

Thursday, May 18 at Zankel Hall at Carnegie Hall
7:30pm: Density parts i & ii (2013-14)

PROGRAM

Edgard Varèse: *Density 21.5* for flute alone (1936)
Felipe Lara: *Meditation and Calligraphy* for solo bass flute (2014)
Felipe Lara: *Parabolas na Caverna* for solo flute (2014)
Marcos Balter: *Pessoa* for six bass flutes (2013)
Mario Diaz de Leon: *Luciform* for flute and electronics (2013)
Du Yun: *An Empty Garlic* for bass flute and electronics (2014)
George Lewis: *Emergent* for flute and electronics (2014)

Claire Chase, flutes
Levy Lorenzo, live sound
Nicholas Houfek, lights

Density 2036: part i is dedicated to Fred Anderson; Density 2036: part ii is dedicated to Elise Marie Mann.

NOTES

January 1936. New York City is in the grip of the Great Depression. Construction sites have fallen silent, leaving the city gap-toothed, littered with half-finished buildings. Many of the skyscrapers that sprouted like weeds during the boom times of the 1920s are now struggling to secure tenants: Locals deride the brand-new Empire State Building as the “Empty State Building.” Still, as always, the city seethes with life. Sirens howl, newsboys shout. The elevated trains rattle and shriek. Radios crackle with variety shows, zippy jazz numbers, and (every once in a while) the reassuring voice of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, addressing the nation in one of his fireside chats.

In the thick of it all—in a house on Sullivan Street crammed with gongs, paintings, and stray leaves of manuscript paper—French composer Edgard Varèse burns with ambition. Varèse wants his music to capture and distill the brute-force, electrified consciousness of the Machine Age. But if he is to succeed, he needs a more extensive set of musical resources than that bequeathed to him by the 19th century. The doors of music must be flung open to admit the entire world of sounds, thinks Varèse, and new instruments must be developed—in particular, electronic instruments capable of producing any sound whatsoever.

The Varèse of 1936 was a youthful spirit with a heterodox vision—but he was no enfant terrible. He was 52 years of age; he had been in New York for more than 20 years and was an established figure in the downtown music scene. New Yorkers already had multiple encounters with Varèse’s musical world, in which traditional instruments sat alongside sirens, lion’s roars, and whatever electronic instruments Varèse could get his hands on. (Very few existed at the time.) But even though some critics praised his work, most New Yorkers just didn’t get it. The New York premiere of Varèse’s monumental symphonic work *Amériques* at Carnegie Hall in 1926 had descended into abject chaos: Murmurs among the crowd grew steadily into a din, with one man seen rising to his feet with his two thumbs pointed downward in a pantomime of a Roman emperor sentencing a gladiator to death. If such hostility were not discouraging enough, Varèse had also been met with indifference from industry leaders he had petitioned for funds to

support the development of the new electronic instruments he so badly needed. As 1936 dawned, Varèse found himself frustrated and increasingly depressed.

It was in January 1936 that Varèse completed *Density 21.5*, written at the request of flutist Georges Barrère as a showcase for his new platinum flute. The piece premiered at Carnegie Hall the following month. *Density 21.5* represents a return to first principles for Varèse. All of the resources he was so adept at handling—orchestral, choral, electronic—are stripped away, leaving nothing but a single voice. Still, the full, stark panorama of Varèse's sound world is present here in miniature. By combining the different registers of the flute with carefully chosen dynamics that range from fortissimo to sudden near-silences, as well as by occasionally treating the flute as a percussion instrument, Varèse shows us just how much timbral variation the flute is capable of. In *Density 21.5*, Varèse makes the flute strange again: He makes it new.

Density 21.5 was followed by a creative desert for Varèse: He would not complete another new work for 10 years. But *Density 2036*, Claire Chase's 24-year commissioning project for solo flute, inserts a stitch into the fabric of time, bringing *Density 21.5* into immediate contact with the electronic, musical, and otherwise creative resources of the 21st century—resources that Varèse himself would have greeted as a parched man does water. Each year, Chase commissions a set of new works for solo flute; every 10 years, she performs all the works commissioned to that point. The final year of the project, 2036, will be the 100th anniversary of *Density 21.5*. Tonight's concert—the first installment in the 10-year *Density* marathon—features works commissioned in 2013 and 2014, the first two years of the project.

