

COLORADO COLLEGE



Summer
Music
festival

Program Notes
by
Michael Grace

FESTIVAL ARTISTS CONCERT

June 20, 2022

7:30 PM

Packard Hall

Summer Hours

Early calm
Quick and lively
Slow, simple
With anticipation
Sunny

Kenji Bunch
(b. 1973)

Kenji Bunch is emerging as one of the most prominent American composers of his generation. The *New York Times* dubbed him a “composer to watch” and his works have been heard in many venues by a large and diverse audience. He has recorded on EMI Classics, RCA, Kleos Classics, GENUIN and several other labels, and he has served as composer in residence at the Vail Valley Music Festival and the Spoleto USA Festival. Born in Portland, he received both bachelor’s and master’s degrees at The Juilliard School, where he studied viola with Toby Appel and composition with Robert Beaser. His orchestral works have been performed by numerous symphonies, including the renowned St. Paul and English Chamber Orchestras, and the New World, Colorado, Phoenix, East Texas, Stockton (CA), Missouri, Asia America, and Honolulu symphonies. Mr. Bunch is also active as a concert violist and a country fiddler.

Here are some brief notes about *Summer Hours* provided by Kenji:

Summer Hours is a celebration of my favorite season, one rich in nostalgic memories of lazy childhood days in the sun, cross-country car trips, and, more recently, favorite spots to visit as a performing musician at summer festivals. The music is drenched in the sounds of Americana; widely spaced harmonies, unabashed melodies, and plenty of folk influences including dance rhythms and a setting of a 19th century folk song, “Peg and Awl” in the middle movement. The work is dedicated to Marya Martin, a longtime friend who has supported my work for many summers, and the Bridgehampton Chamber Music Festival, who premiered the work in August, 2018.

The work is in five movements played without pause. The first, *Early calm*, is slow with beautiful harmonies suggesting the heat of a summer day. In the second movement, *Quick and lively*, the music bursts into lively dance-like rhythms that are passed among the six players. After a bit of this dancing, the bassoon introduces a slow movement, *Slow, simple*, that focuses on the 19th century folk melody “Peg and Awl.” While the melody might not be recognized by today’s listeners, it has a beautiful ballad-like flow that is soon picked up by the clarinet with its voice-like tone color. Repetition of this melody builds to a climax with a beautiful cadence. Finally, in the last two movements, *With anticipation* and *Sunny*, there is an acceleration to a sprightly dance that brings the work to a close. If we think of summer as a happy time, as Bunch states in his program note, this work captures the spirit.

***On Second Thought* (world premiere)**

Ben Robichaux
(b. 1991)

Ben Robichaux is a dedicated composer who aims to write accessible music that musicians and non-musicians alike can enjoy. His chamber works have been featured at numerous national and international festivals. His choir music has been performed by the Academy of Voices of Minneapolis, Minnesota, and others, and his wind ensemble works have been performed across the United States. He was selected as a participant in the National Band Association Young Composers and Conductors Mentor Project, which included a recording and performance with the United States Air Force Band in Washington.

He received a Doctor of Musical Arts in Composition and a Master of Music in composition from the University of Georgia, where he studied with Natalie Williams, Leonard V. Ball, Peter Van Zandt Lane, Adrian Childs, and Emily Koh. He earned a bachelor's degree in instrumental music education from Nicholls State University.

I asked Ben Robichaux about *On Second Thought*. He kindly wrote a program note which tells us a lot about the composition and its curious title. It also tells us something candid about himself and his relationship to the title:

As a demonstration of my insecurity, "On Second Thought" is all about rehashing or rethinking ideas. In fact, the cause-and-effect nature of insecurity is prevalent throughout the work. With echoing textures on the surface level (that's kind of like cause-and effect, right?), the piece is cast in three sections: fast, slow, fast. The return of the initial fast section is a large-scale rethinking of my ideas. The combination of the powerful bass trombone and the nuanced beauty and virtuosity of the strings opened up a variety of inquisitive gestures and moments for this piece. This lends itself well to the give-and-take aesthetic that I was after. "On Second Thought" was composed for John Rojak whose kindness and patience throughout the realization of this piece has been a breath of fresh air!

Who of us has not had second thoughts about our actions and/or statements. So that is a normal human behavior. But we are not always ready to admit it. Here, Ben admits that when the opening section of music returns at the end, he naturally had second thoughts. See if you can hear these.

Tromba

Prologue
Nocturne
Mobile

Ulysses Kay
(1917-1995)

Ulysses Kay should be remembered as one of the preeminent African-American composers of the 20th century. He studied with Howard Hanson at Eastman, Paul Hindemith at Yale and Otto Leuning at Columbia, and he was the first African American to receive the coveted Prix de Rome from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. During his productive life, he received many other high honors.

As a composer, he was most famous for his symphonic, opera and choral compositions, but he wrote for many different ensembles and solo commissions as well. For example, *Tromba* was commissioned by the eminent black trumpet player Fred Irby at Howard University. The correspondence between composer and player is most interesting; Irby details that there should be a slow movement using mutes, that there should be question and answer between the trumpet and piano, and there should be "mixed meters." All of these requests are met in the score that Kay offered to Irby.

