

Thursday Evening, April 18, 2019, at 7:30

The Juilliard School

presents

AXIOM

Jeffrey Milarsky, *Conductor*

IANNIS XENAKIS (1922–2001) **Okho** (1989)

BENJAMIN CORNAVACA, LEO SIMON, JOSEPH BRICKER, *Djembe*

CAROLINE SHAW (b. 1982) **Entr'acte**

AMELIA DIETRICH, EMMA FRUCHT, *Violins*

EMILY LIU, *Viola*

CLARE BRADFORD, *Cello*

Intermission

STEVE REICH (b. 1936) **Tehillim** (1981)

MELLISSA HUGHES, *Lyric Soprano*

NINA FAIA MUTLU, *Lyric Soprano*

KIRSTEN SOLLEK, *Alto*

ELIZABETH BATES, *High Soprano*

Performance time: Approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes, including an intermission

The taking of photographs and the use of recording equipment are not permitted in this auditorium.

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Alice Tully Hall

*Please make certain that all electronic devices
are turned off during the performance.*

Notes on the Program

by Matthew Mendez

Okho

IANNIS XENAKIS

Born May 29, 1922, in Brăila, Romania

Died February 4, 2001, in Paris, France

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, where he had spent much of his life, Xenakis quickly joined the anti-fascist resistance, with wide-ranging personal consequences: not only was he nearly killed in guerilla combat, but following the end of hostilities, in 1947, he found himself a wanted man by the nation's new right-wing authorities, who had 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 straight in the eye, he now devoted himself to an extraordinary, double professional trajectory: Trained in engineering, and deeply conversant with higher mathematics, Xenakis established an active career as an architect, which in turn influenced his composing. Indeed, with its characteristic swarming instrumental "masses," Xenakis' brutally stark, almost monolithic musical idiom has often been portrayed as a kind of translation into sound of some of the volumetric, sculptural principles that animated his architectural practice. At the same time, a visceral, almost "plastic" rhythmic sensibility very often manifested itself in Xenakis' music, and it has been taken as a nod to the ritual character of the ancient Greek dramatic art he so cherished.

Percussion music held an important 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 percussion medium, and to composers' attempts to come to grips with it. Written in 1989 near the end of Xenakis' career, *Okho* typifies these dynamics writ small. Its basic conceit emerged during a visit to the studio of the commissioning ensemble, Trio Le Cercle, where Xenakis was attracted by a djembe, a distinctive goblet-shaped hand drum of West African extraction; he was so inspired by it that he decided to fashion the piece as a study of the instrument's unique capabilities. Each of *Okho*'s three percussionists would therefore perform on his own djembe, with the sonority thus produced merging at times into a kind of composite, "hyper"-djembe. Though the score, as was long Xenakis' wont, was constructed using a number of mathematical organizational schemes, these are but the armatures atop which he distributes the full panoply of sounds the instrument can make, including novel effects like knuckle rolls. The one non-djembe sound, produced by a *grosse peau profonde* ("a large, deep drumhead"), makes its initial appearance around the piece's halfway point—like a voice of fate irrevocably conjured up by the thrum of *Okho*'s djembes.

Entr'acte

CAROLINE SHAW

Born in 1982 in Greenville, North Carolina

The surprise recipient of the 2013 Pulitzer Prize, awarded while she was still enrolled as a Ph.D. candidate at Princeton University, Juilliard Creative Associate Caroline Shaw has become one of the most sought-after composers of her young generation, in demand by venturesome orchestras and the rapper-producer Kanye West alike, the latter of whom has been a regular collaborator in

recent years. Maintaining an active parallel career as a singer and violinist, Shaw has never been shy about the impact of those activities on her composing, and it is her history with the string repertoire she grew up deeply immersed in—favorite works by the likes of Mozart and Brahms—that has so often been, as it were, the “subject” of her own music. She characterizes it as a kind of

classical music fan fiction, revisiting this older music that a lot of us really love, I think, very sincerely. It’s not in a kitschy or ironic way, like “I’m going to deconstruct this little thing, because isn’t that silly and old so let’s undermine these systems ... ” These are things that I grew up with and really love.

