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Concert: ICU Sound Works

Xak Bjerken

Chris Younghoon Kim

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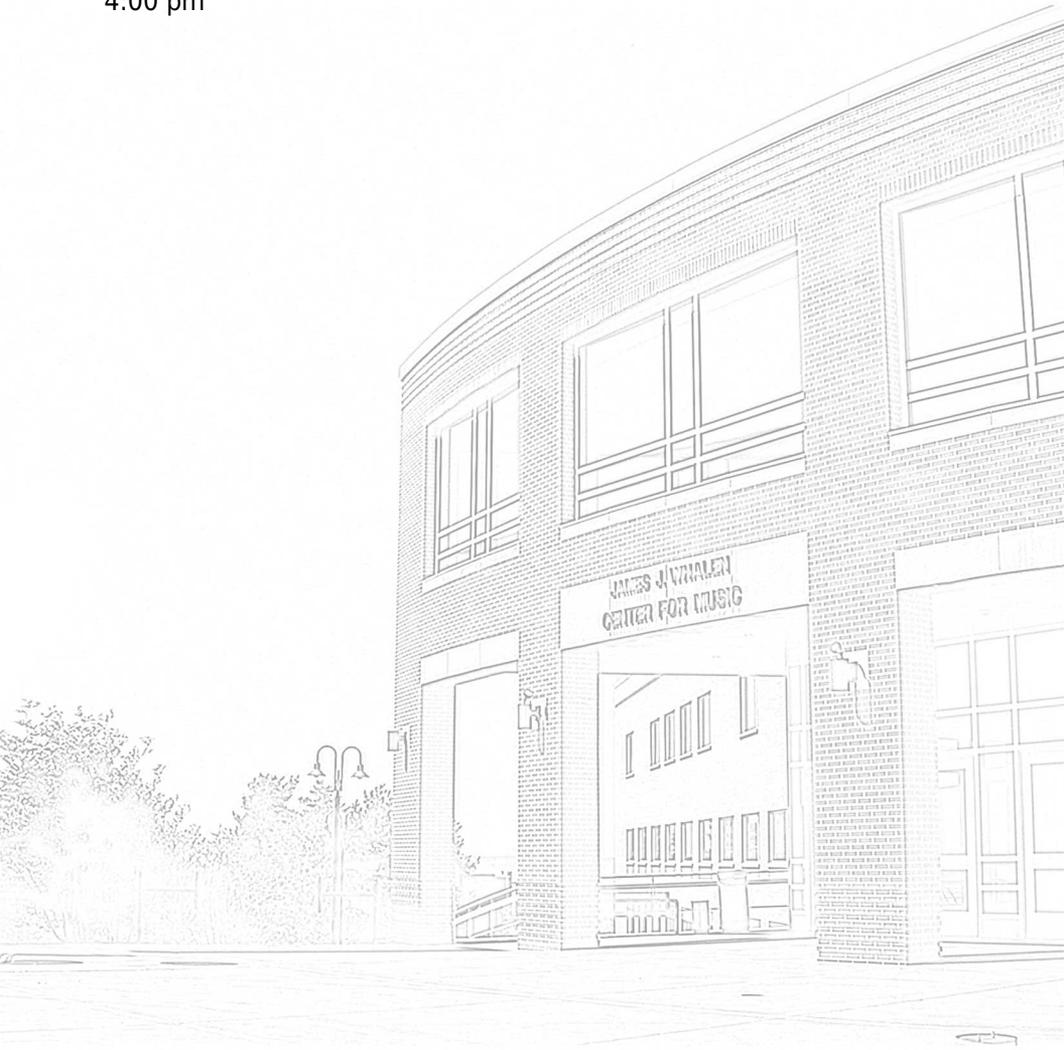
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ICU Sound Works

Xak Bjerken, director
Chris Younghoon Kim, conductor

Ford Hall
Sunday, November 13th, 2016
4:00 pm



ITHACA COLLEGE

School of Music

Program

Schnee (2008)

Canon 1A: Ruhig Aber Beweglich
Canon 1B: Fast Immer Zart Und Still

Hans Abrahamsen
(b. 1952)

Ariana Kim, violin
Kyle Armbrust, viola
Elizabeth Lyon Hall, cello
Juliana May Pepinsky, flute
Paige Morgan, oboe
Richard Faria, clarinet
Andrew Zhou, piano I
Ryan McCullough, piano II
Mike Sparhuber, percussion

Persona Mechanica for solo piano and chamber
orchestra (2016)

I.
II.
III.

Jesse Jones
(b.1978)

Xak Bjerken, solo piano
Susan Waterbury, violin I
Jason Kim, violin II
Kyle Armbrust, viola
Elizabeth Lyon Hall, cello
Desmond Bratton, bass
Stephanie LoTempio, flute
Paige Morgan, oboe
Richard Faria, clarinet
Sonja Larson, bassoon
Shawn Henderson, trumpet
Derek Maseloff, horn
Harold Reynolds, trombone
Andy Sheng, harp/keyboard
Mike Sparhuber, percussion I
Simon Bjarning, percussion

Program Notes

ICU Sound Works performs ambitious projects featuring musicians from both the IC School of Music, and CU's Music Department. Inaugurated in 2015, we mix student and faculty performers, encouraging others to join in these "hands-across-the-gorge" creative efforts.

