Henry Threadgill

Friday, January 11, 2019
Welcome to the Cleveland Museum of Art

In the season ahead, the museum’s performing arts series continues its exciting schedule with a range of artists from traditions far and wide, old and new. This year, a major commissioning program brings six internationally respected composers to Cleveland from around the globe to create new works inspired by the museum’s collection. Co-sponsored by the Cleveland Foundation’s Creative Fusion program, the series of world premieres extends into 2020.

In the Galleries

William Morris: Designing an Earthly Paradise
Through January 13

In Her Image: Photographs by Rania Matar
Through January 13 at Transformer Station

Clarence H. White and His World:
The Art and Craft of Photography, 1895–1925
Through January 21

Renaissance Splendor:
Catherine de’ Medici’s Valois Tapestries
Through January 21

Georgia O’Keeffe: Living Modern
Through March 3

Who RU2 Day: Mass Media and the Fine Art Print
Through March 24

Charles Burchfield: The Ohio Landscapes, 1915–1920
Through May 5

Please turn off all electronic devices before entering the performance hall.

Photography and audio/video recording in the performance hall are prohibited.

Henry Threadgill
Zooid and Oberlin Contemporary Music Ensemble
Timothy Weiss, conductor

Friday, January 11, 2019, 7:30 p.m.
Gartner Auditorium, the Cleveland Museum of Art

PROGRAM

Pathways (2018) World Premiere  Henry Luther Threadgill
(b. 1944)

Zooid
Henry Threadgill, alto saxophone/flute/bass flute
Elliot Humberto Kavee, drums
Liberty Ellman, guitar
Christopher Hoffman, cello
Jose Davila, trombone/tuba

Oberlin Contemporary Music Ensemble
Timothy Weiss, director and conductor
Remy Libbrecht, English horn
Lauren Anker, horn
Camille Vogley-Howes, violin
Devin Cowan, viola
Matthew Frerck, double bass
Tyler Smith, percussion
DIRECTOR’S NOTE

Happy New Year! Our performing arts series reaches another milestone tonight with the world premiere of “Pathways” by composer Henry Threadgill. The Cleveland Museum of Art is home to the longest running curated concert series among any major museum in the US, dating back to 1917. And while the museum has presented countless major composers in its hundred-year history—Béla Bartók, John Cage, Amy Beach, John Adams, Maurice Ravel, Olivier Messiaen, to name just a few, have all graced this stage—this year for the first time the Cleveland Museum of Art commissions new music from artists of international renown.

Tonight’s concert is the first of a series of works that will be premiered over the coming seasons, and it started with a simple question: What is possible when composers are invited into the museum to find inspiration here? Whether from a particular object in the collection, or an installation, or the architecture, the people, the city— with this series of commissions the museum leads the way towards new approaches into the life of a museum and its place in the community.

Written for eleven musicians, “Pathways” joins Mr. Threadgill’s remarkable improvising group Zooid with chamber musicians of the Oberlin Contemporary Music Ensemble making a truly unique and flexible small orchestra. While discussing ideas for collaborative partners with Mr. Threadgill, it quickly became clear that CME under the direction of Tim Weiss is the ideal match—these young musicians are virtuosic and fearless. Indeed, considering the landscape of contemporary classical music today, it’s no coincidence that many of the major artists who define the field like Eighth Blackbird, Claire Chase, International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE), Du Yun and others all came through Oberlin. It would be difficult to imagine a work like this emerging from anywhere else. In the words of another great composer, Duke Ellington, the result is a music that is “beyond category.”

Special thanks to the Cleveland Foundation, who, for the first time, have turned the focus of the Creative Fusion grant to a cohort of composers. Six composers from around the world will develop new works under the auspices of the museum, building on a unique legacy unlike that of any other museum in the US. This would not have been possible without the Cleveland Foundation’s visionary leadership.

Thank you for coming.

Thomas M. Welsh
Director of Performing Arts, Music and Film
COMPOSER’S NOTE

Pathways

This piece—Pathways—started out with my talking with Tom Welsh about Cleveland and what inspiration it might hold in terms of supplying a backdrop or source for a work of art. Well, the museum for one has a history for presenting music and art that is a long path in itself.

I told Tom I was always concerned about the revitalization of Lake Erie as one salient point. The lake is a gift to humans who reside here.

The Oberlin music world has a long history that is also another pathway to Cleveland, and in this time Oberlin has partnered with the museum to make it possible for the musical aggregations that come together.

I have no literary words in preview of the music. The music as always speaks its own language.