Shaw’s metaphor, fan fiction (original narratives written by enthusiasts of fantasy and science fiction franchises, produced in the spirit of vicarious further engagement with their characters), is entirely representative: It has the same balance of whimsy and seriousness of purpose that is also her musician’s distinctive trademark.

In her student days, Shaw was an avid player of string quartets, and the medium is often her compositional vehicle. Her second essay for the line-up, *Entr’acte*, is quintessential Shaw in its impetus, taking a very precise detail in a familiar piece—or more exactly, her own personalized experience with that detail—as the occasion to weave an unexpected web of resonances and charged cross-references. In this case, the inspiration was the minuet—in particular, its contrasting trio—from Joseph Haydn’s last completed string quartet, his Op. 77, No. 2 in F major. The trio takes place in the distant key of the flat submediant, a maneuver more commonly associated with Haydn’s successors, Beethoven and Schubert: In their hands, this particular tonal

slide would come to accrue connotations of inwardness and intimacy of expression, and of idyllic “otherness.” Hence Shaw’s description of what she finds so poignant in the Op. 77, No. 2 trio—the way it “suddenly takes you to the other side of Alice’s looking glass, in a kind of absurd, subtle, technicolor transition.”

The title works as a play on words: “Entr’acte” is a near-homophone of “interact,” and in this sense, it can be understood as nodding at the values of collective interaction so often associated with string quartet playing, and which have made this a source of attraction for performers and audiences alike ever since Haydn. Yet Shaw’s piece clearly invokes the familiar meaning of the word “entr’acte,” as well—as a musical parenthesis between the acts of a dramatic or balletic presentation. As such, the title seems also to draw the listener’s attention to that which is not intended to be the main attraction, but which ends up as the principal object of focus, anyway: the “trio” nominally offered to cast the “minuet” in relief. Hence *Entr’acte* is structured as a series of episodic flights of fancy—from coy, plucked choreographies to games of imitative violin hopscotching—sandwiched between a poignant theme constructed using quasi-classical syntax. Yet on its return, that poignant “minuet” theme (which had audibly “dissolved,” as if scrubbed away, during its first appearance) proves unable to keep the quizzical sounds from the other side of the looking glass contained: After the violins fade away, the cellist is left alone to offer a questioning, non sequitur pizzicato coda, as if, remarks Shaw, “recalling fragments of an old tune or story.”

Shaw’s knack for imbuing familiar sounds with all the freshness of a new encounter was recently recognized by the producers of the television program *Mozart in the Jungle*, when *Entr’acte*—along with Shaw

herself, in a cameo role—was featured on-screen in a 2018 episode.

Tehillim

STEVE REICH

Born October 3, 1936, in New York City

“How small a thought it takes to fill a whole life!” It would be hard to sum up the career of American master composer Steve Reich (’61, composition) more succinctly than with these words, taken from an aphorism by his favorite philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and set to music by him, in a mood of autobiographical self-reflection, in his 1995 piece *Proverb*. After all, for more than half a century, Reich has been pursuing the ramifications of just such “small thoughts”—for example, with his early discovery of desynchronized tape loops, which led to his technique of instrumental “phasing” and, eventually, a wholly personalized yet flexible application of familiar canonic procedures. In all this he was motivated by a desire “to reconnect with the musical basics—tonal center and rhythmic pulse,” and it was for this reason that he immersed himself, notably, in the study of traditional Ghanaian drumming and Balinese gamelan during the 1960s and early 1970s. Yet no matter how much Reich went on to deepen and enrich his idiom in the decades that followed, he has consistently remained true to that original vision, of the mind that it is not always necessary to travel far to uncover new terrain.

In the mid-1970s it started to dawn on Reich, who had grown up a largely nonobservant Jew, that one of the things that had appealed to him in Ghanaian and Balinese repertoires was their character as living, oral repositories for the shared musical habits of the members of those cultures. In a sense, as he later recalled, they had even begun to compensate for the musical traditions associated with his ethnic background, with which he had no connection: “I began to miss the fact

that my own extremely ancient tradition was one that I had lost touch with.” Determined to rectify this, Reich took a course in biblical Hebrew, which quickly led him to the study of cantillation—the codified procedures used to chant scripture during the Hebrew liturgy. Soon enough, subtle traces of the constructive thinking characteristic of cantillation were finding their way into Reich’s music, while a more overt marker of his rapprochement with his Jewish roots would come in 1981’s *Tehillim* (Hebrew for “Psalms,” or literally, “praises”), which proved a turning point in his career.

