

Eighth Blackbird

Nina Shekhar: *ice 'n' SPICE* (2018)

Angélica Negrón: *Quimbombó* (2010)

Jonathan Bailey Holland: *The Clarity of Cold Air* (2013)

Holly Harrison: *Lobster Tales and Turtle Soup* (2016)

INTERMISSION

Jessie Marino: *Rot Blau* (2009)

Viet Cuong: *Electric Aroma* (2017)

Fjóla Evans: *Eroding* (2017)

Julius Eastman: *Stay On It* (1973)

Ice 'n' SPICE, *Electric Aroma*, and *Eroding* were commissioned by Jay and Elizabeth Schlichting for the Blackbird Creative Lab. *Lobster Tales and Turtle Soup* was commissioned for Eighth Blackbird by Musica Viva Australia with support from Geo6 Stearn and the Hildegard Project.

Eighth Blackbird

Nathalie Joachim, flutes
Michael Maccaferri, clarinets
Yvonne Lam, violin

Nick Photinos, cello
Matthew Duvall, percussion
Lisa Kaplan, piano

Eighth Blackbird is Ensemble-in-Residence at the University of Richmond. Nathalie Joachim is a Burkart Flutes & Piccolos artist. Michael J. Maccaferri is a D'Addario Woodwinds Artist. Matthew Duvall proudly endorses Pearl Drums and Adams Musical Instruments, Vic Firth Sticks and Mallets, Zildjian Cymbals, and Black Swamp Percussion Accessories. Lisa Kaplan is a Steinway Artist.

Program Notes:

Nina Shekhar: *ice 'n' SPICE* (2018)

Nina Shekhar (b. 1995) is a Michigan-based composer whose music explores the intersection of identity, vulnerability, love, and laughter. Her works have been performed by leading artists such as ETHEL, soprano Tony Arnold, Kaleidoscope Chamber Orchestra, and saxophonist Jan Berry Baker and have been featured by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, National Flute Association, North American Saxophone Alliance, I Care if You Listen, TUTTI Festival, Bowdoin International Music Festival, and New Music on the Point. She has also previously collaborated with the JACK Quartet, and her piece *Quirkhead*, about O.C.D. and mental illness, is scheduled to be featured in an upcoming PBS documentary. Current projects include a choral commission for The New York Virtuoso Singers, an electroacoustic commission for Third Angle New Music, a piece for Vanguard Reed Quintet, as well as performances at Carnegie Hall and National Sawdust. Nina is a recipient of the 2015 ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composer Award and a finalist in the 2017 and 2018 Morton Gould Awards. Aside from composing, Nina is also an accomplished flutist and pianist, including performances at the Poland International Piano Festival as a soloist with the Lublin Philharmonic and the Detroit International Jazz Festival as lead alto saxophonist with her jazz band. Nina completed her undergraduate studies at the University of Michigan, graduating *summa cum laude* with dual degrees in music composition and chemical engineering. About *ice 'n' SPICE*, Nina writes:

When I was younger, I remember eating my dad's chicken patties, which were loaded with green chilies and garam masala. My brother and I would then run to the freezer to fill our mouths with ice in a rash attempt to cool down the fire on our tongues. *ice 'n' SPICE* captures both the before and after aspects of this memory, contrasting fiery and explosive sections with frigid, sparse, and glassy textures. May everyone enjoy the spice of life, so long as we also remember to keep things cool! Many thanks to Eighth Blackbird, Jay and Elizabeth Schlichting, and everyone at the Blackbird Creative Lab for commissioning this piece.

