



NACUSAsf Presents

The Friction Quartet with Amy Foote

*New music written by members of the
San Francisco Bay Area chapter of NACUSA*
Friday, January 19, 2024, 7:30 p.m.
Sunset Music and Arts, San Francisco

P R O G R A M

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| John G. Bilotta | The Hippocampus Monologue |
| Alden Jenks | Death Marriage |
| Andrew B. Robinson | String Quartet No. 3, The Diversion |

Amy Foote, soprano, Otis Harriel, violin, Kevin Rogers, violin,
Mitso Floor, viola, Doug Machiz, cello



Scan this code for the full program notes, composer biographies, and song texts.

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The Players

Friction Quartet, lauded for performances described as “terribly beautiful” (San Francisco Classical Voice), **“stunningly passionate”** (Calgary Herald), and **“exquisitely skilled”** (ZealNYC), is dedicated to modernizing the chamber music experience and expanding the string quartet repertoire. The quartet achieves its mission by commissioning cutting-edge composers, curating imaginative concert programs, collaborating with diverse artists, and engaging in interactive educational outreach.

Friction made their debut at Carnegie Hall in 2016 as participants in the Kronos Quartet Fifty for the Future Workshop. They returned in March of 2018 to perform George Crumb’s *Black Angels* as part of “The 60’s” festival and their performance was described as, “one of the truest and most moving things I’ve ever heard or seen.” (Zeal NYC)

Since forming in 2011, Friction has commissioned 47 works for string quartet and given world premiere performances of more than 100 works. They developed the Friction Commissioning Initiative in 2017 as a way to work together with their audience to fund specific commissions. The money raised to date has helped Friction commission a total of 12 new works, including six by young composers between the ages 16 and 21. They were awarded a 2019 Intermusic SF Musical Grant to develop a participatory educational program with composer Danny Clay that is designed to be accessible and sensory-friendly. Friction’s past grants include a grant from Chamber Music America that was used to commission a piano quintet from Andy Akiho, which debuted in November 2016, as well as project grants from Intermusic SF and Zellerbach Family Foundation supporting special projects involving the performance of commissioned works.

Since graduating with her Master of Vocal Performance from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, Soprano **Amy Foote** has sung an expansive repertoire, ranging from leading roles on the operatic stage to world premiers of contemporary chamber music. On the operatic stage, Miss Foote has sung leading roles with Berkeley “West Edge” Opera, the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, Wheaton College Conservatory of Music, and Lamplighter’s Music Theater, with whom she recently performed *Cunegonde* from Bernstein’s *Candide* in Spring 2015. Her operatic voice has been deemed “most impressive...[with] accuracy, musicality, and diction...” by the San Francisco Classical Voice.

With contemporary chamber group Nonsemble 6, Amy commissions new monodramas and performs a memorized and staged version of Schoenberg’s *Pierrot Lunaire* which has been performed coast to coast from Stanford University in California to The Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. Amy has worked with over 25 composers nationally and has performed with many new music groups including the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players. She has released experimental rock albums with bay area bands Makeunder and Night Genes.

The Composers

Dance of Life from *Expressions for String Quartet*

Greg A. Steinke

Dr. Greg A Steinke is retired, former Joseph Naumes Endowed Chair of Music/Art and Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Marylhurst University, Marylhurst, Oregon; Associate Director, Ernest Bloch Music Festival ('93-'97) and Director, Composers Symposium ('90-'97) (Newport, OR); served as the National Chairman of the Society of Composers, Inc. (1988-'97). Composer of chamber and symphonic music and author with published/recorded works and performances across the U. S. and internationally; speaker on interdisciplinary arts, and oboist specializing in contemporary music. Dr. Steinke is a past national president of NACUSA (2012-19) and also currently serves on the NACUSA Cascadia and NACUSAsf Chapter Boards.