Having begun with *Density 21.5* itself, we move to Felipe Lara's *Meditation and Calligraphy* for solo bass flute. Upon being asked by Lara how he created his beautiful calligraphies, the Mongolian poet and calligrapher Mend-Ooyo Gombojav responded, "Meditation, meditation, meditation for a very long time ... then calligraphy with one quick gesture." Lara resolved to meditate on a solo bass flute work for an entire evening, and then, upon waking the next day, write the piece in less than 30 minutes. The result is a single, fluid, lyrical musical gesture in which the flute becomes, by turns, a percussion instrument and an amplifier for the flutist's voice.

Lara's *Parábolas na Caverna* for solo flute is a musical illustration of Plato's "Allegory of the Cave," presented in *The Republic* in a dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon. The majority of people are, Socrates tells Glaucon, analogous to prisoners who have been chained to the wall of a cave for their whole lives, and who think that the world is exhausted by what little they can see of it—namely, the shadows that flit across the cave wall opposite them. The philosopher, however, is like the prisoner who manages to escape the cave and to see the world as it truly is with all the pain that this entails. The philosopher is initially blinded, bewildered, and frightened by what he sees; and later, when he returns to the cave to liberate his companions, he is met with incredulity and contempt. Lara's piece gives us the dancing shadows in the cave, the philosopher's struggle against his chafing bonds, and the mingled excitement, dread, and loneliness that comes with seeing the world clearly.

Marcos Balter's *Pessoa* for six bass flutes is a musical adaptation of a poem by Portuguese writer Fernando Pessoa, "Solene passa sobre a fértil terra" ("Solemnly passes above the fertile land"), a meditation on the fleeting, senseless darkenings of mood by which we are all daily afflicted. *Pessoa* opens with a low, plaintive melody for solo bass flute. When the melody repeats, pre-recorded bass flutes enter, unobtrusive at first but growing more and more insistent as the piece progresses. Breathing and shifting, these ghost flutes weave themselves around the melody like smoke, at times obscuring it almost entirely. To witness *Pessoa* in performance

is to have the impression that Chase is being assailed onstage by past versions of herself (she recorded all the parts), which have risen unexpectedly from the depths to crowd around her, only to disperse as unexpectedly as they came.

With the first measure of *Luciform*, a concerto for flute and electronics by Mario Diaz de Leon, we find ourselves in very different territory. An anxious, jagged flute motif erupts into sudden flight, pursued by a slow, swooping figure in the pre-recorded synthesizer part—an echo of the sirens that caused such consternation when Varèse included them in his orchestral works. From here, the flute and synthesizer move through a series of scenes, marked by distinct timbral palettes, with Diaz de Leon’s metal and industrial rock influences clearly audible throughout.

Du Yun’s *An Empty Garlic* for bass flute and electronics is named for Rumi’s eponymous poem, which warns the reader not to waste time on pursuits that death will reveal as having always been “empty / as dry-rotting garlic.” The piece begins with pitched inhalations swirling around a solemn, languorous bass flute motif. Great blooms of electronic sound blossom, grow, and die away as the flute snaps alert, plunging into icier musical waters. The score requires the flutist to sing as well as to play, giving the piece the character of an uncanny duet between Chase and her instrument. In one particularly striking passage near the end, which quotes the sarabande from J. S. Bach’s A-Minor Partita for solo flute, breaths are eliminated entirely, with the flutist inhaling specific vocal pitches before exhaling the flute pitches. The piece culminates in a Varèsian flourish: a sudden, insistent quote of *Density 21.5*’s opening motif.

George Lewis’s *Emergent* for flute and electronics takes Varèse’s stated intention for his 1958 *Poème électronique*—namely, to introduce “a fourth [dimension], that of sound projection” to music—and gives it a 21st-century realization. Through a combination of digital delays, four-channel sound, and real-time timbre transformation, the fully scored flute material is refracted into a host of digital doppelgängers that alternately mimic, mock, and flee from Chase into the furthest corners of the auditorium. As the piece proceeds, Chase bowls through an evermore alien soundscape, until both she and her electronic companions find that they have left Earth entirely and are floating gently and noiselessly through space.

In a lecture given at the University of Southern California in 1939, Varèse quoted his contemporary, French novelist Romain Rolland, in order to express his own views regarding what the artist must do if she is to produce work of real value. The artist, said Varèse, must at all costs stay away from “that bed, all prepared for the laziness of those who, fleeing the fatigue of thinking for themselves, lie down in other men’s thoughts.” Were he present at Carnegie Hall for this concert, and for the others that remain in the *Density 2036* 10-year marathon, Varèse would be heartened to discover that today’s composers are no more lying down in his thoughts than he was in the thoughts of his predecessors.

