ROBERT MORRIS,
COMPOSITION

References and Allusions:
Music by Robert Morris
with guests I-Hsiang Chao, Kevin Lee Sun, and Daniel Brottman

Tuesday, February 1, 2022
Kilbourn Hall
7:30 PM
The four pieces on the concert are all composed by Robert Morris, professor of composition at the Eastman School of Music since 1980.

**Thirty-Nine Webern Variations** (2010)  
Robert Morris  
(b. 1943)

I-Hsiang Chao, piano

**Variations on the Variation of the Quadran Pavan and the Quadran Pavan by Bull and Byrd** (1974)

I-Hsiang Chao, piano  
Kevin Lee Sun, piano

**INTERMISSION**

**All Tonics** (2021)

Daniel Brottman, conductor  
*World Premiere*

**Canonic Minutes** (2006/2021)

Daniel Brottman, conductor  
*World Premiere*
The ideals of homage and tribute have been a part of concert music since the medieval music of 1300 and even earlier; composers have consciously written music that cites and quotes their peers’ and predecessors’ compositions, and certain specific musical forms such as the theme and variation and the parody mass serve this function. More generally, the various neo-classic movements in Western music (and especially 20th-century music) are borne out of the appreciation of earlier forms of music. Recently thinking about how my music relates to other music, I decided to present four pieces that make different forms of reference to compositions by me, John Bull, William Byrd, and Anton von Webern.
—Robert Morris

**Thirty-Nine Webern Variations** (2010)

*Thirty-Nine Webern Variations* is a series of 39 connected pieces that are variations on Webern’s *Variations for Piano, Opus 27* (1936). As in traditional variations, everything in my piece finds its source in the Webern; however, I do not compose variations on one theme or part of the Webern; rather, every passage in the Webern variation--from all of its three movements is employed subject to various degrees of transformation. Moreover, each of my 39 variations corresponds measure-for-measure to a section of the Webern. My variations are each character pieces--just as in traditional variations--except that many are joined together, *attacca*, to form longer continuities of music.
I imagine that the listener who knows the Webern composition will recognize its presence in more than half my sections and feel some sort of connection to it in most of the others. In this way, my composition establishes a bridge between my music and Webern’s—a gesture of homage on my part. This musical example of contextuality is inherent in the Webern itself, since opus 27, like other Webern pieces called Variations, has no theme marked as such, but is a series of sections that are transformations of each other, derived from the various presentations of its twelve-tone row. Or, from a traditional perspective, my piece could be said to use the parody technique of Renaissance music, in which whole swatches of one composition are used in another. This connection to sixteenth century music is not irrelevant to Webern, who received a doctorate in music for bringing out a modern edition of the Choralis Constantinus of Heinrich Issac (1445-1517).

The kinds of transformations that I use on the Webern Variations are expansions of the same as Webern himself employed. I use Webern’s row throughout and various serial compositional techniques most of which he has used in this or other works.

**Variations on the Variation of the Quadran Pavan and the Quadran Pavan by Bull and Byrd (1974)**

As the title indicates, this composition is based on three pieces found in the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book. John Bull's "The Quadran Pavan" is taken as the "theme" of this work and comprises the first sixteen measures. The "Variation of the Quadran" by the same composer and The "Quadran Pavan" by William Byrd are used as source material for the rest of the piece. The latter two pieces, while somewhat different in style, texture, and compositional strategy, are highly related in the domains of motivic identity and local gesture. This suggests that either Byrd or Bull composed his variations on that of his colleague. It is difficult to say whether this was a matter of homage or competition or a mixture of both. I have attempted, nevertheless, to connote the friendly bickering between the two pieces (and, by implication, the composers) by producing passages wherein corresponding parts of each piece are presented simultaneously. Thus, melodic and harmonic deviations are allowed to clash in a heterophonic manner.

