BRITTANY BARRY, Clarinet

featuring JULIE NISHIMURA, piano

and JAMES KANG, viola

Blush for Solo Clarinet

Jean Ahn
(b.1976)

Still Here

Jonathan Russell
(b.1979)

I. Slow and stately
II. Scherzo
III. Lyrical and flowing
IV. Defiantly joyful

Julie Nishimura, piano

INTERMISSION

Black Birds, Red Hills

Libby Larsen
(b.1950)

I. Pedernal Hills
II. Black Rock
III. Red Hills and Sky
IV. A Black Bird with Snow-Covered Red Hills
V. Looking…

James Kang, viola
Julie Nishimura, piano

Concert Fantasia on Motives from ‘Rigoletto’

Luigi Bassi
(1833-1871)

Julia Nishimura, piano

GRADUATE DEGREE RECITAL
SUNDAY, APRIL 23, 2023 · 5:30 PM
GORE RECITAL HALL
**Blush for Solo Clarinet**

**(2010/2019)**

Jean Ahn

A native of Korea, Jean Ahn began her music studies in piano and composition at an early age. Her creative output includes works ranging from solo instruments and chamber music to full orchestra, as well as choral, dance, and electroacoustic music. She received First Prize at the Renée Fisher Competition and the Sejong Korean Music Competition. Ahn is the director of Ensemble ARI, whose mission is to share Korean history and culture with the community, and is a lecturer at UC Berkeley. She is also the music director for CHIM studio, providing music education for special needs students.

*Blush* was originally composed in 2010 for oboe, but never received a concert performance. In 2018 Ahn was approached for a commission by Dr. Wonkak Kim, concert clarinetist and professor of clarinet at the University of Oregon, and she adapted the work for clarinet. The piece evokes the essence of traditional Korean music, providing the performer a great deal of freedom in expressivity and execution of technique and phrasing, which creates an improvisatory effect. Ahn draws inspiration for the piece from a line of poetry by Ebenezer Elliot (1781-1849), “When daisies blush, and windflowers wet with dew…”

**Still Here**

**(2022)**

Jonathan Russell

Jonathan Russell, the child of musical parents, grew up in Poughkeepsie, NY. He began playing the clarinet at the age of 9 and composing in his early teens. Though he entered college at Harvard undecided, he ultimately committed to music and went on to complete master’s and doctoral degrees in composition at the San Francisco Conservatory and Princeton University, respectively. While he composes for a variety of instruments, he is passionate about the “extraordinary sound and spirit” of the bass clarinet and is a member of the Sqwonk bass clarinet duo. Russell is also the founder and leader of Improbable Beasts, a professional 15-member bass clarinet ensemble in the Boston area.

On the evening of February 25, 2022 Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky released a grainy selfie video on the streets of Kiev stating to the people of Ukraine and the world, “We are all here. The soldiers are here, the citizens, are here, and we are here… We defend our independence. Glory to our defenders, glory to Ukraine.” Inspired by this unifying and rallying statement in the face of unprovoked Russian aggression, Russell composed *Still Here* for all the marginalized groups and people that refuse, against all odds, to be destroyed or forgotten.

The first movement opens with clarinet alone singing a mournful, insistent melody before it is joined by piano. Both voices grow together in confidence and intensity before it ends quiet again, but defiant. The second movement is a scherzo with a klezmer-inspired middle section. Despite the heavy message behind the work, Russell writes this playful movement realizing an important
aspect of “Still Here” is proclaiming that we will not merely survive, but we will live fully and experience joy, love, and laughter despite our sorrows and oppression. Movement three is a nostalgic love song. A brief cadenza leads immediately into the final movement, a “rollicking klezmer tune” marked “defiantly joyful.” The movement revisits previous material before closing with the defiant opening theme at maximum volume.

Still Here was commissioned by a consortium of 52 clarinetists and I am excited to perform its Delaware premiere for you this evening.

Black Birds, Red Hills: A portrait of six paintings by Georgia O’Keeffe

Libby Larsen

(1987/1996)

Libby Larsen, a native of Wilmington, DE, is one of America’s most performed living composers. Her catalogue of over 500 works spans a variety of genres from vocal and chamber music to largescale orchestral works and over 15 operas. Larsen is a huge advocate for contemporary music and artists. In 1873 she co-founded the Minnesota Composers Forum, now the American Composer’s Forum, which serves to provide a connection between composers, musicians, and communities as an outlet for young composers to find venues to perform their compositions. Larsen’s music is heavily inspired by jazz and improvisatory music. She frequently writes for the clarinet as her father was an amateur clarinetist in a Dixieland band, so the instrument has always held a special place in her heart, hailing it as a “cultural vehicle in American music.”

