



The Maurice Abravanel
Visiting Distinguished Composers Series

Paula Matthusen

Abravanel Distinguished Visiting Composer

SPLICE Ensemble

Thursday, September 21, 2023

Libby Gardner Concert Hall

Virtual Venue: <https://music.utah.edu/libby-live/index.php>

7:30 p.m.

Program

*(Please hold applause until the end of the program
and turn off all electronic devices that could disrupt the concert.)*

Kucha-lar (2018)

Bahar Royae

Motor Culture (2021)*

Steven L. Ricks

I. Hank's Drive Through the Multiverse

II. Blessed Mother of Acceleration

III. Disastrous Experiment

Intermission

Practicing Entanglements (2023)

Paula Matthusen

*Commissioned by the Barlow Endowment for Music Composition
at Brigham Young University for SPLICE Ensemble.

Biographies

SPLICE Ensemble is a pioneering musical trio acclaimed for its innovative fusion of traditional instruments with electronic elements. Hailed as a "sonic foodfight" by Jazz Weekly, the ensemble consists of Keith Kirchoff on piano, Adam Vidiksis on drums, and Sam Wells on trumpet. They collaborate closely with composers and performers on groundbreaking performance practice techniques that integrate electronics into a traditional performance space. Awarded a prestigious grant from Chamber Music America, the ensemble has commissioned a 25-minute composition from acclaimed composer Caroline Miller, and worked with over 50 composers to create new works. Their other collaborators include Dana Jessen, Paula Matthusen, Vicki Ray, Steve Ricks, Elainie Lillios, Jennifer Beattie, and Bahar Royae. They serve as the resident ensemble for both the SPLICE Institute and SPLICE Festival, and have been featured at a variety of prestigious venues, including M Woods in Beijing, SEAMUS, the Electroacoustic Barn Dance, SCI National, Electronic Music Midwest, Mammoth Cave National Park, and New Music Detroit's Strange Beautiful Music 10. Their recordings can be found on both the SEAMUS and Parma labels.

Born and raised in Iran, **Bahar Royae** is a composer of concert and incidental music. Her compositions are a mixture of timbral and sound-based atmospheric structures, interspersed with lyrical influences derived from her Iranian background. Her works have been performed worldwide, including Italy, Greece, Germany, Canada, Iran, and the USA.

Bahar was recently recognized as a runner-up in National Sawdust's 2018-19 Hildegard Competition. Other awards include the Roger Sessions Memorial Composition Award, Walter W. Harp Music & Society Award, John Bavicchi Memorial Prize, and the Korourian Electroacoustic Award. Bahar received her M.M. in composition from Boston Conservatory, where she studied with Marti Epstein and Felipe Lara, and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. from CUNY where she studies under Jason Eckardt and Suzanne Farrin.

Steven Ricks (b. 1969) is described in BBC Music Magazine as a composer "unafraid to tackle big themes." He creates work that is bold, innovative, ambitious, and diverse, and that often includes a strong narrative influence and theatrical flare. His music is performed and recorded by several leading artists and ensembles, including counterinduction (NY), New York New Music Ensemble, Canyonlands New Music Ensemble (SLC), Talujon Percussion (NY), Hexnut (Amsterdam, NE), Links Ensemble (Paris, FR), Manhattan String Quartet, Earplay (SF), NOVA Chamber Music Series (SLC), Empyrean Ensemble (SF), NY Metropolitan Opera soprano Jennifer Welch-Babidge, pianist Keith Kirchoff, guitarist Dan Lippel, flutist Carlton Vickers, and violinist Curtis Macomber.

Ricks has received commissions and awards from the Fromm Music Foundation, the Barlow Endowment, SCI, and Center for Latter-day Saint Arts, among others, and his music has been featured at multiple national and international conferences,

festivals, and symposia, including ICMC, SEAMUS, NYCEMF, ISIM, KISS (Kyma International Sound Symposium), Third Practice, Festival of New American Music, and TRANSIT (Leuven, BE). Recordings of his music appear on multiple labels, including New Focus Recordings, Bridge Records, Albany Records, pfMENTUM, Vox Novus, and Comprovis Records. Ricks received degrees in music composition from Brigham Young University (BM), the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (MM), the University of Utah (PhD), and a Certificate in Advanced Musical Studies (CAMS) from King's College London. He is a professor in the BYU School of Music where he teaches music theory and composition and is the Music Composition and Theory Division Coordinator (2016 to the present). He is former Editor of the Newsletter for the Society for Electro-Acoustic Music in the United States (2012-19), and was director of the BYU Electronic Music Studio for 20 years (2001-2021).

