

Cleveland Chamber Symphony NEOSonicFall: Going Solo

Small Ensemble Works

Steven Smith, Music Director Sunday, September 21, 2:30pm Baldwin Wallace University - Gamble Auditorium

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CLEVELAND CHAMBER SYMPHONY

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Songs of Correspondence for mezzo-soprano and string quartet, from letters of Willa Cather

Richard Stout

Mariel Elsie Alfred Edith Roscoe

Mezzo-Soprano: Kira McGirr

Violin 1: Leah Burtnett; Violin 2: Sam Petrey Viola: Laura Shuster; Cello: Julie Myers King

Dance Etude #3 for two marimbas Daniel Dorff

Percussion: Andrew Pongracz, Mell Csicsilla

First Concerto for Flute and Percussion Lou Harrison

Flute: Sean Gabriel

Percussion: Andrew Pongracz, Mell Csicsilla

Invention #1 and #2 Dan Levitan

Percussion: Andrew Pongracz, Mell Csicsilla

Three Short Songs of Love

Donald Miller

- 1. Welcome to My Heart
- 2. On to the Next One
- **3.** Forever

Soprano: Brenda Pongracz, Percussion: Andrew Pongracz

*please, no digital recording during the performance.

CCS supporters include: Cuyahoga Arts & Culture, Amphion Foundation, Bascom Little Fund, George Gund Foundation, Ohio Arts Council, Paul M. Angell Family Foundation, and the many individuals that have supported new music for so many years. Support also includes our ongoing partnerships with Baldwin Wallace University and with The Music School Settlement, ensuring stability and growth in our mission and in our impact.

Steven Smith has been the Music Director of the Grammy Award-winning Cleveland Chamber Symphony since 2005. In 2019 he completed a very successful decade-long tenure as Music Director of the Richmond Symphony, expanding the orchestra's repertoire, developing new concert series and enhancing the orchestra's connection to the community. He also served as Music Director of Santa Fe Symphony & Chorus from 1999 to 2013, and as Assistant Conductor of the Cleveland Orchestra from 1997 to 2003. An active composer, his works have been performed by many soloists, ensembles and orchestras, including CCS.

Bio's and Program Notes

Richard Stout joined The Cleveland Orchestra in 2000, and performs the roles of Second Trombone, Bass Trumpet and Euphonium. Prior to that time he was with the Jacksonville Symphony and spent summers at the Eastern Music Festival as faculty. Mr. Stout studied at The Curtis Institute of Music with Glenn Dodson, graduating in 1987. His earlier teachers were Allen Barnhill and Harold Blevins. Richard has been a guest clinician and master class teacher at festivals and universities across the United States, and is on faculty at Baldwin Wallace University and SUNY Stony Brook. Mr. Stout has a solo CD on Albany Records, Decreasing Radius with his wife, pianist Christina Dahl. As a composer, he has written music for brass trio and trombone trio. Songs of Correspondence was released by the Poiesis Quartet with Nancy Maultsby, on a disc entitled "as we are" by the label Bright Shiny Things in 2024.

The eleven songs which compose the cycle *Songs of Correspondence* use texts entirely from *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather*. Each song bears the title of the recipient of Cather's letter or letters from which the text was drawn. The cycle flows in roughly chronological order and contains themes familiar to Cather readers- of her important relationships, her social commentary, her involvement in business affairs, her travels around the world, and her love for family and Nebraska.

The composer is eternally grateful for the support for this project and the artistry of all involved, as well as the connections made with audience members who have been readers of Cather, fans of art song or both, and the opportunity to mingle those worlds together.

Daniel Dorff's woodwind music is frequently performed and recorded worldwide. Over 50 flutists have shared performances of his Sonata (Three Lakes) to YouTube, where there are also over 50 performances each of his In A Deep Funk and Nocturnes for the Nativity. Dorff has written 7 commissions for the Philadelphia Orchestra's education department, and the Minnesota Orchestra's Kinder Konzert series has presented his music over 200 times.

