as diverse as John Lennon, Andy Warhol, and Cage’s own longtime partner Merce Cunningham. Aptly acknowledging the composer’s all-pervasive impact on recent musical trends, Anthony Burgess (author of A Clockwork Orange) once went so far as to dub the late 20th century the “Cage Age.”

During the late 1930s, Cage found work as an accompanist for modern dance, a vocation he would continue to pursue, on and off, for the rest of his life. At the time, practical exigencies—the fact that his ensemble consisted primarily of dancers, not professionally trained musicians—prompted him to restrict his accompaniments to percussion. It was an apt choice for the Depression years: Making virtue out of necessity, an itinerant troupe could easily raid a scrapyard for tumbledown noisemakers like rusty hubcaps and used flowerpots. Yet Cage’s percussive proclivities also had deep artistic

Performance time: approximately two hours, including an intermission

IANNIS XENAKIS (1922-2001)

Pléiades (1978)
Claviers
Peaux
Métaux
Mélanges
Christopher Choi
Benjamin Cornavaca
Harrison Honor
Mizuki Morimoto
Stella Perlic
Tanner Tanyeri

Performance time: approximately two hours, including an intermission
roots, which were reflected in the assessment of his one-time teacher Arnold Schoenberg, who had insisted that his limited harmonic sensibility would forever thwart his compositional ambitions, like “a wall through which I could not pass.” Electing to “devote my life to beating my head against that wall,” Cage embraced the percussive world of rhythm and “noise,” where Schoenberg’s diktat would not apply. He ended up succeeding beyond even his wildest dreams: Today, Cage’s early works are the foundation stones of the percussion literature.

Second Construction

Like its companion installments for percussion ensemble, the Second Construction for four players was composed according to formal principles that served Cage well until the mid-’50s. He would devise a predetermined series of time lengths, like empty “containers” that could be filled with sounds of any kind; these small-scale divisions would then correspond recursively to larger ones bearing the same proportions. The resulting abstract formal scaffoldings were, Cage felt, the most intuitive means of organizing music lacking in tonal relationships. What makes the Second Construction a special case, however, is its simultaneous engagement with some of the compositional techniques Cage had learned from Schoenberg, particularly fugue and counterpoint. Although he terminated his studies with Schoenberg in 1937, Cage would later insist that “in all of my pieces between 1935 and 1940, I had Schoenberg’s lessons in mind.” Coming at the very tail end of that period, in January 1940, the Second Construction can be seen as a last-ditch effort at reconciling some of Schoenberg’s middle-European teachings with the plucky, American “pioneer”-style ethos Cage was on the cusp of making his own. His subsequent description of the Second Construction, as a fugue “of a novel order,” highlights the tension: After all, fugal form is traditionally premised upon tonal conflicts that are unavailable in a non-pitched percussion setting.

Helping to outline this double-tiered structure, the Second Construction requires what is arguably the most heterogeneous instrumental lineup of all three works in the series: not only the large tuned oxen bells heard at the start, or the maracas (shakers) of various sizes, but the complex sonorities of tam-tam and thunder sheet, and the light jazz inflections of snare drum played with brushes. Most striking of all, however, are the sounds of Cage’s own invention, pitch fluctuations obtained by dipping a gong in water, as well as an early version of the prepared piano. Here Cage refers to the modified instrument as a “string piano,” the term favored by his other teacher, Henry Cowell, in reference to direct manipulation of the keyboard’s innards with the hands. Already, though, Cage can be seen extending the concept in the direction of the prepared piano via the use of a cardboard mute and a screw positioned on the strings. In so doing, the Second Construction begins to defamiliarize the instrument into an all-purpose noisemaker, one equally capable of mimicking the sounds of the tuned bells and the tam-tam.
First Construction (in Metal)

Composed for larger forces than its two successors—six players plus an assistant—the First Construction (in Metal) of 1939 was a watershed for Cage, being his earliest work in “time-containers” form. As the title suggests, Cage restricted himself to metallic instruments, broadly construed. Not only do thundersheet, oxen bells, water gong, and string piano once again feature prominently; equally important are parts for anvils, brake drums, cowbells, glockenspiel, and cymbals (of Turkish and Chinese provenance). Though the sound world thus conjured is anything but monochromatic—after all, bronze, steel, and brass each have their own unique, distinguishing material properties—the First Construction’s more limited timbral palette does make it easier to hear Cage’s manipulations of the simplest of rhythmic building blocks. In the words of Cage expert David W. Bernstein, the piece’s “motivic cells are static; they recur unchanged and are never developed. His technique is ‘constructive,’ as his title suggests, rather than ‘developmental,’ a process involving transformation rather than literal repetition.” Instead, Cage relies upon forms of contrast, superimposition, and accumulation to suggest imagined choreographies of abstract, “liberated” sound.

