

# The Ph.D./D.M.A. Programs in Music

February, 16, 2016, 7:30 p.m.

*Baisley Powell Elebash Recital Hall*



## C4 and The Curiosity Cabinet: Composers Now — GC Composers Seminar Concert

*The Ballad-Singer*

Nathan Pell

Brooke Collins, Rebecca Ehren, Bettina Sheppard, Martha Sullivan,  
Mario Gullo, Bill Heigen, Brian Mountford, David See, vocalists;  
Marina Kifferstein, Charlotte Munn-Wood, violin;  
Daniel McCarthy, viola; Caleigh Drane, violoncello;  
Perry Townsend, conductor

*To Fall*

Qin Ding

Rebecca Ehren, Bettina Sheppard, Martha Sullivan,  
Mario Gullo, Bill Heigen, Brian Mountford, David See, vocalists;  
Daniel McCarthy, viola; Caleigh Drane, violoncello;  
Perry Townsend, conductor

*If I can't dance...*

Vicente Alexim

Lorena del Mar, soprano; Bettina Sheppard, mezzo-soprano;  
Joseph Prestamo, piano

*Bloom*

Drake Andersen

Brooke Collins, Rebecca Ehren, Bettina Sheppard, Martha Sullivan,  
Mario Gullo, Bill Heigen, Brian Mountford, David See, vocalists;  
Drake Andersen, electronics; Perry Townsend, conductor

INTERMISSION

*/nim'fəʊnrə/*

Sang Song

Eliza Bagg, soprano; Marina Kifferstein, violin; Vicente Alexim, clarinet

*Recitation Tomb*

Peter Kramer

Brian Mountford, David See, Perry Townsend, baritone;  
Ellery Trafford, Joe Tucker, percussion;  
Martha Sullivan, conductor

Please switch off your cell phones and refrain from taking flash pictures.

*Méandres*

Jean-Patrick Besingrand

Brooke Collins, Rebecca Ehren, Bettina Sheppard, Martha Sullivan, vocalists;  
Martha Cargo, alto flute; Perry Townsend, conductor

*Elegy*

Joseph Prestamo

Brooke Collins, Rebecca Ehren, Bettina Sheppard, Martha Sullivan,  
Mario Gullo, Bill Heigen, Brian Mountford, David See, vocalists;  
Perry Townsend, conductor

## Texts and Program Notes:

### **The Ballad-Singer:**

In setting this poem, I imagined its speaker to be a drunk and disillusioned occupant of a Wessex pub — a character and setting hardly unfamiliar from Thomas Hardy's novels. The quick, ascending figure at the song's opening evokes the din of the pub crowd, which our protagonist occasionally manages to tune out only by remembering what he begs the singer to "make [him] forget." — Nathan Pell.

Text:

Sing, Ballad-singer, raise a hearty tune;  
Make me forget that there was ever a one  
I walked with in the meek light of the moon  
    When the day's work was done.

Rhyme, Ballad-rhymer, start a country song;  
Make me forget that she whom I loved well  
Swore she would love me dearly, love me long,  
    Then - what I cannot tell!

Sing, Ballad-singer, from your little book;  
Make me forget those heart-breaks, achings, fears;  
Make me forget her name, her sweet sweet look -  
    Make me forget her tears.

— Thomas Hardy

### **If I can't dance...**

In her autobiography, Emma Goldman, the anarchist/feminist who lived in New York around the beginning of the 20th century, writes about a time when she was told not to dance at a party as "it was undignified for one who was on the way to become a force in the anarchist movement." Goldman confronts this interference by saying: "I want freedom, the right to self-expression, everybody's right to beautiful, radiant things." From this passage from *Living my Life*, the famous quote "If I can't dance I don't want to be in your revolution" was created.

If I can't dance... aims to musically represent the ideas of oppression and self-expression. The singers, whose voice is initially physically blocked, gradually emancipate themselves from the instrumental texture of the piano to explore their individuality. — Vicente Alexim.

