



Artist Partner Program presents
MARGARET LENG TAN
CABINET OF CURIOSITIES

DECEMBER 8, 2016 . 8PM
KOGOD THEATRE
at The Clarice

THE CLARICE AT UMD
APP
ARTIST PARTNER PROGRAM

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MARGARET LENG TAN
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Diclaviv Enorma.....David M. Gordon
(2007) (b.1976)

Motus Perpetuus – Musica Ornata – Passacaglia
for piano, 2 toy pianos, call bells and tape playback

*Satie Blues**Toby Twining
(1995) (b.1958)

for toy piano and piano

Nothing is Real (Strawberry Fields Forever).....Alvin Lucier
(1990) (b. 1931)

for piano, teapot and miniature sound system

Twinkle, Dammit!.....David Wolfson
(2011) (b. 1964)

for toy piano, rattle, toy hammer
dramatization by Margaret Leng Tan

from *Old Mcdonald's Yellow Submarine**.....Erik Griswold
(2004) (b.1969)

Chooks! and Bicycle Lee Hooker
for toy piano, woodblocks, bicycle bell, bicycle horn, train whistle

INTERMISSION

*Curios** Phyllis Chen
(2015) (b.1978)

- i. March
for tape, video, crank toys, whirlarang and mask
- ii. Wunderkammer
for cymbals, gongs, bowls, video and mask
- iii. Phantasmagoria
for toy piano, toy psaltery, video and mask
- iv. Kassino Interlude
for toy piano, sound objects and clown nose
- v. Carousels
for toy piano, video, music box and clown nose
- vi. Arlecchino
for toy piano, mini-pipe organ, bird whistle and chime mask

United States premiere

*written for Margaret Leng Tan

This performance will last approximately 1 hour 40 minutes.

Yesterday, Margaret Leng Tan presented a workshop entitled *The Three C's: Cage, Cowell, Crumb: Pioneers of the Avant-Garde Piano* to students in the theory/composition and piano divisions of the School of Music. During the workshop, Ms. Tan gave a hands-on demonstration of John Cage's famous invention, the prepared piano, the cluster and string piano innovations of Cage's teacher, Henry Cowell, as well as the timbral magic of George Crumb's interior piano universe. Ms. Tan discussed notational challenges faced by composers of new music and answered questions from the students and faculty members. As an added bonus, Ms. Tan provided a sneak preview of a couple of movements from *Metamorphoses*, a new George Crumb work.

Cabinet of Curiosities is an evening of music-theater works celebrating pianos large and small, toy instruments and sound objects, some newly invented. Margaret Leng Tan treats them as real instruments in keeping with the French Dada artist Marcel Duchamp's statement, "poor tools require better skills." Reveling in this "art of the ordinary," she also fulfills her mentor John Cage's long-standing conviction that one can make music on just about any object capable of producing sound.

In a program encompassing nostalgia and humor, the miniature and the monumental, Tan opens with David M. Gordon's *Diclaviv Enorma*, engaging keyboards, microtonal call bells and tape playback. In electro-acoustic pioneer Alvin Lucier's *Nothing is Real*, the Beatles' "*Strawberry Fields Forever*" wafts from a teapot – now a musical instrument. Toby Twining explores the combined timbres of piano and toy piano in *Satie Blues* while Tan's treatment of David Wolfson's *Twinkle, Dammit!* turns into a toy piano parody of childhood piano lessons. The playful and cheeky Erik Griswold selections are a tour-de-force of multi-tasking. Finally, *Curios*, the music-theater work by Chinese-American composer Phyllis Chen, was a commission from the 2015 Singapore International Festival of Arts celebrating Margaret Leng Tan's seventieth birthday.

Diclaviv Enorma, for keyboard player and CD, was composed in 2007 for the senior piano recital of Timothy Smile, one of my former students.

The work's title is an invented combination of two obscure Medieval Latin terms: "diclaviv," which refers (at least as far as scholars can tell) to a keyboard instrument that has a full complement of chromatic pitches, and "claviv enorma," which designates a special quarter-tone key on a keyboard instrument (sometimes also called a "claviv enharmoniaca"). This phrase was chosen—or created, as it were—because it evokes certain ideas that are directly relevant to my conception of the work as a whole. To begin with, the title looks to me as though it should mean something along the lines of "enormous double keyboard" or "two giant keyboards." Though both of these translations are incorrect, they are nonetheless relevant to the structure of the piece, since I conceive of it as a kind of abstract discourse between two extended "super keyboards."

The first of these "keyboards," which is played by the live performer, is made up of a standard piano, a pair of chromatic toy pianos, and a set of eleven microtonally tuned call bells (the kind that you would find next to a "ring bell for service" sign). The second "keyboard," which is heard on the CD part, is even more expansive, featuring a piano with 24 pitches to the octave, multiple toy pianos, and a full set of call bells. It is to this particular part that the title alludes when it references a "claviv enorma" (i.e., quarter-tone key). The fact that the CD part features a 24-tone piano also gives a whole new meaning to the phrase "a full complement of chromatic pitches."