Angélica Negrón: *Quimbombó* (2010)

Puerto Rican-born composer and multi-instrumentalist Angélica Negrón writes music for accordions, robotic instruments, toys and electronics as well as chamber ensembles and orchestras. Her music has been described as “wistfully idiosyncratic and contemplative” (WQXR/Q2) and “mesmerizing and affecting” (Feast of Music) while The New York Times noted her “capacity to surprise” and her “quirky approach to scoring”. Angélica has been commissioned by the Albany Symphony, Bang on a Can All-Stars, A Far Cry, MATA Festival, loadbang, The Playground Ensemble and the American Composers Orchestra, among others. Her music has been performed at the Kennedy Center, the Ecstatic Music Festival, EMPAC, Bang on a Can Marathon and the 2016 New York Philharmonic Biennial and her film scores have been heard numerous times at the Tribeca Film Festival. She has collaborated with artists like Sō Percussion, The Knights, Face the Music and NOVUS NY, among others and is a founding member of the electronic indie band Balún. Angélica is currently a doctoral candidate at The Graduate Center (CUNY), where she studies composition with Tania León and focuses on the work of Meredith Monk for her dissertation. She's a teaching artist for New York Philharmonic's Very Young Composers Program and Lincoln Center Education working with learners of all ages on creative composition projects. Angélica is currently an artist in residency at National Sawdust working on a lip sync opera titled Chimera for drag queen performers and chamber ensemble exploring the ideas of fantasy and illusion as well as the intricacies and complexities of identity.

She is the Composer-in-Residence for the Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra for their 2018-2019 season. About *Quimbombó*, Angelica writes:

Quimbombó evokes distant personal memories through a festive and celebratory perspective presenting and deconstructing different rhythms and melodic gestures from the Afro-Caribbean tradition of Puerto Rico. The title *Quimbombó* makes reference to the Puerto Rican stewed okra (a dish introduced to Puerto Rican cooking by African slaves) and also serves as an onomatopoeic reference to a distinctive rhythmic pattern persistently used in the composition. The work explores the percussive possibilities of the melodic instruments of the ensemble as well as the voices of the performers as an extension of their playing and as a direct reference to the vocal gestures of the dancers in the performance of bomba, which articulate the spiritual significance of this dance.

Jonathan Bailey Holland: *The Clarity of Cold Air* (2013)

Jonathan Bailey Holland's works have been commissioned and performed by numerous orchestras, including the Atlanta, Baltimore, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dallas, Detroit, Minnesota, and Philadelphia Symphony Orchestras, as well as numerous chamber groups and soloists. A recipient of a 2015 Fromm Foundation Commission, he has received honors from the American Academy of Arts & Letters, American Music Center, ASCAP, the Presser Foundation, and more. He has served as Composer-in-Residence for the Plymouth Music Series of Minnesota, Ritz Chamber Players, Detroit and South Bend Symphony Orchestras, and the Radius Ensemble. Recent highlights include the premiere of *Equality* for narrator and orchestra for the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, and the premiere of *Forged Sanctuaries* by Curtis on Tour, commissioned to commemorate the centennial of National Park Service. Holland is Chair of Composition, Theory and History at Boston Conservatory at Berklee, and Faculty Chair of the Music Composition Low Residency MFA at Vermont College of Fine Arts. Previously he served as Professor of Composition at the Berklee College of Music. About *The Clarity of Cold Air*, Jonathan writes:

Inspired by many a cold, Northern Midwest or New England day, this work is primarily atmospheric, focusing on the sonorities achieved by blending the instruments of the ensemble in various ways. There are many stark sounds - high, glassy harmonics from the strings, bowed metallic percussion instruments, harsh multi-phonics from the winds, airy cymbal rolls.

Holly Harrison: *Lobster Tales and Turtle Soup* (2016)

Holly Harrison is a young Australian composer whose music is driven by the nonsense literature of Lewis Carroll, embracing stylistic juxtapositions, the visceral energy of rock, and whimsical humour. Her work has been played extensively throughout Australia and the world by ensembles and artists including the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, the Cabrillo Festival Orchestra, Orkest de Ereprijs, Alarm Will Sound, Ensemble Offspring, Michael Kieran Harvey and Timothy Phillips, Caroline Cartens, and The Riot Ensemble, among many others. Holly was the inaugural winner of the both the Pyeongchon Arts Hall International Chamber Music Composition Competition with *Red Queen*, *White Queen*, *Alice* and the 2017 Sue W Chamber Music Composition Prize for her work for Eighth Blackbird, *Lobster Tales and Turtle Soup*, which featured on Eighth Blackbird's Australian tour as part of Musica Viva's 2017 International Concert Season. Holly currently teaches composition at MLC School, Burwood, Australia, and completed a Doctor of Creative Arts under the supervision of Bruce Crossman and John Encarnacao at Western Sydney University, where she is currently a sessional academic. *Lobster Tales and Turtle Soup* was commissioned

for Eighth Blackbird by Musica Viva Australia with support from Geo6 Stearn and the Hildegard Project. About the work, Holly writes:

