

VICKY CHOW/CRAIG TABORN Program Notes

A shared concert of two prominent pianists, new musical specialist Vicky Chow and multifaceted pianist/composer Craig Taborn, provides a valuable juxtaposition, setting new music emerging from different traditions in contrast and dialogue.

Described as “brilliant” by *The New York Times*, Vicky Chow has made an indelible mark in the world of new music with her virtuosic, bold and nuanced interpretations. She is the pianist of Bang on a Can All Stars, and has collaborated with many of the world’s most renowned composers and ensembles. For this evening, Chow’s selected works blur the lines between classical, jazz and contemporary music in novel ways. First up is Caroline Shaw’s *Gustave Le Gray*. Shaw, originally a violinist, joined the groundbreaking vocal octet Roomful of Teeth, winning the 2012 Pulitzer Prize in Music for her *Partita. Gustave Le Gray* is an exploration of 19th Century innovation, as it includes elements of a Chopin mazurka, while portraying the Frenchman who invented techniques crucial in the early development of photography. Shaw marks her score with the notation, “like a photograph slowly developing on waxed paper.”

Felipe Lara is a Brazilian-American composer of “technically formidable, wildly varied” (NY Times) orchestral, chamber, vocal, film, electroacoustic, and popular music. His work has been performed worldwide by leading artists, ensembles and festivals. Lara’s *Injust Intonations (#BlackLivesMatter)* was written in 2016, when the BLM movement was just gaining momentum. This bracingly elegiac music is a tribute to the injustice of Black lives lost at the hands of the police.

A versatile composer, improviser and cellist, Tomeka Reid has been described as a “new jazz power source” by *The New York Times*. *Lamenting G.F., A.A., B.T., T.M.*, commissioned for Vicky Chow, was composed in 2020 at the height of the BLM movement, just weeks after the death of George Floyd. This work requires the pianist’s mastery of varied techniques, including pummeling and plucking the strings inside the instrument. *Lamenting* segues into a mad, virtuosic swing on the keyboard, and concludes with a stately, classical dirge. In just a few minutes, it is a powerful invocation and tribute to the senseless police killing of Black lives.

Tania León was recently named the 2021 winner of the Pulitzer Prize in Music for her orchestral work, *Stride*. León’s career dates back a half-century, to a time when women, let alone Black women born in Cuba, were rarely give the opportunity to conduct orchestras or regularly program their compositions, so it should be noted that her combination of perseverant advocacy and excellence played a significant role in shifting this dialogue forward. Her *Rituál*, from 1987, opens languidly, but builds to an explosive finale, seamlessly incorporating elements of jazz and Cuban music. Throughout the piece, León repeats kernels of melody and rhythm hypnotically, more than justifying her score’s title. She writes that the piece is inspired by “the fire that kindles the spirit of

those who inspire others, for these others see something they themselves do not perceive: the fire of initiation.”

Craig Taborn’s work is informed by encyclopedic knowledge of jazz and classical music, as well as his studies of the visual arts and other extra-musical disciplines. A “musician’s musician,” Taborn is a visionary painter of miniscule universes unto themselves. In much of Taborn’s music, each precisely weighted note crucially depends on its place among others, and the musical gesture surrounding it, singing out with a stubborn, almost spiritual urgency. At the same time, he is an understated virtuoso, whose hands can weave boldly independent lines in striking dialogue with each other. For this concert, Taborn is premiering his *3 Set Ups and a Double Cross*. In EXTENSITY’s recent interview with Taborn, he offered the following insights into these new works: “The set ups are a short hand term I use for a specific architectures that are packed full with a lot of structural information. I call them sets ups because (they) started with using a lot of pitch sets and a lot of things from set theory as the basis...so it sets you up for the context of spontaneous composition...in a certain way they’re already compositions, but they don’t have any realization in terms of what specific information is happening within them. The double cross is...dealing more with poetics of sound...I call this this double cross because it’s going against the whole operating principle of those other pieces in terms of how its defined...But all the work is designed to compel me to create in a very focused way in the moment.”

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