Diclaviv Enorma is comprised of three continuous movements, each of which explores a different set of timbral, rhythmic, textural, and harmonic interactions between the two keyboard parts. The first

movement, *Motus Perpetuus* (Perpetual Motion), is a machine-like, though rhythmically irregular, toccata that highlights the jangling tone colors and characteristically imprecise tunings of the toy pianos. Though rigorously synchronized, the two keyboard parts often move at different speeds throughout this movement. *Musica Ornata* (Florid Music) features elaborately ornamented melodic lines interweaving in a dense harmonic tapestry. It is during this section that the quarter-tone piano makes its first appearance, transforming the exotic, modal flourishes of the movement's opening into a tightly-packed, chromatic web. At a number of points in *Musica Ornata*, the two parts move independently of each other, creating a free, non-metrical rhythmic counterpoint. The third movement, *Passacaglia*, is a set of highly chromatic (actually, microchromatic) variations over a repeating harmonic pattern. As the section progresses, material from the preceding movements begins to reappear, gradually transforming the passacaglia into a large-scale recapitulation. Synchronization between the two parts is especially precise in this movement, involving as it does various interlocking patterns and unison rhythms.

Special thanks to John Snyder and Corey Abaira for their help in preparing the CD part.

– David M. Gordon

Satie Blues, for toy piano and piano, is the first-ever composition featuring this special blend of instruments. The opening motif is a nod to the 3rd Gnossienne of Erik Satie. Toby Twining has infused his melancholic *Satie Blues* with ineluctable allusions to “noir,” impelled by the toy piano's vaguely sinister overtones.

Alvin Lucier created **Nothing is Real (*Strawberry Fields Forever*)** for the pianist Aki Takahashi's Hyper Beatles album series. The melody of the Beatles song, *Strawberry Fields Forever*, is first recorded on the piano. The recording is then played back through a speaker hidden in a teapot. During playback the ensuing resonances are manipulated by opening and closing the teapot lid.

Twinkle, Dammit! (an obsessive variation on a well-known children's song) was written as a submission for the 1st International Toy Piano Festival in 2011, which had requested scores for toy piano and toys. Ms. Tan selected it personally for its resonance with her memories of childhood piano sessions and premiered it at the festival; the dramatization (and choice of toys) is hers.”

– David Wolfson

“Chooks” is Australian for chickens. *Bicycle Lee Hooker* is a mini-tribute to the great blues musician, John Lee Hooker. Erik Griswold explains: Knowing the skill and dedication of Margaret Leng Tan, I pushed the limits of toy instrument virtuosity by asking her to coordinate bicycle bells, train whistles and toy piano in *Bicycle Lee Hooker*, a right brain/left brain extravaganza.

Chooks! and *Bicycle Lee Hooker* are part of **Old MacDonald's Yellow Submarine** which was created with generous support from the Australia Council for the Arts. Old Mac was the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's official entry at the 2010 International Rostrum of Composers conference.

Curios is a six-part multimedia work that draws the audience into a musical and theatrical Cabinet of Curiosities (a "Wunderkammer") revolving around the bizarre, bewitching world of the carnival. Whether it be a roomful of carousels or a magic lantern, the "Wunderkammer" beckons us to enter a novel visual and sound world with Margaret as our guide. Using toy pianos, toy instruments and other oddities, *Curios* is inspired by an intriguing 1920s photograph Margaret gave me of three Kassino clowns. This rather grotesque, haunting image embodies our shared fascination with the carnival and is entirely in-synch with Margaret's natural ability to convey both humor and poignancy through her artistry.

– Phyllis Chen

Margaret Leng Tan has established herself as a major force in the American avant-garde. Ms. Tan, whose work embraces theatre, choreography, performance, has been called "the diva of avant-garde pianism" by *The New Yorker*. She is renowned as a pre-eminent John Cage interpreter (her mentor of eleven years) and for her performances of American and Asian music that transcend the piano's conventional boundaries.

Margaret Leng Tan has been hailed as "the queen of the toy piano" (*The New York Times*) and "the toy piano's Rubenstein" (*The Independent*, UK). In 2015 she celebrated her 20th anniversary as a pioneer of the toy piano. After discovering Cage's *Suite for Toy Piano* in 1993, Ms. Tan became fascinated with the artistic potential of the toy piano and more recently, with other toy instruments as well. In her groundbreaking 1997 CD, *The Art of the Toy Piano* (Philips/Universal), she elevated a humble toy to the status of a real instrument. Critics acknowledge her as the world's first toy piano virtuoso inspiring a new, unique repertoire. Her last toy album, *SHE HERSELF ALONE: The Art of the Toy Piano 2*, was released as a Mode Records CD/DVD.

Also available as a Mode DVD is Evans Chan's 2004 documentary, *Sorceress of the New Piano: The Artistry of Margaret Leng Tan*, nominated for "Best Music Documentary" at the American Film Institute/Discovery Channel's SilverDocs.