Third Construction

Written in 1941, the Third Construction has been probably the most successful of Cage’s early percussion works—so much so that by the end of his career, he was facetiously referring to it as his “hit.” Again composed for four players, it calls for a veritable United Nations of percussion, including Latin American, Indo-Chinese, and Pacific Northwest rattles; a Chinese cymbal; a teponaztli, or Mexican slit drum; Cuban claves; Indonesian bamboo “cricket callers”; an African “lion’s roar,” or friction drum; and a Polynesian conch shell. (It could be argued that the lineup skewers towards the sounds of the Pacific Rim—unsurprisingly so, given Cage’s Los Angeles upbringing.) Even more so than in its two predecessor works, also prominent are the impromptu “found” instruments, old tin cans used as drums and shakers. Nor did Cage avoid more familiar orchestral percussion like the ratchet and tom toms, though as with the bass drum, here rubbed instead of struck to produce a distinctive “groaning” effect, many of these are played in a nontraditional manner.

Structurally, the Third Construction puts a more supple, flexible spin on the “time-containers” concept, allocating independent cycles of durations to each player. These cycles nevertheless coincide every 24 measures, at convergence points Cage called “rhythmic cadences.” The piece comprises 24 such cycles, each filled differently, though always with an ear to thrilling, throbbing effects of momentum. Some of the music’s noteworthy attributes include the fluid, improvisatory rhythms Cage claimed to have filched from the Hindustani tradition; the continuous “shaken” sounds that transcend
the short decay time of percussion; and the introduction of the conch, the only pitched instrument, at a climactic moment—the exact two-thirds point. This selective deployment echoes Edgard Varèse’s groundbreaking percussion-only *Ionisation*, which similarly reserved the piano for its final bars.

**Pléïades**  
IANNIS XENAKIS

Alongside Cage, one of the few genuinely sui generis figures in the pantheon of 20th-century composition, Iannis Xenakis always took a path apart in music—inescapably so, perhaps, given the fateful events that marked his early life. Just a teenager when Mussolini’s troops invaded Greece, Xenakis quickly joined the anti-fascist resistance, with wide-ranging personal consequences: Not only was he almost killed in guerilla combat, but following the end of hostilities, in 1947, he found himself a wanted man by the country’s new right-wing authorities, who marked him for death for his wartime involvement with the Communist-led partisan struggle. Forced into exile, he fled to France, where he would spend the rest of his life. With all the intensity and commitment of one who has looked death in the eye, he now devoted himself to an extraordinary, double professional trajectory: Trained in engineering, and deeply conversant with higher mathematics, Xenakis developed an active career as an architect, which in turn influenced his composing. Indeed, with its characteristic swarming instrumental “masses,” Xenakis’ brutally stark, almost monolithic idiom has sometimes been portrayed as a translation into music of some of the volumetric, sculptural principles that animated his architectural practice. At the same time, a visceral rhythmic sensibility often manifested itself in Xenakis’ scores—a nod to the ritual character of the ancient Greek dramatic art he so cherished.

Percussion music held a central position in Xenakis’ oeuvre, possibly because, as Steven Schick suggests, the same tension between the “logical and mythological, mechanical and intuitive” that drove his style has long been inherent to the medium. Written in 1978 on commission from the trailblazing ensemble Les Percussions de Strasbourg, the colossal, 45-minute-long sextet *Pléïades* was not just the most ambitious percussion score of Xenakis’ career, it stands as one of the summits of Xenakis’ whole output, and indeed of the entire percussion literature itself. Composed in four movements whose order Xenakis left flexible, *Pléïades* makes formidable demands of its performers, not the least of which relates to its employment of an instrument the written score refers to as a “sixxen.” (The word is a portmanteau of “six” and the first three letters of Xenakis’ family name.) Envisaged solely for the purposes of performing *Pléïades*, the instrument has typically been constructed from scratch by ensembles intrepid enough to tackle the score. Xenakis’ instructions call for an array of 19 metal bars, arranged in the manner of keyboard percussion, but without
being tuned to a fixed scale. Though Xenakis was often dissatisfied with the sixxen he heard during his lifetime, the timbre he imagined was to be “astounding, strange, full, resounding, and without too much reverberation.” What is more, Pléïades requires not just one sixxen, but a full sextet of them, each one fashioned to produce sounds very close to, yet ever so slightly “out of tune” with, those made by the other five.

