

# Myriad Trio

presented by the uc san diego department of music  
sponsored by the sam b. ersan chamber music fund  
monday, june sixth  
two thousand and eleven



# *Myriad Trio*

Demarre McGill, flute  
Che-Yen Chen, viola  
Julie Smith, harp

With special guests:

Charles Curtis, cello  
Reiko Uchida, piano

Sonata No. 2 in D Major for cello and piano, opus 58 [1843]

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-47)

Allegro assai vivace  
Allegretto scherzando  
Adagio  
Molto allegro e vivace

*intermission*

Pastorales de Noel

Andre Jolivet [1905-74]

L'Etoile  
Les Mages  
La Vierge et L'Enfant  
Entree et Danse Des Bergers

Keymaster

Caleb Burhans

A Sambuca Sonata

Nathan Currier

Fast  
Slow, with continuous rubato  
Fast

## About Tonight's Program

*The iron tongue of midnight hath told twelve.*

*Lovers, to bed; 'tis almost fairy time.*

—Theseus, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act 5

At the end of the slow movement of Mendelssohn's Opus 58 an extraordinary moment of musical evocation occurs: the cellist, holding a sustained G pedal tone beneath the piano's chant-like melody, must pluck with the left hand on the adjoining open string twelve slowly repeated *sforzando* strokes of G. The mournful, ambiguously religious atmosphere of the preceding chorales and recitativos hangs in the air as the final G sounds out. And what follows in the *Molto allegro e vivace* seems at first to be a gathering of witches, scurrying to the summit of the Brocken for the *Walpurgisnacht* celebration, yet within the space of sixteen bars the scene has shifted magically to a forest den of diaphanous moonlit patterns and shadows, a world of triumphal fairies marching and brandishing their miniature arms and proclaiming the triumph of magical love. This is the fantasy world for which Mendelssohn will always be remembered, and of which he is surely the most compelling of musical champions.

Thus we hear the twelve plucked strokes of G as the tolling of midnight (or the *telling*, as Shakespeare's spelling leaves unclear, whether *tolled* or *told*, the one if a bell, and the other if a literal tongue), and it is hard to resist placing the famous lines from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in direct relationship to this unique moment in the chamber music repertoire. But it is more than a direct address to this particular play, which Mendelssohn had loved since his youth (and for which he composed his celebrated Incidental Music). Mendelssohn enjoyed a relationship of mutual affection with England, the English musical public, and the court of Queen Victoria. His love for Shakespeare would have gone beyond bourgeois literary pretensions. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is itself an unprecedented layering of mythological, pagan, religious and magical strains all intertwined and confusing one another in the truest manner of a dream. According to historian Frances Yates, Elizabethans such as Shakespeare and Edmund Spenser might have elaborated, in works like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Faerie Queen*, an explicit program

to proclaim the new order of Renaissance enlightenment under the Virgin Queen Elizabeth through the hazy lens of the Fairy World, and, perhaps in a paradoxical acknowledgement of reality, as no more than a hopeful dream.

Much of the knowledge of alchemy and astrology – the sciences of the ancient world – spread throughout Renaissance Europe in tandem with the Cabballistic knowledge of the Jews expelled from Spain in 1492; these ancient sciences came to be associated in Renaissance England with the “white magic” of John Dee and his student Robert Fludd. Two hundred years later, in Mendelssohn’s Germany, the idealism and universalism of thinkers such as Goethe – one of Mendelssohn’s mentors – returned to notions of the supernatural and the para-scientific, inspired in part by the Shakespeare translations of August Wilhelm von Schlegel, translations which figure as foundational impulses in German Romanticism. (Mendelssohn’s aunt was Schlegel’s sister-in-law.)

What then emerges in this remarkable Mendelssohnian *Adagio* might be discernible as nothing less than a subtle appeal to universalism and human brotherhood. The movement begins with a solemn chorale of typical Lutheran cast, set in long rolling arpeggios in the piano. The cello answers with an impassioned recitativo; but very far from a baroque recitativo, this emphatic, surprisingly chromatic chant has the unmistakable coloring of a cantor’s voice from the synagogue. Rarely in Mendelssohn’s music is his Jewish voice as audible as it is here. The chant is repeated and varied, an octave lower, with the Protestant hymn chords in the piano superimposed over it; and finally, swapping roles, the piano echoes the chant, restlessly, at that very moment when the “iron tongue” of the cello’s G string begins to sound the strokes of midnight. May we suppose that the two traditions, which lived side by side in Mendelssohn’s own inner life, have merged, achieved resolution, in an alchemy proclaimed at the midnight hour, wrought by witches and fairies?

