



SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Presents

Music by
Martin Blessinger, Professor of Music Theory and Composition
with
Michael P. Schneider, Special Guest Artist

Faculty Composition Recital

Monday, March 31, 2025

7:00pm

Van Cliburn Concert Hall at TCU

Program

Sonnet 130 2023

text by William Shakespeare (1564 – 1616)

* world premiere

Amy Stewart, conductor

Soprano

Kimy Coe

Lydia Taylor

Isabella Lopez

Louise Martin

Danna Melendez

Dory McDonald

Cassie Westlund

Alto

Casey Caldwell

Karolina Flores

Sophie Gwaldo

Trinity Robinson

Katie Schulte

Tenor

Kolby Carpenter

Skyler Cloyd

Telvin Culberson

Miguel Pesce

Gael Ivan Pizana

Ethan McGregor

Bass

Elliot Banks

Kai Diamond

De'Evin Johnson

David McDaniel

Charles Nelson

“Cool Cat” from *Pams Across the Page* 2023

Mike Korson, saxophone

Mountain Meditations 2024

* world premiere

Jeanette Velasco, bass trombone; Michael P. Schneider, piano

Satiesque 2013

Michael P. Schneider, piano

“Fat Cat” from *Paws Across the Page* 2023

Mike Korson, saxophone

Celestial Horizon 2024

* world premiere, composed by **Michael P. Schneider**

Jeanette Velasco, bass trombone; Michael Schneider, piano

“Sleepy Cat” from *Paws Across the Page* 2023

Mike Korson, saxophone

Flicker, Flame, Smolder 2018

I. Flicker

II. Flame

III. Smolder

Meg Griffith, flute

“Zoomie Cat” from *Paws Across the Page* 2023

Mike Korson, saxophone

Romantic Suite (arr. Martin Blessinger) 2021

I. “Dusk in June” (Prelude) by Amy Beach (1867 – 1944)

II. “Menuet” by Mélanie Bonis (1858 – 1937) *

III. “Scherzo-Valse” by Cécile Chaminade (1857 – 1944) *

IV. “Caprice à la Boléro” by Clara Schumann (1819 – 1896)

* indicates world premiere

Andrew Eldridge, Chris Nadeau; marimba

Program Notes

Sonnet 130

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;
I grant I never saw a goddess go;
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground.
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.

William Shakespeare (1564 – 1616)

Paws Across the Page

These short works are intended to be performed as interludes, each movement set between other pieces on a recital program as a palate cleanser. Think of a procession of cats, each one with a different personality, strutting across the stage and briefly interrupting the seriousness of the affair. It's not hard to imagine—I've literally seen it happen!

This piece was written for my friend, Mike Korson, himself a fancier of felines.

Mountain Meditations

I conceived of Mountain Meditations as both a metaphorical and emotional embodiment of a mountain. On a metaphorical level, musical gestures rise and fall throughout the piece, evoking the physical presence of a mountain. Indeed, the structure of the piece itself is designed to sketch that form on the largest scale. On an emotional level, I also imagined the journey up and down—the struggles and the glories, the aching muscles and the swollen pride—and used that as the expressive anchor of the musical narrative.

Satiesque

This short piano piece is an excerpt from a suite for marimba and clarinet entitled *Legend Suite*. This suite was premiered by percussionist Andrew Eldridge, whom you'll hear later on the program. I first composed Satiesque, the second movement of *Legend Suite*, for piano which made sense to me based on its inspiration—the well-known *Gymnopédies* of Eric Satie. Turn-of-the-twentieth-century French music has always had a special place in my musical imagination, and this work is an homage to one of my favorite composers and time periods.

Celestial Horizon by Michael P. Schneider

NOTES BY THE COMPOSER

As Henry Wadsworth Longfellow writes in his Psalm of Life, "... *And our hearts, though stout and brave, Still, like muffled drums, are beating Funeral marches to the grave,*" Celestial Horizon is

about the ultimate inevitability of life – namely, death.

