J Holzen

Graduate Recital

Murray and Michele Allen Recital Hall
2330 North Halsted Street • Chicago
Program

Caroline Shaw (b. 1982)
limestone & felt (2012)

Lain Skow (he/him), marimba

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)
String Quartet No. 2 in C major, Op. 36 (1945)

I. Allegro calmo senza rigore

Shannon Mustard (she/her), violin
Hsuan Chen, violin
Georges Mefleh, viola

Kinan Azmeh (b. 1976)
The Fence, the Rooftop, and the Distant Sea (2017)

I. Prologue
II. Ammonite
III. Monologue
IV. Dance
V. Epilogue

Emily Hancock (she/her), clarinet

- Intermission-

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)
Cello Sonata No. 2, Op. 99 (1886)

I. Allegro vivace
II. Adagio affettuoso
III. Allegro passionato
IV. Allegro molto

Dr. Zachary Zwahlen, piano

J Holzen is from the studio of Brant Taylor. This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of the degree Bachelor of Music.

Masks must be worn at all times. As a courtesy to those around you, please silence all cell phones and other electronic devices. Flash photography is not permitted. Thank you.
Program Notes

Caroline Shaw (b. 1982)
limestone & felt (2012)
Duration: 6 minutes
Caroline Shaw is an American composer, producer, vocalist, and violinist. Her works draw from an impressive array of musical skills and experiences that range from composing for Yo-Yo Ma to producing for Rosalía. limestone & felt was originally written for viola and cello, and the ensemble New Morse Code premiered the version for marimba and cello that you will hear today. Shaw describes this piece, saying: “limestone & felt presents two kinds of surfaces – essentially hard and soft. These are materials that can suggest place (a cathedral apse, or the inside of a wool hat), stature, function, and – for me – sound (reverberant or muted).”

She begins the piece with repeated Ds, and explores the textures available to the cello and marimba. The immediacy and percussiveness of the cello pizzicato and snap pizzicato contrasts with the rounder marimba sound. The hockets from the opening fall away, leaving the cello plucking the repeated Ds alone before the marimba melody enters. The cello answers with pizzicato chords while the marimba plays a syncopated ostinato.

The sustained, chorale-like chords that begin the “limestone” section of the piece come as a relief after the syncopation and percussiveness of the opening “felt” texture. The silence between each chord draws attention to the resonance of the harmonies and reverberation in the performance space. The cello returns to playing pizzicato while the marimba plays a whimsical melody, and then the roles are switched. This section dissolves into a polyrhythmic rising gesture. In the next entrance, the marimba and cello repeat a winding, ringing, arpeggiated melody in canon, becoming softer and lighter with each statement. The piece concludes with a groovy coda and a “ballzy crescendo to the end.”

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)
String Quartet No. 2 in C major, Op. 36 (1945)
Duration: 9 minutes
Benjamin Britten was a prominent figure in 20th century English music and wrote a variety of vocal, orchestral, and chamber works. One of his most well-known pieces is The Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra, subtitled “Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Purcell.” Henry Purcell was an English composer in the Baroque period whose writing influenced many of Britten’s works, including his Second String Quartet.
The piece begins with a unison rising tenth that the viola sustains as a double stop. The spaciousness of this interval combined with the hazy effect of its resonance as a drone calls to mind the image of a foggy English countryside. The other three voices play an ancient-sounding melody in unison, speculated to be a reference to Purcell’s *Fantasia Upon One Note*. At the beginning of each phrase, a different part begins to drone a tenth, with the root rising by a fifth each time. The introduction concludes with each of the lower three voices sustaining a tenth with a different root. This creates a dense layer of sound from which the oscillating animato eighth notes emerge.

Throughout the movement, Britten moves between delicate flautando melodies, eerie sections without a discernible pulse, and moments of rhythmic angularity reminiscent of Russian composing in a similar time period. The movement closes with a return to the tenths of the opening, this time staying exclusively in the sonorous key of C Major. Harp-like cello chords and a final reference to the driving eighth note material from earlier on bring the movement to a close.

Kinan Azmeh (b. 1976)
The Fence, the Rooftop, and the Distant Sea (2017)
*Duration: 20 minutes*

Kinan Azmeh is a Syrian clarinetist and composer who regularly performs as a soloist and improviser. This piece was composed in 2017 for Azmeh to perform with Yo-Yo Ma. Azmeh writes, “A fence, a rooftop, and the distant sea were all present there facing my desk while I finished the piece in Beirut in December 2016. These elements were a reminder of how near my hometown of Damascus was yet how far it seemed after being away for 5 years.” This piece draws on elements of Western classical and Arabic music traditions to produce a captivating and character-filled performance.

The “Prologue” starts with a dark and mysterious clarinet cadenza, utilizing the entire range of the instrument, as well as quarter tones. The cello’s role in this movement is primarily accompanimental. “Ammonite” begins with a dissonant and chaotic introduction that features the clarinet and cello in heterophony. The introduction gives way to a persistent rising pattern. This ostinato continues while the cello takes a solo before rejoining the clarinet. The “Monologue” starts as a brooding and dramatic cello cadenza. The clarinet joins in the latter half with spooky horror movie-like chords, and the cello plays a high, wispy melody before the movement fades to black. The “Dance” begins with muted energy and an asymmetrical meter, building to a rock ‘n’ roll cello solo. The clarinet and cello switch roles, with the cello
taking on a ricochet ostinato while the clarinet takes a solo. The opening material returns, and the movement closes with the ostinato fading away. The “Epilogue” begins with melodic fragments and long silences interspersed between them. These fragments gradually expand into a homesick clarinet melody with a pizzicato accompaniment. The simplicity of this movement calls to mind Azmeh’s focus in this piece: “the most powerful memories are simple,” and he urges us to hold onto them.

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)
Cello Sonata No. 2, Op. 99 (1886)
Duration: 30 minutes
One of the staples of the cello repertoire is the Brahms F Major Cello Sonata. This piece is technically demanding for both musicians, but each part gets such beautiful, lush melodies that the wildly un-idiomatic sections are worth the work.

The first movement begins in the triumphant and exuberant key of F Major. Soaring melodies are passed between the cello and piano throughout the movement, and tremolo and bariolage techniques add a sense of energy bubbling underneath the surface, even in soft sections. The second movement is sweeter and more intimate, with a contrasting, darker middle section. The third movement starts off minor, foreboding, and angular before giving way to a lilting, major trio section. The fourth movement theme is joyous and effervescent. The piano and cello each have their turn at arpeggiated flourishes, and the movement ends with a sprint to the finish.

Notes by J Holzen
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