Daniel Dorff was born in New Rochelle, NY; acclaim began at age 18 with First Prize in the Aspen Music Festival's annual composers' competition. Dorff received degrees in composition from Cornell and University of Pennsylvania; teachers included George Crumb, George Rochberg, Karel Husa, Henry Brant, Ralph Shapey, and Elie Siegmeister. He studied saxophone with Sigurd Rascher and bass clarinet with Ronald Reuben. Dorff served from 1996 through 2015 as Composer-In-Residence for Symphony in C, in which he played bass clarinet from 1980 through 2002.

Lou Harrison (1917-2003) was an American musical pioneer, composing works that incorporated Javanese gamelan and non-Western influences and explored the use of alternate tunings and new instruments. Spending much of his youth on the West Coast, he studied with Henry Cowell and Arnold Schoenberg, before moving to New York to work with Virgil Thomson. In addition to

composing, Harrison also worked tirelessly promote the music of Charles Ives, bringing the composer to the notice of the musical world and conducting the first performances if his Symphony No. 3. (Source: https://www.ojaifestival.org/lou-harrison/)

Concerto No. | for Flute and Percussion: A long time ago Henry Cowell, by word and practice, told us that the majority of man's music consisted of a melody with some sort of rhythmic support. This little Concerto was one of my responses to that idea. Here I arranged percussion ostinati to accompany -- now with, now against -- flute melodies in themselves complex, and complexly metered. This difficult (if small). piece was given a remarkable send-off at Bennington College -- Otto Luening played flute, assisted (or confronted) by Henry Cowell and Wallingford Riegger, and I received a kind of "review" of it from Carl Ruggles! (L. Harrison, 1979).

Daniel Levitan is the composer of numerous works for percussion ensemble that are regularly performed at colleges and universities across the country and around the world.

He studied composition at Bennington College (BA, 1976) with Henry Brant, Vivian Fine, and Marta Ptazynska; and percussion privately with Phil Ford and Ray Spiegel (tabla), Frank Malabe (conga and latin percussion), and Tom Hemphill (mallets).

Mr. Levitan, a graduate as well of the North Bennett Street School (1975), works as a piano technician in New York City, and writes and lectures on tuning topics for the Piano Technicians Guild.

Donald Miller is a graduate of The Oberlin Conservatory of Music. He joined the percussion section of The Cleveland Orchestra in 1972 and retired in 202

Performers

Kira McGirr, mezzo-soprano, performs repertoire spanning from the Baroque to contemporary. She has soloed for Elgar's Sea Pictures; Mozart's Requiem and Coronation Mass; Handel's Messiah; Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 and Mass in C Major, among many other works. Highlights for the 2025/26 season include solo debuts with Cleveland Chamber Symphony, Lexington Bach Festival, Heights Chamber Orchestra, The Cleveland Women's Orchestra, and the Musical Theater Project, and return solo engagements with Cleveland Repertory Orchestra, Choral Arts Cleveland, and Perrysburg Symphony Orchestra. She also sings with Apollo's Fire Baroque Orchestra, Cleveland Chamber Choir, and Trinity Cathedral Choir.

Violinist **Leah Goor Burtnett** is an active musician in the Cleveland area, performing regularly with the Columbus Symphony, the Cleveland Chamber Symphony, the Akron, Canton and Youngstown symphonies and the Erie Philharmonic. She is a founding member of the Athena String Quartet and Hiram College Piano Trio.

Leah obtained her Masters degree from the Cleveland Institute of Music, and completed her undergraduate studies at the Eastman School of Music under the direction of Grammy Award winner Peter Salaff.

Laura Shuster is a versatile and accomplished violist, performing regularly with the Bluewater Chamber Orchestra, Cleveland Chamber Symphony, and Playhouse Square musical productions. She is also heard performing with the Erie Philharmonic and Akron Symphonies, as well as numerous chamber ensembles throughout the Greater Cleveland area.

