Thursday, January 7, 2016, 8 PM
‘62 Center for Theatre and Dance, CenterStage

I/O Ensemble: O Death

Pierre Jodlowski (b. 1971)

Mécano 1 (2004)
pour 1 percussioniste et moteur

Matthew Gold, percussion

Ornette Coleman (1930-2015)
arr. Kris Allen

Unknown Artist (1988)

Kris Allen, alto saxophone; Jason Ennis, electric guitar

Frederic Rzewski (b. 1938)

Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues
from North American Ballads (1978-79)
version for 2 pianos (1980)

Doris Stevenson and Nathaniel Vilas ‘17, piano

~ intermission ~

Oscar Bettison (b. 1975)

O Death (2005-07)

I. Chorus I
II. Bone Chapel
III. Take Leave of Carnal Vain Delight
IV. O Death
V. Chorus II
VI. I Believe I’m Sinking Down
VII. Lights in Ashes

Kris Allen, saxophones and recorder; Samantha Stone ‘17, saxophones and recorder; John Wheeler, trombone and melodica; Jason Ennis, electric guitar and banjo; Doris Stevenson, piano; Matthew Gold, percussion; Gabriel Morosky ‘17, recorder; Casey McLellan ‘14, electronics
About the Program

PIERRE JODLOWSKI
*Mécano 1*

PIERRE JODLOWSKI is a composer, performer and multimedia artist. His music, often marked by high density, is at the crossroads of acoustic and electric sound and is characterized by dramatic and political anchors. His work as a composer has led him to perform in France and abroad in most places dedicated to contemporary music as well as in others artistic fields, including dance, theater, visual arts, and electronic music. His work unfolds today in many areas: film, interactive installations, and staged works. He defines his music as an “active process” on the physical level [musical gestures, energy and space] and on the psychological level [relation to memory and visual dimension of sound]. In parallel to his compositions, he also performs on various scenes (experimental, jazz, electronic), both solo and with other artists.

**composer’s note:**

* Mécano 1 is an attempt to stage a singular object in the universe of the musician: the metronome. This “unit” of measurement usually accompanies the composer and performer in the development stage of learning of a work and then it disappears at the time of the concert, giving way to an inaudible fluctuating pulse.

In this music, on the contrary, the metronome is shown (a small engine hitting the surfaces of the drums), imposing the mechanics of both stasis and fragility.

FREDERIC RZEWSKI
*Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues*

Social consciousness has long influenced American composer FREDERIC RZEWSKI’S work. He addresses the issue of labor rights in North American Ballads, a set of four pieces based on union songs. The text of Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues comments on the harsh working conditions in the textile mills of North Carolina in the 1930s. Aggressive hammering clusters in the bass register of the piano open the work, mimicking the relentless, noisy environment the workers had to endure. The influence of the blues jazz idiom contrasts this mechanical soundscape. "In writing these pieces," wrote Rzewski in his program notes, "I took as a model the chorale preludes of Bach, who in his contrapuntal writing consistently derives motivic configurations from the basic tune. In each piece I built up contrapuntal textures in a similar way, using classical techniques like augmentation, diminution, transposition, and compression, always keeping the profile of the tune on some level."  

Xiang Zou

OSCAR BETTISON
*O Death*

Described as possessing “an unconventional lyricism and a menacing beauty” and a “unique voice,” British/American composer OSCAR BETTISON’S work demonstrates a willingness to work within and outside the confines of concert music. His music as been featured and reviewed in the LA Times, the New York Times, the British, Dutch and Italian press as well as having been
played on radio throughout the US, Australia, Britain, The Netherlands and Brazil and on British and Dutch Television. His latest work has been described as “pulsating with an irrepressible energy and vitality, as well as brilliant craftsmanship.”

Recent commissions include major new works for the Los Angeles Philharmonic New Music Group, musikFabrik (twice), The Talea Ensemble, Slagwerk Den Haag, So Percussion, the Bang on a Can All-Stars and a commission for a solo work from the New York Philharmonic for their 2014 Biennial.