As expressed in Munch's Journal: "at times you see with different eyes," a composer "at times [hears] with different [ears.]" And so it is here of "hearing" these paintings at this moment in time. Another moment might produce a different "hearing," or "hearing" impression. I've attempted to create my "hearing" of these paintings and even create different possible hearings within the "hearing" through passages of structured improvisation, which in turn produce different hearings for the listener. So I've composed what I heard, to paraphrase Munch, at this moment in time.

At Water's Edge

Allen Shearer

Allen Shearer has received the Rome Prize Fellowship, the Aaron Copland Award, a Charles Ives Scholarship, residencies at MacDowell, and grants from the National Endowment for the Arts. His *Three Lyrics*, written at the Copland House, won the Sylvia Goldstein Award. The premiere of his opera *Middlemarch in Spring* was named one of the Ten Best Operatic Events of 2015 by the S.F. Examiner, and one of the year's most notable events in classical music worldwide by the Encyclopedia Britannica. His operas *Howards End*, *America*, and *Prospero's Island*, on libretti by Claudia Stevens, were also given successful San Francisco premieres. Shearer holds a Ph.D. from U.C. Berkeley and diplomas from the Akademie Mozarteum. His teachers include Andrew Imbrie and Fred Lerdahl at Berkeley and Max Deutsch in Paris. He is a founding director of Berkeley's Sonic Harvest and a member of the Board of Directors of Ninth Planet.

In *At Water's Edge* the poet, R.P. Blackmur, is stirred by the beauty of the sea and the tides on what must have been a very chilly day on the Atlantic seacoast. Important for my setting was the juxtaposition of the placid beach with a stark tree which elicits thoughts of the crucifixion. This piece was premiered in San Francisco on the Composers, Inc. series with Christine Brandes as soprano soloist.

Mood Swings

Adrienne Albert

Award-winning composer Adrienne Albert (ASCAP) has had her chamber, choral, vocal, orchestral and wind band works performed throughout the U.S., and around the world. Having previously worked as a singer with composers that include Igor Stravinsky, Leonard Bernstein, Philip Glass, and Gunther Schuller, Albert began composing her own music in the 1990s. Her music has been supported by noteworthy arts organizations including the NEA, ACF, MTC/Rockefeller Foundation, Subito, MPE Foundation, ACME, and ASCAP. Recent commissions include works for Cornell University Chorus, Holyoke Civic Symphony, MPE Foundation, Palisades

Virtuosi, Pennsylvania Academy of Music, Chamber Music Palisades, Pacific Serenades among others. A graduate of UCLA, Albert studied composition with Stephen Mosko, orchestration with Albert Harris. Her music is recorded on MSR, Naxos, Navona, Centaur, Little Piper, Albany, and ABC Records, published by Kenter Canyon Music (ASCAP), and also through FluteWorld, TFML, and Trevco Music. Visit: www.adriennealbert.com.

This work is part of a three-movement work for string orchestra that will be called *Dialogues*. The mood of the work is an outgrowth of the growing tensions in the world. With music, subtle interaction takes place between the musicians and the audience which will hopefully open our hearts to a peaceful dialogue. The opening section engages an inverted interval that suggests memories of our childhood. This motif weaves its way through the instruments. Though the work is pensive and sometimes somber, it also has a playful element and addresses the hopes for our futures and those of our children.

Le bestie

Molly Axtmann

Molly Axtmann began playing the piano and composing at age six. Education: Juilliard School (1966–8), B.A. magna cum laude Barnard College (1972) and M.M. in piano performance Manhattan School of Music (1977). Faculty positions: Mannes College of Music in New York City, The San Francisco Conservatory, Community Music Center of San Francisco, The Crowden School, John Adams Young Composers Program at Crowden Center for Music in the Community. In 2002 Ms. Axtmann released her CD *A Year of Days*, a collection of original piano solos performed by the composer. Molly was a regular accompanist for the Niles Silent Film Museum 2003-2010. She scored *Nosferatu*, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *Metropolis* and *the Hunchback of Notre Dame* among others. In 2012 Molly completed her original 18-minute silent film *Inanna and the Huluppu Tree* based on the Sumerian myth. For more information: inannafilm.wordpress.com. In November 2015 Molly released her CD *Wild Coast*, a compilation of original compositions for piano, strings and winds. Molly released her solo piano CD of *The Goldberg Variations* J.S. Bach in 2016. Molly teaches composition, improvisation, theory and piano at her private studio in Oakland. For more information and list of works: mollyaxtmann.com