I would take this concert premiere performance as an opportunity to honor a great American who has donated some part of his life in music to Oberlin. I dedicate tonight’s performance to someone who has been a beacon for me from the time I got music in me. To Sonny Rollins.

I would also like to acknowledge another composer. Robert Ward (1917–2013) and I are the only two artists who held the position of US Army Arranger and Composer at Fort Riley, Kansas, and also won the Pulitzer Prize for Music. Robert Ward was born and raised in Cleveland.

Henry Threadgill
January 2019
ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Henry Threadgill

Only three jazz artists have won a Pulitzer Prize. In spring 2016, Henry Threadgill joined Ornette Coleman and Wynton Marsalis as Pulitzer laureates, when he was honored for *In For A Penny, In For A Pound* (Pi, 2015), the latest album by Zooid, his unconventional quintet (reeds, acoustic guitar, cello, tuba, drums).

“Unconventional” describes not just Henry Threadgill’s music, but his life.

Born in Chicago in 1944, Henry grew up on the South Side, where parade bands and the blues filled the air. He played percussion, then clarinet in the Englewood High School band, but switched to sax at 16. Idolizing Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, and Lester Young, he adored Fritz Reiner’s Chicago Symphony and avant-classical composers like Luciano Berio. He was 17 when he joined the Muhal Richard Abrams’ Experimental Band, which later expanded into the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM); there he found like-minded musical explorers.

When bebop broke, most swing players thought it was nonsense and claimed boppers couldn’t play “real” jazz. The members of what became the AACM faced a similar reaction. So Henry performed at dances and parades, joined polka and Latin bands, sat in theater pits, and raised the roof in churches. He played the blues at joints like the South Side’s Blue Flame with local heroes like Left Hand Frank. All the while, he kept studying Berio, Stravinsky, and Debussy.

In 1967, he enlisted in the Army as a clarinetist-saxophonist, was upgraded to composer-arranger, and then shipped to Vietnam to join the 4th Infantry Division Band. Injured during the 1968 Tet offensive on his way back from guard duty, he was sent home and honorably discharged with two campaign ribbons.

He returned home for Chicago and reenlisted with what was now the AACM, but in 1970 left for the perennial lure of jazz’s Big Apple, New York City. For the next 40 years, while Henry challenged bedrock ideas about jazz, he settled into New York City, where he lives with his wife. Around the East Village, he’s a familiar face on the streets and in the cafes; old friends like Philip Glass and Allen Ginsburg and total strangers alike engage him in animated conversation. But he regularly decamped for months at a time to Goa to recharge his creativity in a faraway, very different world. That openness to ideas and experiences has always been vital to who Threadgill is and how his music works. As Charlie Parker put it, “If you don’t live it, it won’t come out of your horn.”

It was in the East Village—long a seedy, tumultuous haven for outsiders of all types—that Henry Threadgill launched the unconventional concepts that led to his Pulitzer-winning art. AIR (Artists In Residence), his 1970s trio, reimagined ragtime without the piano—a lot like dropping the electric guitar from rock. His 1980s Sextett, pairing complex compositions and dynamic soloists, combined heft and agility, and birthed the “little big band” sound. In the 1990s, Very Very Circus stepped deeper into unorthodoxy, with two electric guitars, two tubas, a trombone/French horn, drums, Henry’s alto sax and flute, and frequent add-ons. With Make A Move, a fluid lineup mixing French horn, tubas, electric and acoustic guitars, and cello, he began exploring the approaches to composing and improvising that led to Zooid. From 2000 on, Zooid became his primary vehicle.

As a composer and improver, Henry sees artistic process and product as inseparable, the essence of jazz. Duke Ellington and Charles Mingus strove toward the same goal. Rooted in that history, Henry’s solutions have taken radical new tacks. For Zooid, the Pulitzer committee explained, “A set of three note intervals assigned to each player...serves as the starting point for improvisation.” Zooid’s musicians make in-the-moment decisions about structure, shaping the work-in-process. The unpredictable results are jazz’s “sound of surprise” updated for the 21st century.

After decades of probing music, cult status, and critical acclaim, Threadgill’s Pulitzer Prize caps growing high-culture recognition: 2016 Doris Duke Artist Award; 2015 Doris Duke Impact Award;
2008 United States Artist Fellowship; 2003 Guggenheim Fellowship. He is especially proud of being the first black non-classical musician to get a Copland House Residency Award. In July 2016, the annual Leadership Conference of the Vietnam Veterans of America honored him with their Excellence in the Arts award—a very special moment for the only Vietnam veteran ever awarded a Pulitzer for music.