Though Reich actually abandoned his engagement with the structural principles of cantillation in it, *Tehillim* was a watershed for a variety of reasons: For one, it was his first text setting since his apprenticeship years; likewise, it contained the first true slow movement he had written since that time; and perhaps most crucially of all, it introduced an approach to rhythm that was the antithesis of the principles that had undergirded all of his previous work. Having begun what would become *Tehillim* with the express intention of setting Hebrew, Reich decided to work with extracts from the psalms, since unlike other key books of Judaic scripture, almost all of the cantillation traditions pertaining to them do not survive. (This meant he would be free to compose unhampered by the weight of tradition—which was precisely the same concern he had had during the early stages of his engagement with the musical practices of Ghana and Bali.) Yet during the course of composing, Reich experienced something unexpected: He found himself parsing his texts’ syllables in constantly alternating groupings of twos and threes. These were then strung together into longer, asymmetrical lines, cued, in one-to-one fashion, to the spoken intonations implied naturally by the words. That he immediately gravitated towards these kinds of “additive” rhythms was, Reich suggests, an echo of his deep

love for the music of Stravinsky and Bartók, who used similar constructive principles (in their case, they were of Eastern European folkloric derivation). “The result,” as Reich would put it, was thus “a piece based on melody in the basic sense of that word”—a true breakthrough both in comparison to Reich’s previous work, and indeed, many of the broader compositional trends of the time.

Not that *Tehillim* abandoned the first principles of iterative rhythmic propulsion that have always been at the heart of Reich’s idiom. In each of the score’s four movements (only the second and third of which are separated by a pause), a constant pulse “grid”—sometimes implied, but just as frequently heard in explicit fashion—drives the music inexorably, and often irresistibly, forward. This grid, which is keyed directly to the rhythms of the vocal melodies, is variously articulated using tuned jingle-less tambourines, handclaps, maracas, mallet percussion, and in the finale’s exultant coda, crotales (small tuned cymbals). Some of these instruments, or ones like them (the crotales and tambourines), are referenced in the famous Psalm 150, which is set in the fourth movement; likewise, Reich notes, rattles and handclaps were

“commonly used throughout the Middle East in the biblical period.” However, these observations are best taken with a grain of salt, for *Tehillim* is not at all an archaeological dig, but rather a work of joyous imaginative synthesis—a real “symphony of psalms” in the Stravinsky vein, and yet one that could only have been written in the late 20th century, by a composer attentive to musical vernaculars from across the globe. Offering an optimistic vision much-needed after the political and spiritual disenchantments of the 1970s, *Tehillim* proves that what was once unfairly disparaged as Reich’s “minimalism” is much more productively framed, as the conductor Michael Tilson Thomas recently indicated, in terms of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov’s affecting saying: “So all things turn over and revolve and are changed ... and in the transformation and return of things redemption is enclosed.”

Matthew Mendez is a New Haven-based critic and musicologist with a focus on 20th- and 21st-century repertoire. He is a graduate of Harvard University and is a Ph.D. student at Yale. He was the recipient of a 2016 ASCAP Foundation Deems Taylor/Virgil Thomson Award for outstanding music journalism.

Texts and Translations

Tehillim

Psalms 19:2-5

*Ha-sha-my-im meh-sa-peh-rím ka-vóhd Káil,
U-mah-ah-sáy ya-díve mah-gíd ha-ra-kí-ah.
Yóm-le-yóm ya-bée-ah óh-mer,
Va-ly-la le-ly-la ya-chah-véy dá-ah.
Ain-óh-mer va-áin deh-va-rím,
Beh-lí nish-máh ko-láhm.
Beh-kawl-ha-áh-retz ya-tzáh ka-váhm,
U-vik-tzáy tay-váil me-lay-hém.*

The heavens declare the glory of G-d,
the sky tells of His handiwork.
Day to day pours forth speech,
night to night reveals knowledge.
Without speech and without words,
Nevertheless their voice is heard.
Their sound goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the ends of the world.