—Jenny Judge

Claire Chase would like to thank all the Density composers and collaborators, Matthew Lyons at The Kitchen, Liz Mahler at Carnegie Hall, the Music Department at Harvard University, the Pnea Foundation Board of Directors, the Cheswatyr Foundation, Kurt Chauviere, Barbara and Andrew Gundlach, James Egelhofer, Jane M. Saks and Project&, Jennifer Judge, Jenny Lai, Ara Guzelimian, Jessica Shand, Carlos Aguilar, and Kirstin Valdez Quade.

DENSITY 2036 COMPOSERS

Praised by *The Chicago Tribune* as “minutely crafted” and “utterly lovely,” *The New York Times* as “whimsical” and “surreal,” and *The Washington Post* as “dark and deeply poetic,” the music of composer **Marcos Balter** (b.1974, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) is at once emotionally visceral and intellectually complex, primarily rooted in experimental manipulations of timbre and hyper-dramatization of live performance.

Past honors include the American Academy of Arts and Letters Music Award, fellowships from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, Civitella Ranieri Foundation, and the Tanglewood Music Center (Leonard Bernstein Fellow), two Chamber Music America awards, as well as commissions from the New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, New World Symphony, Chicago Symphony Music Now, The Crossing, Meet the Composer, Fromm Foundation at Harvard, The Holland/America Music Society, The MacArthur Foundation, and the Art Institute of Chicago. Recent festival appearances include those at Tanglewood Contemporary Music Festival, Ecstatic Music Festival, Acht Brücken, Aldeburgh Music Festival, Aspen, Frankfurter Gesellschaft für Neue Musik, Darmstadt Ferienkurse, and Banff Music Festival. Past collaborators include the rock band Deerhoof, dj King Britt and Alarm Will Sound, yMusic and Paul Simon, Claire Chase and the San Francisco Symphony, the International Contemporary Ensemble, JACK Quartet, Ensemble Dal Niente, Orquestra Experimental da Amazonas Filarmonica, American Contemporary Music Ensemble, American Composers Orchestra, and conductors Karina Canellakis, Susanna Malkki, Matthias Pintscher, and Steven Schick.

His works are published by PSNY (Schott), and commercial recordings of his music are available through New Amsterdam Records, New Focus Recording, Parlour Tapes+, Oxingale Records, and Navona Records. He is the Fritz Reiner Professor of Musical Composition at Columbia University, having previously held professorships at the University of California San Diego, Montclair State University, and Columbia College Chicago. He currently lives in Manhattan, New York.

Mario Diaz de Leon is a composer, performer, and recording artist, whose creative work explores intersections of sound, spirituality, and technology. His music has been acclaimed by the *New York Times*, *Pitchfork*, and the *New Yorker*, and he has received commissions from the Los Angeles Philharmonic, International Contemporary Ensemble, Talea Ensemble, and TAK Ensemble. Diaz de Leon is concurrently active in modern classical music, experimental electronic music, improvisation, and metal, having produced over a dozen albums of his work in collaboration with chamber ensembles, as a solo electronic artist, in the duo Luminous Vault, and with the improvisation trio Bloodmist. In his teenage years he explored electronic, metal, and hardcore music, which was followed by study at Oberlin Conservatory and Columbia University, where he received a doctorate in music composition. Under the stage name Oneirogen, he released several albums of heavy ambient electronics performed internationally, including CTM Festival in Berlin; Donaufestival in Krems, Austria; and The Kitchen in NYC. The first electronic release under his own name, *Heart Thread*, was released in 2022, and pursues an immersive, ecstatic sound across two side-long pieces scored for an ensemble of synthesizers, woodwind timbres, and electronic percussion. *Heart Thread*, Diaz de Leon explains, “is a way for me to explore sacred expressions of abundance—a technology for channeling mystical experience.” Having previously taught at Columbia as Core Lecturer, he is currently Assistant Professor of Music and Technology at Stevens Institute of Technology.

Du Yun, born and raised in Shanghai, China and currently based in New York City, is a composer, performer, and advocate working at the intersection of orchestral, opera, chamber music, theater, cabaret, oral tradition, public performances, sound installation, electronics and

noise. In 2017 she won the Pulitzer Prize for Music for her opera *ANGEL'S BONE* (libretto by Royce Vavrek); her collaborative opera with Raven Chacon, *SWEET LAND*, won the 2020 Best New Opera by the Music Critics Association of North America. Other notable recognitions include Guggenheim, American Academy Berlin Prize, Creative Capital, Foundation Contemporary Arts and a GRAMMY nomination in Best Classical Music Composition (for her work *Air Glow*). Her studio albums have been a *New Yorker* Notable Recording of Year in 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2021, respectively. Her latest monodrama opera, *In Our Daughter's Eyes*, was a notable performance of the year in 2022 by the *New Yorker*.