A dedicated educator, Laura maintains a vibrant teaching studio where she instructs violin and viola students ranging in age from 5 to 65. In addition to her private studio, she is a faculty member at the Cleveland State University School of Music.

Julie Myers King, cellist, is a member of the BlueWater Chamber Orchestra, the Akron Symphony, the Cleveland Chamber Symphony, the Cleveland Pops Orchestra and the Athena String Quartet. She holds degrees in cello performance from Indiana University and Louisiana State University. She is an active freelancer in the Northeast Ohio area, and spent thirteen winters as

the Assistant Principal Cellist of the Sarasota Opera Orchestra. In addition, she performs frequently at Playhouse Square. She resides in Cleveland Heights with her husband, Richard, their children Charlie and Amelia and miniature poodle, Ernie.

Andrew Pongracz has been the principal percussionist of The Cleveland Chamber Symphony since 1999. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from Hiram College and a Master of Music degree from Cleveland State University. Andrew is also the principal percussionist of The Youngstown Symphony and principal timpanist with The Cleveland Pops orchestra. He also performs regularly with The Erie Philharmonic, Great Lakes Theatre, and The Cleveland Playhouse. Andrew has also performed with Aretha Franklin, The Who, Charo, Kansas, Yes, and Frankie Valli. He lives in Lakewood with his wife, Brenda, and their two sons, Alexander and Christopher.

Mell Csicsila is a dynamic and versatile percussionist and drummer based in Cleveland, Ohio. He can be heard frequently as as a first-call musician at Cleveland's Playhouse Square and with many of the region's professional ensembles including the Cleveland Chamber Symphony, CityMusic Cleveland, and orchestras and chamber groups across the United States, including touring with the Paragon Ragtime Orchestra. A specialist in musical theater, he has supported the national tours of over 35 Broadway musicals including Wicked, Anastasia, The Wiz, and Beautiful in Cleveland and in theatres across the United States and has been a musician for professional theater companies in Ohio, Arizona, Utah, Florida and Idaho. He holds degrees from Cleveland State University and did additional graduate work at the Cleveland Institute of Music.

Sean Gabriel has been principal flutist of the Cleveland Chamber Symphony since 1995. He earned performance degrees from the Baldwin Wallace Conservatory and the Indiana University School of Music, with his main teachers being William Hebert and James Pellerite. Sean is also the principal flutist of the Blue Water Chamber Orchestra and was principal flutist of the Opera Cleveland Orchestra from 2001-2010. His a member of the Erie

Philharmonic and is on the faculty of the Baldwin Wallace Conservatory and the Cleveland State University School of Music.

Brenda Pongracz, soprano, holds a BA in Music from Hiram College, an MM in Music History from Cleveland State, an MM in Vocal Performance from Temple University, and an Ed.D. in Higher Education Leadership from Walden University. As a soprano and performer, has performed with Opera Cleveland, Cleveland Opera on Tour, Hiram College Opera Theater, Cleveland Composer's Guild, and other professional venues throughout Northeast Ohio. Brenda is a soloist at St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Lakewood, Ohio. She has also been a soprano soloist at Old Stone Church, Church of the Covenant, St. James Anglican, and Trinity Cathedral. She lives in Lakewood, Ohio with her husband, percussionist Andrew Pongracz, and two children, Alexander and Christopher.

About the Cleveland Chamber Symphony

Since its founding by Dr. Edwin London in 1980, the **Cleveland Chamber Symphony** has served a leading role in the art of contemporary American music through its mission to commission, perform, record and promote musical works by composers of our time. Its history of over 170 world premiere performances and wide range of recordings has been critically acclaimed, and has been recognized by many awards, including a 2007 Grammy Award, numerous ASCAP awards and repeated recognition by the American Music Center. Its recent collaborations with Verb Ballets, the Cleveland School of the Arts and the launching of the annual NEOSonicFest demonstrate CCS's ongoing commitment to contemporary performance and education in Northeast Ohio.

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NEOSonicSpring Cleveland Chamber Symphony Steven Smith, Music Director April, 2026

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&

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