## **Bloom:**

This piece explores the practice of listening as a way of organizing relationships within an ensemble. The sounds are improvised, but over the course of the piece each performer will alternate between different roles, imitating or transforming the sounds of another performer, or contributing a new sound that may in turn be transformed or echoed by someone else. The electronics further transform the performers' voices during the performance, creating a constellation of sounds that seem to come together and diverge in time with the performers' breathing. This piece is inspired by *Tuning Meditation* by Pauline Oliveros. — Drake Andersen

To listen to more of Drake's music, please visit: [www.drakeandersen.com](http://www.drakeandersen.com).

/nɪmˈfəʊniə/:

**nymph**, *n.* /nɪmf/

1. *Chiefly Classical Mythol.* Any of a class of semi-divine spirits, imagined as taking the form of a maiden inhabiting the sea, rivers, mountains, woods, trees, etc., and often portrayed in poetry as attendants on a particular god.

**dysphonia**, *n.* /dɪsˈfəʊniə/ [Greek δυσφωνία harshness of sound] difficulty of speaking arising from affection of the vocal organs.

**phoneme**, *n.* Brit. /ˈfəʊni:m/ , U.S. /ˈfoʊnɪm/ 1. *Linguistics.* **a.** A unit of sound in a language that cannot be analysed into smaller linear units and that can distinguish one word from another (e.g. /p/ and /b/ in English *pat*, *bat*).

— *Oxford Dictionary of English*

**Nymphonia** is a genus of moths of the Yponomeutidae family.

— *World Heritage Encyclopedia*

## **Recitation Tomb:**

Ezra Pound's poem *The Tomb at Aker Caar* depicts the presence of a soul or perhaps the perspective of time. The quality of isolation and suppression found in this poem struck me as fit for homogeneous musical ensembles, especially whereby two groups are at odds with one another while attempting to fuse at the same time. This piece is also a response to Georges Apherdis' Recitations for solo voice, and utilizes rhythmic material from Recitations eleven and fourteen as well as pitched material from Recitation four. Accumulation of these materials (for instance the pyramid shape of Recitation eleven) is further pronounced, in Recitation Tomb by a slowly descending series of dyads throughout the first part of the piece, effectively burying the vocal range in the low register. Pound's poem deals with aspects of decay, in such a way that a reading of his poem isn't much different from running one's fingers along the remains of hieroglyphs from an unearthed tomb, in an attempt to decipher the words in greater detail. Here bits and pieces of text have fallen to the ground, the voices pass the words around in fragments, although following the original linear arc of Pound's

poem a sense of decoding these cryptic words permeates this setting. The feeling of accumulation in Apherdis' Recitations is here reconfigured and fragmented, whereby a simplicity of pitch and timbre attribute to a static yet accumulating development through which the voices are affectively "buried" in a tomb themselves. — Peter Kramer.

To listen to more of Peter's music, please visit: [www.peterkramermusic.wordpress.com](http://www.peterkramermusic.wordpress.com).

**Text:**

I am thy soul, Nikoptis. I have watched  
These five millennia, and thy dead eyes  
Moved not, nor ever answer my desire,  
And thy light limbs, wherethrough I leapt aflame,  
Burn not with me nor any saffron thing.

See, the light grass sprang up to pillow thee,  
And kissed thee with a myriad grassy tongues;  
But not thou me.  
I have read out the gold upon the wall,  
And wearied out my thought upon the signs.  
And there is no new thing in all this place.

I have been kind. See, I have left the jars sealed,  
Lest thou shouldst wake and whimper for thy wine.  
And all thy robes I have kept smooth on thee.

O thou unmindful ! How should I forget!  
-Even the river many days ago,  
The river? thou wast over young.  
And three souls came upon Thee-  
And I came.  
And I flowed in upon thee, beat them off;  
I have been intimate with thee, known thy ways.  
Have I not touched thy palms and finger-tips,  
Flowed in, and through thee and about thy heels?  
How 'came I in'? Was I not thee and Thee?