With his new lineups Ensemble Double-Up (two pianos, two alto saxes, tuba, cello, and drums) and 14 or 15 Kestra: AGG, this consummate creative shapeshifter is upending artistic expectations yet again, while planning a unique international concert series.

**Jose Davila**

Tuba player and trombonist Jose Davila is a versatile New York-based musician whose work spans across a broad spectrum of musical genres; everything from traditional to cutting-edge jazz, to salsa and classical music. He is currently a member of Henry Threadgill’s Zooid and bands led by guitarist Liberty Ellman and alto saxophonist Steve Lehman. His work with both Threadgill and Ellman extends the tuba from its traditional role as part of the rhythm section to a front-line solo voice. His playing can also be heard on the Grammy-nominated salsa recording *Un Gran Dia en el Barrio* from the Spanish Harlem Orchestra and *Remembranzas and Siguendo la Tradicion* from Soneros del Barrio.

Davila has also worked in the bands of Ray Charles, Andrew Hill, Tito Puente, Celia Cruz, Marc Anthony, Eddie Palmieri, Ray Anderson, Butch Morris, Ted Nash, along with the Lincoln Center Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra and the American Symphony and New York City Opera Orchestras.

A native of Puerto Rico who was raised on the East Coast, Jose received his formal musical training from the University of Connecticut and Mannes College of Music.

**Liberty Ellman**

Based in Brooklyn New York, guitarist/composer Liberty Ellman has performed and or recorded with a host of standout creative artists including: Joe Lovano, Myra Melford, Wadada Leo Smith, Butch Morris, Vijay Iyer, Steve Lehman, Greg Osby, Rudresh Mahanthappa, Nels Cline, Somi, Matana Roberts, Ledisi, JD Allen, Michele Rosewoman, Adam Rudolph, Josh Roseman, Barney McAll, Okkyung Lee, Steven Bernstein, Ben Goldberg and John Zorn. In 2014 Ellman worked with Jason Moran on Luanda Kinshasa, a video installation by visionary filmmaker Stan Douglas.

Mr. Ellman is perhaps best known for his long tenure in Henry Threadgill’s groundbreaking ensemble, Zooid. The group has recorded several critically lauded albums. Their most recent recording *In For A Penny, In For A Pound* earned a Pulitzer prize for Mr. Threadgill. In addition to playing guitar, Mr. Ellman is credited as producer and mixing engineer on that recording. He has mixed and mastered many other recordings as well, including Gregory Porter’s “Be Good,” which was nominated for a Grammy.

Ellman has released 4 of his own critically acclaimed albums: *Orthodoxy, Tactiles, Ophiuchus Butterfly*, and 2015’s *Radiate* on Pi Recordings. His compositional style has been described as “At once highly controlled and recklessly inventive,” and the *Wall Street Journal* said: “Ellman, along with his peers, is helping to define post millennial jazz.” Voted #1 Rising Star Guitarist in the 2016 *Downbeat* Critics Poll, he was also honored in the 2015 *Jazz Times* expanded critics poll, as one of the four guitarists of the year alongside Bill Frisell, John Scofield, and Julian Lage.

Liberty Ellman has also worked beyond the jazz world: hip hop artists Midnight Voices, and The Coup, dance producer DJ Joe Claussell, and worked on remixes of N’Dea Davenport, Chico Freeman, Ann Dyer, Ayo and others. He also made an appearance on the Grammy nominated Groove Collective record, People People Music.
Timothy Weiss

Conductor Timothy Weiss has earned critical acclaim for his performances and bold programming throughout the United States and abroad. His repertoire in contemporary music is vast and fearless, including masterworks, very recent compositions, and an impressive number of premieres and commissions. He has been a recipient of the Adventurous Programming Award from the League of American Orchestras.

For more than two decades, Weiss has directed the Oberlin Contemporary Music Ensemble, bringing the group to a level of artistry and virtuosity in performance that rivals the finest new music groups. Recent engagements include the Arctic Philharmonic in Norway, Orchestra 2001 in Philadelphia, Eastman Broadband Ensemble, BBC Scottish Symphony, Britten Sinfonia in London, International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE), and the Melbourne Symphony in Australia.

A committed educator, Weiss is professor of conducting and chair of the Division of Contemporary Music at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, where he helped create and mentor the ensembles Eighth Blackbird and ICE. He also serves as a faculty member and conductor of the Aspen Contemporary Ensemble at the Aspen Music Festival and School, and he is music director of the Arctic Philharmonic Sinfonietta in Bodø, Norway. He holds degrees from the Royal Conservatory of Music in Brussels, Northwestern University, and the University of Michigan.

