

*Composer Portraits*

# Anna Thorvaldsdottir

Either/Or

Zeena Parkins, *harp*

David Shively, *percussion*

Richard Carrick, *conductor*

— ◆ ◆ ◆ —  
Thursday, December 5, 8:00 p.m.  
— ◆ ◆ ◆ —



# From the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

Our 25th Anniversary Season is off to an amazing start! Already, we've presented four concerts of John Zorn's music over the course of five days; hosted three free Pop-Up Concerts onstage here at Miller; and premiered 125 new works inspired by John Cage's "Party Pieces." And there are many more incredible programs to come this spring, from a two-night percussion extravaganza featuring Steven Schick to a powerhouse program curated by Steve Reich, pairing his *Tehillim* with Bach's *Christ lag in Todes Banden*.

You may not realize that **Miller Theatre relies on the financial support of friends like you to make these performances possible**. Ticket sales cover only a small portion of our costs; without donations from audience members like you, we simply couldn't continue to produce the performances you know and love.

If you value what we do, I urge you to **show your support by making a donation**. You can make your gift tonight by returning the enclosed envelope to the table in the lobby, or by visiting us online at [www.millertheatre.com/support](http://www.millertheatre.com/support). Your contribution will go directly towards funding our performances, and I can promise you that it will make a difference.

Thank you for making Miller Theatre a part of your year-end giving plans. Warm wishes to you and yours this holiday season.

Sincerely yours,



Melissa Smey  
Executive Director

*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.*

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Anna Thorvaldsdottir (b. 1977)

*into - second self* (2013) **U.S. premiere**  
four horns, three trombones, and percussion

*[one]* (2008)  
piano with percussionist

*Ró/Serenity* (2013) **U.S. premiere**  
bass flute, bass clarinet, piano, percussion, two violins, viola, and cello

INTERMISSION

On-stage discussion with Anna Thorvaldsdottir and Richard Carrick

*Tactility* (2012) **New York premiere**  
percussion and harp

*Hrím* (2009/2010)  
chamber orchestra

This program runs approximately eighty minutes, including intermission.

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Major support for Composer Portraits is provided by  
the National Endowment for the Arts and the Francis Goelet Charitable Lead Trusts.

Special thanks to Jack Miller's Tractors, Inc., Schoharie, NY.

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# About the Program

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## Introduction

Nature  
listen  
flow free  
individually  
embrace  
listen  
Nature

(Anna Thorvaldsdóttir, program note on *Dreaming*)

There is the slow breath of the earth – the growth of plants, the turning of the seasons – and this is perhaps what the Icelandic composer Anna Thorvaldsdóttir is hearing in her music, the flowing unfolding of rich detail within wholeness. She has worked with various media, from symphony orchestra to studio electronics, but always with a sense more of listening than imposing, of allowing sound to form itself.

Born in 1977, she graduated from the Iceland Academy of the Arts in 2004 and then studied with Rand Steiger and Lei Liang at UCSD. By the time she received her doctorate there, in 2011, her reputation was established. Three milestones had come in 2006: the Iceland Symphony Orchestra gave the première of *A Moment of Peace*, her *Six Minutes* for flute, percussion, and harp was presented at the International Rostrum of Composers in Vienna, and another chamber piece, *Aton*, was recorded for CD. Another important moment was the first performance, in 2010, of her orchestral *Dreaming*, which last year was honored with the Nordic Council Music Prize. A portrait album, *Rhizōma*, was released in 2011.

She has become quite prolific in recent years. Apart from the items on this evening's program, works she has produced since *Dreaming* include another orchestral score,



*AERIALITY*, as well as *scape* for partly prepared piano, – *aura* – for percussionists, *Shadows* for brass and percussion, and *Shades of Silence* for string trio with harpsichord or piano. She also composed the music for Martein Thorsson’s movie *XL*, which was released earlier this past summer.

### ***into - second self* (2013)**

First performed in April this year by members of the Iceland Symphony under Ilan Volkov, this ten-minute piece is scored for four horns, three trombones, and four percussion players. The musicians are to be dispersed around the performance space, though with at least one percussionist on stage, for reasons as much dramatic as musical.

From out of faint noises, the dim light of pitched tone begins to appear: a medium-low G, soon wavering with slow glissandos and quarter-tone displacements, then bulging and disappearing – but not for long before a different light enters, that of B flat, this time with octaves and fifths, a sound that, reproducing overtones, speaks of raw nature. Again there is a kind of heaving stability, with narrow slides and quarter-tone roughnesses, and again the percussion players seem to be sounding the sound. The implications this time, though, are mightier, as the new sound spreads to embrace the old and, in the process, be transformed.

