Chick Corea and Béla Fleck 10.3.15 at 8:00 p.m.
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CANDLER CONCERT SERIES
2015/2016
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CONRAD TAO, PIANO
Friday, October 16, 8:00 p.m.
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CONRAD TAO, PIANO

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2015, 8:00 P.M.

This program is made possible by a generous gift from the late Flora Glenn Candler, a friend and patron of music at Emory University.
PROGRAM

cage  
David Lang  
(b. 1957)

Toccata in F-sharp Minor, BWV 910  
Johann Sebastian Bach  
(1685–1750)

Two Thoughts about the Piano  
I. Intermittences  
II. Caténaires  
Elliott Carter  
(1908–2012)

Earring  
Julia Wolfe  
(b. 1958)

Études-Tableaux in A Minor, op. 39, No. 2  
Sergei Rachmaninoff  
(1873–1943)

wed  
Lang

—INTERMISSION—

Pictures at an Exhibition  
Promenade  
1. Gnomus  
2. Il vecchio castello  
3. Tuileries  
4. Bydlo  
5. The Ballet of Unhatched Chicks in Their Shells  
6. Samuel Goldberg und Schmuyle  
7. Limoges  
8. Catacombe  
9. The Hut on Fowl’s Legs  
10. The Great Gate of Kiev  
Modest Mussorgsky  
(1839–1881)

Program is subject to change.

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cage and wed from memory pieces

Born in Los Angeles, David Lang was named Musical America’s 2013 Composer of the Year and recipient of Carnegie Hall’s Debs Composer’s Chair for 2013–2014. A prolific composer, his body of work spans all genres. His opera, orchestra, chamber, and solo works are various, embracing the ominous, ethereal, passionate, urgent, hypnotic, and unsettling. Many are emotionally direct. Critics have noted that much of his work expands the definition of virtuosity because even deceptively simple pieces can be extremely difficult to perform and require the musicians and their audiences to give them intense concentration. “There is no name yet for this kind of music,” wrote Los Angeles Times music critic Mark Swed of Lang’s work. His music binds together the classical music tradition with a sense of the contemporary and urban with its melodies that are often accompanied by noise and its harmonies that are pulled apart by pounding rhythms.

Lang’s cage, composed in 1992, is the first of his eight memory pieces; wed is the third. Each, around five minutes long, is dedicated to a specific person. The composer John Cage is the dedicatee of cage. A young conceptual artist, Kate Ericson is the dedicatee of wed. Ericson and her husband were married in a hospital room as she was dying of brain cancer. In his writing about memory pieces, Lang shares:

One of the horrifying things about growing older is that your friends don’t all grow older with you. People grow sick and then they die. You watch, you try to comfort them, and then you try to comfort yourself. The true horror is that after a while your memories begin to fade. How long can you hold on to the sound of a voice, the memory of a strange event, a bittersweet feeling, a silly story?

I was friends with all the dedicatees of the enclosed set of pieces—some were closer friends than others—and I have very personal memories of my dealings with them that I don’t want to fade. Each of these little pieces highlights some aspect of my relationship with each friend. I hope this will help me hold on to these memories just a little while longer.

There are a few ways to approach these pieces. In one respect they are inventions, each an intellectual and philosophical exploration of one distinct, mechanical way to make music. They are also little etudes, as each one highlights a different technical concern, such as overlapping arpeggios
(spartan arcs), polyrhythmic counterpoint (wed), or strange cross-hands (cello). The way I choose to look at them is as laboratories for larger works. If I can incorporate the music or the ideas or the techniques of these little pieces into other works, then I am in some way keeping something of my friendship alive.

I would like to thank the different pianists who have either premiered one or more of these works or who have offered advice about how to edit or present these pieces—David Arden, Carlo Boccadoro, Anthony de Mare, Moritz Eggert, and Lisa Moore. Most of all I want to thank Yvar Mikhashoff—I was writing Yvar a piece when John Cage died (August 12, 1992). I put that piece aside and wrote cage, which Yvar then played several times. Yvar was already ill then and it was his idea that I write a series of memorial pieces. If there is any one person to whom this entire set should be dedicated it is Yvar.

**Toccata in F-sharp Minor, BWV 910**

In the seventeenth century, toccata was widely used as the name for virtuosic keyboard pieces. Bach carried this usage into the eighteenth century. He wrote two toccatas for organ as showy introductions to fugues, and composed more than a half dozen of them as harpsichord pieces. This one, belonging to a group of early works, was probably written in 1712, and is not well-known. It was not published until 1853. Bach’s virtuosic and rhapsodic harpsichord toccatas are often performed as today on the piano.

