

MAYA BEISER – Cello
ALMOST HUMAN

David Cook
Clifton Taylor/Carolyn Wong
Stephen Arnold

Sound design
Lighting design
Lighting/Projection Director

PROGRAM:

Tsmindao Ghmerto
For Cello and Vocals

Anonymous,
arranged by Evan Ziporyn

Khse Buon (1980)
For solo cello

Chinary Ung

Motion Detector (2006)
For solo cello, sampled chorus and live electronics (2006)
Commissioned by Maya Beiser for the “Almost Human” project

Joby Talbot

Feige/Antiphonal Song (2003)

Tan Dun

All Vows (2006)

Michael Gordon

Commissioned for Maya Beiser by The Carnegie Hall Corporation through the generosity of The Maria and Robert A. Skirnick Fund for New Works at Carnegie Hall.

-----Intermission-----

I am writing to you from a far-off country (2006)

Music by: Eve Beglarian
Video by: Shirin Neshat
Text by: Henri Michaux

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Notes on the program:

The cello, with its warm and rich singing tone, is said to most resemble the human voice.

In this concert I have collaborated with some of the most talented composers on the contemporary classical scene. I wanted each one to write music inspired by vocal traditions that they feel deeply connected to. The resulting works give the cello a powerful and haunting opportunity to “sing” the music. The works draw from cultures as diverse as Jewish, Armenian, Cambodian and Chinese. All share rich traditions of communicating heritage and folklore through the chanting human voice.

As in my previous projects I was interested in performing music while creating a large sensory canvas. Here, I wanted to create solo cello pieces that unveil a large sonic world with the use of sampled and live voices, electronics, and video projections.

Though I appear mostly alone on stage, I am indebted and grateful to the many wonderful professionals who have worked with me behind the scene, in my studio and in many other studios across New York City to help make this concert come alive.

-Maya Beiser

A N O N Y M O U S, arranged by E V A N Z I P O R Y N **Tsmindao Ghmerto**

Tsmindao Ghmerto, (Holly God), is a Sanctus from the orthodox Georgian Liturgy. Georgia has one of the world's most ancient polyphonic singing traditions, unique in its harmonic and its extreme polyphonic approach. Many songs have distinct archaic traits dating from pre-Christian times. The harmonies are unlike anything in European music, with untempered intervals and striking harmonic convergences.

In Evan Ziporyn's setting, Maya's voice, and the voice of her cello, weave a double helix of sanctity and intimacy. Two of three melodic strands are performed on the cello, the third is sung. The human voice, sometimes sandwiched between the cello lines and other times rising above, elevates the whole into a tromp d'orielle: a “solo trio”. The sound of the cello and voice is twined in a weightless high-wire act. The result is to render the abstractions of musical sound as humanized and human-sized.

C H I N A R Y U N G **Khse Buon**

Over a period of more than six years during his country's darkest days under Pol Pot, Cambodian-American composer Chinary Ung devoted hours every day to transcribing the endangered traditional music of Cambodia - preserving it and learning it himself on the roneat-ek, a Cambodian xylophone. He wrote no music of his own. In 1980 with Khse Buon, the words in Khmer for “four strings,” he broke his silence.

In Khse Buon, distinctly Cambodian musical elements convey the architecture of the piece, and Asian principles in general are honored: drones and modal melodies revolve around single notes that are colored and ornamented by micro-tonal inflections. However, there is none of the contemplative exoticism that we in the West have learned to associate with the sounds of South East Asia. Khse Buon is serrated. It is melancholy. It resonates with the memories of those who were lost.

Twenty years after Khse Buon, Chinary Ung relates, “I was trying to find my place in a new country. For me it was a question of integrating Asian ideas without being too derivative.” The questions of Khse Buon still echo: Can we make a coherent language in a multi-lingual world? Can we find a way to become more than simply where we come from?

JOBY TALBOT
Motion Detector

Living in a 21st century western metropolis means having our every move detected by machines. Our cell phone calls & credit card transactions are monitored by computer, our movements in public are recorded on cctv – even in our own homes invisible infrared beams are on hand to track our progress from room to room.