He has been the recipient of a number of awards including a Chamber Music America Commissioning Award (2013), the Yvar Mikhashoff Commissioning Fund Prize (2009), a Jerwood Foundation Award (1998), the Royal Philharmonic Society Prize (1997), the first BBC Young Composer of the Year Prize (1993) as well as fellowships to both the Tanglewood and Aspen music festivals.

Born in the UK, he studied with Simon Bainbridge at the Royal College of Music (London), with Louis Andriessen and Martijn Padding at the Royal Conservatorium of The Hague (The Netherlands) and at Princeton University where he completed his PhD with Steve Mackey as his advisor. He has served on the composition department at the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University since 2009.

composer's note:

O Death that was written for Ensemble Klang and premiered in New York City in March 2007. The idea for O Death started when I heard the folk-song of the same name. In the song, a young person pleads with the character of death not to "take them so soon." I was immediately struck with the parallels between this and parts of the Requiem Mass and so I started to think about grafting popular music elements (particularly from blues and other American folk music) onto a kind of Requiem Mass structure (a structure which is typically rather fluid to begin with). As the Requiem Mass normally involves sung text, and O Death does not, I like to think of it as a Requiem Masque.

O Death is scored for two saxophones, trombone, percussion, piano, electric guitar, and electronics. In addition, the players are also required to play recorders, jew’s harps, and harmonicas, as well as banjo and melodica.

O Death is around 65 minutes long and is in seven movements:

I) Chorus I The two chorus movements are the only movements not to feature the entire ensemble. Chorus I is scored for two tenor saxophones, trombone, slide-guitar and taped samples.

II) Bone Chapel is a memento mori. The title comes from the Bone Chapel in Evora, Portugal, an 18th Century chapel literally made from human bones. Above the door of the chapel is an inscription that reads:

“We bones that are here, for your bones we wait.”
Bone Chapel is based on the idea of a one-note solo, a common feature of many blues solos.

III) Take Leave of Carnal Vain Delight is a banjo-lead scherzo-macabre. The title comes from a 17th century English broadside, in which the character of death speaks to a young woman:

"...throw those costly robes aside,
No longer may you glory in your pride;
Take leave of carnal vain delight,
I'm come to summon you away this night."

IV) O Death is loosely based on the American folk-song of the same name. If the third movement was an invitation from the figure of death, this movement is the young person’s response, a few centuries later and several thousand miles away:

"O, Death!
How you’re treating me!
You’re closin’ my eyes so I can’t see.
Well, you’re hurtin’ my body,
You make me cold,
You run my life
Right out of my soul.

O Death! O Death!
Won’t you spare me over ’til another year?"

V) Chorus II is scored for 2 tenor saxophones, trombone, slide-guitar and flowerpots.

VI) I Believe I’m Sinking Down deals with memory. Alternating furious and serene sections coalesce with the use of a dictaphone playing back the previous loud section’s material during the moments of repose. Gradually both types of material are filtered out with the introduction of a kind of half-remembered clockwork. The title comes from Robert Johnson’s Crossroad Blues:

"You can run, tell my friend, poor Willie Brown,
Lord, that I’m standing at the crossroad, babe,
I believe I’m sinking down."

VII) Lights in Ashes begins with Jew’s Harps. This section gives way to a different type of clockwork: a slowly moving resonant unison. The movement owes its title to Sir Thomas Browne:

"Since our longest Sunne sets at right descensions, and makes but winter arches, and therefore it cannot be long before we lay down in darknesse, and have our lights in ashes."
About the Artists

KRIS ALLEN is a Lyell B. Clay Artist in Residence in Jazz Activities and Lecturer in Music at Williams College. An active saxophonist, composer, bandleader and recording artist, Allen is a member of the Truth Revolutions Recording Collective. Kris has performed and/or recorded with many living legends of jazz music, including Illinois Jacquet, Gerald Wilson, Curtis Fuller and Andy Gonzales, as well as with modern stars such as Helen Sung, Winard Harper, the Mingus Dynasty, and Mario Pavone. He performs nation and world-wide with his own quartet and as a sideman in the groups of Noah Baerman, Earl Macdonald, Jen Allen, Andy Jaffe, and Benje Daneman among others.