In composing *Variations... by Byrd and Bull*, I chose to work exclusively with the source material and remain in the G mixolydian/ionian tonality. In addition to the technique of juxtaposition mentioned earlier, I subjected the sources to many diverse compositional operations (such as re-registration, multiple doublings, inversion and/or retrogression, sampling,
fragmentation, and the like) so that the piece’s shape and details would range in a continuum from quotation to complete alteration. The medium of the two piano duet seemed best for this work due to the spatial separation yet timbral identity of the instruments. Thus, spatial relationships (concertato techniques) and textural possibilities play an important role.

In sum, I wanted to comment musically on the relationships between the activities of transcription, arranging, editing, orchestration, making variations and composing. It can be easily shown that any of these activities have resulted in the acculturation of one style or another in the history of Western art or popular music. Indeed, the source material itself is the result of such activities. The aural result of these operations on a source subject in this piece involve the evocation of other musics beside Elizabethan keyboard music; there are references to the piano style of late Beethoven, the neo-classic Stravinsky, post-Webern "pointillism", French rococo and impressionistic styles, minimalism, and so on.

All Tonics (2021)

*All Tonics* for a chamber ensemble of 13 instruments has affinities with my 1973 composition, Not Lilacs, a quartet for jazz instruments. Not Lilacs was a breakthrough piece for me but its compositional surface is very different from *All Tonics*. The connection is to the ordered hexachord used in Not Lilacs, which has some deep structural properties, and can be registered as a very beautiful combination of tones. The way I used the hexachord produces 200 fragments of music which are sequenced produce a sort of timbral kaleidoscope. A different texture sets-off the timbral flux, in which the whole ensemble plays the hexachords vertically to produce something like arpeggiated chords.

I liked the title *All Tonics* because it describes the character of so-called atonal music in a positive way: not a series of dissonants, but a series of notes, each of which is its own tonic.

Technical note for those who are interested. I take the Not Lilacs hexachord and combine it in a matrix with eight versions of itself. Then these matrices are each divided into 25 parts producing 200 compositional units. The units can range from 2 to 36 notes. Each of these units are orchestrated into an eight-part ensemble derived from the 13 instruments. The parts are: flute/alto flute, oboe/English horn, clarinet/bass clarinet, bassoon, horn and piano, violins, viola, cello, and string bass. There are exactly as many unique combinations of the eight parts as matrices.
Canonical Minutes (2006/2021)

Canonical Minutes (sinfonia version) is an orchestration of my piece for pipe organ of the same name. The organ work was written in March 2006 as part of a larger composition, SOUND/PATH/FIELD, on commission from the Society for New Music to celebrate its thirty-fifth anniversary.

This new sinfonia version completely preserves the pitch structure of its predecessor based on a cycle of 29 notes that overlaps all twenty-nine of the tetrachordal harmonies available in the 12-note, equal-tempered system—each harmony occurring exactly once in the cycle. Each ordered tetrachord in the cycle becomes the subject of a canon, so the piece can be described as a series of 29 canons. The orchestration is designed to make each canon easy to hear.

MEET THE ARTISTS

Robert Morris

Robert Morris has taught at the Eastman School of Music since 1980. Morris has composed over 180 compositions (including computer, outdoor, and improvisational music), and written over 60 articles and four books on topics in music theory, music criticism, composition, and Indian music.

I-Hsiang Chao

Pianist I-Hsiang Chao is currently pursuing a Master of Music degree in piano performance and literature at the Eastman School of Music in the studio of Prof. Alexander Kobrin. Having completed his undergraduate studies also at the same school, he has been actively engaged in issues of contemporary musical discourse, performing regularly with the Eastman Musica Nova Ensemble for over five years under the direction of Brad Lubman, as well as collaborating with student and faculty composers. He is part of the newly founded Trio Cerchio, dedicated to promoting underrepresented repertoire in the 20th century and noted for the “warmth and color” of their interpretations. Previously, he has also had compositional guidance from Dr. David Liptak, Dr. Robert Morris, Dr. Carlos Sanchez-Gutierrez, and Dr. Ricardo Zohn-Muldoon.