The Toccata in F-sharp Minor is memorable for what has been described as the “arch” shape of its four movements and its unusual key for Bach’s era. It opens with a bravura flourish then unfolds an expressive adagio marked by a descending chromatic figure. A fugue in rapid, detached toccata style follows, leading via improvisatory “deconstruction” to a 6/8 fugue finale capped by a closing flourish.

**Two Thoughts about the Piano**

The pieces comprising Two Thoughts about the Piano were written in 2007, when Carter was ninety-nine. Approaching his one hundredth birthday, Carter remarked, “I finally have done all my adventures and great big noisy pieces. Now I write simple ones.” Two Thoughts about the Piano was co-commissioned by the Carnegie Hall Corporation and the Gilmore International Keyboard Festival.
A chapter of Marcel Proust’s novel *Les intermittences du coeur* inspired the atonal, dissonant *Intermittences*. Carter wrote “the many meanings silences can express in musical discourse challenged me to use some of them in *Intermittences* . . . a short work that also uses many different piano sounds to convey its expressive meanings.” The mood changes quickly in this work, which uses the sostenuto pedal frequently to sustain particular notes in the contrapuntal texture and to underline complex rhythmic relationships. The work, which musically examines contrasts or differences, has been described as wistful.

*Caténaires*, which is briefer and more frenetic than *Intermittences*, reflects the image of a catenary, or the curve that a hanging chain creates with its own weight. Carter explained that he “became obsessed with the idea of a fast one-line piece with no chords. It became a continuous chain of notes using different spacings, accents, and colorings to produce a wide variety of expression.”

**Earring**

Philadelphia-born composer Julia Wolfe composes music that is a fusion of folk, classical, and rock genres. The *Wall Street Journal* described Wolfe’s music as having “an intense physicality and a relentless power that pushes performers to extremes and demands attention from the audience.” Her works are rhythmically vigorous and complex and often dissonant, and she is often described as post-minimalist. Recipient of numerous honors, including most recently the 2015 Pulitzer Prize in music, Wolfe is the cofounder and coartistic director of the Bang on a Can music collective, and is a faculty member in composition at New York University.

Thalia Myers, who commissioned *Earring*, performed its premiere. The brief, moodily atmospheric *Earring* has a repeating, rhythmically steady, slowly descending figure played at the top of the keyboard, which creates a crystalline, jangling backdrop for a gentle, midrange melody.

**Études-Tableau in A Minor, op. 39, No. 2**

The étude-tableau is a form of piano piece Sergei Rachmaninoff invented. The term étude-tableau loosely translates as “picture-study.” Each of the études is known to be a musical evocation of a pictorial or narrative idea, and each presents a brief, musical image like a tiny symphonic poem whose subject is the composer’s secret, although Rachmaninoff hesitated to reveal the programs, saying “I do not believe in the artist
disclosing too much of his images;” however, he did finally reveal the secret of some of them.

The Études-Tableaux were Rachmaninoff’s last works composed in Russia, prior to moving to the United States. Composed between 1916 and 1917, the Études-Tableaux, op. 39 are longer and more challenging than those of the earlier op. 33 series, but they are equally poetic. Robert Matthew-Walker, a biographer of Rachmaninoff, wrote that the op. 39 Études-Tableaux are a hidden set of variations on Rachmaninoff’s idée-fixe, the Dies Irae, and that parts of the plainchant are quoted directly in all of the pieces. He calls the works “virtuosic in the extreme,” mentioning the tragic and powerful Étude No. 2 as extraordinarily difficult. In this sedate work, Rachmaninoff introduces three themes, the third of which is based on the Dies Irae chant, which is used as an ostinato figure throughout the piece.

Pictures at an Exhibition

Modest Mussorgsky composed Pictures at an Exhibition as a memorial to his friend, the Russian artist Viktor Hartmann, who had died in 1873 at age thirty-nine. Shortly after the artist’s death, Mussorgsky visited a retrospective exhibit of Hartmann’s sketches, stage designs, and architectural studies and felt the need to capture the experience in music. By early summer 1874, he had completed the work, a lengthy and fiendishly difficult suite for solo piano. At the time of Mussorgsky’s death in 1881, the piece had been neither performed nor published. It fell to his friend and colleague Rimsky-Korsakov to tidy up the manuscript and bring it to print in 1886.