This is the second movement of a work setting the *Canto Primo* of Dante to music. It portrays Dante's meeting with the three beasts: a leopard, a lion and a she-wolf as he descends to the inferno. There he will meet Virgil who will be his guide through the Inferno. The three beasts are often interpreted as representing the following evil tendencies of humans: lust, pride and avarice.

The composition has four movements. Dante encounters Virgil portrayed by a baritone in the third movement. Virgil informs Dante that he must defeat these beasts to attain salvation. This story intrigued me since young childhood where I found a volume with wood engravings in my grandparent's basement. I wrote the composition for the International Composers' Conference in Talloires, France.

This will be the fourth performance of this work. It is set in Italian because I drew no inspiration from translations in English. As soon as I heard the Italian spoken so beautifully by Piero Mancini the music instantly became alive and flowed from my ears and heart through my hands to musical notation. I thank the musicians for bringing it to life.

Flora

Davide Verotta

Davide Verotta was born in an Italian town close to Milano and moved to San Francisco as an eager twenty-seven-year-old. A professor at UCSF in biomathematics and statistics (gasp) for thirty years, he has been actively involved in the SF new music scene for a good twenty, and eventually left math behind to concentrate exclusively on composing. He studied piano at the Milano conservatory ages ago. Composition is more recent, with studies at SFSU, where he earned an MA, and UC Davis. Davide teaches piano and composition privately and at the Community Music Center in SF. He has received numerous local commissions, international competition prizes, and composition grants. For more information, please visit his web site at <http://www.davideverotta.com>, or his youtube channel at www.youtube.com/@Davideverotta.

A soft-spoken warning about global warming and the perils associated with the Anthropocene, *Flora* is based on two ancient texts about the goddess of spring. The first, by Ovid (*Fasti*, Book 5, 8 C.E.), describes the origin and powers of Flora, and the second, a poem by Virgil (*Georgiche*, Book 2; 30 B.C.E.) celebrates the season of rebirth. In the *Flora* narrative, the goddess appears to the poet, answers his question about her nature and powers, and warns about the silent spring that might be coming. Then, symbolized by a final section for string quartet, the apparition disappears.

The Hippocampus Monologue

John G. Bilotta

John G. Bilotta was born in Waterbury, Connecticut, but has spent most of his life in the San Francisco Bay Area where he studied composition with Frederick Saunders. His works have been performed by soloists and ensembles around the world including Rarescale, Earplay, the Talea Ensemble, the Washington Square Contemporary Music Society, Chamber Mix, North/South Consonance, Musica Nova, the Avenue Winds, the Presidio Ensemble, the Boston String Quartet, the San Francisco Composers Chamber Orchestra, the Kiev Philharmonic, the Oakland Civic Orchestra, San Francisco Cabaret Opera, Bluegrass Opera, Boston Metro Opera, the Thompson Street Opera, New Fangled Opera, Floating Opera and VocalWorks. He serves on the Board of Directors for Goat Hall Productions and on the Executive Committee of the Society of Composers, Inc. He is currently vice-president of the San Francisco Bay Area Chapter of NACUSA.

Rosetta's Stone is a collaborative opera conceived by Norwegian composer and writer Oded Ben-Horin for a team of creative artists. The librettists were Ben-Horin (Norway) and John F. McGrew (U.S.) and the composers were Jostein Stalheim (Norway) and John G. Bilotta (U.S.). *Rosetta's Stone* was envisioned as a neuroscience opera combining the artistic expression of scientific concepts with the drama of one man's decline into Alzheimers. In the story, the main character's major brain regions appear as actual characters. *The Hippocampus Monologue*, sung by the Hippocampus itself, makes it obvious that it is the Hippocampus' own accelerating destruction by the disease that underlies the main character's increasingly difficult cognitive problems.