Tromba is a three-movement work. It includes movements entitled: *Prologue*, *Nocturne*, and *Mobile*. Kay provided program notes about the composition:

It begins with a *Prologue* in which the trumpet makes the opening statement alone, with the piano lending support later. This movement is followed by a *Nocturne*. Here various colors of the trumpet's timbre are exploited through use of various mutes. The work concludes with a movement titled *Mobile*. Here the lively music shows off the trumpet's natural brilliance in a sort of *moto perpetuo*.

This three-movement form maintains the Classical convention of fast-slow-fast. In the first movement, the piano accompanies the trumpet as the latter pursues various fanfare-like melodies. The second movement follows the iconic nocturne texture with a harmonic accompaniment in the piano while the solo instrument offers elongated and often chromatic melodies. It is here that Kay calls for several mutes, which alter the normal brassy trumpet sound, making it more mellow and soft. The third movement is faster and brings the work to a dramatic close.

Piano Quintet No. 1 in A minor, Op. 30

Allegro

Adagio non troppo

Scherzo. Presto

Finale. Allegro

Louise Farrenc
(1804-1875)

The first half of the 19th century saw the emergence of women as professional musicians, but it was not easy for them. Three notable examples – Fanny Mendelssohn (sister of the well-known composer Felix), Clara Schumann (wife of the famous Robert) and Louise Farrenc (wife of flutist Aristide Farrenc) – all struggled with a widespread cultural bias against women in music, particularly in composition. Of these three, Farrenc probably received the most recognition as a composer in her time. She was married to Aristide Farrenc, a flutist, and together they performed and created a major music publishing company. And she was so well known as a pianist by herself that she was offered a piano professorship at the Paris Conservatory, a great honor and the only woman to achieve such a prestigious appointment in the entire 19th century.

One might wonder why such a well-known musician would vanish into obscurity soon after her death. Several factors contributed to this: As one critic noted “Farrenc’s immensely successful career [mostly as a performer] seems at odds with her contemporary obscurity. Much of this incongruity must be attributed to the sexism of audiences, critics, historians, and even colleagues – Farrenc’s salary at the Conservatory was half that of her male counterparts for much of her tenure there.” Incidentally, after the notorious success of one of her compositions, she used her newfound clout to get her salary raised to a comparable level with her male colleagues! Go for it, Louise!

Most of Farrenc’s early compositions were for solo piano, not surprising for the active virtuoso performer. But while she was still relatively young (at 27) she composed the Piano Quintet No. 1 in A minor, her first major chamber music work. This quintet is a stunningly beautiful early romantic work. The listener might first notice the influence of Beethoven in its classical construction. The outer movements are in the traditional classical forms, and the middle movements follow the standard pattern of older works. Yet Farrenc was determined to advance the more passionate styles associated with romantic composers, especially those in Paris such as Berlioz and Chopin. So this quintet is a magnificent bridge from the older aesthetic ideal to the newer one. This balance can be seen in each movement.

The first movement, *Allegro*, is full of nobility and serious passion from the opening theme heard first in the strings and then combined with the rhythmic drive of the piano. The traditional more lyrical second theme is first heard in the piano but then given to all. There is a dramatic closing theme that mostly belongs to the piano with lots of difficult parallel thirds in the right hand. Was Louise assuring herself, as the pianist in the first performance, an unmistakable prominence? The development of the themes is at times classical sounding, but at times imbued with driving romantic passion. Throughout this movement, Farrenc creates the finest thematic material – there are flowing transitions from theme to theme, rising romantic climaxes, and expressive idiomatic piano writing that might remind us of Mendelssohn or even Chopin.

The second movement, *Adagio non troppo*, is elegant and tuneful, just the way these slow movements are supposed to be. It is also in a major key. One might note that it opens with an exquisite cello solo which soon gives way to the piano to continue the operatic like aria. There is a striking modulation to the minor mode in the middle which adds some angst. The third movement, *Scherzo: Presto*, is a flurry of activity, often complex in the way the instruments share the highly rhythmic melodic snippets. There is a middle section, the “Trio,” which is distinctively calmer and in a curious new key. It too has clever little syncopations which add to its charm. The *Scherzo* returns to close the brief movement.

The fourth movement, *Finale: Allegro*, is in a rondo form, with a little theme, the *ritornello*, recurring from time to time to give the movement a sense of order and balance. Often the ritornellos find new embellishments on the theme, such as punctual chords or scale-like runs in the piano which remains central throughout the movement. Farrenc resists the usual urge to end with a grand climax, and instead allows the movement to run its course and end in a quiet and dignified denouement.

Farrenc, and particularly this piano quintet, were relegated to obscurity for nearly two centuries, in part at least because of the gender of the composer. But they are now being heard more and more thanks to programming like this which overcomes gender bias and celebrates the “woman’s voice” in musical composition.

Upcoming Summer Music Festival Events

coloradocollege.edu/musicfestival

Outreach Concert

6 p.m. Tuesday, June 21

Gold Hill Mesa (142 S. Raven Mine Drive), free

Music at Midday

12:15 p.m. Wednesday, June 22, and Thursday, June 23

Packard Hall, free

Festival Artists Pre-Concert Recital “Alla Breve”

6:15 p.m. Thursday, June 23, Packard Hall, free

Festival Artists Concert

7:30 p.m. Thursday, June 23, Packard Hall

Ticketed event



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