The fairy music of the finale achieves a dreamlike wonder not least through the sheer fact of velocity – the blurring of sonority through speed, a feverishness and intoxication of sound moving faster than the ear can fairly hold on to. An utterly different setting is suggested by the gnome-like gait

of the *Allegretto scherzando*; the gratuitous ornaments of the opening-theme grace notes belie a heaviness compounded by repetition: the toils of miners, digging for forbidden riches. The second theme emerges from out of nowhere, a melody of utter contentment and self-possession, oddly (yet appropriately) anticipating in its melodic contours the '60's pop tune *Feelin' Groovy*. And looking back to the opening *Allegro assai vivace* we find a sprawling movement in an epo-lyrical mode, propelled by repeated chords in a 6/8 meter; its length projects into time a surprisingly slight range of thematic material, varying not the themes themselves but their tonal identities. Thus the recapitulation is preceded by material surprisingly in E major, and the coda is preceded by a striking detour of the opening theme into E-flat major, in which the consequent of the theme gets stuck and circles around on itself, seemingly transfixed by its unfamiliar tonal surroundings, finally to re-assign G from the position of the third in E-flat to that of the minor seventh in A major, a sort of trap door back into the reassuring reality of D major.

The surroundings of Mendelssohn's actual life were undoubtedly lavish and approving, and it is hard to shed the image of him as a prodigy, a *wunderkind*, as Goethe described him in 1821. This picture of the incredibly accomplished and intelligent rich boy clings to contemporary assessments of his music as conservative and tame, affirming the status quo and the German tradition to which he was so devoted. More to the point though is the emotional limitation of a man who seemed to never quite outgrow the safety and comfort of his childhood. We miss the urgency verging on madness of Schumann, or the abandon of Chopin, not to mention the despairing simplicity of Schubert. We imagine the universally approved-of scion of bankers seeking the truth content of existential suffering which he does not know except as an idea. A movement like the *Adagio* of Opus 58 is probably what Charles Rosen has in mind when he refers to Mendelssohn's invention of "religious *kitsch* in music".

But it is just the fantasy quality of his music that gives it another emotional richness, a hopefulness which is of the very nature of the dream state. His espousal of a dreamlike idealism may be naïve, but it is not sentimental. *Lovers, to bed:* like dreams, Mendelssohn's music is structured around

ambiguities, multiple narratives, shifting environments and a copiousness of bewildering detail. In Opus 58, we find ourselves in a musical expanse suffused with the atmosphere of magic and the imagination unrestrained.

– Charles Cross

#### *Pastorales de Noel* for Flute, Bassoon & Harp by Andre Jolivet

Born of artistic parents, Andre Jolivet (1905-1974), was inspired by influences of both old and new, and especially instruments that were used in ancient times. Even throughout his various compositional phases, Jolivet was continually interested in acoustics and atonality, having been inspired specifically after hearing his first Schoenberg concert in 1919. Jolivet studied composition with Edgard Varese, the only European student to do so, and worked closely with other avant-garde composers to form *La jeune France*, a movement associated with mysticism, promoting a more human language and a less abstract form of writing. Throughout his life as a composer, Jolivet's intent was always to "give back to music its original, ancient meaning, when it was the magical, incantatory expression of the religious beliefs of human groups."

Written during a period when Jolivet was experimenting with a simpler compositional style, *Pastorales de Noel*, for Flute, Bassoon & Harp, evokes the plaintiveness, and then celebration, of the spiritual journey to Bethlehem. Each movement represents an important element of the Christmas story including the Star, the Magi, the Virgin and Child, and the Shepherds. The piece rouses an oriental tone through the accompaniment and atonal figures, especially in the movement of the Magi. Although clearly a seasonal work due to the title and suggestion of Christian symbols, the music itself is worldly with a universal message and, thus, is often performed beyond the Christmas season. Tonight the piece is performed with flute, viola, and harp, as is customary for the work and for ensembles similar in instrumentation.

