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Faculty Recital:
Nicholas Walker, double bass
Kyle Armbrust, viola
Xak Bjerken, piano

Hockett Family Recital Hall
Saturday, January 26th, 2019
4:00 pm
Program

Fernweh - A Longing for Far-Away Places
Frühjarsmudigkeit - A Sense of Listlessness Brought on by the Coming of Spring
Sehnsucht - Ardent Longing, Pining, or Yearning for Unattainable Life Experiences
Fingerspitzengefühl - "Fingertips Feeling" - Intuitive Empathy with Things & People

Weltschmerz - Depair Caused by the State of the World
Kopfkino - "Head Cinema" - Playing Out an Entire Fantasy Scenario in Your Head
Geborgenheit - The Perfect Combination of Cozy, Warm, Safe, & Comfortable
Luftschloss - An Unrealistic Dream - an "Air Castle"

A Grease Fantasy (2008) Nicholas Walker
I. Prelude
II. The Word
III. Hopelessly Devoted
IV. Look at Me
V. The One That I Want

Xak Bjerken, piano

Grease theme by Barry Gibb © 1978 Gibb Brothers Music
Hopelessly Devoted to You theme by John Farrar © 1978 Unichappell Music Inc.
Look at Me, I'm Sandra Dee theme by Warren Casey & Jim Jacobs © 1971/2 Warren Casey & Jim Jacobs
You're the One That I Want theme by John Farrar © 1978
Unichappell Music Inc.
We Go Together theme by Warren Casey & Jim Jacobs © 1971, 1972 Warren Casey & Jim Jacobs
Program Notes
Zugzwang - Eight Duos

In April of 2017 I wrote Zugzwang - Eight Duos for Double Basses, for Matthew McDonald & Rick Stotijn to play together at the 50th Anniversary ISB Convention in Ithaca. All three of us have a deep love of Germanic music, although we are from non-German countries. This inspired a work for bassists from all cultures to play together, eight duos that depict "Eight German language words that do not exist in English, but ought to". In January of 2018 I arranged the duos for double bass and cello, which inspired this new arrangement for double bass and viola.

A Grease Fantasy

It has long been a passion of mine to share the lyrical, versatile sound of the bass with a larger audience, and the concerto fantasy seemed an ideal vehicle to do so. I have often performed Frank Proto’s A Carmen Fantasy, and have been surprised to learn that many of Bizet’s themes are unknown to younger audiences. This led me to toying with some of the themes from the 1978 musical/movie, Grease. Before I knew it, I was arranging and then composing in earnest. Some of this Grease Fantasy, such as the solo Prelude, is predominantly original material, with Grease themes barely recognizable. The Word, however, uses the Bee Gees theme song material as a jumping off point for an improvisation and concerto antics. Hopelessly Devoted, is essentially an arrangement of the Olivia Newton-John billboard hit, with some new material and re-harmonization. Look at Me I’m Sandra Dee is treated as a scherzo. The whining theme is followed by 5 variations, each variation increasingly fragmented. The One That I Want is transplanted from 1970’s disco into the rhythmic world of Afro-Cuban music. With some reference to the original, it is essentially a contrafact, a new melody over the harmonic structure of the original song. After a pizzicato improvisation, the soloist engages the piano with a sort of arco-hand-jive exchange of We Go Together (shoo-bop sha whada whadda yippidy boom da boom). Popular Music, as it is called, is heard in the background all around us – it can be like wallpaper, a tapestry of background sound we often take for granted. But in the concert hall this music can be reconsidered, offering a unique lens with which to regard the double bass.

Xak Bjerken

Pianist Xak Bjerken has appeared with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Spoleto Festival Orchestra, Thaïland 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.