34:13-15

*Mi-ha-ish hey-chah-fáytz chah-yím,
Oh-háyv yah-mím li-róte tov?
Neh-tzór le-shon-cháh may-ráh,
Uus-fah-táy-chah mi-dah-báyv mir-máh.
Súr may-ráh va-ah-say-tóv,
Ba-káysh sha-lóm va-rad-fáy-hu.*

Who is the man that desires life,
and loves days to see good?
Guard your tongue from evil,
and your lips from speaking deceit.
Turn from evil, and do good,
Seek peace and pursue it.

18:26-27

*Im-chah-síd, tit-chah-sáhd,
Im-ga-vár ta-mím, ti-ta-máhm.
Im-na-vár, tit-bah-rár,
Va-im-ee-káysh, tit-pah-tál.*

With the merciful You are merciful,
with the upright You are upright.
With the pure You are pure,
and with the perverse You are subtle.

150:4-6

*Hal-le-lú-hu ba-tóf u-ma-chól,
Hal-le-lú-hu ba-mi-ním va-u-gáv.
Hal-le-lú-hu ba-tzil-tz-láy sha-máh,
Hal-le-lú-hu ba-tzil-tz-láy ta-ru-áh.
Kol han-sha-má ta-ha-láil Yah,
Ha-le-yu-yáh.*

Praise Him with drum and dance,
praise Him with strings and winds.
Praise Him with sounding cymbals,
praise Him with clanging cymbals.
Let all that breathes praise the Eternal
Hallelujah.

Meet the Artists



PETER KONERKO

Jeffrey Milarsky

American conductor Jeffrey Milarsky is music director of AXIOM and senior lecturer in music at Columbia University where he is music director and conductor of the Columbia University Orchestra. He received his bachelor and master of music degrees from Juilliard where he was awarded the Peter Mennin Prize for outstanding leadership and achievement in the arts. In recent seasons 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, 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. A

much-in-demand timpanist and percussionist, Milarsky has been the principal timpanist for the Santa Fe Opera since 2005. In addition he has performed and recorded with the New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, and Pittsburgh Symphony. He has recorded extensively for Angel, Bridge, Teldec, Telarc, New World, CRI, MusicMasters, EMI, Koch, and London records.

AXIOM

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. AXIOM's current season opened with a concert as 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*. The 2017–18 season comprised programs featuring the music of composer and former Juilliard faculty member Jacob Druckman, the works of Luciano Berio, and Hans Abrahamsen's complete *Schnee*. In 2016–17 AXIOM programs honored John Adams on his 70th birthday, Steve Reich on his 80th birthday, and the music of Kaija Saariaho.

AXIOM

Jeffrey Milarsky, *Music Director and Conductor*

Tim Mauthe, *Manager*

REICH *Tehillim*

MELLISSA HUGHES, *Lyric Soprano*

NINA FAIA MUTLU, *Lyric Soprano*

KIRSTEN SOLLEK, *Alto*

ELIZABETH BATES, *High Soprano*

Piccolo

Mei Stone

Flute

Giorgio Consolati

Oboe

Pablo O'Connell

English Horn

Alexandra von der
Embse

Clarinet 1

Keeheon Nam

Clarinet 2

Sunho Song

Bassoon

Steven Palacio

Percussion 1

Omar El-Abidin

Percussion 2

Mizuki Morimoto

Percussion 3

Tyler Cunningham

Percussion 4

Stella Perlic

Percussion 5

Simon Herron

Percussion 6

Jacob Borden

Electric Organ 1

Derek Wang

Electric Organ 2

Ilia Laskin

Violin 1

Katherine Lim
Agnes Tse
Ariel Lee

Violin 2

Isabella Geis
Angela Kim
Grace Rosier

Viola

Joseph Peterson
Jay Laureta
Rae Gallimore

Cello

Jessica Hong
Drake Driscoll
Osheen Manukyan

Double Bass

Janice Gho

ORCHESTRA ADMINISTRATION

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