### ***Ró* / [Chinese character] (2013)**

The dual-language title, “Serenity” in Icelandic and Chinese, honors the occasion of the first performance, which was given by the Icelandic new-music ensemble Caput at this year’s Beijing Music Festival, just a month after the première of *into*. There are correspondences between the two works, not least in duration, but also differences that spring from the instrumentation, which here comprises two low woodwinds – bass flute and bass clarinet – plus string quartet, together with percussion and piano (played on the frame and directly on the strings, with fingers, a superball mallet, and an electronic bow, as well as on the keyboard). Pitched sound arises from noise and may always fold back into it, the noise produced as much from the string and wind instruments as from the percussion and piano. Natural harmonics – octaves and fifths in the ensemble texture, and harmonics played on the instruments – create an effect of sound resonating in its wild state, even while the composer’s definition of that sound is scrupulous and sophisticated. There is also a similar progression, from an A center to a

C, but here with flickers of melody measuring a much faster time than that of the main substance.

“When you see a long sustained pitch,” the composer advises her performers in the score’s preface, “think of it as a fragile flower that you need to carry in your hands and walk the distance on a thin rope without dropping it or falling.” And this: “Brokenness... indicates a fragile state of wholeness.”

### ***[one] (2008)***

Union, it will already be clear, is a principle with Thorvaldsdóttir. Here it comes about from the arrival of two musicians, different in aptitude, training, and repertory, at the one instrument: a grand piano. The first performance of the piece, which plays for twelve minutes or so, was given in 2009 at the Dark Music Days, Iceland’s annual wintertime new-music festival, by Tinna Thorsteinsdóttir and Frank Aarnink.

Both musicians are, of course, using their special skills: the pianist at the keyboard, the percussionist using mallets and wire brushes as well as fingertips. But both, too, are taken into less familiar territory, especially in exploring the instrument’s interior. Mutual supportiveness is of the essence, through clusters to which both players contribute, melodies that move from normal piano sound to less normal and back again, harmonics they produce together, altered sound that comes when the pianist at the keyboard plays notes being struck or muted by the percussionist working directly on the strings, and so on. As the field of action widens and narrows and widens again, two become one.

### ***Tactility (2012)***

Composed for another two-person team, the Duo Harpverk (Katie Buckley and, again, Frank Aarnink), this piece opens a different route to alliance, the musicians now in their own spaces, on their own instruments, but often blending in sound – and in how sound is produced. Tactility = touch. The harp, like the guitar and lute, is an instrument that requires the touch of the performers’ fingers on its vibrating elements, its strings, and Thorvaldsdóttir applies that approach also to her percussion writing, asking for the direct bodily contact of hands, fingertips, or fingernails on the instruments: bass drum, tam tam, a wooden object, and a klakabönd (“ice links”), a metal disk about ten inches across that looks like a circle of frozen drips. Even when using mallets and other



implements, the percussionist is more to coax than strike. Meanwhile, the harpist goes some way toward acting like a percussionist, tapping on the wood of the instrument with fingers or mallet, brushing hands over the strings, and so on.

Watching all this is important. “Every touch,” the composer writes at the head of the score, “every preparation, placement of objects, and gesture is a part of the musical work.”

Unlike all the other pieces on this program, *Tactility* is in separate movements – seven of them, though only four are heard, the even-numbered ones being silent. The piece had its first performance in Washington, D.C., in March of this year – which makes a total of three Thorvaldsdóttir compositions heard for the first time within a three-month period on three different continents.

### ***Hrím* (2009/2010)**

In the three and a half years since Caput gave the première, at the National Gallery of Iceland, *Hrím* has been heard widely, tonight’s being its fourth performance in the U.S. alone. There are good reasons for its success. It makes a nod to one of the founding masterpieces of the new-music ensemble repertory, the Ligeti Chamber Concerto, but, within the scope of eight minutes, it creates a whole world of its own, poetic and exquisitely crafted.

“The piece is,” the composer’s note states, “inspired by the notion of dispersion, represented as release and echoing in the sense that single elements in the music are released and spread through the ensemble in various ways throughout the process of the piece.” This is something like the art of canon, except that the imitating voice will often be slower than the original, perhaps lapsing before the melody is complete – and *Hrím* is full of beautiful melodic gestures. Dispersion can lead so far that only one note is left: E in octaves about half way through the composition. Thorvaldsdóttir marks this significant moment “freeze,” which might be nicely taken as a pun, as not only does the music here stop in time but also it conveys – as it does, too, in its tremblings, its twinklings, its breathy sounds, its delicacy – the sense of its title, meaning “Hoarfrost.” New energy is soon being pumped in by piano, brass, and bass clarinet, but the dispersion continues to another, final point of rest.

Program notes by Paul Griffiths

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# About the Artists

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**Richard Carrick** is a New York-based composer, pianist, and conductor. His music, described as “charming, with exoticism and sheer infectiousness” by Allan Kozinn of *The New York Times*, has been performed internationally by ISCM World Music Days-Switzerland, Vienna’s Konzerthaus, the New York Philharmonic, Tokyo International House, and others. Upcoming premieres include a large-ensemble work for the New York Philharmonic BIENNIAL 2014, a Fromm Foundation commission for MiVOS Quartet, *Dark Flow Double Quartet* for Either/Or and Ensemble Son, and *Prisoner’s Cinema*. Recent works include the hour-long *Flow Cycle for Strings*, *Harmonixity* for saxophone quartet, and *Adagios for Strings*. His large-scale multimedia works such as *Cosmicomics*, based on stories by Italo Calvino, combine video, electronics, and live musicians. Carrick is co-founder and co-artistic director of Either/Or, and as a critically acclaimed pianist and conductor he regularly premieres works by leading composers including Helmut Lachenmann, Jonny Greenwood, and Rebecca Saunders, as well as his own compositions. He teaches composition at Columbia University and New York University.

