



University of North Texas College of Music

Master's Recital | Thursday, March 23, 2023 | 8:00 pm | Lab West

F. August Bish, double bass

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- God Only Knows (1966).....Brian Wilson/Tony Asher
(b. 1942)/(b. 1939)
vibraphone
- Searchin' (2019).....Jazzmeia Horn (b. 1991)
voice • vibraphone • drumset
- Bloom From the Bone (2021).....F. August Bish (b. 1999)
alto saxophone • trumpet • vibraphone
guitar • drumset
- Song Yue Rao.....Chinese Traditional
arr. 2019 Linda May Han Oh
soprano saxophone • violins • viola • cello
piano • drumset
- Wang Chun Feng/Hard Times Come
Again No More (1933/1854).....Teng Yu-hsien/Lee Lin-chiu/
Stephen Foster
(1906–1944)/(1909–1979)/(1826–1864)
arr. F. August Bish
voice • pipa • Jacob Cortez, violin
guitar • drumset
- The Bending Mirror (2023).....F. August Bish
tenor saxophone • trumpet
piano • drumset
- Sunny in a Bird's Eye (2023).....F. August Bish
voice • flute • trombone
piano • guitar • drumset

God Only Knows—Brian Wilson and Tony Asher's critically lauded baroque pop track, "God Only Knows" has been extensively covered and critiqued. Rock music scholar Drew Nobile cites its status as the favorite song of Beatles bassist Paul McCartney to support the claim that it is one of the greatest songs ever written. In determining my repertoire for this recital, I concluded that I wanted to experiment with an opener which was not particularly fast or loud, but intense in other ways that capture the audience's attention. Inspired by Brad Mehldau's solo recordings of the piece, my good friend Tom Riley and I seek to explore the engrossing rich yet playful harmony of this piece while embodying the complex take on love expressed by the lyrics of this famous Beach Boys tune. While I can't deny the 22-person ensemble in the original recording (consisting of two guitars, two basses, a string quartet, winds, brass, two accordions, many voices, harpsichord, piano, and plastic orange juice cups) is iconic, I hope you enjoy the intimate sound of this pared down duo instrumentation.

Searchin'—Dallas native Jazzmeia Horn was an early jazz influence for me. The incredible proficiency she has of her voice left an impression on me after I had the opportunity to hear her perform in Port Townsend, Washington, in the Summer of 2018. Horn is highly decorated as a soloist and performer, having won the Sarah Vaughn International Vocal Jazz Competition in 2013 and the Thelonius Monk Institute International Jazz Competition in 2015. Her 2017 album, *Social Call*, earned her first Grammy nomination, and her follow-up, *Love and Liberation*, was nominated for best vocal jazz album in 2020. "Searchin'" is a composition of hers from the latter album which upon listening completely blew me away, especially with the velocity and accuracy of Horn's scat solo. I was excited, then, to learn that the piece was included in Terri Lynne Carrington's new book, *New Standards: 101 Lead Sheets*. Using that book as a guide for Horn's original changes, I transcribed her original solo, which will be featured as a soli in this arrangement.

Bloom from the Bone—I composed "Bloom from the Bone" as a therapeutic vehicle for improvisation. As with any transition, there were challenges that came with the process of starting my master's degree. While a lot of the difficulties were exciting, and I felt ready to be pushed at North Texas, it was sometimes hard not to get weighed down by the exposing of weaknesses that comes with the territory of intense study. To remind myself to move past those feelings and towards self-improvement, I wrote this piece. The piece features harmony which feels and sounds like it slowly, gently wraps back in and around on itself. The circular harmonic motion represents a mantra that encourages: "Maybe life is good. Maybe life is hard. But take the time to appreciate the process of life either way."

Song Yue Rao—Malaysian born Australian bassist Linda Oh arranged this traditional Chinese song for her 2019 album Aventurine. The album features unique instrumentation, blending the sounds of both a traditional string quartet and a jazz quartet. “Song Yue Rao,” a folksong in the diverse category of Chinese music called “shuochang yishu” (lit. talk-sing arts), is an ode to a scene in nature wherein the narrator describes a meeting of a bright moon and deep green pine trees. The lyrics play with the words “yue” (moon) and “song” (pine), using homophones and compound words to fit both in nearly every line, while still progressing through a narrative about Nature coming together to form this picture. Oh’s arrangement keeps this playful energy even while omitting the words, with her writing deftly weaving and reworking an ostinato first harmonically and then metrically.