The piece is inspired by chapters nine and ten of Lewis Carroll's nonsense book *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), 'The Mock Turtle's Story' and 'The Lobster Quadrille'. Along with Alice, the main characters in these chapters are the Gryphon and the Mock Turtle. Both creatures are composites of two animals: the Gryphon an amalgam of an eagle and a lion, the Mock Turtle a cow and a turtle. I see these chimera characters as a type of metaphor for the amalgam of musical styles in the piece; rock, jazz, metal, hip-hop, pop, blues and funk. The Gryphon and Mock Turtle scold Alice for imagined slights, tell long stories and sing long songs which never quite end, order her to recite poetry (which comes out all muddled!), and insist on her taking part in an unusual dance; the Lobster Quadrille. In capturing these happenings, I've set the piece with a type of stop-start momentum and spattering of rhythmic hiccups. The piece is split into four main sections, and there are four main melodic/rhythmic threads that continue throughout. These are woven across each other, intertwining at times, as well as appearing as discrete soundblocks, positioned side-by-side, and/or careening off into another direction/thread at the latest possible moment. These include: a blues-y piano and slap cello refrain – Alice's hurrah!; lyrical string lines and long glissandi, mirroring the exaggerated and 'mock' emotion of the Turtle's sad story and heavy sobs; funky bass lines with flashes of disco – a reimagining of the Lobster's Quadrille; and metal-inspired bursts of sounds with trashy cymbal stacks – the continual 'little arguments' and misunderstandings that take place. At the same time, these four ideas draw influence from the branches of arithmetic studied by the Mock Turtle: 'Ambition, Distraction, Uglification, and Derision'. These titles are, of course, a parody of the traditional branches, and together inform how I have approached the four sections in the way of tempo changes, time signature shifts, and the warping of phrases - though I won't say in which order they appear or which musical thread they relate to!

Jessie Marino: *Rot Blau* (2009)

Jessie Marino is a composer/performer/media artist from New York. Her current work explores the repetition inside common activities, ritualistic absurdities, and the archeology of nostalgic technologies. Her pieces score out sound, video, physical movements, lighting and staging which are then placed within organized temporal structures, fractured narratives and musical frameworks. Jessie is the Co-Founder of the experimental performance duo ON STRUCTURE and is Co-Artistic Director, Composer, and Cellist for the composer-performer collective Ensemble Pamplemousse. Her compositions have been performed internationally by groups such as Ensemble Pamplemousse (USA), SCENATET (DK), SoundInitiative (FR), We Spoke Percussion (UK), Line Upon Line Percussion (USA), Handwerk (DE), Ensemble Adapter (DE), Die Ordnung Der Dinge (DE), Zwerm Electric Guitar Quartet (BE), and Mocrep (USA). Jessie's work has recently been commissioned by Darmstadt Summer Course (DE), Borealis (NO), Kong Tomorrow (DK), Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival (UK), SPOR Festival (DK), Retro Disco, SCENATET Ensemble, We Spoke Percussion, and she was an Artist-in-Residence at the Headlands Foundation for the Arts (CA). About *Rot Blau*, Jesse writes:

Rot Blau is a tightly knit rhythmic duo which uses synchronized and mirrored upper body movements to create small vignettes which depict the exercises of two androids. The performers are outfitted with identical wigs, in red and blue respectively, and two toned (white + red or blue) gloves that have hard metal tacks on each of the finger tips. The performers execute their movements in unison, and as the vignettes progress, the performers switch their seating arrangement (first Player 1 sits on the left side, then moves to the right side), their wigs (first Player 1 wears blue, then switches to red) and eventually their gloves. By

the end of the piece, the two performers have completely switched over to the other players color scheme and position on the stage.