Du Yun is Professor of Composition at the Peabody Institute of John Hopkins University. As a curator and advocate for new music and art, she was a founding member of the International Contemporary Ensemble, artistic director of MATA festival (2014-2018), and founded the FutureTradition initiative championing collaborations in oral tradition practices. She was Artist of the Year at the Beijing Music Festival in 2019, and the Asia Society in Hong Kong has honored her for her continued contributions to the performing arts. The Carnegie Foundation and the Vilcek Prize in Music have honored her as an immigrant who has made lasting contributions to American society.

Praised by *The New York Times* as "a gifted Brazilian-American modernist" whose works are "brilliantly realized," "technically formidable, wildly varied," and possess "voluptuous, elemental lyricism," **Felipe Lara**—whose work includes orchestral, chamber, vocal, film, electroacoustic, and popular music—engages in producing new musical contexts by means of (re)interpreting and translating acoustical and extra-musical properties of familiar source sonorities into project-specific forces. He often aspires to create self-similar relationships between the macro and micro-articulation of the musical experience and highlights the interdependence of acoustic music composition and technology.

His music has been recently commissioned by leading soloists, ensembles, and institutions such as the Arditti Quartet, Brentano Quartet, Claire Chase, Conrad Tao, Donaueschinger Musiktage, Ensemble InterContemporain, Ensemble Modern, Helsinki Philharmonic, International Contemporary Ensemble, Loadbang, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Parker Quartet, and São Paulo Symphony Orchestra, as well as recently performed by the Ensemble Recherche, esperanza spalding, Ilan Volkov, JACK Quartet, KNM Berlin, Mivos Quartet, Netherlands Radio Chamber Philharmonic Hilversum, New York Philharmonic, Nouvel Ensemble Moderne, Peter Eötvös, Steven Schick, Susanna Mälkki, Talea Ensemble, Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra, and Thomas Adès.

The recipient of a Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study Fellowship from Harvard University, he holds a Ph.D. in Music Composition from New York University (Graduate School of Arts and Science) where he was a Henry M. MacCracken Fellow, a Master's from Tufts University, and a Bachelor's degree from Berklee College of Music. Lara is an Assistant Professor and Chair of the Composition Department at The Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University. Having previously taught at Boston Conservatory at Berklee and Faculty of Arts and Science at New York University, he was Visiting Assistant Professor at the University of Chicago's Department of Music and Visiting Lecturer at Harvard's Department of Music, where he was awarded two Harvard Excellence in Teaching Awards.

George E. Lewis is the Edwin H. Case Professor of American Music at Columbia University, where he serves as Area Chair in Composition and Faculty in Historical Musicology. A Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy, and a member of the Akademie der Künste Berlin, Lewis's other honors include a MacArthur Fellowship (2002) and a Guggenheim Fellowship (2015), a Doris Duke Artist Award (2019), a United States Artists Walker Fellowship

(2011), an Alpert Award in the Arts (1999), and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Lewis studied composition with Muhal Richard Abrams at the AACM School of Music and trombone with Dean Hey. A member of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) since 1971, Lewis's work in electronic and computer music, computer-based multimedia installations, and notated and improvisational forms is documented on more than 150 recordings. His work has been presented by the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonia Orchestra, Radio-Sinfonieorchester Stuttgart, Mivos Quartet, Boston Modern Orchestra Project, London Sinfonietta, Spektral Quartet, Talea Ensemble, Dinosaur Annex, Ensemble Dal Niente, Ensemble Pamplémousse, Wet Ink, Ensemble Erik Satie, Eco Ensemble, and others, with commissions from American Composers Orchestra, International Contemporary Ensemble, Harvestworks, Ensemble Either/Or, Orkestra Futura, Turning Point Ensemble, Studio Dan, San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, 2010 Vancouver Cultural Olympiad, IRCAM, Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra, and others. Lewis's music is published by Edition Peters.