And no sun comes to rest me in this place,  
And I am torn against the jagged dark,  
And no light beats upon me, and you say  
No word, day after day.

Oh! I could get me out, despite the marks  
And all their crafty work upon the door,  
Out through the glass-green fields. . . .

Yet it is quiet here:  
I do not go.'

— Ezra Pound

## Méandres:

Méandres was inspired by the events that occurred in Paris on November 13th 2015. These attacks affected me profoundly as a French native and former student at the Paris Sorbonne University. In this piece, I tried to depict the different emotions we experience after a traumatic event. The flute is influenced alternately by the different voices and their respective characters. A sense of confusion emanates from these different emotions and melts into an incomprehension and a certain madness in regards to the situation. — Jean-Patrick Besingrand

To listen to more of Jean-Patrick's music, please visit: [www.jeanpatrickbesingrand.com](http://www.jeanpatrickbesingrand.com).

## Elegy:

When writing a vocal or choral composition, I begin with the text. My goal is to embody the words, to create a musical space that reflects and explores their meaning and emotions. Brandon Jordan Brown is a poet living in LA, and his moving words were the inspirational starting point.

To listen to more of Joseph's music, please visit: [www.josephprestamo.com](http://www.josephprestamo.com).

## Text:

### An Answering Machine Elegy for Aunt Mary

*I'm not sure if you know yet...*

*Something bad happened,*

*to Aunt Mary...*

*You hear about this stuff, but never think someone is going to do it.*

*A month ago,*

*she kept telling me*

*there is a roof on the world.*

*That it sits on top of all the trees*

*like a heavy stone. That she felt things shaking*

*sometimes, and nothing*

*that falls on our heads is*

*brand new.*

*It all may look different,*

*but it lands on you the same,*

*like snow.*

— Brandon Jordan Brown

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[www.brandonjordanbrown.com](http://www.brandonjordanbrown.com)

# The Composers Now Festival

The Composers Now Festival celebrates living composers, the diversity of their voices and the significance of their musical contributions to our society. During the month of February, the Festival brings together dozens of performances presented by venues, ensembles, orchestras, opera companies, dance companies and many other innovative events throughout New York City. Experience the sounds and get to know the creators behind the music. From jazz to indie, from classical to electronic and beyond, join us on a sonic journey through the landscape of the arts of our time. Composers will be in attendance, interacting with audiences. Composers Now is a project partner of The Fund for the City of New York. We gratefully acknowledge the support of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the Cheswaty Foundation, the Ann and Gordon Getty Foundation, Newburgh Institute For The Arts and Ideas, ASCAP, BMI, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council and Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts.

# C4: The Choral Composer/Conductor Collective

The C4 ensemble is a unique, award-winning chorus that is directed and operated collectively by its members - singers (all), composers, and conductors (in various combinations). The group not only presents concerts, but works to enrich artists and audiences alike through passionate advocacy of new choral music and the mentoring of emerging choral musicians. It is the first organization of its kind and one of the few choral groups in the nation to focus exclusively on works from the last twenty-five years.

Roots of the organization go back to 2005 when the founders wanted to create a new kind of ensemble that would work within a democratic framework. C4 has now reached its 11th season presenting a wide array of choral works by well known veterans and emerging composers—C4 members and others. In self-presented concerts, invited appearances, and through educational outreach, the ensemble has performed nearly 40 programs made up exclusively of music of our time. Audiences have thrilled to hear an ensemble made up largely of composers and conductors (who take turns at the podium) performing complex music at a very high level.

C4 has collaborated with outstanding artists – Fireworks Ensemble, Ensemble Dance, filmmaker David Finkelstein, and the Canite String Quartet – and has appeared in outstanding venues – The Cell, Galapagos Art Space, Le Poisson Rouge, Tenri Cultural Insitute, The DiMenna Center, Mark Morris Theatre, Roulette, Issue Project Room, The Theatre at Manhattan Movement and Arts Center, and Baruch Performing Arts Center.