## *A Sambuca Sonata, for Flute, Viola, and Harp*

Sambuca, which most people know today as a licorice-flavored liqueur, was the name the Greeks gave to a kind of sharp, shrill-sounding harp, of Eastern, possibly Jewish origin. The Greeks then gave this same name to a wooden flute made from the elder bush, and in the middle ages it was also associated with the viol, at least to the extent that the Hurdy-gurdy, an instrument shaped like a viol and played by means of a rotating wheel, was sometimes called a “Sambuca rotata.” Thus, the word Sambuca is tied up with the ancestors – in each case, ancestors of low birth, as it were – of the modern harp, flute, and viola.

Somehow, the present-day association with alcohol seems very meet, in that a certain objectionable quality seems to have gone with the name – in 1545 one George Ascham wrote, “This I am sure... all maner of pypes, barbitons, sambukes... be condemned of Aristotle.” The word Sambucistria – for a female Sambuca player – was used by Plutarch and others to evoke a feeling of “foreign-inspired decadence” [Grove’s Dictionary of Musical Instruments, 1984].

My work is truly a Sambuca sonata. Written for the three Sambuca instruments, I have first of all seemingly endeavoured to make the harp part particularly “Sambuca-like” (i.e., sharp and shrill) with its many nail and xylophonic effects, but more importantly, have used musical material that corresponds to the low-brow, somewhat Dionysian, indeed, today even Bacchanalian implication of the name – thus, rock music seems to inspire a great deal of my work [the Samba, an appropriately Bacchanalian Braziliaain Carnival dance, in duple meter with syncopations, while apparently having no etymological connection to Sambuca, might seem to be musically involved, too]. The Sambuca which lies behind this rather drunken piece is probably the only musical instrument which became a model for an instrument of war; one Craxton wrote in 1489 that “Sambuce is an engyn whiche is made in manere of a harpe able to perce a walle.”

But whether talking of the modern liqueur or the ancient instrument “condemned of Aristotle” and mentioned four times in the Book of Daniel, it is a shame that Debussy – inspired by the Dionysian side of classical culture

(as in *Prelude a l'apres-midi d'un faune*) – seems to have remained ignorant of Sambuca, a word which to some extent must lie behind all works for this wonderful instrumentation which he invented, and which I might seem to have striven unconsciously, equally ignorant, to make the sole basis of my work – until, having completed this piece, written for harpist Marie-Pierre Langlamet, and rummaging around for a title, I chanced upon it in an old dictionary.

– Nathan Currier

## About the Performers

Winner of a 2003 Avery Fisher Career Grant, flutist **Demarre McGill** has performed concerti with the Chicago Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony, San Diego Symphony, Baltimore Symphony and Milwaukee Symphony, among others. An active chamber musician, Mr. McGill is a member of the Jacksonville, Florida based Ritz Chamber Players and has been a member of Chamber Music Society Two, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center's program for emerging young artists. He has been featured on a PBS "Live From Lincoln Center" broadcast with the Chamber Music Society performing Bach's Brandenburg Concerto #2 as well as on an Angel Records CD playing Bach's Brandenburg Concerto #5 with pianist Awadagin Pratt and the St. Lawrence String Quartet. Mr. McGill has participated in the Music from Angel Fire, Santa Fe, Kingston, Cape Cod, Music@Menlo, Bay Chamber Concerts, Mainly Mozart, La Jolla and Marlboro music festivals. He has also performed on the Ravinia Festival's "Rising Star" series, the A&E Network Series "The Gifted Ones," and was special guest on the Mr. Roger's Neighborhood television program. Currently principal flutist of the San Diego Symphony, Mr. McGill has held the same position with The Florida Orchestra and the Santa Fe Opera Orchestra. He also served as acting principal flutist of the Pittsburgh Symphony during the 2005-06 season. In addition to his performance schedule, Mr. McGill is the co-founder and Artistic Director of Art of Élan, a chamber music organization in San Diego that aims to expose new audiences to classical music. Mr. McGill received his Bachelor's Degree in Flute Performance from The Curtis Institute of Music where he studied with Julius Baker and Jeffrey Khaner. He continued his studies with Mr. Baker at the Juilliard School, where he received a Masters of Music degree.