Schnee (2008)

Scored for two pianos and percussion with trios of woodwinds and strings, Schnee is an hour-long set of gradually crystallizing canons that are also musical portraits of snow: its flurries, how it blankets and blanks out the landscape, its delicacy, its cold. There are ten canons in pairs, and though all are based on a modal melody, the piece is by no means white-note music. Indeed, microtonal retunings made during the course of performance are crucial to how it sounds, beautifully blurring the counterpoint as the canons shift in and out of focus. At the same time, this snow music is pure white in its objectivity besides being as clear as glass in its textures.

The ten canons are also variations at different levels. Every second one is directly related to its predecessor, and all of them have the same ideas and processes floating in slow similar spirals, as if seen in mirrors. Time is simultaneously standing still, splitting, revolving and accelerating away—standing still because of the layers of repetition and the omnipresence of the basic melody; splitting because layers will move at different speeds; revolving because the same ideas are constantly being refracted and reformed as layers knock against one another; and accelerating away because the movements get shorter and shorter, from nine minutes down to one.

At the pristine beginning, the tune picks itself out right at the top of the piano as one of the string instruments keeps repeating a superhigh harmonic, almost pitchless, creating gasps of intensity—fire in ice. The tune is repeated and then overlapped in the first intimation of the kind of interference pattern of past and present that is one of the most remarkable features of the work. On a larger scale, the entire first movement (for piano quartet, sounding as no piano quartet ever did) is embedded in the second (for the full ensemble).

- Paul Griffiths

In a creative life of almost half a century, **Hans Abrahamsen** has more than once had the courage to stop, and the equal courage to start again - freshly, out of a clear reconsideration of where he was before. His allegiances are shown by the roll of composers whose works he has, as a master orchestrator, reconceived: Bach and Ligeti, Nielsen and Schumann, Schoenberg and Debussy. But he has long

discovered his own terrain – quite often a snowscape, as in his early masterpiece *Winternacht* or the work in which he found his fully mature style, *Schnee* (2006-8), generally acknowledged one of the rare classics of the twenty-first century.

Besides these two pieces for instrumental ensemble, his output includes four string quartets, a collection of ten piano studies (some of which he has recomposed in other forms), concertos for piano, for piano and violin, and for piano left hand, and a monodrama for soprano and orchestra, *let me tell you*, for which he recently won the 2016 *Grawemeyer Award* for Music Composition. He is currently at work on his first opera, after Hans Christian Andersen's *The Snow Queen*.

- Paul Griffiths

Pianist **Xak Bjerken** has appeared with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Spoleto Festival Orchestra, Thailand Philharmonic Orchestra, the Schoenberg Ensemble, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic in Disney Hall. He has performed at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, Glinka Hall in St Petersburg, the Konzerthaus in Berlin, and for many years performed throughout the US as a member of the Los Angeles Piano Quartet. He has performed with the Cuarteto Casals, the Prazak, New Zealand, and Miami string quartets, and held chamber music residencies at the Tanglewood Music Center, Spoleto Festival and Olympic Music Festival. He is the director of Ensemble X, a new music ensemble, and has served on the faculty of Kneisel Hall, the Eastern Music Festival, and at the Chamber Music Conference at Bennington College. Bjerken has worked closely with composers György Kurtag, Sofia Gubaidulina, Steven Stucky, and George Benjamin, and over the next two years, will be presenting premieres of piano concertos by Stephen Hartke, Elizabeth Ogonek, and Jesse Jones. He released his first solo recording on CRI in 2001, and has since recorded for Koch International, Chandos, Albany Records, Artona, and is about to release his third recording for Open G Records, presenting solo and chamber works by Steven Stucky. Xak Bjerken is Professor of Music at Cornell University where he co-directs Mayfest, an international chamber music festival with his wife, pianist Miri Yampolsky. Bjerken studied with Aube Tzerko at the University of California at Los Angeles and received his Master's and Doctoral degrees from the Peabody Conservatory as a student of and teaching assistant to Leon Fleisher.

Composer, conductor, and mandolinist **Jesse Jones** is an American artist of wide-ranging tastes and influences. His music has been performed extensively across North America, Europe, and Asia. Jones has received numerous accolades as both a composer and performer, including a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Elliott Carter Rome Prize in Composition from the American Academy in Rome, a Juilliard String

Quartet Commission, a Tanglewood Commission, a Barlow Commission, the Charles Ives Scholarship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, an EarShot New Music Reading with the New York Philharmonic under Alan Gilbert, and a fellowship in Aldeburgh Music's "Jerwood Opera Writing Programme." Jones is an alumnus of both the Tanglewood Music Center and the Aspen Music Festival and School, and has received the Heckscher Foundation Prize in Composition from Ithaca College, and the Sage Fellowship from Cornell University. Jones has participated in the Underwood New Music Readings of the American Composers Orchestra, received fellowships and honors from the University of Oregon, and awards from ASCAP. His choral music is published internationally by Earthsongs. In summer 2016, an all-Jones CD is slated to be released by the Freiburg-based Ensemble Recherche, and New York's Argento Ensemble, with soprano Sharon Harms & tenor Zach Finkelstein.

Jones holds a DMA in music composition from Cornell University. While there, he studied composition with Steven Stucky, Roberto Sierra, and Kevin Ernste, as well as piano with Xak Bjerken. In 2007, Jones earned his Master's degree in composition from the University of Oregon, under teachers David Crumb and Robert Kyr, and in 2005 his Bachelor's degree from Eastern Oregon University, under John McKinnon and Leandro Espinosa. Most recently, Jones has been appointed Assistant Professor of Composition at the Oberlin Conservatory.

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