Moonset

A DMA Recital by Matthew Henson

March 15th, 2024 - 5:00pm
Conrad Prebys Music Center, Experimental Theater

Nuits

  i.   C'est bien la nuit
  ii.   Le réveil profond

Giacinto Scelsi (1905-1988)

Prologue and Two Scenes for Double Bass
(for Todd Seeber)

  i.   Prologue
  ii.   Aria
  iii.   Scherzo

Graham Gordon Ramsay (1962)

Three Nocturnes
(for Robert Black)

  i.   Moonrise
  ii.   Night Wind
  iii.   Moonset

John Luther Adams (1953)

Accurate Placement

Jürg Frey (1953)

This performance of *Nuits* is a showcase not only of my recent work as a performer, but also -- and perhaps more so -- of my recent research pursuits. As many of Scelsi's works result from exact transcriptions of his own improvisations for other instruments, they often contain details nonidiomatic to the capabilities of the instrument for which they are ultimately scored. Lately, much of my research has been directed towards understanding the historical and methodological contexts of Scelsi's compositional output, using these understandings to develop personal interpretations of the two works contained within *Nuits*. My score of *C'est bien la nuit* contains a heavy layer of marked alterations far beyond the typical fingerings and interpretive directions I customarily provide for myself. For *Le réveil profond*, my interpretive solutions to the technical contradictions the piece presents have taken me away from the published score, completely, as, for this performance, I will use a score that I have crafted around my own technical solutions. However, it is my conviction that interpreting these scores in this way does not introduce defects on their performance but lifts them towards interpretations guided by Scelsi's intention for his own works.

These works present two perspectives on a concise central idea. As is true of much of Scelsi's work, both pieces explore sonic shades of a central pitch. Here, both works center around F. In *C'est bien la nuit*, the material energetically struggles to escape from F and -- fighting intense gravity -- ultimately does so. *Le réveil profond*, from an opposed perspective, explores this center nearly from stasis, as a dyad of F and G slowly merges back into the unified origin.

Prologue and Two Scenes leaps rapidly between passages of boisterous hyperactivity and moments of delicate lyricism, both within each movement and in its macroscopic construction. The brief "Prologue" explosively telegraphs the piece's materials, preparing the "Aria" of heart wrenching registral interplay and the mercurial "Scherzo" of angular variations. *Three Nocturnes* continues, telling the unadorned narrative of night's passing. As night sets in, "Moonrise" establishes a tense stasis, from which the relentlessly undulating "Night Wind" emerges. Once the wind has given way, "Moonset" tells the nightly tale of the moon's attempt to evermore radiate, ultimately in vain. Concluding, *Accurate Placement* shifts the posture to one of inwardness. As three cycles of fragile whispers unhurriedly unfold, this work presents an introspective instant dilated in a vastness of time. I understand these final three works as a unified set. Wholly unrelated in their conceptions, they may still be seen to present compelling throughlines in their technical and tonal constructions.

I have borrowed the performance's title from the final movement of the featured work by John Luther Adams, as it -- to me -- may also aptly evoke the characteristic trajectory of these four works ordered as they are.

~Matthew

Matthew Henson is a double bassist, conductor, and music theorist specializing in the performance and research of music of the present time. He currently performs primarily as a solo bassist and bassist with the University of California San Diego Palimpsest Ensemble, as well as being the conductor of the UC San Diego Chamber Orchestra. He is also a part of the Boston-based contemporary music ensemble Alinéa, of which he is a founding member and administrator.

As a bassist, Matthew has performed with orchestras, including the New England Conservatory Symphony, New England Conservatory Philharmonia, Symphony New Hampshire, Boston Civic Symphony, Pierre Monteux Festival Orchestra, and Pacific Lyric Association. He has also been a part of many smaller ensembles, including Palimpsest, Alinéa, Project [Blank], the soundSCAPE festival, and numerous informal groups.
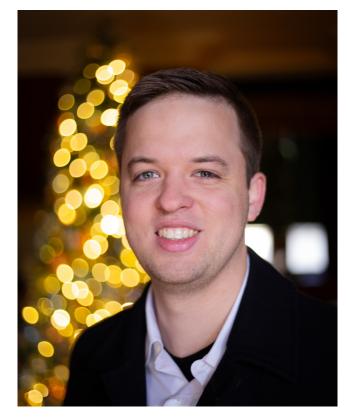
Photo by Zachary Smith

Beyond currently conducting the UC San Diego Chamber Orchestra, Matthew has been the cover conductor for Symphony New Hampshire, an associate at the Conductor's Institute of South Carolina, and has performed with informal collegiate orchestras, choirs, and chamber ensembles.

As a theorist, Matthew is interested in research pursuits which find applications for analytical engagements with scores for performers. His most recent research has been in developing performative approaches to the string works of Aaron Cassidy and Giacinto Scelsi, reconsidering virtuosic performance through the music of Rebecca Saunders, and analyzing generative compositional processes in the music of John Luther Adams, Arvo Pärt, and Peter Ablinger.

Matthew received a Bachelor of Music in Double Bass Performance with a minor in Contemporary Music Theory and Applied Composition from the New England Conservatory of Music in 2020. While at NEC, he studied classical double bass performance with Todd Seeber and contemporary music theory and performance with Efstratios (Stratis) Minakakis. He recevied his Master of Music from UC San Diego in 2022 under the instruction of Mark Dresser. Currently, he is a DMA candidate at UC San Diego, set to finish the degree in 2025. During his education, Matthew has also received close mentorship from Joseph McFadden, Donald Palma, Erica Washburn, David Loebel, Erik Carlson, and Marcos Balter.