Described by the Strad Magazine as a musician whose "tonal distinction and essential musicality produced an auspicious impression", Taiwanese violist **Che-Yen Chen** (also known as "Brian Chen") has established himself as a prominent recitalist, chamber, and orchestral musician. He is the first-prize winner of the 2003 William Primrose Viola Competition, the "President prize" of the 2003 Lionel Tertis Viola Competition. Currently

the principal violist of San Diego Symphony, Mr. Chen has appeared as guest principal violist with Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, and Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. He has performed throughout the US and abroad in venues such as Alice Tully Hall, Merkin Hall, Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Jordon Hall, Library of Congress in D.C., Kimmel Center, Taiwan National Concert Hall, Wigmore Hall, and Snape Malting Concert Hall, among numerous others. A founding member of the Formosa Quartet, the first prize and the Amadeus prize winner of the 10th London International String Quartet Competition, Mr. Chen is an advocate of chamber music. He is a member Myriad Trio, Camera Lucida, Lincoln Center Chamber Music Society Two, the Jupiter Chamber Players, and has toured with Musicians from Marlboro after three consecutive summers at the Marlboro Music Festival. A participant at the Ravinia Festival, Mr. Chen was featured in the festival's Rising Star series and the inaugural Musicians from Ravinia tour. Other festival appearances include the Kingston Chamber Music Festival, International Viola Congress, Mainly Mozart, Chamber Music International, La Jolla Summerfest, Primrose Festival, Bath International Music Festival, Aldeburgh Festival, Seattle Chamber Music Society Summer Festival, Taiwan Connection, and numerous others. Mr. Chen has also taught and performed at summer programs such as Hotchkiss Summer Portal, Blue Mountain Festival, Academy of Taiwan Strings, Interlochen, Mimir Festival, and has given master-classes at the Taiwan National Arts University, University of Missouri Kansas City, University of Southern California, University of California Santa Barbara, and McGill University. Mr. Chen began studying viola at the age of six with Ben Lin. A four-time winner of the National Viola Competition in Taiwan, Mr. Chen came to the US and studied at The Curtis Institute of Music and The Juilliard School under the guidance of Michael Tree, Joseph de Pasquale, and Paul Neubauer. Mr. Chen had served on the faculty at Indiana University-South Bend, University of California San Diego, San Diego State University, McGill University, where he taught viola and chamber music.

Principal Harpist of the San Diego Symphony, **Julie Ann Smith** is one of the most prominent young harpists today, performing as both an orchestral musician and concert artist. Gaining international recognition for her performing

style and diverse repertoire, Ms. Smith was the Silver medalist winner in the 2004 USA International Harp Competition and Bronze medalist in 2001. She made her National Symphony Orchestra debut in 2003 and has been honored in numerous competitions throughout the country. She is an active recitalist and soloist with orchestras across the country, enchanting audiences with her dramatic presence and engaging style. Her appearances include performances with the San Diego Symphony, the New World Symphony Orchestra, the South Dakota Symphony, the West Los Angeles Symphony, the Corpus Christi Symphony Orchestra, the National Repertory Orchestra, and the Cleveland Institute of Music Orchestra. She has been the featured recitalist for the 2006 American Harp Society National Conference, the 2007 USA International Harp Competition and guest artist for the 2010 Young Artist Harp Seminar in Rabun Gap, GA. Equally experienced as a chamber and orchestral musician, Ms. Smith collaborates with renowned musicians across the country. A founding member of the San Diego-based Myriad Trio, she regularly appears in chamber concerts and festivals and has performed abroad in Italy and Japan. During the 2006-07 season she was the Acting Principal Harpist of the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra and prior to that held the position of Principal Harpist for the New World Symphony Orchestra. As a teacher, Ms. Smith maintains a harp studio and works with students of all ages. A trained instructor in the Suzuki method, she has served on faculty at Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp and regularly gives master-classes across the county. Ms. Smith released her first album, *The Rhapsodic Harp*, which is available from her website, [www.harpjas.com](http://www.harpjas.com). Attending the Cleveland Institute of Music, she received her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in harp performance where she studied with Yolanda Kondonassis. Her other primary teachers have included Alice Chalifoux and Patrice Lockhart. A native of Hastings, NE, Ms. Smith began studying the harp at age eleven.