The suite consists of musical depictions of ten paintings by Hartmann, interspersed with a recurring Promenade theme, or intermezzo, that represents a visitor—in this case, the composer himself—strolling through the exhibition. The powerful nature of the intermezzi, Mussorgsky acknowledged in one of his letters, reflects his own large physique.

Following the opening Promenade, the first four movements, or “pictures,” in order of appearance, are: Gnomus, a depiction of an awkward dwarf conveyed through irregular rhythms and forceful outbursts; Il vecchio castello, a solemn and lyrical portrayal of a medieval troubadour singing on the grounds of a grand castle; Tuileries, a sprightly sketch of children at play in the well-known Tuileries Gardens in Paris; and Bydlo, a ponderous characterization of the lumbering of a large Polish ox cart.
The scampering fifth movement, *The Ballet of Unhatched Chicks in Their Shells*, represents a costume design by Hartmann for a children’s ballet. The sixth scene evokes an image of *Samuel Goldenberg und Schmuyle* through the interplay of a strident melody in the lower register and a twittering chant-like theme in the upper. The folksy and cheerful quality of the seventh movement, *Limoges*, is neutralized by the eighth, *Catacombae*, which casts an eerie shadow with ominous chords and variations on the recurring intermezzo.

The last two scenes of *Pictures at an Exhibition* are the most renowned. *The Hut on Fowl’s Legs* is a nightmarish portrayal of the cackling witch Baba-Yaga on the prowl for her prey. She charges—bounding in a virtuosic passage in octaves—right into the tenth and final picture, *The Great Gate of Kiev*. With a depiction of Hartmann’s sketch of a proposed city gate topped by cupolas in which carillons ring, Mussorgsky brings the piece to a majestic close.

**CONRAD TAO**

Conrad Tao has appeared worldwide as a pianist and composer, and has been dubbed a musician of “probing intellect and open-hearted vision” by the *New York Times*, a “thoughtful and mature composer” by NPR, and “ferociously talented” by *Time Out New York*. In June 2011, the White House Commission on Presidential Scholars and the Department of Education named Tao a Presidential Scholar in the Arts, and the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts awarded him a YoungArts gold medal in music. Later that year, Tao was named a Gilmore Young Artist, an honor awarded every two years highlighting the most promising American pianists of the new generation. In May 2012, he was awarded the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant.

During the 2015–2016 season, Tao performs with the Philadelphia Chamber Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Cincinnati Symphony, Dallas Symphony, Buffalo Philharmonic, Pacific Symphony, and Calgary Philharmonic, among others. Past notable symphonic engagements have included the San Francisco Symphony, Baltimore Symphony, Toronto Symphony, St. Louis Symphony, Detroit Symphony, National Arts Centre Orchestra, Indianapolis Symphony, and Nashville Symphony. Tao maintains a close relationship with the Aspen Music Festival, and has appeared at the Sun Valley Summer Symphony and Mostly Mozart Festival.
In June 2013, Tao kicked off the inaugural UNPLAY Festival at the powerHouse Arena in Brooklyn, which he curated and produced. The festival, designated a “critics’ pick” by Time Out New York and hailed by the New York Times for its “clever organization” and “endlessly engaging” performances, featured Tao with guest artists performing a wide variety of new works. Across three nights encompassing electroacoustic music, performance art, youth ensembles, and much more, UNPLAY explored the fleeting ephemera of the Internet, the possibility of a twenty-first-century canon, and music’s role in social activism and critique. That month, Tao, a Warner Classics recording artist, also released Voyages, his first full-length album for the label, declared a “spiky debut” by the New Yorker’s Alex Ross. Of the album, NPR wrote: “Tao proves himself to be a musician of deep intellectual and emotional means—as the thoughtful programming on this album . . . proclaims.” His next album, Pictures, will release in October 2015.

Tao’s career as a composer has garnered an unprecedented eight consecutive ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composer Awards and the Carlos Surinach Prize from BMI. In the 2014–2015 season, while serving as the Dallas Symphony Orchestra’s artist in residence, Tao premiered his orchestral composition, The World Is Very Different Now. Commissioned in observance of the fiftieth anniversary of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, the work was described by the New York Times as “shapely and powerful.” His most recent commission, a piano concerto titled An Adjustment, was premiered to great acclaim by the Philadelphia Chamber Orchestra in September 2015.

Tao attends the Columbia University/Juilliard School joint degree program and studies piano with professors Yoheved Kaplinsky and Choong Mo Kang at Juilliard. He studies composition with Christopher Theofanidis.
The Schwartz Center gratefully acknowledges the generous ongoing support of Donna and Marvin Schwartz.

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