A cosmic blacksmith’s shop that sees those “astounding” non-unisons hammered into the air, “Métaux” (“Metals”) is Pléïades’ showcase for the sixxen. Indeed, the “Métaux” movement agglomerates their timbre in such a way that, as Schick suggests, in some performances the sixxen begin to resemble the cries of voices—a sound freighted with humanistic, even humanitarian, significance elsewhere in Xenakis’ catalog. Not that this extraordinary effect should be allowed to overshadow Pléïades’ other movements, like “Peaux” (literally, “skins”), which employs a battery of pulsating membrane drums to dogged, almost shamanistic effect. Then there is “Claviers” (“Keyboards”), in which marimbas, xylophones, and vibraphones simulate the composite sonority of Indonesian gamelan, complete with Xenakis’ own approximation of a traditional pélog scale. (It is telling that the Balinese gamelan tradition relies upon scintillating interference patterns very much like those heard in “Métaux”, albeit with devotional-spiritual connotations.) As for “Mélanges” (“Mixtures”), it combines the forces employed individually in each of the three other movements, in a gesture of visionary, gale-force synthesis.

As was generally true of Xenakis’ titles, this one is of Greek provenance—an invocation of the Pléïades of ancient myth, the seven daughters of the titan Atlas and the sea-nymph Pleione. Catasterized (i.e. transformed into objects visible in the night sky) as a star cluster in the Taurus constellation, the Pléïades were associated with rainfall in ancient harvesting traditions; hence their etymological derivation from the Greek pleiôn, for “plenty.” Xenakis also invoked some of the word’s other connotations, like those relating to notions of “multiplicity” and “plurality”—all-important concepts in his compositional universe, where statistical constructive processes took pride of place. In Pléïades, no player ever assumes a lead role for long. Much more common are extended passages in which the instrumentalists, playing at slightly different speeds, aggregate into what Xenakis’ program note poetically describes as “clouds, nebulae, dust galaxies of rhythmically organized beats.” In this, the score is premised upon one of the simplest of musical phenomena—the interplay, outlined most plainly in “Peaux,” between patterned regularity and its dissolution into rhythmic “plenty.” At the most extreme end of this dichotomy, Xenakis continues, are exponential transformations (still continuous) which sweep the listener along like a whirlwind, dragging him as though to inevitable catastrophe or to a contorted universe. Again infinitely great speeds, corresponding to brutal breakings-up of the transformations.
Meet Daniel Druckman

Percussionist Daniel Druckman (Pre-College ’76; BM, MM, ’80, percussion) 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 Percussion Ensemble. After receiving his bachelor’s and master’s degrees 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.
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. In recent seasons, the ensemble 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. Last season, the ensemble paid tribute to Princeton University composers. 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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Daniel Pate, Percussion Department Coordinator

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The Juilliard Percussion Ensemble thanks Eduardo Leandro and Stony Brook University for the gracious loan of the sixxen for this evening’s performance of *Pléiades*. 
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 27
7:30pm, Peter Jay Sharp Theater
AXIOM
Jeffrey Milarsky, Conductor
Sophia Bacelar, Cello
Toru TAKEMITSU Rain Spell (1982)
Melinda WAGNER Wing and Prayer (1996)
Pierre BOULEZ Messagesquise (1976)
Thomas ADÈS Living Toys (1993)
FREE

FRIDAY, MARCH 27
7:30pm, Alice Tully Hall
Juilliard Orchestra
Jörg Widmann, Conductor
Stella Chen, Violin
Program includes the U.S. premiere of Juilliard alumnus
Jörg Widmann’s Violin Concerto No. 2 (2018)
$30

MONDAY, APRIL 13
7:30pm, Alice Tully Hall
New Juilliard Ensemble
Joel Sachs, Conductor
Featuring five world premieres:
Evan ANDERSON new work (2020)
Marc Migó CORTÉS new work (2020)
Diana SYRSE new work (2020)
YE Xiaogang Strophe (2020)
YAO Chen new work (2020)
FREE

TUESDAY, MAY 12
7:30pm, Weill Recital Hall
Lisa Arnhold Memorial Recital
Ulysses Quartet
Works include:
Joseph SUMMER Sycorax (World premiere)
Pavel HAAS Quartet No. 2, “From the Monkey Mountains” (1925)
$20

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