I-Hsiang is originally from Hsinchu, Taiwan and began studying piano at the age of six, later composition; teachers he studied with in Taiwan include
Bai-Hui Guo, Ching-Wen Tao, Dr. Lina Yeh, Li-Chu Feng, and Dr. Gordon Shi-Wen Chin. He is grateful to have received tutelage in piano from many mentors in Eastman, including Dr. Douglas Humpherys and Prof. Vincent Lenti.

Kevin Lee Sun

With "probing seriousness" (Performing Arts Monterey Bay) and "a stunningly beautiful palette of colors" (Peninsula Reviews), pianist Kevin Lee Sun interprets music old and new. Since winning second prize at the 2011 Waring International Piano Competition, Sun has performed a diverse solo repertoire around the world, including works by Hanns Eisler at the Arnold Schönberg Center in Vienna, Janáček at the Banff Centre in Canada, Schubert at Pianofest in the Hamptons, and Hyo-shin Na at the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg. As a proponent of contemporary American composers’ works, Sun has performed pieces by Frederic Rzewski, Hyo-shin Na, Jeffrey Gao, Daniel De Togni, and many others as part of Stanford University’s New Music Ensemble, San Francisco Conservatory of Music’s Composition Department, and Thomas Schultz’s Summer Piano Seminar at Stanford. For his commitment to programming rarely heard and currently relevant music, Sun was named finalist for the 2021 Berlin Prize for Young Artists. Now a DMA candidate at the Eastman School of Music, Sun teaches University of Rochester and Eastman undergraduates in applied piano lessons and studies piano with Alexander Kobrin.

Daniel Brottman

Daniel Brottman is a conductor, hornist, pianist, and composer from Palatine, Illinois. As a conductor, he has performed with ÆPEX Contemporary Performance, OSSIA New Music, the Ann Arbor Camerata, as well as at the Bang on a Can and June in Buffalo summer festivals. He currently serves as pianist for the North Carolina-based new music ensemble earspace. Daniel holds degrees in horn performance from the Eastman School of Music and Northwestern University, as well as a composition degree from Eastman. As a hornist, he has performed with Alarm Will Sound, Ensemble Signal, the Slee Sinfonietta, and the Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra. His primary horn teachers were W. Peter Kurau, Gail Williams, and Jon Boen. Daniel's compositions have been performed by OSSIA New Music, Fifth House Ensemble, and members of the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE). Daniel has studied conducting at the University of Michigan and at the Eastman School of Music, in the studio of Brad Lubman. Currently, Daniel is training to teach mindfulness meditation.
UPCOMING EVENTS AT EASTMAN

Wednesday, February 2, 2022
Composers’ Concert
Kilbourn Hall, 7:30 PM
Free admission

Saturday, February 5, 2022
FACULTY ARTIST SERIES
Steve Doane and Friends
Kilbourn Hall, 7:30 PM
Free admission

Monday, February 7, 2022
Black Student Union:
Florence Price Legacy Concert
Kilbourn Hall, 7:30 PM
Free admission

Saturday, February 12, 2022
FACULTY ARTIST SERIES
Piano Collaborative
Kilbourn Hall, 7:30 PM
Free admission

We acknowledge with respect the Seneca Nation, known as the “Great Hill People” and “Keepers of the Western Door” of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. We take this opportunity to thank the people on whose ancestral lands the Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester currently occupies in Rochester, New York.

Information about upcoming Eastman concerts and events can be found at:
www.rochester.edu/Eastman/calendar
www.facebook.com/ConcertsAtEastman

Kilbourn Hall fire exits are located along the right and left sides, and at the back of the hall. In the event of an emergency, you will be notified by the stage manager. If notified, please move in a calm and orderly fashion to the nearest exit.

Please note: The use of unauthorized photographic and recording equipment is not allowed in this building. We reserve the right to ask anyone disrupting a performance to leave the hall.

Restrooms are located in the Wolk Atrium near the rear doors of Hatch Recital Hall. Fully-accessible restrooms are available on the first floor of the Eastman School. Our ushers will be happy to direct you to them.

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For Information on Eastman’s Centennial events and campaign, please visit