Motion Detector pits Maya Beiser's cumulative cello loops against an endlessly ascending choral glissando. The vocal sample is taken from Signum records upcoming cd of my piece, Path of Miracles, performed by Tenebrae conducted by Nigel Short.

-Joby Talbot

TAN DUN
Feige (Antiphonal Songs)

The Miao people are among 55 ethnic groups comprising China's non-Han minority population. In Feige, Tan Dun draws on the antiphonal Miao vocal tradition by having the solo cello on stage engage a singer on a video screen. Suddenly, a musical structure originally intended to communicate across mountain villages and open fields navigates entirely new boundaries of time, place, and culture.

Partly to ensure that the Miao marry outside of immediate kin, their folk singing has developed a piercing vocal quality (guaranteed to carry for long distance if needed) that not only packs a wealth of emotional expression, but demands highly stylized responses from any prospective partners. "Feige" is a form of dialogue singing in which the two participants traditionally never see each other. In this movement, the solo cello initiates the exchange, with the image of a woman listening attentively until she is ready to respond. "This is a very human sound, and immediately I envisioned that she was communicating with someone on the opposite side of the earth," Tan says. "In her moments of silence as we were filming, I was already composing the cello's response."

MICHAEL GORDON
All Vows

The holiest day of the Jewish liturgical year, Yom Kippur, begins with the Cantor's recitation of Kol Nidre, (literally All Vows). The bland legalistic text of Kol Nidre, which annuls the vows one might make during the year, was elevated to 'national anthem' like status as Jews sought a means to atone for transgressions forced upon them as a result of life in the Diaspora. Thus the somber European melody for Kol Nidre, with its melismatic minor modes, has become the most identifiable tune of the Hebrew service. I grew up listening to this melody sung once every year, first as a young child in Managua and later in Miami, and Maya Beiser also grew up with this melody, which she used to play on the cello for the service on her Kibbutz in Israel.

Making sense of Cantorial singing isn't easy. The hybrid blend of Hebrew Cantillation and Gregorian Melismas combined with a dose of European Opera is unlike anything a modern person hears anywhere outside of a synagogue. I asked myself this question: what does this ancient melody mean to me now? Or if you like: what do I really want to hear next year at Yom Kippur?

One of the great experiences a composer has is to be able to work again with a truly remarkable performer. When Maya Beiser and I spoke about the idea for this work, (my second piece for her after Industry, 1992), Maya offered to bring a Cantor on stage with her for the performance. It certainly would have been a spectacle, but All Vows is really a piece for the cello. I extend my deepest gratitude to Maya Beiser and Carnegie Hall for their support in the creation of All Vows and a big thanks to Luke DuBois who worked with me as Sound Designer in the creation of the electronics.

-Michael Gordon

EVE BEGLARIAN

I am writing to you from a far-off country

Video by SHIRIN NESHAT
Text by HENRY MICHAUX

Years ago I read a poem by the Belgian Surrealist Henry Michaux. The poem, "I'm writing to you from a far-off country", offers a vulnerable yet powerful female voice innocently commenting on her world. For a reason I cannot explain to this date, the voice of a woman in the poem, reflecting on her inner landscape, got transcribed in my mind to the "voice" of the cello.

I was fortunate to meet two extraordinary artists, composer Eve Beglarian, and video artist Shirin Neshat, who instinctively understood what it was that so compelled me about this poem. Together, we have created a multimedia dreamscape where the poem is presented through speech, music, singing, and visual experience. The juxtaposition of all the sensory ingredients serves to highlight the beauty of the poem and the power of that "voice".

"From a Far-Off Country" is conceived as a true collaboration between the performer, the composer, and the filmmaker. While it's not central to the conception of the piece, I feel it significant that three women of Middle-Eastern backgrounds (Jewish Israeli, Muslim Iranian and Christian Armenian) are coming together to collaborate intimately on this new work. In a world where recent events have focused on the Middle East as an epicenter of regional and religious strife, one hopes that women may have the power to restore sensible harmony.

I hope that the success of our collaboration would be a call to women from "far-off countries", which after all, is every country, to attempt the same.

