

Eastman Musica Nova

Brad Lubman,
conductor

Peiwen Zou and Yiran Zhao,
assistant conductors

Augusta Read Thomas,
Howard Hanson Visiting Composer

Friday, April 4, 2025

Kilbourn Hall

7:30 PM



EASTMAN
SCHOOL OF MUSIC
UNIVERSITY of ROCHESTER

~ PROGRAM ~

Eastman Musica Nova

Brad Lubman, *conductor*

Peiwen Zou and Yiran Zhao, *assistant conductors*

Carillon Sky (2005)

Augusta Read Thomas

(b. 1964)

8'

Leona Liu, *violin*

Peiwen Zou, *conductor*

éclat (1965)

Pierre Boulez

(1925-2016)

10'

Brad Lubman, *conductor*

~ INTERMISSION ~

Mémoriale (1985)

Pierre Boulez

5'

Andy Hanks, *flute*

Brad Lubman, *conductor*

Solstice Ritual (2024)

Augusta Read Thomas

20'

Brad Lubman, *conductor*

~ PROGRAM NOTES ~

Carillon Sky

The title *Carillon Sky* refers to a fantasized image that stimulated me to compose this music — that of a sky full of very soft tinkling and flickering bells, as well as very clamorous pealing, ringing, resonant bells, through which one floats. As if a Cathedral's Bell Tower becomes a metaphor for nature's ever changing landscape and the violin soloist is a distinctive bird soaring, interacting, circling and swirling in the resonance. The original working title for this composition was *Birds and Bells*, since there are many bird-like and bell sounds; but *Carillon Sky* seemed a more abstract and poetic title upon reflection.

The idea was to try to compose a mini violin concerto, but one that is in fact a “whole piece” — all packed into less than 8 minutes. This is like a miniature etching.

The solo violin part is marked with this performance indication: “*Passionate and rubato; like a jazz improvisation. Accentuate the variety of characters.*” Nine bars before the end of the work, there is an option for the soloist to compose and play a short (30 second) cadenza in the style and language of the composition. Trust for the skills and taste of the original soloist, Mr. Baird Dodge, inspired Augusta to allow this option, which recalls the great, deep-rooted tradition of players making cadenzas in concerti.

Made up of several phrases, some of which end on fermatas, the works characters include: majestic, playful, elegant, resonant, spirited, calmly floating, bold, with repose, resolute and graceful. The form is slightly unusual in that the phrases are of asymmetrical length. As if a “group of improvisers” takes the materials a little further “out” or “back in” (in the jazz sense of those words) with each successive phrase. The piece *accumulates* — rather than being in one of the standard forms, such as *ABA* form, or rondo form. The form is the best reaction to the objects calling it into being.

Great care was given to the selection of pitches and to the creation of the harmonic fields in this work. I LOVE harmony; and think of my harmonies (simple or rich) as a moving target within a moving target.

It was my intention to bring out much color from the 14-member ensemble.

In the soloist's part, as well as in the ensemble, there are imbedded, in any phrase, other sub-phrases. A kind imbedded-counterpoint emerges with two or three simultaneous lines. For instance, some of the music is made up of long notes and some of short figurations (trills and arabesques) and it is the connection of the two that I find interesting. I like to “write out” the trills because I hear them to have more than 2 notes, to be sporadic in rhythm, and thus, not to be just a simple trill. A highly nuanced figure, with a particular shape and inner life is more interesting to my ears. I use many grace notes. Another example of the imbedded counterpoints comes from the fact that the violin has many different colors, especially from range to range. The lowest register is rich, dark and haunting, while the very top range is trumpet-like, brilliant and shimmering. Springing back and forth between different registers, and with contrasting dynamics, gives the sensation that more than one voice is in play and that somehow the truth of the piece is in the crossways between the various intersections.

While the music was very carefully made, and is highly nuanced, and is a “serious” piece of music, it should sound free, spontaneous, resonant, jazzy, playful and alive.
- Augusta Read Thomas

éclat

Pierre Boulez composed *éclat* for 15 instruments with different reverberation times: from the longest sounding, the piano, to intermediates such as vibraphone, harp, cimbalom, etc., up to the mandolin. The listener can hear the fading of a chord, as one tone after another fades. Structurally these resonances are comprised of a harmonic framework — for example, if at the beginning, a piano chord is silently depressed and held by the third pedal, the chord is heard when you play one of the sounds of which it is composed; to its immediate “revival” when the staccato passage here reverberates the chord tones. As the other hand remains in a “hold pedal” legato line, once the pedal is lifted, the echoing overall sound is the chord in the background. The harmony is therefore never revealed directly, but results from complex interactions, by means of which it is revealed only subliminally.

