

C a r t h a g e

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Chamber Music Series Events

February 25, 2007

Cantus
Siebert Chapel
3 p.m.

April 15, 2007

Quin String Trio
Siebert Chapel
3 p.m.



Alford Park Drive
Racine, WI 53140-1994
www.carthage.edu

L'Ensemble Pennetier

October 22, 2006
A. F. Siebert Chapel



Program

Jean-Claude Pennetier, piano

France Pennetier, piano

Georges Pennetier, percussion

Christopher Thompson, percussion

Prélude à l'après midi d'un faune **Claude Debussy**
(1862-1918)

Amen du désir **Olivier Messiaen**
(*excerpts from 7 visions de l'Amen for two pianos*) (1908-1992)

Ignescence **Yoshihisa Taïra**
(1937-)

Intermission

Variations en étoile: Musique électro-acoustique **Guy Reibel**
Improvisations à la percussion de Georges Pennetier (1936-)

Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion **Béla Bartók**
Assai lento—Allegro molto (1881-1945)
Lento ma non troppo
Allegro non troppo

L'ENSEMBLE PENNETIER is represented by
Melvin Kaplan, Inc., 115 College Street, Burlington, Vermont 05401
www.melkap.com

Biographies

Jean-Claude Pennetier, piano

A multi-faceted musician—composer, conductor, teacher, chamber player—Jean-Claude Pennetier is, above all, a remarkable soloist and recitalist. Beginning his piano studies at three and a half, he was enrolled at the age of six in the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Paris. When he was just ten years old, M. Pennetier was recognized for his extraordinary talent, winning first prizes in piano, chamber music and theory from the Conservatoire. He went on to win the Prix Gabriel Fauré at 18, first prize in the International Montréal Competition at 23 and first prize in the International Geneva Competition at 25.

In great demand for appearances with orchestras and in recital, M. Pennetier performed with the Orchestre de Paris, the Staatskapelle of Dresden, NHK in Tokyo, and at festivals around the world. At the age of 30, however, he interrupted his performing career to pursue composing and conducting and to expand and deepen his repertoire. He explored musical theater and contemporary music, and wrote operas for children and award-winning film scores.

After several years of experimentation and enrichment, M. Pennetier returned to the concert stage to great acclaim, and has been active since in many musical capacities throughout Europe, in North and South America and in Japan. In recent seasons, he has toured with the orchestras of Lille, Pays de Savoie, and Poitou, and has performed with l'Orchestre de Paris and the Cannes, Limoges, Lugano and Trieste orchestras.

Recital appearances have included Moscow, Munich, Copenhagen, and the major cities of Central America. In the 2004-2005 season, his recital schedule included St. Petersburg, New York and Los Angeles. M. Pennetier also records and tours worldwide as a member of the Paris Piano Trio ("Les Musiciens"). He frequently conducts and performs chamber music in Paris and throughout France. In 2002, M. Pennetier had the great honor of being named a Chevalier de la Legion d'honneur.

A recent performance of Saint-Saëns Second Concerto with the Orchestre de la Radio et Télévision Suisse Italien under the direction of Alain Lombard was both broadcast and televised, and he has begun recording a major addition to

his substantial and highly regarded discography, a traversal of the 32 Beethoven Sonatas (eight each year) for Lyrinx.

France Pennetier, piano

Pianist, composer, actress and orchestral conductor, France Pennetier studied at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris where she was awarded first prize in piano, in chamber music, in harmony (Prix Halphen and Prix Jean Gallon), and in piano accompaniment, as well as honors in counterpoint and composition. For three years, she studied Interpretation of Baroque Music with William Christie, and Introduction to Electronic/Acoustic Music with Pierre Schaeffer and Jean-Etienne Marie. Mme. Pennetier made her debut as head of singing at the Nice Opera in 1963, and throughout her career she has devoted herself to contemporary music, as well as classical repertoire. Currently, a large part of France Pennetier's activities are devoted to working with singers and to lyric interpretation, working with Charles Bruck, Marius Constant, Max Deutch, Diego Masson, as well as with her husband, Jean-Claude Pennetier, with whom she writes transcriptions of musical stage works. Since 1969, she has been affiliated with the principal Paris conservatories.

