

Composer Portraits

Olga Neuwirth

International Contemporary Ensemble

Cory Smythe, *solo piano*

Jayce Ogren, *conductor*

Thursday, December 6, 8:00 p.m.



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locus...doublure...solus (2001)
for piano and ensemble

Olga Neuwirth (b. 1968)

Cory Smythe, *piano*
International Contemporary Ensemble

INTERMISSION

On-stage discussion with Olga Neuwirth and Claire Chase

...ce qui arrive... (2004) **U.S. premiere**

after text fragments by Paul Auster

for two ensembles, samples, and live electronics; as well as three songs on texts
by Andrew Patner and Georgette Dee

International Contemporary Ensemble

Paul Auster, *voice*

Georgette Dee, *chansonnier*

Live electronics realized by Markus Noisternig, IEM (Graz, Austria)



This program runs approximately one hour and 45 minutes, including a brief intermission.

Major support for Composer Portraits is provided by
the Francis Goelet Charitable Lead Trusts.

Please note that photography and the use of recording devices are not permitted. Remember to turn off all cellular phones and pagers before tonight's performance begins. Miller Theatre is wheelchair accessible. Large print programs are available upon request. For more information or to arrange accommodations, please call 212-854-7799.

About the Program

Introduction

Born in Graz in 1968, Olga Neuwirth grew up with music in the family with her jazz musician father and her uncle Gösta Neuwirth, a composer, noted music historian, and composition teacher. She started trumpet lessons when she was seven, and studied composition, film, and painting in San Francisco for a year before she enrolled, in 1986, at the Hochschule für Musik in Vienna. There were also decisive encounters with two established composers: Adriana Hölszky and Luigi Nono. After graduating, in 1993, she spent a year in Paris studying with Tristan Murail and at IRCAM.

She wrote her conservatory dissertation on the music (by Hans Werner Henze) in Alain Resnais's *L'Amour à mort*, and film has remained a vital part of her life. She has worked with filmmakers, including the Quay Brothers; composed scores for silent films (notably Vikking Eggeling's *Diagonal Symphony*); composed the score for a feature film by Michael Glawogger; realized her own short films (recently working on her short film *Composer as Mad Scientist*); was presented at the Documenta 12 in Kassel in 2007; and remade David Lynch's *Lost Highway* as an opera. Her music generally has something of the glaze of film, the sense that, though the expressive gestures may be violent or disturbing, they are unfolding somewhere apart and unreachable. Immediacy and distance seem to be simultaneously present, as are innovation and memory: the startling new idea or process and the reference to the musical past, sometimes in the form of quote or imitation. Multiplicity — of focus, of expression, of time — often comes from dense layerings, though passages of stillness and openness are also characteristic.

Literature has been almost as important to Neuwirth as film and architecture. One of her earliest works was a cantata with words by Nobel Prize-winner Elfriede Jelinek, *Aufenthalt* (1992–93). She has worked with Jelinek since the age of sixteen, including on her first two operas, *Bählamms Fest* (1997–98) and *Lost Highway* (2002–03). Their most recent collaboration was for a video and series of photos by Neuwirth for the Charim Gallery in Vienna entitled *Das Fallen. Die Falle*. Her third opera — *The Outcast*, about Herman Melville as an old, forgotten, and smiled-at man — received its

world premiere in Mannheim earlier this year and had a libretto by Barry Gifford and Anna Mitgutsch. A new version of Alban Berg's *Lulu* was premiered this autumn at the Komische Oper Berlin. Entitled *American Lulu*, it is set in New York City and New Orleans.

Other landmarks include two portrait concerts at the 1998 Salzburg Festival; a piece for orchestral strings and percussion commissioned for Pierre Boulez's 75th birthday tour (*Clinamen/Nodus*, 1999); the forty-minute *Construction in Space* for four wind soloists, four instrumental groups; and electronics (2000–01); *torsion: transparent variation* for bassoon and ensemble (2001); the trumpet concerto *...miramondo multiplo...*, with which she returned to the Salzburg Festival in 2006; the viola concerto *Remnants of songs...an Amphigory* (2009), written for Antoine Tamestit; and her third string quartet, *in the realms of the unreal* (2009). Her website — www.olganeuwirth.com — provides further information about an output that is already large and diverse.