Cellist **Charles Curtis** has been Professor for Contemporary Music Performance at UCSD since Fall 2000. Previously he was Principal Cello of the Symphony Orchestra of the North German Radio in Hamburg, a faculty member at Princeton, the cellist of the Ridge String Quartet, and

a sought-after chamber musician and soloist in the classical repertoire. He holds the Piatigorsky Prize of the New York Cello Society, and received prizes in the Naumburg, Geneva, Cassado and Viña del Mar (Chile) international competitions. He has appeared as soloist with the San Francisco Symphony, the National Symphony, the Baltimore Symphony, the Symphony Orchestra of Berlin, the NDR Symphony, the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, the Orquestra de la Maggio Musicale in Florence, the Janacek Philharmonic, as well as orchestras in Brazil and Chile. His chamber music associations have taken him to the Marlboro, Ravinia, Wolf Trap, La Jolla Summerfest and Victoria Festivals, among many others. Curtis has recorded and performed widely with soprano Kathleen Battle and harpsichordist Anthony Newman, as well as with jazz legends Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter and Brad Mehldau. He is internationally recognized as a leading performer of unique solo works created expressly for him by composers such as La Monte Young, Éliane Radigue, Alvin Lucier, Alison Knowles and Mieko Shiomi as well as rarely-heard compositions by Terry Jennings, Richard Maxfield, Cornelius Cardew, Christian Wolff, Morton Feldman and John Cage. Recent performances have taken him to the Angelica Festival in Bologna, the Guggenheim in New York, the MaerzMusik Festival in Berlin, Dundee Contemporary Arts, the Auditorium of the Musée du Louvre in Paris, the Kampnagel Fabrik in Hamburg, as well as Philadelphia, Austin, Ferrara, Chicago, the Konzerthaus Dortmund, Brooklyn's Issue Project Room and Harvard University. In the Bavarian village of Polling Curtis performs and teaches every summer at Kunst im Regenbogenstadl, a space devoted to the work of La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela. Last spring an in-depth interview with Curtis appeared on the online music journal Paris Transatlantic. Curtis is artistic director of San Diego's Camera Lucida chamber music ensemble and concert series.

Pianist **Reiko Uchida**, First Prizewinner of the Joanna Hodges Piano Competition and Zinetti International Competition, has appeared as soloist with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Santa Fe Symphony, the Greenwich Symphony, the Princeton Orchestra, among others. She made her New York solo debut in 2001 at Carnegie's Weill Hall under the auspices of the Abby Whiteside Foundation. She has performed solo and chamber music concerts throughout the world,

including the United States, Japan, France, Italy, Germany, Russia, Finland, Bulgaria, and the Czech Republic, in venues including Avery Fisher Hall, Alice Tully Hall, the 92nd Street Y, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, the Kennedy Center as well as the White House in Washington D.C., and Suntory Hall in Tokyo. Her festival appearances include Spoleto, Schleswig-Holstein, Tanglewood, Santa Fe, and Marlboro. As a chamber musician, she was one of the first pianists selected for Chamber Music Society Two, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center's program for outstanding emerging artists. She has been the recital partner for Jennifer Koh, Thomas Meglioranza, Jaime Laredo, and Sharon Robinson, with whom she performed the complete works of Beethoven for cello and piano. Her recording with Jennifer Koh, "String Poetic", was nominated for a Grammy Award. She has also collaborated with the Borromeo and Tokyo String Quartets. She is a member of the Laurel Trio and a member of the Moebius Ensemble, a group specializing in contemporary music and in residence at Columbia University. Reiko began studying the piano at the age of four with Dorothy Hwang at the R.D. Colburn School and made her orchestral debut with the Los Angeles Repertoire Orchestra at the age of nine. As a youngster, she performed on Johnny Carson's Tonight Show. She holds an Artist Diploma from the Juilliard School, a Bachelor's degree from Curtis Institute of Music, where she studied with Claude Frank and Leon Fleisher, and a Master's degree from the Mannes College of Music, where her principal teacher was Edward Aldwell.



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