Christopher Hoffman

Christopher Hoffman is best known as a cellist and composer. He writes for his ensembles Multifariam, The Silver Cord Quintet, and Company of Selves. He currently performs in Henry Threadgill’s Zooid (recipient of the 2016 Pulitzer Prize), Double-Up Ensemble, and 14 Or 15 Kestra: Agg; Tony Malaby’s Tubacello Quartet; and Jeremiah Cyberman’s Pale Horse. Christopher has had the honor of working with Martin Scorsese, Yoko Ono, Bleachers, Marianne Faithfull, Iron & Wine, Ryan Adams, Marc Ribot, Michael Pitt, Anthony Coleman, and many more.

Elliot Humberto Kavee

Elliot Humberto Kavee has performed/recording ground-breaking new music with Omar Sosa, Joseph Jarman, Henry Threadgill, Steve Coleman, Don Cherry, Cecil Taylor, Francis Wong, Ben Goldberg, John Tchicai, Glenn Horiuchi, Elliot Sharp, Tim Berne, Jon Jang, Rudresh Mahanthappa, Vijay Iyer, and his own projects. Before moving to New York, he was the drummer of choice among the San Francisco Bay Area’s most gifted creative musicians, playing on over 40 critically acclaimed recordings. In addition, Kavee was a musician, composer, musical director, actor and writer with the Tony award-winning San Francisco Mime Troupe for seven years—the only musical director in the group’s 40-year history to win a dramalogue award. He was a percussionist, cellist, and composer with the Club Foot Orchestra, who performed their score for G.W. Pabst’s Pandora’s Box at Lincoln Center. His collaboration with Asian-American Jazz pioneer Francis Wong has yielded 20 recordings and countless performances. As a founding member of the trail-blazing Omar Sosa Sextet, Kavee recorded four CDs and has toured the world. For his debut recording as a solo performer (on Eliasound records), “not only did Kavee make his skin and metallic percussion instruments sing by effecting a polytimbral/polyrhythmic approach, he further mixed up the program by doubling on cello. (Yes: drums and strings, one player, at the same time)—SF Weekly.

Oberlin Contemporary Music Ensemble

The Oberlin Contemporary Music Ensemble (CME) has served as a fertile training ground for scores of powerhouse new music performers and groundbreaking ensembles, including the multiple Grammy Award-winning sextet Eighth Blackbird and the International Contemporary Ensemble. In performances throughout the academic year, CME performs music of all contemporary styles...
and genres, from minimalism to serialism, and from electronic to cross genre, mixed media, and beyond.

Under the direction of Timothy Weiss, CME has collaborated with many prominent composers from a variety of backgrounds, including Stephen Hartke, George Crumb, Harrison Birtwistle, Helmut Lachenmann, David Lang, Joan Tower, Frederic Rzewski, Vijay Iyer, and many others. CME premieres works by prominent Oberlin faculty, student, and alumni composers, as well as distinguished guests. In addition to its concerts at Oberlin, CME regularly tours the United States, with performances in recent years taking the ensemble to the Winter Garden, Miller Theatre, Merkin Concert Hall, Harvard University, Benaroya Hall, Palace of Fine Arts, Chicago’s Ganz Hall, and Carnegie Hall’s Weill Recital Hall, as well as in numerous partner concerts with the Cleveland Museum of Art. The ensemble was featured as part of Bang on a Can’s 30th anniversary celebration at the Brooklyn Museum.

UPCOMING PERFORMANCES

Carolin Widmann Fri/Mar 29, 7:30, St. John’s Episcopal Church, Ohio City. A wonderfully versatile musician, violinist Carolin Widmann’s activities span the great classical concerti, new commissions specially written for her, solo recitals, and a wide variety of chamber music. Widmann was awarded the Bayerischer Staatspreis for music in 2017, honoring her individuality and exceptional musicianship. She rarely performs in the US, and this solo performance of old and new repertoire will be a special treat. $25, CMA members $22.

Avi Avital with Omer Avital Wed/Apr 10, 7:30, Gartner Auditorium. Grammy-nominee mandolinist, Avi Avital, comes from a classical tradition whilst award-winning bass virtuoso and oud player, Omer Avital, is an acclaimed jazz performer and composer. In “Avital meets Avital,” these two musicians—joined by Omer Klein on piano and Itamer Doari on percussion—draw on the diverse influences of Moroccan and North African sounds, folkloric and classical traditions, Israeli harmonies and Mediterranean rhythms creating a musical melting pot where the finesse of chamber music meets the raw emotional energy of jazz. $33–$45, CMA members $30–$40.
Please **turn off all electronic devices** before entering the performance hall.

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Programs are subject to change.

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