***locus... doublure...solus* for piano and ensemble (2001)**

Neuwirth's piano concerto also has literary connections, but now indirectly, words not trespassing into the music beyond its title, which intercalates those of two works by Raymond Roussel: his novel *Locus Solus* and his long descriptive poem *La Doublure*. These nested titles insert a principle of doubleness (one meaning of *doublure* is "understudy") into an idea of the single, even singular, *Locus Solus* being translatable as "A Place Alone." All piano concertos, of course, are about two things coexisting, and this one adds further bifurcations that have to be made coherent, in that the viola is tuned just over a quarter-tone sharp and the electric keyboard just over a quarter-tone flat. Unsettling tunings become part of the work's craziness.

That craziness may contain a further reference to Roussel's wonderfully convoluted writings. John Ashbery's synopsis of *Locus Solus* begins: "A prominent scientist and inventor, Martial Canterel, has invited a group of colleagues to visit the park of his country estate, Locus Solus. As the group tours the estate, Canterel shows them inventions of ever-increasing complexity and strangeness." In this case, Neuwirth and her performers take the place of the mad scientist, and the inventions are the seven movements of the piece, made with repeating, rotating, and alternating blocks that easily suggest machines made of sound, though one might be reminded, too, of Messiaen's electric hymns fabricated from birdsong.

Most of the movements include somewhere the marking “schreitend/dolce,” the only verbal marking in the score, suggesting purposeful progress (“striding”) is not incompatible with expressiveness. Certainly these sonic cogwheels, pulleys, weights, and levers are exuberantly busy and colorful — alive, one might say.

The first movement and the last are fixed in place; the other five may be presented in any order. Only one is slow, and has two notes — the C sharp and D sharp above middle C — caused to sound throughout by electronic bows applied to the strings of the solo piano. Another movement dashes by in a flurry, with glissandos right up the treble half of the keyboard. Still another is a march, touched in at times with the Weill-Eisler arrow in Neuwirth’s packed quiver. Types change; only the light in which they are shown stays bright.

...ce qui arrive... after text fragments by Paul Auster
for two ensembles, samples, and live electronics; as well as three songs on texts
by Andrew Patner and Georgette Dee (2004)

What happens, is. In 2002, Paul Virilio had the opportunity to expand his work as a cultural theorist into the forum of an exhibition, on the theme of accidents, under the title “ce qui arrive” (what happens). Neuwirth took the same phrase to label what developed as one of her longest and most powerful concert works, in which accidents and collisions are subsumed in music that generally moves slowly, oozing forward, and that takes place as if in a large resonant container, partly thanks to the electronic presence, on which Neuwirth worked at the Institute for Electronic Music and Acoustics in Graz, partly thanks to the harmonic spectra on D — spectra often including quarter-tones — that bulge and stay and move throughout the composition. Perhaps this echoing music is the sound of memory, revolving on events — life experiences as recorded by Paul Auster, reading from his *Hand to Mouth* and *The Red Notebook*, as well as musical events and references (folk song, popular song, chorale). Or perhaps we could imagine the work’s components — instrumental and electronic music, spoken monologue, intermittent songs — as remnants of a shipwreck, reverberating underwater.

It is not just accident, however, not just coincidence that brings these things together. The D on which the music focuses, the steady light at its center, is the predominant pitch of Auster’s speaking voice, which is generally heard more or less straight, though occasionally it is electronically altered, sometimes to blend in with the strings.



So although the voice seems to be telling its stories outside the music, it is at the same time central to that music, to the extent that the ‘resonant container’ could even be thought of as Auster’s vocal cavity, whose frequencies the instruments pick out. The mouth, therefore, is both an object on the horizon of this piece and the space within which it unfolds.

