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2024-25



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CU Boulder is a **SMOKE-FREE CAMPUS**.

The University of Colorado Boulder, Colorado's flagship university, honors and recognizes the many contributions of Indigenous peoples in our state. CU Boulder acknowledges that it is located on the traditional territories and ancestral homelands of the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Ute and many other Native American nations. Their forced removal from these territories has caused devastating and lasting impacts. While the University of Colorado Boulder can never undo or rectify the devastation wrought on Indigenous peoples, we commit to improving and enhancing engagement with Indigenous peoples and issues locally and globally.

SoundWorks

7:30 p.m., Wednesday, Feb. 19, 2025

ATLAS B2 Black Box Experimental Studio

Content advisory: this event includes flashing lights

PROGRAM

Bloom (2009)

Alexandra Gardner

Peyton Magalhaes, cello

Cypress (2019)

Alexandra Gardner

Shannon Donahoe, baritone saxophone

Tourmaline (2004)

Alexandra Gardner

Joel Ferst, soprano saxophone

64-Bit Electronic Music Composition Competition Finalists

Intermission

Faith and Ruin on Piney Mountain

Alan Mackwell (Alan McMurray Award winner)

Joel Ferst, baritone saxophone

Shelter in Place

Holly McMahon (SPARK Award winner)

Harveen Gill, dancer

Holly McMahon, live electronics

fractured.jpg

Gracie Fagan (SPARK Award winner)

Phu Le, touch designer

Gracie Fagan, live electronics

PROGRAM NOTES

Bloom (2009)

Alexandra Gardner

Bloom for cello and electronics was created for Joshua Roman with support from an American Composers Forum Subito Grant. It is the ninth work in a series of compositions for solo instruments and electronics. Initially, the work included a boombox to play the electronics so that Joshua could perform it easily whenever and wherever he desired. As I worked, I considered the context in which I think of listening to a boombox — with a smallish group, probably of friends, in a gathering under a tree, in someone's home or maybe on a beach. A very different listening space than a concert situation! The title refers to the music developing from bubbling textures into a dense soundscape and Joshua's sunny disposition.

Cypress (2019)

Alexandra Gardner

The cypress tree is considered a symbol of mourning and immortality in many cultures and appears in legends from Greek mythology to Christianity. It has often been planted to mark graveyards with the idea that its straight, tall stature helps guide departed souls toward heaven. This work is also part of my saxophone quartet *Tides*. I wanted a standalone movement dedicated exclusively to the baritone saxophone's capacity for warmth, strength and agility.

Tourmaline (2004)

Alexandra Gardner

Tourmaline was created in the studios of the IUA/Phonos Foundation in Barcelona, Spain. It is the sixth piece in a series of compositions for solo instrument with electronics. Crystal tourmaline often shows two or more colors, such as watermelon tourmaline, which has a red center and is surrounded by bright green. A small change in the complex makeup of the developing crystal will result in a completely different color scheme.

According to legend, wearing the stone can lend permanence and stability to friendships and love relationships. In this composition, the saxophone and electronics are closely linked in a fast-paced, animated conversation. The electronic part takes on a definite personality as it weaves about, interrupting and commenting on the saxophone part. Twisting and turning through a series of moods and situations, the many possibilities for interaction between the two instruments are revealed.

Faith and Ruin on Piney Mountain

Alan Mackwell (Alan McMurray Award winner)

Faith and Ruin on Piney Mountain is a single-movement work for baritone saxophone and electronics inspired by the lyrics of Craig Johnson's bluegrass tune *Damned Old Piney Mountain*. The song, sung from the perspective of a former sawmill worker in mid-20th century Appalachia, details his relationship with both the logging practice as well as his relationship to the logging industry, which abandoned him after his fingers were cut off in a bandsaw accident. Interwoven with the singer's life story are cries of disdain for his disability and the failure of his marriage, which the singer pins not on the logging industry or his faith, but the landscape itself. The last stanza, however, pulls sharply away from this hatred-fueled depiction of the mountain, bittersweetly detailing the various ways in which nature has reclaimed the sawmill he used to work at. *Faith and Ruin on Piney Mountain* seeks to replicate the soundscapes of this long-abandoned sawmill, meditating on the nature of the space in relation to the singer's hatred for it in conjunction with the remaining cinders of the industry that betrayed him and the West Virginian landscape.

Shelter in Place

Holly McMahon (SPARK Award winner)

Shelter in Place is an electro-acoustic work featuring dance, performance art, and live processing of prepared audio. It explores themes of discomfort, belonging and vulnerability in times of uncertainty.

fractured.jpg

Gracie Fagan (SPARK Award winner)

fractured.jpg is a piece filled with the deepest gratitude for Annika Socolofsky, Carter Pann, John Drumheller and Michael Theodore. Thank you, truly, for guiding my growth as an artist and educator the past two years.