Éclat, said Boulez, means first of all “splinter” or “fragment”. However, it can also mean “explosion” and “reflections of light.” These different meanings can be applied just as well to the form of the music as to its substance and poetic expression, and that is precisely what held such a great fascination for him; *Éclat* as the epitome of an experiment in listening, a positive aesthetic appeal. A bold spirit once compared the piece to the first stage of a rocket firing or to the beginning of a work that is still almost unwritten. The musical reality combines both approaches, the materialistic as well as the philosophical.

There is in fact an “explosion” in *éclat*. For the most part, it is the piano that provides the impulse here; the other instruments work with the “material” it introduces, always with a resolute, “flashing,” fragmentary gesture that gradually diffuses in dialogue. The instrumentation is mainly responsible for this tempering of the overall sound. Boulez divided the ensemble into two parts; first, there is the group of “soloists,” whose instruments need a resonator to sound: piano, celesta, cimbalom, glockenspiel, vibraphone, tubular bells, harp, mandolin, and guitar.

Juxtaposed is the group of instruments which can easily sustain a note: alto flute, English horn, trumpet, trombone, viola, and cello. The result of this ingenious combination is a crystalline sound that rejects the extremes of high and low register. *Eclat* is also an attempt to focus on the essence of the sound itself, on its variety and ability to modulate, thus reflecting the “controlled freedom” also advocated by Boulez in other works of this period, which allows the conductor of this music considerable latitude. In several passages he alone determines the order, which means that the interpreters must react quickly in order to be able to contribute to the *éclat* of the performance. Boulez countered any accusations that this meant the abdication of the composer with a dialectical distinction: the free dimension assumes “a super-competence on the part of the composer.”

The structure of *Éclat* seems clear: a glittering piano cadenza opens the sequence of sound events as the instruments play freely; this leads to a longer section in which excitement is generated by dynamically varied instrumental interactions and ends with a passage made up of a “wave” of trills. The fourth section consists of an exchange of ideas between the background instruments and the “soloists” initiated by a motif in the cello, which the other voices gradually take up and develop further. The piano again bursts into the midst of this stream of sound, thus causing another *éclat*, a discourse that ends happily, if you will: sparkling tutti at the close. The magic of harmony.

– **Thomas May**

Los Angeles Philharmonic program note

<https://www.hollywoodbowl.com/musicdb/pieces/317/eclat>

Mémoriale

Tracing the lineage of Pierre Boulez’ body of work can be like sleuthing through the tangled limbs of a person’s ancestry. Many works have evolved and mutated into various forms, and sometimes pollinated new works with new names. *Mémoriale* was seeded by the piece *...explosante-fixe...*, which Boulez composed in 1971 as a tribute to Igor Stravinsky (who had died in April). It was a simple text the composer submitted to the English music journal *Tempo*, which he included with instructions. “As is often the way, I was asked to prepare a realization myself,” he later said, “and when I tried simply to use my text and the formulae I had given I found myself compelled to enrich it, so that my version is infinitely more complex than the text which I sent to the journal. This is quite normal where the process of evolution is at work.”

He wanted the piece to move away from the “tiny society” created by the usual spatial proximity of chamber musicians. “The material is derived from a series of cells that are constantly permuted,” he explained, “with variations appropriate to each instrument. Each part is related to the others, but not directly through immediate coordination, rather by an oblique sort of coordination. The elements are the same, but they are broken up and elaborated in different ways.”

Explosante “permuted” from Boulez’s initial piece for clarinet, flute, and trumpet into a version for octet and electronics. There would be two more iterations for two different ensembles, but in 1985 a germ from *Explosante* took root in a new work entirely. During the early ’80s Boulez had enjoyed working with a young Canadian named Lawrence Beauregard, the principal flutist (“who was very eager to experiment”) for Ensemble InterContemporain, the contemporary chamber group founded by Boulez. Beauregard died in 1985 (at only 28), and Boulez took what began its life as a tribute to Stravinsky and reconceived it as a memorial for the flutist that would be a dynamic showcase for flute and octet, which premiered at a concert in Beauregard’s memory.

Yet it’s hardly a dirge. Boulez paid tribute to the young experimenter by creating a workout for the lungs and entire mouth, making frequent use of flutter tongue, tremolo, and other special effects. The flute – here exotic, sparse, alien – is given center stage, with its string and horn compatriots restrained by practice mutes and soft dynamics. The ragtag chamber ensemble flits, pecks, and scratches around the wandering, shivering, sputtering flute line. The piece takes a “puzzle” or “kaleidoscopic form” – terms Boulez gave to a kind of structure “in which the alternation of cumulative thematic developments creates the form,” he explained, “while constructing components of the global form on characteristics of tempo, density, and timbre.” Strained harmonies close in on warm tonality and then pull out again into a harsher climate. “It revolves around this E-flat and you don’t know if it’s a tonality or a gravity center,” notes French composer Marc-André Dalbavie (a student of Boulez). “It was a sort of post-tonal moment.”