C4 has also championed the creation of new music for chorus through its Composer Commissioning Competitions, drawing well over 500 submissions from composers world-wide and granting nearly \$10,000 in prizes and stipends with the help of expert panelists, Eric Banks, James Bassi, Aaron Jay Kernis, Clara Longstreth, and Steven Stucky.

Educational outreach became part of C4's activities beginning in 2013 with a very successful weekend residency at Tufts University. Members took part in a reading/critique of student compositions, led a master class for the university choir, and performed a full length concert. C4 now makes itself available – in part or in total – for a wide variety of educational activities.

C4's debut album "C4, Volume 1: Uncaged" was released in June 2013 and received rave reviews from The American Record Guide and Fanfare Magazine and was featured by WQXR (NY) as "Q2 Album of the Week." The group's second album is scheduled for release in May 2016.

C4's success in forwarding new music of all kinds led to its receiving a 2014 Chorus America/ ASCAP Adventurous Programming Award in 2014.

Since its debut, C4 has performed nearly 250 works by more than 120 composers including 92 world, 7 US, and 14 New York/East Coast premieres. The group fills an important niche in the cultural life of New York and beyond, and has proven its commitment to presenting high caliber music in a welcoming atmosphere.

# The Curiosity Cabinet

**1. curiosity cabinet (noun):** 15th-century piece of furniture, typically made of wood, with many drawers and shelves of different sizes. These drawers and shelves were used to display a collection of artifacts, and these artifacts were often connected by a theme related to the collector's profession. A scientist, for example, might exhibit remnants of botanical life or various medical anomalies, while a hunter might collect and display petrified butterflies or ravenous animal teeth. Curiosity cabinets were often the only place for laity to glimpse exotic pieces of fossilized wildlife, like the tip of the horn of a rhino or claw from a hawk. These cabinets—and the collections they housed—are often considered to be predecessors of the modern museum, and have influenced various contemporary organizations such as the grotesque Mütter Museum of medical oddities, Oxford University's Ashmolean Museum, and the NYC-based new music ensemble the Curiosity Cabinet (see definition 2).

**2. Curiosity Cabinet (proper noun):** 20th- and 21st-century chamber music collective whose drawers filled are with the musical curiosities and talents of 20 instrumentalists and 6 singers, each as unique as any wildlife oddity (see definition 1). Founded in 2009 by composer and conductor Whitney George, The Curiosity Cabinet's interdisciplinary thematic performances champion new works by living composers, combined with the immersive drama of sounds, images and gestures, and invite audiences to indulge in the pleasure of spectacle, in the fun of looking as well as listening, and in the disorientating effect of satire.

Among the ensemble's accolades include the Robert Engelman Award for the premiere performance of George's 50-minute monodrama *The Yellow Wallpaper* (2010) and the CUNY Graduate Center's prestigious Robert Starer Award for George's 13-movement work *The Anatomy of the Curiosity Cabinet* (2011). Other performance highlights include the annual New York City Composers NOW festival (since 2011), the premiere of selections of a new opera by David Bridges (2011), and performing as the ensemble-in-residence at the annual Hartford Women Composers' Festival (2011). Its recent interdisciplinary collaborations include the Satie-inspired theatrical installation *Un Lieu de Vie* with artist collective Concrete Timbre (2014) and *The Curious Tale of Ed Leeskahnin* with puppeteer Daniel Patrick Fay at Standard Toykraft Theater in Brooklyn (2015).

Highlights of their 2015-16 season include a collaboration with Concrete Timbre on their newest theatrical presentation, *4 Wars*, *Fresh Squeezed Opera* on their annual summer production, a presentation of *The Strange Library* at the 2nd annual New Music Gathering, Daniel Felsenfeld's curated series at National Sawdust, and Dixon Place's Works in Progress Series for Whitney George's award-winning work *Night, like velvet: in twelve letters*, using the poetry of Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes. The ensemble is thrilled to be collaborating with the esteemed choral group C4 for a presentation of original works by Graduate Center composers for the month-long Composers NOW celebration.