Georges Pennetier, percussion

Born into eminently musical surroundings, Georges Pennetier began his musical education at home. At a very young age, he took part in training at the Cathedral of Chartres and the children's choir of the Paris Opera. At age ten, he played and sang in a film by Henri Sautet. At eighteen, he began to study percussion at the conservatory in Cergy-Pontoise. He played both traditional percussion instruments and finger drums of all sorts, appearing in performances that used these techniques by composers such as Maurice Ohana, Jacques Castereda, and Edgar Varèse, as well as works in the traditional repertoire. In 1991, he discovered dance working with choreographer Stephane Ripon, and became president of the organization Fou de Bassan, where he began work in composition and research in "rhythm/movement." In the following years, he wrote ballet music that was performed in various cities in Provence and the Paris region with different dance groups. This brought him, in 1998, to writing the music for plays, including Shakespeare's *Richard III* performed in Paris and Avignon. In 1999, he performed as the narrator in Stravinsky's *L'Histoire du Soldat*. Since 2000, he has composed more works combining dancers and instruments as well as a very successful children's show for an actress and two percussionists. He is, at present, a professor of percussion and accompanist for contemporary African dance at the École de Musique et Danse in Trappes.

Chris Thompson, percussion

Originally from the San Francisco Bay area, Chris Thompson has had the pleasure of performing orchestral, chamber, and solo music on both coasts and abroad. He was the winner of the 2001 Kent-Atwater Concerto Competition in Los Angeles and held the principal timpanist position for two years simultaneously with both the American Youth Symphony and YMF's Debut Orchestra. In the summer of 2001, he was an academy member of the Pacific Music Festival in Sapporo, Japan, under the direction of Charles Dutoit, and in 2004 he returned to Japan on tour with the Line C3 Percussion Group, of which he is a founding member.

Mr. Thompson has gained a unique and unprecedented musical insight through his involvement with The Music Paradigm, an organization that uses an orchestra to provide a highly valuable learning experience to members of any sort of dynamic organization, as well as to inspire and build new audiences for orchestral music the in the United States and internationally.

Mr. Thompson also has performed with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Lincoln Center Festival, Stamford Symphony, EOS Orchestra, Dimpho Di Kopane, Princeton Symphony, Music Academy of the West's Festival Orchestra, Vermont Mozart Festival, Guild Opera Company, Blue Hill Troupe, Angeles Symphony, and Westwood Chamber Orchestra, among others. He holds his master's degree from the Juilliard School, where he was a student of Daniel Druckman. He also earned a bachelor's degree from UCLA as a student of Mitchell Peters, and in composition as a student of Roger Bourland. He currently resides in Brooklyn, where he spends his free time writing funny techno music.

Program Notes

Claude Debussy (1862 – 1918)

Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune

The *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (or *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*) is a musical composition for orchestra by Claude Debussy that was first performed in 1894, conducted by Gustave Doret. It was inspired by the poem *L'après-midi d'un faune* by Stéphane Mallarmé and later formed the basis for the ballet of the same name by, Vaslav Nijinsky. The composition is one of Debussy's most famous works and is considered a turning point in the history of music; composer-conductor Pierre Boulez even dates the awakening of modern music from this score, observing that "the flute of the Faun brought new breath to the art of music."

About his composition Debussy wrote, "The music of this prelude is a very free illustration of Mallarmé's beautiful poem. By no means does it claim to be a synthesis of it. Rather there is a succession of scenes through which pass the desires and dreams of the faun in the heat of the afternoon. Then, tired of pursuing the timorous flight of nymphs and naiads, he succumbs to intoxicating sleep, in which he can finally realize his dreams of possession in universal Nature."

It contains one of the most famous passages in musical modernism, the half step descent to the tritone and ascent of the flute. The work is called a prelude because Debussy intended to write a suite of three pieces—Prelude, Interlude, and Final Paraphrase—but the last two pieces never were written. Although it is tempting to call this piece a tone poem, there is very little musical literalism in the piece; instead, the languorous melody and shimmering orchestration as a whole evoke the eroticism of Mallarmé's poem.

The *Prélude* at first listening seems improvisational and almost free-form; however, closer observation will demonstrate that the piece consists of a complex organization of musical cells, motifs carefully developed and traded between members of the orchestra. A close analysis of the piece yields a deep appreciation of the ultimate compositional economy of Debussy's craft.

