

— Department of Music Presents —

MUSIC

The Universal Connection

Davenport Residency:

**ELIZABETH BROWN AND
MOMENTA QUARTET**

Studley Theatre

Tuesday, April 25

7:30 p.m.

ELIZABETH BROWN AND MOMENTA QUARTET

Program

Field Guide to the Moon
for shakuhachi and cello (2023)

Elizabeth Brown
(b. 1953)

- I. Telescope*
- II. Sleepwalking*
- III. Topography*
- IV. Satellite*

*world premiere

Just Visible In The Distance
for string quartet (2013)

Elizabeth Brown

- I. Slowly Toward the North – Glimpse – A Halo for ADDA – Harmony, no Protagonist - Slowly Toward the North*
- II. Through a Barren Landscape – Harmony – Respite – Aria – Harmony, no Protagonist*

Piranesi for theremin, string quartet,
and video by Lothar Osterburg (2007)

Elizabeth Brown

INTERMISSION

String Quartet No. 1 (1903)
(1875-1965)

Julián Carrillo

- I. Maestoso- Allegretto*
- II. Allegro*
- III. Largo*
- IV. Maestoso- Allegro con fuoco*

Program Notes

This year's Davenport Residency is a collaboration between composer/performer Elizabeth Brown and the Momenta Quartet. Their relationship goes back many years and includes many performances and world premieres of Brown's works, as well as sharing the stage with Brown performing on flute, shakuhachi, and theremin. The first half of the concert will consist of three works by Brown, including a world premiere. The second half will be Momenta Quartet alone, presenting a work from their unique repertoire in what is undoubtedly a New Paltz premiere of Julián Carrillo's First String Quartet.

Elizabeth Brown writes:

Field Guide to the Moon, for shakuhachi and cello, is a group of brief stream-of-consciousness pieces played without pause. It is dedicated to the memory of Renate Heller (1947-2023), who explored all the oceans of the world with wonder. This will be the world premiere performance of this work for a combination of Western and Japanese instruments.

Just Visible in the Distance, for string quartet, consists of intuitively assembled small movements, each flowing into the next. Persistent musical material from some of my earlier pieces resurfaces often. The title is from W. G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn*, a book I love and have read many times. This quartet was written for, and is dedicated to, the Momenta Quartet.

Piranesi, the 3rd collaboration between Lothar Osterburg and Elizabeth Brown, is inspired by the dramatic, exaggerated architectural world created by Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778) in his *Carceri*, or imaginary prisons. One of the masterpieces of printmaking, the *Carceri* are notable for being issued in two states: initially in 1744 when Piranesi was 24, then again 17 years later, in a heavily worked, dramatically darker version;

these two states give the viewer a unique insight into the creative mind and working process of the artist. In his homage to Piranesi, Osterburg uses stop-motion animation to capture the many stages in his own unique artistic process, from the initial conception to the completion of a photogravure, his printmaking specialty. Osterburg and Piranesi, who share an October 4th birthday, both combine a unique artistic vision with an outstanding technical expertise in etching. Brown combines string quartet, with its long history in western culture, with the wild card of the theremin!

Michael Haas (cellist), writes:

Julián Carrillo is a largely overlooked Mexican composer who was revered by European avant-garde circles of the 1960s and 70s for his pioneering use of microtonality. He called this system El Sonido 13 (“The Thirteenth Sound”), and began composing works exploring quarter-tones and other microtonal intervals as early as the 1920s. He published his article “Theory of the Thirteenth Sound” in 1923 and even created new instruments to play this music, including guitars with quarter-tone fret boards and a microtonal harp with strings tuned for every 16th of a tone. Interest in his ideas spread abroad, including to the U.S. where he had premieres at Carnegie Hall and by the Philadelphia Orchestra under Leopold Stokowski. Despite this early support, his music is rarely performed today. Much remains unpublished and unperformed. Harvard musicologist Alejandro Madrid, author of the 2015 book *In Search of Julián Carrillo and Sonido 13*, is responsible for cataloging the handwritten manuscripts of the thirteen string quartets, and working with Momenta Quartet to transcribe and record the complete set which will be released by Naxos Records.

While Carrillo’s later life was greatly focused on microtonal music, he began his musical career firmly grounded in the western classical tradition. After graduating from the National Conservatory in Mexico City, he went to study in Paris, Leipzig, and eventually Belgium where he was a violin pupil of Eugène Ysaÿe. He composed in traditional genres including symphonies,

sonatas, and string quartets. The thirteen quartets cover a wide range of styles and follow Carrillo's compositional development throughout his life, from tonal classical-inspired works, to atonal works composed in modes of his own creation, to his later microtonal system.

Carrillo's String Quartet No. 1 is written in a grand romantic style, with the opening chords reminiscent of Beethoven's String Quartet Op. 127. While its harmonic language is and four-movement form is quite traditional, Carrillo expresses his experimental and curious nature through its thematic development. The work is cyclic, with the opening music returning at the end of the piece. But furthering this idea, Carrillo uses and reworks this thematic material into every movement of the piece.

Alejandro Madrid writes:

"All the themes and secondary motives throughout String Quartet No. 1 derive from the same original source. This is a radicalization of Liszt's idea of thematic transformation... [giving] the quartet an intense sense of unity but also an uncanny, almost minimalist character... [It] exemplifies Carrillo's thorough mastery of counterpoint but also shows the powerful interplay of his intellectual concerns and creative strengths."

Artist Bios

Elizabeth Brown combines a composing career with a diverse performing life, playing flute, shakuhachi, and theremin in a wide variety of musical circles. Her chamber music, shaped by this unique group of instruments and experiences, has been called luminous, dreamlike and hallucinatory.