Viet Cuong: *Electric Aroma* (2017)

Called “alluring” and “wildly inventive” by *The New York Times*, Viet Cuong’s music has been performed on six continents by a number of soloists and ensembles including Sō Percussion, the PRISM Quartet, JACK Quartet, Sandbox Percussion, Cabrillo Festival Orchestra, Jacksonville Symphony, Albany Symphony, Gregory Oakes, and Mimi Stillman, in venues such as Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, International Double Reed Society Conference, US Navy Band International Saxophone Symposium, and Midwest Clinic. Viet’s awards include the ASCAP Morton Gould Award, Suzanne and Lee Ettelson Award, Theodore Presser Foundation Music Award, Cortona Prize, Walter Beeler Memorial Prize, Boston Guitarfest Competition, Dolce Suono Ensemble Competition, and Prix d’Été Competition. He also received honorable mentions in the Harvey Gaul Memorial Competition and two consecutive ASCAP/CBDNA Frederick Fennell Prizes. Viet has held artist residencies at Yaddo, Ucross, and the Atlantic Center for the Arts, and was a scholarship student at the Mizzou International Composers Festival, Blackbird Creative Lab, Copland House’s CULTIVATE Institute, and the Aspen and Bowdoin music festivals. Currently a Diploma student at the Curtis Institute and a Naumburg and Roger Sessions Doctoral Fellow at Princeton, he holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the Peabody Conservatory. About *Electric Aroma*, the composer writes:

Between painting, sculpting, and printmaking, Pablo Picasso found the time to write some very intriguing poetry. *Electric Aroma* was creatively sparked by a line he wrote on October 10, 1936 which reads “an electric aroma a most disagreeable noise.” By using electronic-inspired sounds such as buzzy snare drum and vibraphone effects, glitch-like flutter tonguing, and raucous multiphonics, the piece forces some disagreeable sounds to agree with each other as they are woven into a distorted tango-like romp. This piece was commissioned by Elizabeth and Justus Schlichting for the 2017 Blackbird Creative Laboratory.

Fjóra Evans: *Eroding* (2017)

Fjóra Evans is a Canadian/Icelandic composer and cellist. Her work explores the visceral physicality of sound while drawing inspiration from patterns of natural phenomena. Commissions and performances have come from musicians such as Bang on a Can All-Stars pianist Vicky Chow, Quince Contemporary Vocal Ensemble, and the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra. Her work has been featured on the MATA Festival, Bang on a Can Marathon, Ung Nordisk Musik, and the American Composers Orchestra’s SONiC Festival. She has studied composition with Julia Wolfe, cello performance with Matt Haimovitz, and completed a graduate degree in composition at the Yale School of Music in 2018. Fjóra is the 2017 winner of the Robert Fleming Prize—an award given by the Canada Council for the Arts to one composer annually. About *Eroding*, Fjóra writes:

Over thousands of years the glacial river Hvítá in Iceland has carved a deep gorge into the surrounding landscape. At one particular twist in the river, the erosion has left several huge pillars of hyaloclastite rock, which look as they were flung haphazardly into the riverbed. In fact they were revealed slowly over time from the process of the river carving away their surroundings. In *Eroding*, the players create a dense mass that gets worn down over time in order to reveal the spiky formations beneath the surface.

Julius Eastman: *Stay On It* (1973)

Julius Eastman (1940-1990) was a composer, singer, and pianist whose compositions drew from 20th century classical music as well as free jazz, improvisation, new wave rock, and disco. He grew up in Ithaca, NY, beginning piano lessons at 14, and later attended Ithaca College and the Curtis Institute of Music, where he graduated in 1963. In the late 60s Eastman was invited by composer-conductor Lukas Foss to join the Creative Associates, an ensemble based at SUNY Buffalo, where he also joined the music faculty. His time in Buffalo until the mid-70s was incredibly fruitful, touring with the ensemble and composing many of his famous early works for them such as *Thruway*, *Trumpet*, *Colors*, and *Stay On It*. He later moved to New York City, where he became part of the “downtown” New York scene through his own music and in collaboration with artists such as Meredith Monk, Arthur Russell, Peter Zunmo, and others. Eastman often wrote his music following what he called an “organic” principle, where each new section of a work contained all the information from previous sections, though sometimes removed. This principle is most evident in his three works for four pianos, *Evil Nigger*, *Crazy Nigger*, and *Gay Guerrilla*, all from around 1979. By the 1980s he was touring internationally, but struggled with a series of personal misfortunes which led to his premature death in 1990 at age 49.