The first woman to graduate with a Doctor of Musical Arts from Juilliard in 1971, Tan was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts by the State University of New York in 2011. She was inducted into the Singapore Women's Hall of Fame in 2014. In 2015 Ms. Tan was awarded the Cultural Medallion, Singapore's highest cultural accolade.

www.margaretlengtan.com

David M. Gordon holds a Ph.D. in music composition from the University of Chicago, as well as B.M. and M.M. degrees in composition from Northern Illinois University. His principal composition teachers include Shulamit Ran, Marta Ptaszynska, and Jan Bach. Presently, Gordon serves on the faculty of Wheaton College (Illinois), where he teaches both composition and music theory. He specializes in chamber music that explores exotic timbres, unconventional instruments, microtonal tunings, and complex rhythms.

www.davidmgordon.com

Composer and singer **Toby Twining** is one of America's leading innovators in the field of vocal music. He has helped expand the palette of new music through innovative vocal and instrumental techniques, including harmony at the micro-consonant level. Recordings of his music include *Shaman* and *Chrysalid Requiem* (Toby Twining Music: BMG Classics, 1993 and Cantaloupe Music, 2002, respectively), *Satie Blues* and *Nightmare Rag* (Margaret Leng Tan, The Art of Toy Piano: Universal/Point, 1997), *9:11 Blues* (Matt Haimovitz, Anthem: Oxingale/Artemis 2002), and *Eurydice*, winner of a 2008 Barrymore Award (Cantaloupe Music, 2011). Twining has received Fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the Foundation for Contemporary Arts. He has enjoyed a long and joyful collaboration with Ms. Tan.

www.tobytwiningmusic.com/

Alvin Lucier is a trailblazer in experimental music and sound installations that explore acoustic phenomena and auditory perception. A long-time music professor at Wesleyan University, Lucier was a member of the influential Sonic Arts Union, which included Robert Ashley, David Behrman, and Gordon Mumma. Much of his work is influenced by science and explores the physical properties of sound itself: resonance of spaces, phase interference between closely tuned pitches, and the transmission of sound through physical media. *I Am Sitting in a Room* (1969), one of Lucier's most important and best-known works, has become a classic in the electro-acoustic music repertoire. Alvin Lucier was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award by the Society for Electro-Acoustic Music in the United States and received an Honorary Doctorate of Arts from the University of Plymouth, England.

www.alucier.web.wesleyan.edu

David Wolfson has written art songs, theatre songs, comedy songs, pop songs and songs for big-headed-costumed-character amusement parks shows; he has written music for bassoon quartet, percussion ensemble, SATB chorus and cello quartet; he has composed incidental music for plays and done sound design for Macy's display windows. The New York Times has called

his work “musically inventive” and “theatrically forceful.” His CD, *Seventeen Windows*, was released by Albany Records in 2013.

www.davidwolfsonmusic.net

Erik Griswold is an Australian-American composer-pianist who fuses experimental, jazz and world music traditions to create works of striking originality. Besides specializing in prepared piano, percussion and toy instruments, Griswold is also a sound and installation artist. He performs in *Clocked Out Duo* with percussionist Vanessa Tomlinson.

www.erikgriswold.org

Phyllis Chen is a pianist, toy pianist and composer whose musical interests have led in numerous directions as a soloist and collaborative artist. As a composer Phyllis is the recipient of commissions and grants including the Fromm Music Foundation, Roulette Intermedium (Jerome Fund), Opera Cabal Opera Shop, Baryshnikov Arts Center, Jack Quartet, ICE, New Music USA and A Far Cry. Phyllis is a founding member of International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE), the renowned New York-based collective. Phyllis is also the founder of UnCaged Toy Piano, an annual call for scores and biennial festival dedicated to expanding the repertoire for toy piano. She has collaborated extensively with her partner Rob Dietz with whom she has created *Looking Glass ReWandered*, *The Memoirist*, *Pearlescence*, *Chroma*, *Carousels* and *The Slumber Thief*.

www.phyllischen.net

Caley Monahon-Ward is an audio engineer specializing in on-location recording. His experience has included electroacoustic music performance, broadcast sound mixing for megachurch-style gospel productions, sound reinforcement for celebrity panel discussions, orchestral film score recording, and jazz festival production management. As an instrumentalist, Caley has concentrated largely on the avant-rock unit Voice Coils for the past year. He plays stringed instruments and percussion, and produces records.

Curios video designer: Rob Dietz • *Curios* instrument designer: Ranjit Bhatnagar • *Curios* mask designer/theatrical direction: Stanley Allan Sherman/Mask Arts Company • *Curios* lighting designer: Nicholas Houfĕk
Curios clown cadenzas by Margaret Leng Tan • Technical director/sound engineer: Caley Monahon-Ward
Teapot by Ragnar Naess • Margaret Leng Tan: photo by Michael Dames • *Kassino* clowns with dog, c. 1920: photographer unknown • *Curios*, commissioned by the Singapore International Festival of Arts 2015, was first performed on August 27, 2015 at the School of the Arts, Singapore. It was co-produced by CultureLink Singapore. Margaret Leng Tan plays the Steinway piano and the Schoenhut toy piano.

THE CLARICE

The **Artist Partner Program** engages national and international visiting artists who are committed to sparking exploration and discovery through participatory arts experiences.