Lewis received the 2012 SEAMUS Award from the Society for Electro-Acoustic Music in the United States, and his book, *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music* (University of Chicago Press, 2008) received the American Book Award and the American Musicological Society's Music in American Culture Award.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Claire Chase, described by The New York Times as “the North Star of her instrument’s ever-expanding universe,” is a musician, interdisciplinary artist, and educator. Passionately dedicated to the creation of new ecosystems for the music of our time, she has given the world premieres of hundreds of new works by a new generation of artists, and in 2013 launched the 24-year commissioning project Density 2036. Now in its 10th year, Density 2036 reimagines the solo flute literature through commissions, performances, recordings, education, and an accessible archive at density2036.org.

Chase co-founded the International Contemporary Ensemble in 2001, was named a MacArthur Fellow in 2012, and in 2017 was awarded the Avery Fisher Prize from Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. She is currently professor of the practice of music at Harvard University, where she teaches courses on contemporary music, interdisciplinary collaboration, nonprofit arts organizations, and community-building through the arts. She is also a creative associate at The Juilliard School, and a collaborative partner with Esa-Pekka Salonen and the San Francisco Symphony.

As an undergraduate at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, Chase co-founded the International Contemporary Ensemble, a collective of musicians, digital media artists, producers, and educators committed to creating collaborations built on equity and cultural responsiveness. She served as the ensemble’s artistic director until 2017, and as an ensemble member on performance and education projects on five continents, developing an artist-driven organizational model that earned the group the Trailblazer Award from the American Music Center in 2010 and the Ensemble of the Year Award in 2014 from Musical America Worldwide.

From 2016 to 2019, Chase served as co-artistic director of Ensemble Evolution with her longtime collaborator Steven Schick. Ensemble Evolution is now a project of the International Contemporary Ensemble in collaboration with The New School College of Performing Arts.

Chase grew up in Leucadia, California, with the childhood dream of becoming a professional baseball player before she discovered the flute. She now lives in Brooklyn.

Born in Bucharest, Filipino-American **Levy Marcel Ingles Lorenzo, Jr.** works at the intersection of music, art, and technology. Called an “electronics wizard” by *The New York Times*, his international body of work spans electronics design, sound engineering, instrument building, installation art, improvisation, and percussion performance. With a primary focus on inventing new instruments, he prototypes, composes, and performs new electronic music. As an art consultant, Levy designs interactive electronics ranging from small sculptures to large-scale public art installations with artists such as Alvin Lucier, Christine Sun Kim, Ligorano-Reese, Autumn Knight, and Leo Villareal. As a musician, he has worked with artists such as Peter Evans, Tyshawn Sorey, Anna Thorvaldsdottir, Ryuichi Sakamoto, George Lewis, Henry Threadgill, and Claire Chase. As a sound engineer, he is in demand as a specialist in the realization of complete electro-acoustic concerts with non-traditional configurations. A core member of the acclaimed International Contemporary Ensemble, he fulfills multiple roles as percussionist, electronics performer, and sound engineer. His work has been featured at STEIM, REWIRE, MIT Media Lab, Harvestworks, Banff Centre, Harvard University, G4TV, Grey Group, Bose, Amazon Studios, BBC, The New York Times, the Hermitage and Burning Man. He recently made his soloist debut with the New York Philharmonic for the reopening concerts of David Geffen Hall at Lincoln Center.

Levy earned degrees as Master of Electrical & Computer Engineering from Cornell University, and Doctor of Musical Arts in Percussion Performance from Stony Brook University. He has presented numerous workshops and lectures on electronic musical instrument design and performance practice. Dr. Lorenzo holds a position as Professor of Creative Technologies at The New School, College of Performing Arts where he is director of the Nstrument Lab.

Nicholas Houfek (he/him) is an NYC-based lighting designer. Frequent and recent collaborations include: International Contemporary Ensemble, Marcos Balter’s *Oyá* with the New York Philharmonic, Natalie Merchant, Claire Chase, Ojai Music Festival, Silk Road Ensemble, John Kelly’s *Underneath the Skin*, Marc Neikrug’s *A Song by Mahler*, Anohni’s *She Who Saw Beautiful Things*, Suzanne Farrin’s *La Dolce Morte*, George Lewis’ *Soundlines*, Anna Thorvaldsdottir’s *In The Light of Air*, and Ash Fure’s *The Force of Things*. Recent creations include the ColorSynth and other applications of live lighting for performance. Excerpts of *Instructions for Lighting* can be read at commonwelljournal.com and will be in the first print edition released September 2023. Mr. Houfek is an ensemble member of the International Contemporary Ensemble, a member of USA829, and a graduate of Boston University.