Death Marriage

Alden Jenks

Alden Jenks is a composer and music teacher.

Death Marriage uses a poem by California poet Joseph Stroud. It is a strange fantasy, described by a woman, of her marriage with Death. They are on vacation in southern Mexico. A mix of somber irony, sometimes reflective, sometimes comical, sometimes just scary. It came to my attention at the same time as this performance opportunity. I jumped at the chance to write something for this stellar combination of performers.

String Quartet No. 3, The Diversion

Andrew B. Robinson

In 1975, I obtained my Bachelor of Music degree in composition at Willamette University, in Salem, Oregon. Earning a living outside the field of music, it was not until retiring in 2012 that I returned to composing. I have largely focused on writing music for small chamber ensembles.

Some of my works over the past several years have been performed at various music festivals.

- 2017 Bruno Maderna Composition Festival in Lviv, Ukraine: *String Quartet No. 2* (2016)
- 2018 Astoria Music Festival in Astoria, Oregon: *String Quartet No. 4* (2017)
- 2019 Sao Paulo Contemporary Composers Festival: *Passacaglia for String Quintet* (2019)
- 2022 Bruno Maderna Composition Festival: *The Fantasy for Clarinet Quintet 2020 Day Trip*

From *String Quartet No. 3* (subtitled *The Demagogue*), the third movement, *The Diversion*, is a lighthearted romantic escapade that highlights the demagogue's own desire for self-gratification. While there may be carnal passion and play found in this adventure, it is ultimately a self-indulgence. This movement was the first written of this four-movement string quartet. Written in August and September, 2016, at the height of the 2016 US presidential election, it has undergone revisions, along with the other movements over the years since.

Texts

At Water's Edge

R.P. Blackmur

Sweet the cold sea-moss, the old
Tide-sounds and sea-change, the folding
of the waters on the earth—sweet
the sea pools and enchanted

these to the salt verge of youth
the breaking of life upon the shore

and here the tree
that other sweetness
—look where the two thieves
their bright harsh eyes embrace
with all the slow variety
of Noah's Ark
male and female, each in kind.

Sweet are we
hanging taut on the like tree
of the great dark

—what mercy of this world
what roman spear
could sweeten so
the new year

"Of a Muchness" from "Three Poems" (1930), *Poems of R. P. Blackmur*, Princeton University Press, copyright © 1977 by Princeton University Press. By permission.

Le bestie

Ed ecco, quasi al cominciar de l'erta,
una lonza leggiere e presta molto,
che di pel macolato era coverta;

e non mi si partia dinanzi al volto,
anzi 'mpediva tanto il mio cammino,
ch'ì fui per ritornar più volte vòlto.

Temp' era dal principio del mattino,
e 'l sol montava 'n sù con quelle stelle
ch'eran con lui quando l'amor divino

mosse di prima quelle cose belle;
sì ch'a bene sperar m'era cagione
di quella fiera a la gaetta pelle

l'ora del tempo e la dolce stagione;
ma non sì che paura non mi desse
la vista che m'apparve d'un leone.

Questi pareo che contra me venisse
con la test' alta e con rabbiosa fame,
sì che pareo che l'aere ne tremesse.

Ed una lupa, che di tutte brame
sembiava carca ne la sua magrezza,
e molte genti fé già viver grame,

questa mi porse tanto di gravezza
con la paura ch'uscìa di sua vista,
ch'io perdei la speranza de l'altezza.

E qual è quei che volontieri acquista,
e giugne 'l tempo che perder lo face,
che 'n tutti suoi pensier piange e s'attrista;

tal mi fece la bestia senza pace,
che, venendomi 'ncontro, a poco a poco
mi ripigneva là dove 'l sol tace.

Dante Alighieri

And almost where the hillside starts to rise
look there!-a leopard, very quick and lithe,
a leopard covered with a spotted hide.