-Maya Beiser

When Maya approached me eighteen months ago to write a new piece for this evening's concert, she brought me a poem by the Belgian surrealist Henri Michaux. I immediately fell in love with the poem, which is written as a series of twelve letters "from a far-off country." I find the strangely articulated quest narrative almost unbearably moving: in their dreamlike and mysterious way, the letters somehow manage to embody the wounded seeking for wholeness, for understanding, for transcendence that is a central experience of the human condition.

My first idea was to have many singers from many different far-off countries accompany Maya on her journey, but then I decided to use traditional Armenian chants and songs as the melodic basis of the whole piece. This music is simultaneously far-off and familiar to Western ears because of Armenia's peculiar and perilous location at the nexus of East and West, Greek and Persian, Turkish and Russian. The finished piece includes recognizable Armenian sources, recomposed and rendered far-off by using American, North African, and Indonesian compositional techniques.

Maya is the protagonist of the piece, she carries the text as well as the vast majority of the music, both live and pre-recorded. Alexandra Montano supplies her beautiful singing as a counterpoint to Maya's.

Maya and Shirin and I have worked on this piece for about a year now with a level of intensity and intimacy that is much closer to my experience working in theater than the standard concert music situation. I am very grateful for the opportunity to work with these incredible artists, and I thank them and their families for creating the space in which this work could happen.

-Eve Beglarian

The video component of this program is an attempt to pay tribute to Michaux's surrealist language in depiction of the narrator, as well as the 'universe' she describes. In "From A Far-Off Country" this fusion between sound, words and image intends to offer an experience where the viewer may leave with an impression of the 'inner world' as opposed to the 'outer world' of the narrator.

-Shirin Neshat

MAYA BEISER - Biography

Described by the The New Yorker as a "cello goddess" and by the San Francisco Chronicle as "the queen of post-minimalist cello," Maya Beiser has captivated audiences worldwide with her virtuosity, eclectic repertoire, and relentless quest to redefine her instrument's boundaries.

Over the past decade, she has created a new repertoire for cello, commissioning and performing many works written for her by today's leading composers. Most recently, Maya has collaborated with composers Louis Andriessen, Tan Dun, Brian Eno, Philip Glass, Osvaldo Golijov, Steve Reich, and Simon Shaheen, among many others. Maya toured this past season as the featured soloist of Philip Glass's Naqoygatsi with the Philip Glass ensemble, performing with them at the Sydney Opera House, Lincoln Center, the World Expo in Nagoya, Japan, and in Barcelona, Paris, and San Francisco.

Maya's critically acclaimed multimedia concert "World To Come" premiered in October 2003 at the Krannert Center in Illinois, and as part of the inaugural season of Carnegie Hall's new venue, Zankel Hall. Highlights of her subsequent "World To Come" tour included performances at the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C., UCLA's Royce Hall, the Kimmel Center in Philadelphia, and the Ravinia Festival in Chicago. She has premiered her new project, "Almost Human" at Carnegie's Zankel Hall to a sold out house in March 2006. Upcoming engagements in the 2006/2007 season include her debut performance at London's Barbican Hall, return appearances at Carnegie Hall and the Kennedy Center, as well as concerts at major venues in Atlanta, Chicago, Minneapolis and Seattle.

Maya's performance of Steve Reich's Cello Counterpoint is featured on the recent Nonesuch CD "You Are," chosen by The New York Times as one of the top albums of 2005. She is also the soloist on the Sony Classical CD release of Tan Dun's "Water Passion." Maya has performed as soloist with orchestras and major ensembles around the globe including the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, Montreal Symphony, Sydney Symphony, China Philharmonic and the Bach Akademie, Stuttgart. She has released three solo CD's with Koch Classics including "Oblivion", "Kinship" and "World To Come".

Raised on a kibbutz in Israel by her French mother and Argentinean father, Maya Beiser is a graduate of Yale University. Her major teachers were Aldo Parisot, Uzi Weizel, Alexander Schneider, and Isaac Stern. Maya was the founding cellist of the legendary new music ensemble, the Bang on a Can All-Stars.

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