The over-arching five-part rondo begins with a stately 16 bar chaconne in E-flat minor (A section). This progression of chords provides all the melodic and harmonic building blocks that the entire piece is comprised. After a series of variations over the chaconne, we arrive at our B section in G-flat Major. This theme, cushioned with snippets of the chaconne progression, is uplifting and nostalgic - wrapping together beautiful thoughts of life and the deceased.

We arrive at the middle A section already more vigorous, and the ensuing set of variations progresses through quicker as the 16 bar chaconne is truncated to 8 measures. This section builds into an explosion of sound and chaos, just as the reality of loss can often lead to similar emotional chaos.

Out of the chaos and turmoil (C section), we glimpse redemption. Our hearts are filled with warmth and we understand for a moment our importance and delicate cycle of life.

The final return of the A section is bittersweet. After all, we have experienced loss and are the ones left to live with this loss. Like the Celestial Horizon, we can only get a glimpse from a distance and know that our loved ones are now in a beautiful place.

This is my first composition after the passing of my father, Richard Gary Schneider, and I would like to dedicate this performance to his memory.

Flicker, Flame, Smolder

Flicker, Flame, Smolder is a three-movement solo work for flute that traces the lifespan of fire and, in parallel, artistic inspiration. The first movement is halting and nervous while the second is breathless and ebullient. The third movement is a sexy slow burn and introduces both extended flute techniques and body percussion. Melodic material is shared across the three movements in ways both subtle and obvious, drawing a single thread across the set. This work is dedicated to Dr. Kristen Queen, my friend and frequent collaborator, whose passion, brilliance, and—yes—fire have been a source of artistic inspiration for me for many years.

Romantic Suite

The seed of this work was planted in 2019 during the bicentennial celebration of Clara Schumann, the world-renowned pianist, composer, and pedagogue. That year, I dedicated my creative energies to projects that related in some way to her musical life. For example, in addition to developing a graduate course at TCU based on Schumann's music, I also composed a new work modeled after her *Three Romances for Violin and Piano* entitled *Three Romances: Homage to Clara Schumann*, jointly commissioned by the Texas Music Teachers Association and the Music Teachers National Association. I also arranged several of her works with the goal of sharing this wonderful music with performers who might not otherwise encounter them on their native instruments. One of those arrangements, the virtuosic piano showpiece "Caprice à la Boléro" from Schumann's op. 5 *Quatre Pièces Caractéristiques*, became the backbone of the present suite for marimba duet.

The remaining movements consist of arrangements of music by women who, similar to

Clara Schumann, composed during the Romantic era of music (roughly 1820-1900). I find arranging among the most rewarding musical endeavors as it is an opportunity to not only deeply understand and appreciate the work of another composer but also to share it with a wider community of musicians and music-lovers. While the marimba wasn't on the radar of the Western classical musical tradition until the mid-twentieth century, this suite gives modern percussionists an opportunity to encounter these women and these works in a collaborative setting.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the performers – students, colleagues, and friends – for bringing my music to life and for being so supportive throughout the process of putting together a recital. Without willing performers, composers have no voice.

Thank you to my TCU composition colleagues – Blaise Ferrandino, Till Meyn, Neil Anderson-Himmelspach, and Trey Gunter. You have so often been a source of inspiration and reassurance for this inherently self-questioning composer.

Thank you to my partner, Dru Ussery, who has endured many late nights, frazzled nerves, and frustrated ambitions on the creative path that birthed these works. I don't know how you put up with me, but I'm glad you do! 🦀🦀🦀🦀

And, finally, thank you to *you*, this audience, for being here this evening to experience the joy and fellowship of live music-making! Everything from the black dots on the page to the vibrations in the air is but a musical means to an end, leading us to this instant - the blessed moment of artistic community that makes a composer's soul take flight.