He did not disappear from sight, but stayed;
indeed, he so impeded my ascent
that I had often to turn back again.

The time was the beginning of the morning;
the sun was rising now in fellowship
with the same stars that had escorted it

when Divine Love first moved those things of
beauty;
so that the hour and the gentle season
gave me good cause for hopefulness on seeing

that beast before me with his speckled skin;
but hope was hardly able to prevent
the fear I felt when I beheld a lion.

His head held high and ravenous with hunger
even the air around him seemed to shudder-
this lion seemed to make his way against me.

And then a she-wolf showed herself; she seemed
to carry every craving in her leanness;
she had already brought despair to many.

The very sight of her so weighted me
with fearfulness that I abandoned hope
of ever climbing up that mountain slope.

Even as he who glories while he gains
will, when the time has come to tally loss,
lament with every thought and turn despondent,

so was I when I faced that restless beast
which, even as she stalked me, step by step
had thrust me back to where the sun is speechless.

Flora

Ovid/Virgil

Narrated: "Who are you?" And the goddess answered my question, and while she spoke, her lips breathed vernal roses

Flora, mi chiamano Flora
E pure mi chiamano Hare Ke, Freya, Sita,
Rafu-sen, Hebe! Lada!

Goddess of sunlight

Sono perenne luce
splendida, radiosa
sposa del vento siderale
Sono desio d'eterna primavera
di alberi frondosi, di giardini colorati
bagnati da limpide acque

Goddess of sunlight, Goddess of flowers

A primavera gonfia la terra avida di semi
con piogge fertili il cielo scende
nel grembo della sposa
al suo corpo si unisce
accende ogni suo germe

I prati rinverdiscono
si aprono i campi
si sparge il tenero umore
al nuovo sole si affidano i germogli

Life! I am Goddess of new life

I am everlasting radiance
but be warned
a silent spring is coming
no bird, no insect, no flower
only wind and fire

Take care of my domain, or I may leave.

Flora, mi chiamano Flora

Flora, I am called Flora
And also I am called Hare Ke, Freya, Sita,
Rafu-sen, Hebe! Lada!

Goddess of sunlight

I am everlasting light
splendid, radiant
bride of the sidereal wind
I am the longing for eternal spring
of leafy trees, of colorful gardens
bathed by clear waters

Goddess of sunlight, Goddess of flowers

In spring the earth swells greedy for seeds
heaven descends with fertile rains
in the womb of the spouse
joins to its body
ignites every germ

The meadows turn green again
fields open up
the tender humor spreads
the sprouts yield to the new sun

Life! I am Goddess of new life

I am everlasting radiance
but be warned
a silent spring is coming
no bird, no insect, no flower
only wind and fire

Take care of my domain, or I may leave.

Flora, I am called Flora

The Hippocampus Monologue

Oded Ben-Horin

Here, within, secrets awakening, within,
Wait for time to tell their future, its beginning
Some day, some way, dreamt time, away
So far, so near, here
Deep within,
a secret,
here, here,
For if time could tell of futures, of tomorrows
A fear of what that could be...
Did you ever think we'd see...
At times so unclear...
Until a new day is found...
Stars of skies of sights and sound...
my Hell-and-Heaven wings...
a grander scheme of things,
so unclear...
One new day to find...
so far,
so near,
here,
here

NACUSA is a non-profit organization founded in 1933 by Henry Hadley, originally as the National Association of Composers and Conductors. It is one of the oldest organizations devoted to the promotion and performance of music by Americans. Each NACUSA chapter typically sponsors several concerts each year which feature music by its members. NACUSA has chapters in Cascadia, East Coast, Great Plains, Los Angeles, Mid-Atlantic, Mid-South, San Francisco Bay Area, the South East, Southern Oregon, and Texas. Started by Nancy Bloomer Deussen and John Webber more than twenty years ago, the San Francisco Bay Chapter has evolved into an active organization with a peak membership of seventy-five composers. It produces four to six concerts a year in the San Francisco Bay Area. Learn more at <http://nacusasf.org>

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