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Graduate Recital: Craig Poissant, soprano and alto saxophones

Craig Poissant

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GRADUATE RECITAL

Craig Poissant, soprano and alto saxophones
Kathy Hansen, piano

Hockett Family Recital Hall
Saturday, March 25, 2006
1:00 p.m.
PROGRAM

Facades (1981) 
Elegy (1981)
Concert Suite (1998)
  I. Lively
  II. Like and Old Folk Song
  III. Scherzando
  IV. Introduction and Jump

Brillance (1974)
  I. Declame
  II. Desinvolte
  III. Dolcissimo
  IV. Final

INTERMISSION

Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano (1997)
  I. Prelude
  II. Recitative
  III. Variations
  IV. Toccata

Philip Glass
  (b. 1937)
Jindřich Feld
  (b. 1925)
William Bolcom
  (b. 1938)
Ida Gotkovsky
  (b. 1933)
Mark Kilstofte
  (b. 1958)

Graduate recital presented in partial fulfillment for the degree of
Master of Music in Saxophone Performance.

Craig Poissant is from the studio of Steven Mauk.
Program Notes

Born in Baltimore, Maryland, Philip Glass is a graduate of the University of Chicago and the Juilliard School. In the early 1960s, Glass spent two years of intensive study in Paris with Nadia Boulanger and while there, earned money by transcribing Ravi Shankar's Indian music into Western notation. Upon his return to New York, he applied these eastern techniques to his own music. Glass's works are best described as minimalistic, heard here with remarkably simplistic beauty.

Facades was written in 1981, originally to accompany a scene in the film Koyaanisqatsi, which was eventually cut from the film. The title refers to the facades of buildings in the Wall Street area of New York City. Eventually the music found its way onto the CBS Glassworks record, retaining its original text. This version, arranged by Marilyn Shrude for soprano saxophone and piano, was first performed on John Sampen's recording Visions in Metaphor.

Jindrich Feld, born in Czechoslovakia in 1925, is rapidly establishing a reputation as one of the world's foremost composers of wind music. Best known for his flute pieces, commissioned by Jean-Pierre Rampal, he is also very familiar with the saxophone. Saxophonists may recognize his Concerto, written for famed saxophonist Eugene Rousseau and premiered at the Seventh World Saxophone Congress in Nurnberg in 1982.

Elegy, an original work for soprano saxophone and piano, was composed in 1981. It follows Feld's basic tenet of presenting a strong melodic line, thus continuing a Czech tradition rooted in the music of Dvorák, Smetana, Janácek, and Martinu. At the same time, Feld achieves both contrast and balance by including sophisticated rhythmic patterns and colorful rhapsodic lines.

William Bolcom, recipient of the 1988 Pulitzer Prize for music, has received commissions from the Vienna Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Berlin Domaine Musical, and many others. Mr. Bolcom has been admitted to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, holds honorary doctorates from the San Francisco Conservatory and Albion College, and is the recipient of the Ross Lee Finney Distinguished Professorship at the University of Michigan, where he is Chair of the Composition Department.

Concert Suite for E-flat Alto Saxophone and Band (1998) was written specifically for the University of Michigan Symphony Band and the famed professor of saxophone Donald J. Sinta. About the Concert Suite Bolcom relates the following: A major feature of the piece is the extensive use of very high notes - known as "altissimo" - on the alto saxophone. (One might get them easier on a soprano, but that would be cheating!) This is Professor Sinta's specialty and one of the many reasons he is so sought-after as a teacher, and so I felt impelled to throw a few very, very high notes at him that were perhaps over the edge of playability. At first Don swore that many notes were impossible, and I changed one or two, but very soon he called: "Don't change any more notes - I'm taking the challenge!" So the piece is a four-movement high-wire act.

The Suite incorporates influences from my composing life. The first movement, Lively, is reminiscent of my beloved teacher, Darius Milhaud; the folksong-like second movement incorporates a simple melody that I have heard in my head most of my life. Scherzando is a fast triple-time waltz, followed by Introduction and Jump, evoking the detective dramas of early television.
Pianist and composer Ida Gotkovsky was born in Calais, France in 1933. She attended the Paris Conservatoire where she studied with Olivier Messiaen and Nadia Boulanger, and where she won numerous prizes in composition. In addition to her studies in Paris, Gotkovsky also studied at the University of Texas, where she began writing more works for American commissions. In 1992, Gotkovsky was commissioned to write a work for the opening of the Winter Olympics, and the resulting work, Oratorio Olympique, became an international success.

Brillance is a four-movement work dedicated to exploring the sonic capabilities and technical extremes of the saxophone. In movement one, "Declame," Gotkovsky moves from one dynamic extreme to the other, whispering in lyrical pianissimo one moment and raging with a strong fortissimo the next. Throughout the movement the free rhythms and recitative writing gives the listener the strong impression of witnessing an ongoing improvisation. Movement two, "Desinvolte," is essentially a dance-like scherzo and bears the instruction "with humor." Sections of light, rapid tonguing alternate with more sustained passages that suggest the lilting of an eighteenth-century gigue. In "Dolcissimo," Gotkovsky returns to the tempo and improvisatory quality of the first movement, but now with genuine tenderness and savor. The last movement, "Final," is formally the clearest of the four movements and is written in four major sections. As each of the sections is reminiscent of one of the earlier movements, "Final" seems to summarize Brillance as a whole.

An experienced performer and conductor, Mark Kilstofte is one of relatively few composers also trained as a singer. He studied at St. Olaf College and the University of Michigan where he was a Rackham Pre-Doctoral Fellow and assistant conductor of the new music ensemble, Contemporary Directions. His principal composition teachers were William Albright, Leslie Bassett, William Bolcom and Eugene Kurtz. He is currently associate professor of theory and composition at Furman University, a private liberal arts college in Greenville, South Carolina.

The Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano was commissioned by the Ambassador Duo and premiered by Cliff Leaman and Derek Parsons at the XI World Saxophone Congress in Valencia, Spain. About the Sonata, Kilstofte says the following: The piece begins softly with a quasi-homage to Bach. In the ensuing recitative, G. & S. meet M. C. Hammer (maybe L. L. Cool J.) in a static, but often mesmerizing assemblage of prepared piano, slap-tongue effects, and metronome obbligato. The variations that follow -- the true focal point of the composition -- are at once sublime, introspective (but frequently shallow), and constitute the most schizophrenic portion of the work as a whole. Here the music flits from thought to thought in true stream-of-consciousness fashion. Yet, despite this multiple personality disorder, the twenty-odd "re-wordings" of the theme combine to presage an elegiac procession and soaring sax line of considerable meaning near the conclusion. Allowing little time for reflection, the duo attacks the closing toccata. The attentive listener will easily supply the final note.