— **Tim Greiving** is a film music journalist in Los Angeles.

Find him at timgreiving.com

<https://www.hollywoodbowl.com/musicdb/pieces/493/memoriale>

Solstice Ritual

Over the past forty-five years, I have composed many works whose titles point to natural and celestial radiance: galaxy, star, sun, earth, moon, sky, light, dawn, illumination, equinox, summer, etc. One central metaphor of my life’s creative work is that of light refracting. Of interest to me, for my work, is to build, sculpt, and compose clean, clear, transparent, translucent, luminous, radiant, shining, resounding, and resonant musical materials.

Solstice Ritual for 14 virtuosi shares many of these preoccupations. The two solstices happen in June (the 20th or 21st) and December (the 21st or 22nd). These are the days when the sun’s path in the sky is the farthest north or south from the Equator. A hemisphere’s winter solstice is the shortest day of each year, and its summer solstice the longest of each year. In the Northern Hemisphere the June solstice marks the start of summer: this is when the North Pole is tilted closest to the sun, and the sun’s rays are directly overhead at the Tropic of Cancer. The December solstice marks the start of winter: at this point the South Pole is tilted closest to the sun, and the sun’s rays are directly overhead at the Tropic of Capricorn. In the Southern Hemisphere, the seasons are reversed.

Cultures throughout the epochs, and in all corners of planet Earth, have performed a multitude of rituals to celebrate and mark the solstices. As I composed *Solstice Ritual*, in my mind’s ear and eye were sonic and visual images of fourteen musicians, a conductor, and dancers, performing outdoors (if feasible) during the precise moment of a solstice. For this reason, when it is also feasible, *Solstice Ritual* is to be performed with dancers. Although the score took most of its inspiration from the vivid illuminations and dazzling rays of the summer solstice, at times *Solstice Ritual* explores contrasting materials whose shadowy character may also suggest the relative absence of light that marks the winter solstice.

A related sonic and balletic image I had when composing this composition was that of a kaleidoscopically radiant light refracting with vibrant and multi-shaped energies in a constant state of transformation. The music's energy-flows vary and braid together musical materials that are blazing, , radiant, kinetic, ritualistic, resonant, lyrical, rhythmic, reflective, fiery, avid, dynamic, effervescent, and, at times, harmonically jazz-like. The resulting labyrinth of musical interrelationships showcases the world-class musicians of AXIOM and superstar conductor Jeffrey Milarsky. Importantly, *Solstice Ritual* was not conceived of as an ensemble piece. Rather, it is a score for fourteen highly virtuosic soloists.

Solstice Ritual also pays homage to the composers Edgard Varèse and Maurice Ravel, and it celebrates their imagination, joy, love, vitality, soul, energy, great chords and rich chord progressions, resonant orchestrations, tight big-band-like splash-chords, and the sheer beating-heart inner life of their music. I love all of their compositions and to give just two examples among many, Varèse's percussion writing and Ravel's gorgeous orchestrations have been longstanding sources of inspiration.

The eighteen-minute composition is in three parts played without a pause. The first part, "Reaching Skyward," unfolds bell-like fanfares—with outgrowths and transformations and lasts five minutes and thirty seconds. The second part, "Solstice Rites," consists of a series of shorter sections entitled "Drumming Ritual 1," "Bells Recap," "Cosmic Clock 1," "Drumming Ritual 2," and "Cosmic Clock 2." These sections last six minutes and thirty seconds. The third and concluding part, "Bell Prayers," lasts seven minutes.

Although my music is meticulously notated in every detail, I like it to sound like it was spontaneously invented—always in the act of becoming. The creative journey—not a predictable or fixed point of arrival—is, for me, essential. I dance while I compose, hoping that my music will feel organic and self-propelled. I work hard to ensure that my music too dances; I often create in my mind and ear imaginary flexible dances and ballets, poems, visual art doodles, lighting, or animations, and I love virtuosic performances that percolate and spiral with natural musicality. I draw maps of form and never follow them! Rather, I follow the music where it needs to go and then redraw the maps of form over and over and over.

Solstice Ritual is dedicated with admiration and gratitude to Jeffrey Milarsky and The Juilliard School.

- Augusta Read Thomas

The music of **Augusta Read Thomas** (b. 1964 in New York) is nuanced, majestic, elegant, capricious, lyrical, and colorful — "it is boldly considered music that celebrates the sound of the instruments and reaffirms the vitality of orchestral music" (Philadelphia Inquirer).