There is multiplicity and ambiguity, too, in the roles of the instruments, which form at once two groups answering one another from opposing sides of the stage and a single formation, itself poised between new-music ensemble and club band. Some of the instruments are at times absorbed into the electronic sound; all of them stand out on occasion as soloists. Passages where everyone is following the same rhythm are inter-cut with others, longer, where the instrumental parts are not coordinated, so that time seems to flow smoothly, or not at all. The more popular-style music comes to a head three times for songs interpreted by the German transgendered performer Georgette Dee, songs in which Neuwirth, herself crossing boundaries, adopts a style associated with the Brecht settings of Weill and Eisler.

Playing for almost an hour, the piece holds us in its grip as it conveys us, perhaps unsuspectingly, to a moment of epiphany — a moment that, though stunning and resolving when it comes, seems to have been there all along, the condition for everything else.

Program notes by Paul Griffiths

About the Artists

Jayce Ogren is rapidly developing a reputation as one of the finest young conductors to emerge from the United States equally at home in both symphonic and operatic repertoire. In recent seasons, he has conducted the Boston Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, New World Symphony, International Contemporary Ensemble, and the Grand Rapids Symphony. On the opera stage, after an invitation from New York City Opera to conduct a staged production of Mozart's *Magic Flute*, he was subsequently re-invited for a critically acclaimed new production of Bernstein's *A Quiet Place* which was a resounding success. In the summer of 2012 he conducted a chamber version of *The Marriage of Figaro* as part of the Verbier Festival Academy as well as making his debut in the Mostly Mozart Festival (New York) with the International Contemporary Ensemble. Later in the season he again worked with the International Contemporary Ensemble on a project centered around Olga Neuwirth's music, performed as part of the prestigious Wien Modern Festival and Miller Theatre's Composer Portraits series in New York. Ogren will

conduct *West Side Story* as a Film with Orchestra project with both the National Arts Centre Ottawa Orchestra and the Detroit Symphony. Ogren's relationship with the New York City Opera continues with two new productions in the 2012/13 season — Britten's *Turn of the Screw* and Rossini's *Moses in Egypt*. Ogren is also a published composer whose music has been premiered at venues including the Royal Danish Conservatory of Music, the Brevard Music Center, the Midwest Clinic in Chicago, the American Choral Directors Association Conference, and the World Saxophone Congress. His work titled Symphonies of Gaia has been performed by ensembles on three continents and serves as the title track on a DVD featuring the Tokyo Kosei Wind Orchestra.

Pianist **Cory Smythe** is an improviser, chamber musician, and performer of contemporary classical music. As a member of the International Contemporary Ensemble, he has contributed to numerous premieres, worked with composers Philippe Hurel, Dai Fujikura, Steve Lehman, Magnus Lindberg, Kaija Saariaho, Mathias



Pintscher, and Alvin Lucier among many others, and performed in venues across the U.S. and abroad. *The Wire* magazine described his recent performance of solo piano music by Anthony Braxton as “startling... gorgeously dense”, and a forthcoming recording by ICE (Mode Records) will feature Smythe as the piano soloist in Iannis Xenakis’s *Palimpsest*. Smythe has played with or among a wide array of artists, including Braxton, the Greg Osby Four, Tyshawn Sorey, the Metropolitan Opera orchestra, the New York Philharmonic, and in recital with violinist Hilary Hahn. In the spring of 2011 he released his debut album, *pluripotent* — a collection of original compositions and improvisations for solo piano which has garnered praise from *New York Times* critic Steve Smith, among others. Smythe is a graduate of the music schools at Indiana University and the University of Southern California, where his principal teachers were Luba Edlina-Dubinsky and Stewart Gordon.