Wang Chun Feng/Hard Times Come Again No More (medley)—From 1895–1945, Taiwan was under Japanese rule. While some of the Taiwanese population initially hoped a more centralized government power would solve certain political instabilities. This period was marked by strict, fascistic enforcement of laws which aimed to limit cultural expression, even to the point of restricting in some cases the use of Chinese and the native Hokkien language. “Wang Chun Feng,” or “Bang Chhun-hong” in Hokkien, represents for me the resilience of the Taiwanese people, who have historically endured many periods of hardship. The composer, Teng Yu-hsien was born and died during Japanese occupation and was only permitted to work in the music industry by rewriting many of his songs, including this one, as Japanese nationalistic anthems. Its lyrics describe a young girl who is so excited at the prospect of romance that she mistakes the sound of the wind for a suitor knocking at her door. The story, which defiantly refers to a traditional folkloric Taiwanese marriage god, is also a metaphor for the Taiwanese natives anticipating freedom from imperial control. Today the song is still performed and recorded by Taiwanese musicians in Hokkien, despite its history. My arrangement draws harmonically from a recording by Taiwanese jazz pianist Jo-Yu Chen.

Around seventy years prior, just before the start of the American civil war, Stephen Foster composed the tune “Hard Times Come Again No More.” While much of Foster’s works are marred by their historical origins in blackface minstrel shows, this parlor song remains one of his only well-known compositions that was unrelated to the practice. As a result, it has found more universal popularity among a diverse pool of musicians. It has been recorded by the likes of Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen, Mavis Staples, Bill Frisell, Johnny Cash, Mary J. Blige, Dolly Parton, The Proclaimers, Japanese pop and jazz musician Akiko Yano, Estonian folk-pop group Folkmill, Israeli Hebrew language performer Shuli Natan, and many, many more. It is used as the theme of the United States of America in the turn-based strategy video game *Sid Meier’s Civilization VI*. My arrangement borrows harmonic choices from the version recorded by James Taylor, Yo-Yo Ma, Mark O’Connor, and Edgar Meyer. The lyrics of the song express the sentiment that someone in the world will always be experiencing hardship, and we should feel encouraged to sympathize with them even when our lives are

good. I paired the songs because of overarching themes of resilience and kinship, but by coincidence, both Foster and Yu-hsien died at 37, almost one hundred years apart.

The Bending Mirror—“The Bending Mirror” is a piece that aims to capture anxieties about time. Inspired by some of Linda Oh and others’ compositions, I wanted to approach writing a piece of instrumental music that incorporated a narrative as a primary element. Sometimes, I feel like a person’s life can have so much going on that he/she inevitably finds himself/herself at the end of the day knowing they’ve accomplished things, but not being able to visualize having done any of those things. Partially inspired by the ending scene of Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey*, I envisioned a story in which the protagonist owns a cursed mirror. Every time he/she looks in the mirror, he/she is met with a slightly older version of himself/herself, and finding that hours have passed without them being aware of any of it. One day, they accidentally glance in the mirror and are thrust decades into the future. Realizing they have found themselves at the end of their life, they are surrounded by loved ones who they do not recognize. Feelings of panic transform into exhausted relief. The dark, but relaxed melody represents the mirror, being the last thing they look at, taunting the protagonist with its physical form visually untouched by the passing of time.

Sunny in a Bird’s Eye—I wrote “Sunny in a Bird’s Eye” as a musical tribute to my musical influences, and as a lyrical tribute to the people in my life who I have been closest to. I’m truly fortunate that a lot of those people are in both categories. The lyrics play a dual role, being written from the perspective of a young woman, Sunny, imagining what a sparrow passing overhead thinks of her when it surveys the ground as it flies. Her optimistic take on the animal’s thoughts serves less as a literal interpretation of what’s going on in the bird’s head and more as her projection of how happy and content she is with life. The form and style of the song is modeled after a Brazilian chôro, as Brazilian music was one of the first styles that got me interested in studying jazz.

Personnel

Katelyn Hunter Robinson, voice • Yuxin Mei, pipa • Jacob Cortez, violin

Joseph Reding, violin • Alice Bish, viola • Sarah Hart, cello

Natalie Suvarnasuddhi, soprano & alto saxophone

Gabriel Nieves, tenor saxophone & flute • Caleb Pitman, trumpet

Jason Schilling, trombone • Ethan Nguyen, piano • Ryan Peterson, guitar

Tom Reilly, vibraphone • Austin Crawford, drumset