PERSONNEL

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Annika Socolofsky, faculty coach

Nicholas Felder, community outreach coordinator

Gracie Fagan, social media coordinator

Keenan Powell, stage manager

ATLAS B2 Black Box Experimental Studio

Chris Petillo, audio engineer and production manager

Brad Gallagher, technical and production specialist

Sean Winters, B2 scholar in residence

Gracie Fagan

As one of the country's youngest emerging multimedia artists, Gracie Fagan (she/her) experiments with human perception to comment on the intersectionality of identity and pop culture. Fagan combines audio, projection, performance art, theatre and dance to create immersive performances and environments not typically found in the traditional concert hall setting. Her pieces continue to be selected for showcase in national conferences, including the SHE Festival for Women in Music, Electronic Music Midwest Festival, the International Women Composer's Festival

of Hartford, the Eugene Difficult New Music Ensemble, and completing a residency with the Walden school. She has received multiple grants to further her work, including the Ida M. Vreeland Award, the Vada Kinmann Oldfield grant for academic and artistic advocacy of minorities, the John Phillips Sousa Band Award and the 2018 Nebraska Young Artist award. Her most recent projects include completing a residency at the TANK Center for the Sonic Arts in Rangely, Colorado and performing on the CU Boulder SoundWorks series. She is also collaborating with Coral Douglas, Joel Ferst and Phu Le on a number of upcoming projects, installations and improvisations. Fagan is currently teaching composition and music technology at the University of Colorado Boulder while pursuing a Master of Music, and received a Bachelor of Music in composition from the University of Nebraska – Lincoln in 2023.

Alexandra Gardner

Praised as “highly lyrical and provocative of thought” (San Francisco Classical Voice) and “mesmerizing” (The New York Times), the music of composer Alexandra Gardner is thrilling audiences and performers alike with a “particular alchemy of craft, whimsy, and sensual appeal” (The New Yorker). She composes for varied instrumentations and often mixes acoustic instruments with electronic music and field recordings, drawing inspiration from mythology, the natural sciences, and contemporary literature.

Gardner’s compositions are regularly featured at festivals and venues around the world, including the Aspen Music Festival, Beijing Modern Festival, Centro de Cultura Contemporanea de Barcelona, Festival Cervantino, Grand Teton Music Festival, The Kennedy Center, The Library of Congress and the Warsaw Autumn Festival. Her music has been commissioned and presented by leading organizations and ensembles such as the National Flute Association, the American Harp Society, Astral Artists, Boulanger Initiative, Chicago Composers Orchestra, Seattle Symphony, SOLI Chamber Ensemble, Strathmore Music Center, Tesla Quartet and the United States Navy Band.

Among Gardner's honors and awards are recognitions from the American Composers Forum, ASCAP, Maryland State Arts Council, Mid-America Arts Alliance, The National Endowment for the Arts, The Netherland-America Foundation and the Smithsonian Institution. She has conducted residencies at the Atlantic Center for the Arts, Harvestworks Digital Media Arts Center, Liz Lerman Dance Exchange, MacDowell and Willapa Bay AiR. She spent two years as a visiting composer at the Institut Universitari de l'Audiovisual in Barcelona, Spain, and served as Composer-In-Residence for the Seattle Symphony. Her music is recorded on the Innova, Ars Harmonica, Naxos, and Neuma labels. Gardner holds degrees from The Peabody Institute of Johns Hopkins University and Vassar College. She lives in Baltimore, Maryland.

Alan Mackwell

Described as “an original composer with new ideas and a command of complex symphonic writing” (BroadStreet Journal), New Zealand-American Alan Mackwell (b. 1998) is a BMI award-winning young composer and performer based in Boulder. In his work, Mackwell seeks to explore a unique blend of atmospheres inspired by his experiences in the Permian Basin, northern New Mexico and Appalachian North Carolina using a highly resonant and bluegrass-influenced musical language. He earned a BM at the Boston Conservatory and an MA at Tufts University. Mackwell is currently pursuing a DMA at the University of Colorado Boulder where he teaches an Intro to Music Technology course.

Mackwell's music has been played on three different continents and several U.S. states. His compositions have been played by high-achieving groups such as The Philadelphia Youth Orchestra, The New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, the Amorsima Trio, Hub New Music and the Corvus Ensemble. He was the grand prize winner of the Philadelphia Youth Orchestra's Inaugural Young Composers' Competition in addition to being a two-time finalist for the Todd Corporation Young Composers' Awards hosted by the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. Mackwell is the winner of the 2023 American Prize as well as a BMI Student Composer Award, which he won in 2022 for his string trio *Remains of a Permian Gas Station*.

Holly McMahon

As a compelling performer and composer with a delicate yet expansive style, Holly McMahon has the ability to lift her hands from piano keys in complete silence. For many years she has worked with and connected countless musicians across several genres including film, theater, dance and contemporary performance. She continues to explore new instrumentations and stylistic choices through her studies of music composition, music technology and piano performance at the University of Colorado Boulder. She is most well known for her works for solo piano, which typically feature carefully sculpted, running lines and evocative yet comfortable rhythmic textures that have been described as “lush” and “uniquely vibrant.” As she focuses on creating atmosphere through the shape of sound over time and careful repetition, McMahon’s music is uniquely breathtaking and reminds listeners of their ability to experience art in a uniquely human way.

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Photo credit: Glenn Asakawa.