The main musical themes are introduced by woodwinds, with delicate but harmonically advanced underpinnings of muted horns, strings and harp. Recurring tools in Debussy's compositional arsenal make appearances in this piece: Bracing whole-note scale runs, harmonic fluidity without lengthy modulations between central keys, tritones in both melody and harmony.

The development of the slow main theme moves fluidly between 9/8, 6/8 and 12/8. Debussy explores voicings and shading in his orchestration brilliantly, allowing the main melodic cell to move from solo flute to oboe, back to solo flute, then two unison flutes (yielding a completely different feel to the melody), then clarinet, etc. Even the accompaniment explores alternate voicings; the flute duo's soaring, erotic melodic cell rides lush rolling strings with violas carrying the soprano part over alto violins (the tone of a viola in its upper register being especially sumptuous). And in the first minute of the piece, Debussy mischievously throws in a bar of complete silence, giving the listener the opportunity to explore the musical quality of negative space within a gentle flowing river of sound.

Though this piece was originally penned for orchestra, Debussy also arranged the composition for two pianos.

—Wikipedia

Olivier Messiaen (1908 – 1992)

Amen du désir

Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992) is considered one of the greatest composers for his clearly defined and unique character: inspired by nature and Catholic ideology. His music is known for its melodic invention—ranging from the liveliness of ecstatic dance to the serene austerity of plainsong—and for its rhythms marked with the freedom of Indian classical music, and above all, for its uncharted terrain of unusual and beautiful harmonies.

Throughout his lifetime, Messiaen carried out the roles of performer (as parish-organist), teacher and composer with Christ-like dedication; and the fruits of his labour are duly apparent: the enlargement of the organ's repertoire in contemporary composition, an army of renowned students who have included Pierre Boulez, Karlheinz Stockhausen and Alexander Goehr; and a portfolio of some of the greatest music ever written.

Within this extensive catalogue are a number of highly original works for the piano which have become permanent cornerstones of late twentieth-century virtuoso repertory: *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* and *Catalogue d'oiseaux* come immediately to mind. But Messiaen's singular contribution to the repertoire of the piano-duo must be counted amongst the most valuable of all time: gone are the leisure-traits which have characterised much of the nineteenth-century's developments in four-hand (or more) writing—*Visions de L'Amen* is a *tour de force* exercise in musical architecture, sonority and rhythmic complexity.

Inspired by a work of theology, *Visions* serves to justify Messiaen's conviction of the four-fold definition of 'Amen': the act of creation, the 'Amen' of acceptance, desire, and the 'Amen' afforded by Paradise's fulfilment. To these he has added "the lives of creatures that say Amen through the simple fact that they exist." Conceived as a virtuoso vehicle for Messiaen and his brilliant young pupil, Yvonne Loriod (whom he would later marry), the music exploits very different temperaments and techniques by assigning entirely separate roles to the two pianos: the first part - given to Loriod - has all the technical ravages, the bells, birdsongs and decorative figuration; while the second (Messiaen's own part) carries the themes and underlying harmonies.

Visions is a compound of seven movements: a work of unity that may be perceived as two symmetrical halves (of three movements) sandwiching a central section. The opening movement (*Amen de la Création*) introduces the "theme of Creation" amidst a double-layered rhythmic ostinato in a gigantic wave of crescendo; the subsequent movement (*Amen des étoiles, de la planète à l'anneau*) displays three different developments of a five-note motif in a kaleidoscopic swirl of pianistic colour.

Movement three (*Amen de l'Agonie de Jésus*) introduces a genuine interplay of pianism in a passage of sonorous heterophony; whereby three 'weeping' motifs serve to represent the agony of Jesus on the Mount of Olives. The central 'Amen' (*Amen du Désir*) begins in ineffable calm and brings the tension to mount in an impressive display of jazzy improvisation and big-boned virtuosity for the second pianist.

The fifth movement (*Amen des Anges, des Saints, de chant de oiseaux*) calls upon the "theme of Creation" in a more fluid, almost improvisatory, incarnation; bordering a central section of 'birdsong' (a typical feature of Messiaen's music) in which strains of nightingales, blackbirds, chaffinches and whitethroats have been meticulously transcribed.

Amen du Jugement is a brief exposition of three icy notes; in nature, a grim mirror-reflection of the third movement's solemnity. The final *Amen de la Consommation* transforms the "theme of Creation" into a triumphant chorale amidst a carillon of chords and brilliant scintillating rhythms. With *Visions*, the first fruits of partnership between Messiaen and Loriod were sown; and thus begun the composer's association with the piano in most of his large-scale works.