Black Birds, Red Hills was inspired by the works of the great American painter Georgia O’Keeffe (1887-1986). The work was originally written for soprano, clarinet, and piano, but difficulty in securing rights to the text resulted in the revised edition for viola, clarinet, and piano. Larsen has described O’Keeffe’s style as lines that never go point-to-point, but flow infinitely and reveal beauty and meaning through the magnification of objects, specifically the horizon line, the black rock, and the black bird.

Movements I, III, and IV reflect the “V shape” of the hills outside O’Keeffe’s New Mexico home, which she described as the arms of two great hills which reach out to the sky and hold it like an abstract cradle. In movement II, Larsen likens the music to O’Keeffe’s image of the black rocks she found on her walks to the Glen Canyon dam. The artist was fascinated by the effect of time on the rocks and how it turned them into precious objects. The fourth movement flows immediately into the seven-measure fifth movement in a final moment of introspection. Listed below are the paintings which inspired each movement:

   Movement one: Pedernal and Red Hills, 1936
   Movement two: Black Rock with Blue Sky and White Clouds, 1972
   Movement three: Red and Orange Hills, 1938
   Red Hills and Sky, 1945
   Movement four: A Black Bird with Snow-Covered Red Hills, 1946
   Black Bird Series (In the Patio IX), 1950
Concert Fantasia on Motives from ‘Rigoletto’
(1865)

Luigi Bassi was a Romantic composer and clarinetist born in Cremona, Italy in 1833. He studied at the Milan Conservatory from 1846 to 1853 and was a much sought after performer. He joined the orchestra at the Teatro alla Scala, a famous opera house in Milan operating from 1778 to today, where he was principal clarinetist after composer and clarinetist Ernesto Cavallini left his post. In addition to his celebrated clarinet playing, Bassi composed nearly thirty works, including numerous works for clarinet. Most of these works belonged to the opera fantasy genre, popular in Italy at this time. Opera fantasy presents borrowed melodies from an opera, often elaborated through variation, presenting original cadenzas and newly composed material. This compositional technique served to showcase a composer’s creativity and the performer’s virtuosity.

Rigoletto, composed by Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901), premiered in Venice in 1851. It tells the story of a hunchback jester named Rigoletto in the court of the flirtatious Duke of Mantua. When the Duke is confronted for seducing Count Monterone’s daughter, Rigoletto responds with humiliation and malice on his behalf and the Count curses the two of them as harrested. Little does Rigoletto know that the Duke has also been courting his jester’s daughter, Gilda, who is abducted by courtiers. The next day the Duke is distraught catching wind of Gilda’s kidnapping, but the courtiers arrive boasting about their capture of Rigoletto’s ‘mistress,’ Delighted, the Duke hurries off to his conquest. Rigoletto arrives and is overcome with rage. He plots to take revenge on the Duke despite Gilda’s pleading for her lover. Rigoletto and Gilda visit an assassin for hire, Sparafucile, and while outside here the duke serenading Sparafucile’s sister, Maddalena. Gilda is devastated and agrees to flee disguised as a boy, but she returns and overhears Maddelena urge her brother to spare the Duke and kill Rigoletto instead. Sparafucile refuses but agrees to murder the next stranger who enters the inn to produce a body. Gilda decides to sacrifice herself for the Duke, knocks on the door and is stabbed. Rigoletto returns to claim the body, assuming it is the Duke’s Hearing his supposed victim singing in the distance, he frantically opens the sack to find his daughter, who dies asking for his forgiveness. Horrified, he remembers Monterone’s curse.

Bassi’s Concert Fantasia on Motives from ‘Rigoletto’ features the following selections from Verdi’s opera:

“Mio padre,” recitative by Gilda & Rigoletto
“Piangi, piangi fanciulla,” duet by Gilda and Rigoletto
“Bella figlia dell’amore,” quartet by Duke, Maddalena, Gilda, Rigoletto
“Caro nome che il mio cor,” aria by Gilda
“Scorrendo uniti remota via,” chorus
“Parmi veder le lagrime,” aria by Duke