Stay On It, one of Eastman’s best known works, is among the first to presage postminimalism and one of the first art music compositions inspired by pop music progressions. The work features an upbeat riff heard at the very start that permeates the majority of the work. This riff stays constant while being layered upon by additional notes and rhythms, later being spliced with silence, and at times becomes buried under other riffs trying to assert dominance or by howling glissandos trying to drown it out. After repeatedly reasserting itself it eventually subsides, introducing another slower, gentler riff that grows and fades, ending the work.

Eighth Blackbird

Eighth Blackbird, hailed as “one of the smartest, most dynamic contemporary classical ensembles on the planet” (Chicago Tribune), began in 1996 as a group of six entrepreneurial Oberlin Conservatory students and quickly became “a brand-name defined by adventure, vibrancy and quality” (Detroit Free Press). Over the course of more than two decades, Eighth Blackbird has continually pushed at the edges of what it means to be a contemporary chamber ensemble, presenting distinct programs in Chicago, nationally, and internationally, reaching audiences totaling tens of thousands. The sextet has commissioned and premiered hundreds of works by composers both established and emerging, and have perpetuated the creation of music with profound impact, such as Steve Reich’s *Double Sextet*, which went on to win the 2009 Pulitzer Prize. The ensemble’s extensive recording history, primarily with Chicago’s Cedille Records, has produced more than a dozen acclaimed albums and four Grammy Awards for Best Small Ensemble/Chamber Music Performance, most recently in 2016 for *Filament*. Longstanding collaborative relationships have led to performances with some of the most well-regarded classical artists of today from heralded performers like Dawn Upshaw and Jeremy Denk, to seminal composers like Philip Glass and Nico Muhly. In recent projects, Eighth Blackbird has joined forces with composers and performers who defy the persistent distinction between classical and nonclassical music, including works by The National’s Bryce Dessner and Arcade Fire’s Richard Reed Perry, and performances with Justin Vernon of Bon Iver, My Brightest Diamond frontwoman Shara Nova, Will Oldham aka Bonnie “Prince” Billy and Iarla Ó Lionáird of The Gloaming, among others.

Eighth Blackbird first gained wide recognition in 1998 as winners of the Concert Artists Guild Competition. Since 2000, the ensemble has called Chicago home, and has been committed to serving as both importer and exporter of world class artistic experiences to and from Chicago. A recent year-long pioneering residency at the Museum of Contemporary Art-Chicago, during which the ensemble served as a living installation with open rehearsals, performances, guest artists, and public talks, exemplified their stature as community influencers. Receiving the prestigious MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions, Chamber Music America's inaugural Visionary Award, and being named Musical America's 2017 Ensemble of the Year have supported Eighth Blackbird's position as a catalyst for innovation in the new music ecosystem of Chicago and beyond.

Eighth Blackbird's mission—moving music forward through innovative performance, advocating for new music by living composers, and creating a legacy of guiding an emerging generation of musicians — extends beyond recording and touring to curation and education. The ensemble served as Music Director of the 2009 Ojai Music Festival, has held residencies at the Curtis Institute of Music and at the University of Chicago, and holds an ongoing Ensemble-in-Residence position at the University of Richmond. In 2017, Eighth Blackbird launched its boldest initiative yet with the creation of Blackbird Creative Laboratory, an inclusive, two-week summer workshop and performance festival for performers and composers in Ojai, CA.

The members of Eighth Blackbird hail from the Great Lakes, Keystone, Golden, Empire and Bay states. The name "Eighth Blackbird" derives from the eighth stanza of Wallace Stevens's evocative, imagistic poem, Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird: "I know noble accents / And lucid, inescapable rhythms; / But I know, too, / That the blackbird is involved / In what I know."

Eighth Blackbird is managed by David Lieberman Artists and Paola Castellano.