The International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE), described by the *New York Times* as “one of the most accomplished and adventurous groups in new music,” is dedicated to reshaping the way music is created and experienced. With a modular makeup of 33 leading instrumentalists performing in forces ranging from solos to large ensembles, ICE functions as performer, presenter, and

educator, advancing the music of our time by developing innovative new works and new strategies for audience engagement. ICE redefines concert music as it brings together new work and new listeners in the 21st century. Since its founding in 2001, ICE has premiered over 500 compositions, the majority of these new works by emerging composers, in venues ranging from alternative spaces to concert halls around the world. The ensemble received the American Music Center’s Trailblazer Award in 2010 for its contributions to the field, and received the ASCAP/Chamber Music America Award for Adventurous Programming in 2005 and 2010. ICE is Ensemble-in-Residence at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago through 2013. The ICE musicians also serve as Artists-in-Residence at the Mostly Mozart Festival of Lincoln Center through 2013, curating and performing chamber music programs that juxtapose new and old music. ICE has released acclaimed albums on the Nonesuch, Kairos, Bridge, Naxos, Tzadik, New Focus, and New Amsterdam labels, with several forthcoming releases on Mode Records. Recent and upcoming highlights include headline performances at the Lincoln Center Festival (New York), Musica Nova Helsinki (Finland), Wien Modern (Austria), Acht Brücken Music for Cologne (Germany), La Cité de la Musique (Paris), and tours of Japan, Brazil, and France. ICE has worked closely with conductors Ludovic Morlot, Matthias Pintscher, John Adams, and Su-

sanna Mälkki. With leading support from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, ICE launched ICElab in early 2011. This new program places teams of ICE musicians in close collaboration with six emerging composers each year to develop works that push the boundaries of musical exploration. ICElab projects will be featured in more than one hundred performances from 2011–2014 and documented online through DigitICE, a new online venue, and ICE’s blog. ICE’s commitment to build a diverse, engaged audience for the music of our time has inspired The Listening Room, a new educational initiative for public schools without in-house arts curricula. Using team-based composition and graphic notation, ICE musicians lead students in the creation of new musical works, nurturing collaborative creative skills and building an appreciation for musical experimentation. Read more at www.iceorg.org.

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Ensemble

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Eric Lamb, *flute*
Nick Masterson, *oboe*
Campbell MacDonald, *clarinet*
Joshua Rubin, *clarinet*
Alicia Lee, *clarinet*
Rebekah Heller, *bassoon*
Ryan Muncy, *saxophone*
David Byrd-Marrow, *horn*
Gareth Flowers, *trumpet*
Michael Lormand, *trombone*
Dan Peck, *tuba*
Nathan Davis, *percussion*
Ross Karre, *percussion*
Jacob Greenberg, *keyboard*
Erik Carlson, *violin*
Jennifer Curtis, *violin*
Wendy Richman, *viola*
Michael Nicolas, *cello*
Randall Zigler, *bass*
Daniel Lippel, *guitar*
Cory Smythe, *solo piano*

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Kumi Ishizawa, *assistant engineer*



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Miller Theatre at Columbia University is the leading presenter of new music in New York City and one of the most vital forces nationwide for innovative programming. In partnership with Columbia University School of the Arts, Miller is dedicated to producing and presenting unique events in dance, contemporary and early music, jazz, opera, and performance. Founded in 1988 with funding from John Goelet, Brooke Astor, and the Kathryn Bache Miller Fund, Miller Theatre has built a reputation for attracting new and diverse audiences to the performing arts and expanding public knowledge of contemporary music.

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Tuesday, December 11, 6:00 p.m. (doors at 5:30 p.m.)

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Zorn for Strings

Jennifer Choi, David Fulmer, Jesse Mills, and Christopher Otto, *violins*

David Fulmer, *viola*

Fred Sherry, *cello*

Saturday, December 15, 8:00 p.m.

JAZZ

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Saturday, February 9, 8:00 p.m.

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Sofia Gubaidulina

International Contemporary Ensemble

Christian Knapp, *conductor*

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