Paula Matthusen is a composer who writes both electroacoustic and acoustic music and realizes sound installations. She has written for diverse instrumentations, such as “run-on sentence of the pavement” for piano, ping-pong balls, and electronics, which Alex Ross of *The New Yorker* noted as being “entrancing”. Her work often considers discrepancies in musical space—real, imagined, and remembered. Awards include the Walter Hinrichsen Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a Fulbright Grant, two ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composers’ Awards, and the 2014 - 2015 Elliott Carter Rome Prize. Matthusen has also held residencies at MacDowell, Yaddo, Hambidge, ACRE, create@iEar at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, STEIM, the Atlantic Center for the Arts, VCCA, CMMAS, Konstepidemin, Copland House, Composers NOW Residency at Pocantico, the Hambidge Center, and Loghaven. Matthusen completed her Ph.D. at New York University – GSAS and has taught at Columbia University, the TU-Berlin (through DAAD), University at Buffalo as the Slee Visiting Professor, and Florida International University. Matthusen is currently Professor of Music at Wesleyan University. Matthusen’s work is available through Innova, Cantaloupe Music, New Amsterdam Records, AntiCausal Systems, Carrier Records, Quiet Design Records, and C.F. Peters.

Vocalist/Poet/Composer **Jennifer Beattie**, hailed by Opera News for her “exuberant voice and personality”, performs a wide range of vocal music from early to experimental. She collaborates as a poet/lyricist with classical, jazz and experimental composers, and co-creates works combining the mediums of visual & performance art, poetry, music, and theater. She has been a featured soloist with The National Opera Orchestra at the Kennedy Center, The Philadelphia Orchestra, Opera Philadelphia, NYC’s Park Avenue Armory, and at the Mozarteum in Salzburg. As a specialist in writing for the voice she has premiered more than 150 works written for her instrument, and has been a regular Artist-in-Residence with the college composers at Yale University since 2008. She is a member of SpacePants, a composer/performer duo with violist Diana Wade (Los Angeles) that plays an amplified 25-foot long drainage tube, and is a lecturer in voice at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, NC.

Program Notes

Kücha Lar is a reconstructing process of a deconstructed folk tune from Azerbaijan (North-West of Iran). It is an experimentation with ways in which the sound of each individual instrument can relate to and concurrently transform into an overarching electronic part, consisting of the sound of processed trumpet samples and other natural sounds. Later on in the work, all three of these source materials are altered so that the listener perceives an obvious connection between the three - giving the impression not only of three separate sound entities, but also of three different versions of the same organic matter. The tune says: "I sweep the dusts of the laneway, So it is empty of ashes when my beloved returns."

Motor Culture — In 2010 I was invited by my friend Ned McGowan to write a piece for his ensemble Hexnut as part of a project they initiated: WRENCH. It was inspired by the photography of Edward Burtynsky, and each composer involved wrote a piece that coordinated sound with one or more of Burtynsky's images. At the time I was drawn to two images related to Burtynsky's concept of "Motor Culture," that is, all the activities of taking from the earth and production that relate to the automobile, from oil drilling to car manufacturing to freeway systems and beyond. I've continued to think about how the automobile influences so many aspects of my life and decided to make this piece a poetic exploration of some of those facets. The first movement, "Hank's Drive Through the Multiverse," takes as inspiration a children's song by Pinto Colvig called "Honkety Hank," a song I used to listen to from an old vinyl single my Dad had. This playful inspiration is transformed into and/or pit against a more rigorous process of color and talea that provides the underlying structure for the piece. Ultimately, I picture a sort of surreal journey that juxtaposes the playful and idealistic view of going for a ride with the more problematic features and dangers of automobile travel.

The second movement, "Blessed Mother of Acceleration," steals a line from The Blues Brothers movie (which itself features a lot of driving and an epic car chase) to suggest the ability of cars to accelerate, but also the general "drive" or push to go faster, be better, advance in technology, etc. (cue Daft Punk's "Harder, Better, Faster, Stronger"). The constant pulse, driving rhythms, and propulsive electronics are pushing things forward in a way that suggests progress, but also perhaps has the spirit of getting out of control and heading for disaster.

The final movement, "Disastrous Experiment," is a somber reflection on the painful aspects of automobile violence, both intentional and accidental. *Motor Culture* was commissioned by the Barlow Endowment for Music Composition at Brigham Young University for SPLICE Ensemble and this is its premiere performance.

- Steve Ricks

The excerpts presented in this performance/lecture that form *Practicing Entanglements* represent a small selection of the work-in-progress *Weaving Resonances*, which is the outgrowth of nearly a decade long period of research and conversation with Mammoth Cave, its history, and the many people connected to it. This specific set of compositions marks the return of the SPLICE Ensemble (Keith Kirchoff, Adam Vidiksis, Sam Wells) and Jennifer Beattie to Mammoth Cave following a recording session originally completed in 2019. Hopefully this will be followed by yet other opportunities to interact with the cave and its numerous complexities.

We owe a great deal of thanks to Mammoth Cave National Park, and in particular to Rick Toomey, Brice Leech, Janet Bass Smith, and Jerry Bransford, whose conversations and research (if not literally their voices) make appearances in this collection. The collection will continue to be updated and revised.

Many thanks to Wesleyan University and their GiSOS Distinctive Project Grant, which provided invaluable support for this creative research.

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