**Zeena Parkins**, pioneer of contemporary harp practice and performance, reimagines the instrument as a “sound machine of limitless capacity.” Parkins has built three versions of her one-of-a-kind electric harp and has extended the language of the acoustic harp with the inventive use of unusual playing techniques, preparations, and layers of electronic processing. Parkins’s compositions have been commissioned by Ne(x)tworks ensemble, Merce Cunningham Dance Company, Roulette Intermedium, the Eclipse Quartet, William Winant, Bang on a Can, the Whitney Museum, the Tate Modern, Montalvo Arts Center, and others. She has released four solo records and her compositions and band projects are on six Tzadik recordings, most recently *Trouble in Paradise* with Ikue Mori and Phantom Orchard. As a sought-after collaborator, Parkins has worked with artists including Fred Frith, Björk, Ikue Mori, Maja Ratkje, John Zorn, Yoko Ono, Kim Gordon, Lee Renaldo, and Thurston Moore.

**David Shively** performs as a soloist and chamber musician throughout North America and Europe, working in media ranging from traditional percussion to

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Hungarian cimbalom to musical saw to analog electronic systems and feedback. Currently based in Brooklyn, he has been co-artistic director of the ensemble Either/Or since 2004, curating its programs and festivals. He also guests regularly with groups such as Collegium Novum Zürich, NYNME, GNOM-Baden, and the International Contemporary Ensemble. Recent solo engagements include Dia:Beacon, Performa 09, the American Academy in Rome, Other Minds, and Wittner Tage für neue Kammermusik. Stage soloist credits include *Prima... ins innere* (München, 2000; Stuttgart, 2010) and *The Persians* (National Actors' Theatre). He has recorded for CRI, Mode, New World, Starkland, Tzadik, and many other labels, in addition to numerous works for film, sound installation, and radio broadcast.

**Either/Or** is a cutting-edge contemporary music ensemble based in New York City. Founded in 2004 by pianist/composer Richard Carrick and percussionist David Shively, Either/Or focuses on compelling new and recent works for unconventional ensemble formations rarely heard elsewhere. The group draws upon its roster, featuring some of New York's leading interpreters, to present intense chamber music alongside larger ensemble works. Either/Or has performed to critical acclaim at Miller Theatre, Merkin Concert Hall, The Kitchen, MATA Festival, the Austrian Cultural Forum,

and ICA:Boston, in addition to frequent appearances at experimental music venues such as The Stone, Roulette, and Issue Project Room. Programs have included numerous world, U.S., and New York premieres; these range from major works of American experimental music to rarely heard classics from the dynamic margins of the European avant-garde. In addition to its ongoing collaborations with emerging artists, Either/Or has brought distinguished composers such as Helmut Lachenmann, Paolo Aralla, and Chaya Czernowin to New York for concerts and lectures.

### **Ensemble**

Ian Antonio, *percussion*  
Aaron Baird, *bass*  
Jen Baker, *trombone*  
David Byrd, *horn*  
Jennifer Choi, *violin*  
Rachel Drehmann, *horn*  
Vasko Dudkovski, *bass clarinet*  
Michelle Farah, *oboe/english horn*  
Matt Gold, *percussion*  
Stephen Gosling, *piano*  
Russell Greenberg, *percussion*  
Margaret Lancaster, *flute/bass flute*  
Matt Marks, *horn*  
Chris McIntyre, *trombone*  
Esther Noh, *violin*  
James Rogers, *trombone*  
Christa Van Alstine, *clarinet*  
Alex Waterman, *cello*  
Laura Weiner, *horn*  
Erin Wight, *viola*

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# About Miller Theatre

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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, with a focus on contemporary and early music, jazz, opera, and multimedia performances. Founded in 1988, Miller has helped launch the careers of myriad composers and ensembles over the past 25 years, serving as an incubator for emerging artists and a champion of those not yet well known in the United States. A three-time recipient of the ASCAP/Chamber Music America Award for Adventurous Programming, Miller Theatre continues to meet the high expectations set forth by its founders—to present innovative programs, support the development of new work, and connect creative artists with adventurous audiences.

## 25th Anniversary Committee

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*Steinway is the official piano of Miller Theatre*

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# Upcoming Events

**Tuesday, December 10,**  
**doors at 5:30 p.m., music at 6:00 p.m.**  
POP-UP CONCERT  
**Yarn/Wire**

**Saturday, December 14, 8:00 p.m.**  
*at St. Paul's Chapel, Columbia University*  
EARLY MUSIC  
**Wondrous Birth**  
New York Polyphony

**Thursday, January 23, 8:00 p.m.**  
SPECIAL EVENT  
**Simone Dinnerstein, *piano***

**Thursday, January 30, 8:00 p.m.**  
**Saturday, February 1, 8:00 p.m.**  
SPECIAL EVENT  
**Steven Schick: Solo**

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