Brown's music has been heard in Japan, Russia, Colombia, Australia, South Africa and Vietnam as well as across the US and Europe. A Guggenheim Fellowship recipient and Juilliard graduate, she has received grants, awards and commissions from Orpheus, St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble, the Barlow Foundation, the Asian Cultural Council, the Japan/US Friendship Commission, Music from Japan, the Electronic Music Foundation, Bravo! Vail Valley Music Festival, the Cary Trust, and NYFA, among others. She has two solo CDs: *Elizabeth Brown: Mirage* (New World) and *Blue Minor: Chamber Music by Elizabeth Brown* (Albany), and her music is also available on CRI, Innova, and Music and Arts. She has been Artist-in-Residence at the Hanoi National Conservatory and in Grand Canyon National Park, and a fellow at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Center in Italy and at the MacDowell Colony.

Recent activities include performing as thereminist with the Boston Symphony, playing flute with the New York City Ballet Orchestra, and appearing across Japan and the U.S. with her trio of two shakuhachi and ichigenkin (one-string koto). She premiered her shakuhachi solo *Dialect* at the World Shakuhachi Festival 2018 in London; her music has also been featured at shakuhachi festivals in Kyoto, Prague, Sydney, and New York City.

Brown began studying shakuhachi in 1982 and its music has been a major influence on her musical language. She is celebrated both here and in Japan for her compositions combining eastern and western sensibilities.

Since winning grand prize in the Makino Yutaka Composition Competition as well as a prize in the Senzoku Gakuen Shakuhachi Composition Competition, her music has performed in Japan by Pro Musica Nipponia, Reigakusha, and Orchestra Asia. She writes extensively for Japanese traditional instruments.

Other notable pieces include *Arcana*, for flute and recorded sound; Brown's chamber opera *Rural Electrification*, for theremin, voice, and recorded sound; ongoing collaborations with artist Lothar Osterburg such as *Piranesi*, for theremin, string quartet, and video, and *A Bookmobile for Dreamers*, a forty-minute performance for theremin, recorded sound, and video; the installation *Collected Visions*, a collaboration with photographer Lorie Novak; *Delirium*, *Archipelago*, and *Seahorse*, all featuring the original microtonal instruments of American composer/inventor Harry Partch; and numerous pieces for the *Momenta Quartet*, with whom she has an ongoing relationship. Her flute music is performed worldwide.

Brown was born in 1953 in Camden, Alabama, where she grew up on an agricultural research station. After receiving a Master's degree in flute performance from The Juilliard School in 1977, she started composing in the late 1970's. Brown teaches shakuhachi at Columbia University and Bard College, and teaches theremin at Bard as well. She is married to visual artist Lothar Osterburg.

Momenta: the plural of momentum – four individuals in motion towards a common goal. This is the idea behind the Momenta Quartet, whose eclectic vision encompasses contemporary music of all aesthetic backgrounds alongside great music from the recent and distant past. The New York City-based quartet has premiered over 200 works, collaborated with over 250 living composers and was praised by The New York Times for its “diligence, curiosity and excellence.” In the words of The New Yorker’s Alex Ross, “few American players assume Haydn’s idiom with such ease.”

Momenta’s educational-performing circuit includes Binghamton, Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Harvard, Hawaii Pacific, Michigan State, New York, Temple, Tufts, Washington and Yeshiva Universities; Bard, Barnard, Bates, Haverford, Hunter, Ithaca, Lehman and Williams Colleges; and Boston, Cincinnati, Eastman and Mannes conservatories. Momenta has received two Koussevitzky Foundation commission grants, for Malaysian composer Kee Yong Chong in 2009 and for Bolivian composer Agustín Fernández in 2011; a Barlow Foundation commission for Claude Baker in 2016; a Jerome Foundation grant to commission Eric Nathan in 2013; and a Chamber Music America commission for Alvin Singleton, whose resulting work *Hallelujah Anyhow* (2019) is featured prominently in Momenta’s repertoire. Deeply committed to the musical avant-garde of the developing world, Momenta has premiered and championed the works of Tony Prabowo (Indonesia), Cergio Prudencio (Bolivia) and Hana Ajiashvili (Georgia); has collaborated with numerous gamelan ensembles; and in 2018, was brought by the U.S. Department of State and U.S. Embassy La Paz to Cochabamba, Bolivia for new-music concerts and a teaching-performing residency at the Instituto Laredo.

Momenta has appeared at such prestigious venues as the Library of Congress, National Gallery of Art, the Smithsonian’s Freer Gallery, Rubin Museum, Miller Theatre at Columbia University, the Princeton Institute for Advanced Study, Chamber Music Cincinnati, and the Louisville and Philadelphia Chamber Music Societies. Festival credits include the renowned Cervantino Festival in Mexico; MATA; Music from Japan; Ostrava

Days in the Czech Republic; RED NOTE New Music; the Smithsonian's "Performing Indonesia"; the Yellow Barn Artist Residency; and since 2015, the quartet's own annual member-curated Momenta Festival in New York City, featuring world premieres and samplings from Momenta's unique personal repertoire.

Momenta has recorded for the Albany, Bridge, Centaur, Furious Artisans, Innova, Navona, New Focus, New World and PARMA labels; and has been broadcast on WQXR, Q2 Music, Austria's Oe1 and Vermont Public Radio. Upcoming recording adventures include a project to perform and record all thirteen string quartets by Mexican microtonal maverick Julián Carrillo (1875-1965) and an American album featuring diverse works by Elizabeth Brown, Jason Hwang, Shawn Jaeger, Yusef Lateef, and Roberto Sierra.

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