—Program note by Darrell Ang

Yoshihisa Taira

Ignescence

Born in Tokyo in 1937, Yoshihisa Taira studied music at the University of the Arts in Tokyo, then at the National Academy of Music in Paris under André Jolivet, Henri Cutilleux, and Olivier Messiaen, where, in 1971, he received first prize for composition. The musical language of Taira and the scarcity of his comments makes listening the true way to understand his music. He has said of his work, "What is music for me? I often wonder. Perhaps it is the instinctive song of a prayer which makes me be. Around me float an infinity of sounds which I have retained. Breating generates spontaneous movements which correspond mutually and which come to be opposed to the silence within man, which, it should be recognized, is endowed with a breath of life. There is thus created, for a few moments, a certain atmosphere, a certain music which my music tries to collect and to make communicable. I would like to be a musician who can hear alive silence. Far from being an abstract word suitable for the wild imagining of dubious theories which give place to vain explanations, music is for me an alive, concrete verb."

Taira's works have been played in the main festivals and institutions of contemporary music. He teaches composition at l'École Normale de Musique in Paris.

Guy Reibel

Variations en étoile : Musique électro-acoustique

This electro-acoustic work of Guy Reibel, penned in 1967, treats the phenomenon of the rebound. Soon after its composition, Jean-Pierre Drouet, an internationally recognized percussionist, started to improvise parts, mixing his sonorities with the electro-acoustic sounds, thus creating a true dialogue. He began to include it in his repertoire, and consequently the *Variations en Étoile* became regarded as a solo percussion piece to be played with a band. No specific part was ever written down, the piece being an improvisatory collaboration between Reibel and Drouet; thus, each performer is free to play the piece how he wishes, for instance choosing the instrument he uses, the time between each variation, etc.

—France Pennetier

Béla Bartók (1881 – 1945)

Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion

Béla Bartók's *Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion* was written in 1937 and had its premiere on January 16, 1938, in Basel, Switzerland, with Bartók and his wife Ditta as pianists. Not long after, Bartók noted that "the whole thing sounds quite unusual—but the Basel people like it anyway [and] it had a 'tremendous' success."

In a newspaper article, Bartók stated: "For some years now, I have been planning to compose a work for piano and percussion. Slowly, however, I have become convinced that one piano does not sufficiently balance the frequently very sharp sounds of the percussion."

Another reason for the *Sonata*'s duo-piano scoring may have been that the Bartóks had begun giving concerts together.

Universally acknowledged as one of Bartók's masterpieces, the *Sonata* demands intricate synchronization between the two pianos and percussion. Although the percussion often has a merely accompanimental function, adding emphasis or setting off ideas delineated by the pianos, Bartók nonetheless paid considerable attention to balancing all of the instruments. The score not only contains precise performance directions but also a drawing that shows correct instrumental placement: the pianos, keyboard facing the audience, are to be grouped on either side and in front of the percussion, with pitched instruments in closest proximity to the pianos. (In December 1940, at the instigation of his publisher, Bartók transcribed the *Sonata* as the *Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra*, a work not often heard but of considerable interest nonetheless.)

Bartók previously had demonstrated a fascination for combining piano (which is, after all, essentially a percussive instrument) and percussion, most notably in the remarkable, and at that time (1926) unique, slow movement of his *First Concerto*, scored only for piano, percussion and winds. However, the harmonic language of the *Sonata*—systematized and extremely complex (as are its structural relationships)—is much less concerned with barbaric drive and percussive discord. Rather than tone-clusters, the *Sonata* features chords of fifths and octaves, and even simple triads, along with an overlying tonality of C major (though with tritonal emphasis). Still, the *Sonata*'s most striking aspect—even more so than the many singular color effects—is perhaps its non-violent asymmetrical rhythmic propulsion and the sheer dancelike quality of much of the music.

The *Sonata* is cast in three movements, the first by far the longest. The opening movement, in sonata form, begins with an ominous-sounding slow introduction

and has three contrasting themes (syncopated; melodic; contrapuntal). The Impressionist-tinged slow movement, in ternary form, stands in great contrast, as does the predominantly diatonic sonata-rondo finale, with its sardonic and unexpectedly folksy main theme, its atmosphere of humor and its witty ending.

—Program note by Phillip Ramey