

PHIL PIERICK, saxophone Sylvia Eunhee Seok, piano with Sophie Benn, cello

Tuesday, October 29, 2024 7:30 P.M. Eidson-Duckwall Recital Hall

PROGRAM

Five Strauss Lieder for Alto Saxophone (arr. 2024)*

Richard Strauss (1864–1949) arr. Phil Pierick

I. Schön sind, doch kalt, op. 19, no. 3 (1888)
II. Mein Auge, op. 37, no. 4 (1898)
III. Zueignung, op. 10, no. 1 (1885)
IV. Befreit, op. 39, no. 4 (1898)
V. Das Rosenband, op.36, no. 1 (1897)

Speak, my soul (2016)

Roydon Tse (b. 1991)

D(i)agon(als) (2005/2022)

Augusta Read Thomas (b. 1964)

intermission

Dig in the air (2023)^

Frédéric Durieux (b. 1959)

reflected air (2015)

Jeffrey Mumford (b. 1955)

Sophie Benn, cello

Sonate en ut dièse (1943)

Fernande Decruck (1896–1954)

I. Très modéré, expressif II. Andante III. Fileuse IV. Nocture et Final

*denotes world premiere ^denotes US premiere

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

I was first drawn to playing art songs on the saxophone about fifteen years ago. Many have identified a vocal quality in the timbre and expressive capacity of the saxophone, which I feel these *Five Strauss Lieder for Alto Saxophone* exemplify. Of course, the inherent obstacle to overcome in performing these or any songs is the inability to "play" the text. In transcribing these vocal lines, I have chosen a rather literal interpretation, letting the texts inform the direction and length of phrasing and the German vocal—largely vowel—sounds inform the timbre. The texts and poetic images also figure strongly, with translations of each song by Richard Strauss below.

Schön sind, doch kalt (Beautiful, Yet Cold) Mein Auge (My Vision) Zueignung (Dedication) Befreit (Released) Das Rosenband (The Rose Ribbon)

—Phil Pierick

Speak, my soul (2016) is a still and deliberately slow piece. The piece came about as a commission from Jeffrey Leung, who wanted a piece to showcase his lyrical side as a performer having already received many commissions that were quite fast and furious. Personally speaking, it was a pleasure to write Speak, my soul since the piece preceded four other compositions that were extremely fast and taxing to write. This piece for me was a point of reflection as I looked inward to create an emotional and sonic landscape that for me would be most genuine. While the composition rests on simple harmonies that move slowly over the surface, the difficulty lies in the execution of the saxophone part which requires circular breathing from the performer.

-Roydon Tse

Made up of five phrases, each of which ends on a fermata, the work's characters include: majestic, playful, elegant, spirited, jazzy, calmly floating, bold, with repose, passionate, resolute, assertive, and graceful. The form is slightly unusual in that the five phrases are of asymmetrical length. They last 20, 30, 40, 110, and 120 seconds, respectively, giving the feeling that the first three phrases are warming up to, and building energy and material for, the longer final two phrases—as if the "improviser" takes the materials a little further "out" (in the jazz sense of that word) with each successive phrase. The piece accumulates, rather than being in one of the standard forms, such as ABA or rondo form.

The work is called D(i)agon(als) for two reasons. First, I wanted to have the name "Dagon" in the title, in a creative way; also because in all of the phrases there is an implied diagonal. By this I mean that there are imbedded, in any phrase, other sub-phrases. A kind of imbedded-counterpoint emerges with two or three lines going on at once. For instance, some of the music is made up of long notes and some of short figurations (trills and arabesques) and it is the connection of the two that I find interesting. I always notate the trills because I hear them to have more than two notes, to be sporadic in rhythm, and thus, not to be just a simple trill. A highly nuanced trill or arabesque, with a particular shape and inner life is more interesting to my ears. I use many grace notes. Springing back and forth between different registers, and with contrasting dynamics, gives the sensation that more than one voice is in play and that somehow the truth of the piece is in the *diagonal* between the various intersections.

—Augusta Read Thomas

Since 2007, I have composed a cycle of five works whose central instrument is the saxophone.

Together, these scores have established a kind of network whose initial material is characterized by the sound and idiomatic qualities of the saxophone, from which I composed the main musical figures that in turn form a network of cells, rhythms, and pacing.

The special feature of *Dig in the air* is that one of the works of my cycle, *Étude N°1* for alto saxophone, was transcribed and essentially transformed into a piece for solo oboe, *In den Lüften*, the latter then having been transcribed and, in turn, really transformed to become *Dig in the air*. Today, no musical work can be transcribed as it is, as extended techniques and instrument design have developed and considerably extended the spectrum of the sonorities of each instrument.

Dig in the air is a kind of lament, a song of sadness and melancholy, one of whose models is the Kaddish, with its mixture of sadness and hope.

-Frédéric Durieux

Inspired by the beautiful work of Paris-based photographer and violinist, Nathalie Wizun, *reflected air* was commissioned by and written for Duo Denisov, an ensemble which is also based there. Cast in three short movements, the work celebrates the expressive possibilities and timbral combinations that result from the combination of alto saxophone and 'cello, often highlighting aspects of reinforcement and divergence. The third movement initially references the first, but then quickly moves in a variety of other directions, often punctuated by the 'cello's chords which create resonances in the alto saxophone. The middle movement is primarily concerned with attacks, differing registers, and syncopation.

-Jeffrey Mumford

A prolific though obscure composer for saxophone, Fernande Decruck was a classmate of Olivier Messiaen and Jacques Ibert at the Paris Conservatoire where she studied organ and composition. The *Sonate en ut dièse* is clearly in the late Romantic tradition and is one of Decruck's most consequential works for saxophone. Her husband, Maurice, was a bassist and amateur saxophonist who often served as inspiration for her saxophone compositions, though the *Sonate* was written for and dedicated to pioneering French saxophonist Marcel Mule. The work exists and is performed in multiple versions—for saxophone or for viola and with piano or with orchestra. The expansion of the performable range of the classical saxophone during the 20th century and the possibility of circular breathing have led many saxophonists to integrate portions of the viola version.

—Phil Pierick

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

PHIL PIERICK

Classically trained and experimentally minded, Chicago-based saxophonist, improviser, singer, and educator Phil Pierick has been called "the Swiss Army knife of saxophonists." Though equally at home performing music spanning the past five centuries, he is an emphatic advocate for new music and has commissioned more than 25 new works and presented over 50 premieres. <u>I CARE IF YOU LISTEN</u> describes his duo Ogni Suono's 2018 album, <u>SaxoVoce</u>, as "a tour de force of new possibilities for saxophone and voice." He has appeared as a concerto soloist with the Eastman Wind Ensemble, the Slovenian Armed Forces Band, and Taiwan-based MIT.

Phil teaches saxophone at Butler University, with previous appointments at the Eastman School of Music, the University of Illinois, the College of Wooster, and as a guest throughout the world. He studied at Eastman (DMA), the University of Illinois (MM, BM), and in Vienna (Fulbright Scholar) and Paris (Beebe Scholar). Phil is a Vandoren Artist.

SOPHIE BENN

Sophie L. Benn, PhD, enjoys a multifaceted career as a musicologist, cellist, and baroque cellist. She is an assistant professor of musicology at Butler University. For nearly a decade, she was a member of the musical community in Cleveland, Ohio, where she served as the principal cellist of the City Music Chamber Orchestra, co-directed Cleveland Uncommon Sound Project (CUSP), an organization dedicated to new and experimental music, and was a core member of Opus 216. In her academic work, Dr. Benn studies dance, performance practice, and modernisms in early twentieth-century France and the United States.

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