

# EMPAC

MUSIC / SOUND

## Architeuthis Walks on Land

Miranda Cuckson

SAT / APR 25<sup>TH</sup>

8:00 PM



## Program

### Architeuthis Walks on Land + Miranda Cuckson

*Mikka S* (1976)

*de terrae fine* (2001)

*Intermedio alla Ciaccona* (1986)

Iannis Xenakis

Georg Friedrich Haas

Brian Ferneyhough

Miranda Cuckson, VIOLIN

— interval —

from *The Surveyors* (2014)

The Speculators

84°03'N 174°51'W

The Assayers

82°06'S 54°58'E

The Surveyors

Amy Cimini, VIOLA +

Katherine Young, BASSOON +

## *Mikka S*

Iannis Xenakis (1922-2001), a Greek/French citizen, was not only a musician, but an engineer, architect, mathematician, and author of major theoretical works on music. In his compositions, he incorporated ideas stemming from his scientific interests, pioneering electronic music, and applying stochastic and aleatoric processes, and set and game theory. While his works derive from highly cerebral concepts and treat sounds as objects put through experimental processes, the results are often surprisingly visceral and emotional. Tension and excitement build up as layers accumulate and clash, and the combination of control and disorder in the rhythm creates a wild sense of motion. Xenakis wrote *Mikka S* in 1976 following his first solo violin work, *Mikka* of 1971. Both pieces are based mainly on the glissando, a sliding pitch effect. Whereas *Mikka* consists of a single line, *Mikka S* ups the ante with two contrapuntal lines that move independently. At times, this requires extreme physical flexibility, as the violinist's fingers must converge and cross directions, or stretch across strings. The two lines are in almost constant motion and frequently create a buzzing microtonal friction, but they coincide now and then on momentarily consonant intervals. Toward the end of the piece, the energy of the constant sliding erupts into boisterous bowed attacks and jagged, short glissandos.

## *de terrae fine*

Austrian Georg Friedrich Haas is widely recognized as one of today's leading composers. Born in 1953, he studied piano and composition in Graz with Gösta Neuwirth, and in Vienna with Friedrich Cerha. He is currently Lecturer in Music at the Hochschule in Basel and Professor of Composition at Columbia University. Frustrated by the limitations of conventional equal temperament, Haas has probingly explored the sonic, harmonic, and expressive possibilities of microtonality. His work uses minute intervals like eighth-, sixth-, and quarter-tones, and pitch relationships drawn exactly from the overtone series, causing the intense beating of frequencies and "difference tones" that buzz along with the actual played pitches. In addition to generating a radical focus on sound itself, Haas' insistence on microtonality has created new wells of expressive meaning in these relatively unfamiliar sonic distances. Perpetuating the malaise and despair of much 20th-century art, his music finds nuances of despondency and pain, but also surprising beauty, in the uncomfortable spaces between tones.

Haas relates that, while composing his violin piece *de terrae fine* on a year's sabbatical in Ireland, he was mired in a severe depression. The work's title, meaning "about the end of the world," evokes not just an apocalyptic vision but a devastating sense of isolation. The music's single line of winding microtonal motions seems to trace the twinges in a person's lonely, anguished train of thought. Long tones swell in heaving sighs. At times, the overwhelming feeling of desperation suddenly gives way to a sickly nostalgia, with startlingly sweet double-stops and feather-light, sliding arpeggios. About halfway through the work, the mood turns to anger, as pounding, massive chords burst out. Moving upward by microtonal increments, the chords build in accelerating waves to a violent frenzy of raging despair, followed by a collapse into exhaustion, as a few tremulous, wistful wisps disappear into silence.

### *Intermedio alla Ciaccona*

Brian Ferneyhough's music has earned him a reputation as one of the most influential creative personalities and musical thinkers on the contemporary scene. Born in 1943, he studied with Lennox Berkeley, Ton de Leeuw, and Klaus Huber. He has taught at the Freiburger Musikhochschule, Darmstädter Ferienkurse, UCSD and most recently Stanford University. He was awarded the Ernst von Siemens Music Prize for 2007. *Intermedio alla Ciaccona* is one of several solo violin pieces that he has written. It is dedicated to English violinist Irvine Arditti.

Ferneyhough's music is highly dense and complex, with flamboyant gestures skittering across large registral expanses and calling for vigorous physical choreography. His notation is very layered and detailed, with polyrhythms nestled within polyrhythms, microtonal pitches, and frequent alternations between varied extended techniques. While the surface activity is often fast-moving, the pulse, as notated in the time signature and metronome marking, is often very broad. Ferneyhough has described this as a "tension-field between tempo and meter." In *Intermedio alla Ciaccona*, this tension is amplified by Ferneyhough's use of the chaconne, or passacaglia: a ground-bass that underpins the music. The chaconne is presented at the outset of the piece as very loud, sustained double-stops outlining eight chords (a series upon which Ferneyhough based his *Carceri d'Invenzione* group of compositions). The violin then sets forth with mercurial, brilliant flourishes and irregular explosions. A relatively lyrical, calm interlude in the middle of the eight-minute piece builds up to some very high glissandos and to a jaggedly-contoured, single-line climax, after which the chaconne intervals return as heavy sliding tones. The material splinters into sparser utterances at the close.

### *The Surveyors*

Archieuthis Walks on Land developed *The Surveyors* during a 2011 residency at the Rensing Center for the Arts in the Smoky Mountain foothills of South Carolina and recorded, mixed, and mastered the album at The Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center (EMPAC) at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Juxtaposing these sites, *The Surveyors* evokes, at turns, a gritty landscape built of wood, string, and air, while, at other moments, the music uncouples from the acoustic realities of these two old instruments in unexpected ways. The duo reconsiders the imaginary and physical spaces their music can create, applying electronics in tandem with improvisational spontaneity and lithe, precise composition.

## Biographies

### Miranda Cuckson

Violinist and violist **Miranda Cuckson** is acclaimed for her performances of a wide range of repertoire, from early eras to the most current creations. She studied at the Juilliard School, where she received her BM, MM, and DMA degrees and won the Presser and Richard F. French awards. She is in demand as a soloist and chamber musician, appearing in major concert halls, as well as at universities, galleries, and informal spaces, and is on the violin faculty at Mannes College the New School for Music.

### Architeuthis Walks on Land

Sawing, sputtering, gurgling and wailing, **Architeuthis Walks on Land** is every bit the displaced and terrifying cephalopod that the name suggests. Using the viola and bassoon—two instruments rarely associated with free improvisation and noise—Amy Cimini and Katherine Young construct chaotic sound masses, raise towering monoliths, and spin out spacious gestures. Crafting their improvised materials into sophisticated structures, they capture the compositional, timbral and expressive breadth of this uncommon coupling: from divergently soloistic to profoundly intertwined playing, from a slowly unfolding intimacy to raw friction. Cimini and Young lunge and flutter through their materials with the intuition and energy of constant discovery.

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# EMPAC

The Curtis R Priem Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center (EMPAC) is where the arts, sciences, and technology interact with and influence each other by using the same facilities and technologies, and by breathing the same air.

EMPAC hosts artists and researchers to produce and present new work in a building designed with a sophisticated architectural and technical infrastructure. Four exceptional venues and studios enable audiences, artists, and researchers to inquire, experiment, develop, and experience the ever changing relationship between ourselves, technology, and the worlds we create around us.