A composer featured on a Grammy winning CD by Chanticleer and Pulitzer Prize finalist, Thomas' impressive body of works "embodies unbridled passion and fierce poetry" (American Academy of Arts and Letters). The New Yorker magazine called her "a true virtuoso composer." Championed by such luminaries as Barenboim, Rostropovich, Boulez, Eschenbach, Salonen, Maazel, Ozawa, and Knussen, she rose early to the top of her profession. The American Academy of Arts and Letters described Thomas as "one of the most recognizable and widely loved figures in American Music."

She is a University Professor of Composition in Music and the College at The University of Chicago. Thomas was the longest-serving Mead Composer-in-Residence with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra for conductors Daniel Barenboim and Pierre Boulez (1997-2006). This residency culminated in the premiere of *Astral Cantic*, one of two finalists for the 2007 Pulitzer Prize in Music. During her residency, Thomas not only premiered nine commissioned orchestral works, but was also central in establishing the thriving MusicNOW series, through which she commissioned and programmed the work of many living composers. For the 2017-2018 concert season, Thomas was the Composer-in-Residence with the Eugene Symphony Orchestra, while Francesco Lecce-Chong served as Music Director and Scott Freck as Executive Director. Thomas was MUSICALIVE Composer-in-Residence with the New Haven Symphony, a national residency program of The League of American Orchestras and Meet the Composer.

Thomas won the Ernst von Siemens Music Prize, among many other coveted awards. She is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Thomas was named the 2016 Chicagoan of the Year.

In 2016, Augusta Read Thomas founded the University of Chicago's Center for Contemporary Composition, which is a dynamic, collaborative, and interdisciplinary environment for the creation, performance and study of new music and for the advancement of the careers of emerging and established composers, performers, and scholars. Distinguished by its formation within an uncompromising, relentlessly searching, and ceaselessly innovative scholarly environment, which celebrates excellence and presents new possibilities for intellectual dialogue, the Center comprises ten integrated entities: annual concert series featuring the Grossman Ensemble, CHIME, visiting ensembles, distinguished guest composers, performances, recordings, research, student-led projects, workshops and postdoctoral fellowships. Not only is Thomas one of the most active composers in the world, but she is a long-standing, exemplary citizen with an extensive history of being deeply committed to her community. She is the former Chairperson for the American Music Center; Vice President for Music, The American Academy of Arts and Letters; and Member of the Conseil Musical de la Fondation Prince Pierre de Monaco.

In February 2015, music critic Edward Reichel wrote, "Augusta Read Thomas has secured for herself a permanent place in the pantheon of American composers of the 20th and 21st centuries. She is without question one of the best and most important composers that this country has today. Her music has substance and depth and a sense of purpose. She has a lot to say and she knows how to say it — and say it in a way that is intelligent yet appealing and sophisticated."

Recent and upcoming commissions include those from the Santa Fe Opera in collaboration with the San Francisco Opera and other opera companies, PEAK Performances at Montclair State University and the Martha Graham Dance Company, The Cathedral Choral Society of Washington D.C., The Indianapolis Symphony, Tanglewood, The Kaleidoscope Chamber Orchestra, Des Moines Symphony, Boston Symphony, the Utah Symphony, Wigmore Hall in London, JACK quartet, Third Coast Percussion, Spektral Quartet, Chicago Philharmonic, Eugene Symphony, the Danish Chamber Players, Notre Dame University, Janet Sung, Lorelei Vocal Ensemble, and the Fromm Foundation.

Thomas has the distinction of having her work performed more frequently in 2013-2014 than any other living ASCAP composer, according to statistics from the performing rights organization (New York Times). Her discography includes 90 commercially recorded CDs.

~ **PERSONNEL** ~
Eastman Musica Nova

Flute

Andy Hanks
Honor Hickman

Oboe

Ernest Chau

Clarinet

Eliza Reimold

Horn

Amelia Caruk
Nicole Keller

Trumpet

Benjamin Kim

Trombone

Xin Chen

Percussion

Brandon Berlanga
John Dawson
Sammy DeAngelis
Andrew Lauler
Cass Lo
Michael Smith
Irene Yang

Keyboard

Irene Huang
Ko Muramatsu
Yikai Yin

Harp

Sunshine Quan

Violin

Jingxuan Hu
Leona Liu
Zihua Ma
Ciara McGuire
Madison Oh

Viola

Anna Denfeld
Sujin Kim

Violoncello

Alex Englehardt
Aaron Lieberman

Guitar

Zhen Liu

Mandolin

Ken Luk, *guest artist*

Cimbalom

Nick Tolle, *guest artist*



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