Guitarist JASON ENNIS is a musician with a unique sound, deep groove, sensitive feel and a diverse background in Jazz, Blues, Brazilian Music and Classical Music. A graduate of Middlebury College (BA in music), Jason attended Berklee College of Music (Boston) and The San Francisco Conservatory of Music.

He leads his own instrumental group, Trio Jota Sete and co-leads the world jazz trio, La Voz de Tres, which has toured extensively throughout the United States and Chile and has released two CDs: La Voz de Tres (2010) and Sueños y Delirios (2014). He is a member of The Thomas Bergeron Ensemble, whose May 2015 release, Sacred Feast, presents re-imaginings of selected works by French composer Olivier Messiaen and is a member of vocalist Michelle Walker's powerhouse blues project, Opus Bliss. He is co-composer and musical director for Natalia Bernal's En Diablada, an original music project inspired by Andean folkloric traditions.

Ennis is faculty member and is curriculum coordinator at Interplay Jazz in Woodstock, Vermont and has given workshops at colleges and Universities throughout the US and Chile. For the 2015-16 academic, Ennis is Lecturer in Music at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. For more information and a current listing of upcoming performances, please visit www.jasonennis.com.

MATTHEW GOLD is a percussionist in the New York based Talea Ensemble and a member of the Talujon percussion group. As a member of Talea he appears on festivals and programs across the U.S. and internationally presenting concert programs, master classes, and lectures. Mr. Gold is an instructor of percussion at Williams College where he directs the Williams Percussion Ensemble and the annual I/O Festival of New Music. He serves on the artistic staff of the Wellesley Composers Conference and the faculty of the Institute and Festival for Contemporary Performance at Mannes College. Mr. Gold performs frequently with such groups as the New York City Ballet and the Mark Morris Dance Group, and has performed with the New York Philharmonic on its "Philharmonic 360" program at the Park Avenue Armory.

Pianist DORIS STEVENSON has won lavish praise from critics and public alike in performances around the world. She has soloed with the Boston Pops, played at Carnegie Hall and Alice Tully Hall in New York, the Kennedy Center in Wahington D.C., Salle Pleyel in Paris, Sala de Musica Arango in Bogota, and Suntory Hall in Tokyo. Her acute sensitivity and musicianship have made her a sought-after partner with some of the leading lights in string playing. She has performed with Gregor Piatigorsky, Jascha Heifetz, Ruggiero Ricci and Paul Tortelier, great players of the
Committed to new music, she has performed the works of over 100 composers of the last century.

A native of Massachusetts, JOHN WHEELER has spent the last 25+ years as a freelance Trombonist based in NYC working, recording, and touring with some of music's most iconic and celebrated Grammy winning artists. Artists include: Aretha Franklin, Barry Manilow, Barry White, Bette Midler, Dolly Parton, Frank Sinatra Jr., Frankie Valli, George Benson, Glen Campbell, Janet Jackson, Johnny Mathis, Joni Mitchell, Julio Englasis, Kansas, Kenny Rogers, Lionel Richie, Liza Minnelli, Luther Vandros, Manhattan Transfer, Mariah Carey, Mel Torme, Natalie Cole, Ricky Martin, Roger Daltrey, Rosemary Clooney, Smokey Robinson, Spinal Tap, Fifth Dimension, Four Tops, Funk Brothers, Gypsy Kings, The Moody Blues, OJs, Spinners, Temptations, Tony Bennett, Wayne Newton, Will Smith, Yanni, and Yes.

Film and television credits include Analyze That, Last Days of Disco, Clifford’s Big Adventure, 24 Hour Woman, Bird, and the HBO series OZ.

NATHANIEL VILAS ’17 is a junior physics and music major at Williams. He studies piano under Doris Stevenson and plays in the Williams Jazz Ensemble and Williams Jazz Septet as well as, on occasion, in the Williams Percussion Ensemble and in various works for I/O. Also a bassoonist, he has been a member of the Berkshire Symphony for the past two years.