

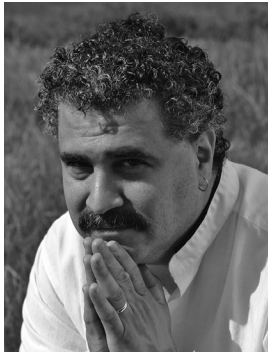
AKROPOLIS REED QUINTET

Sunday, February 9, 2020

All Program Notes Provided by Akropolis



The Akropolis Reed Quintet is celebrating its 10th anniversary as one of the United States' most prominent touring chamber music ensembles, and one of the few presenting primarily new classical compositions. It offers a program of original music for reed quintet by living composers Marc Mellits, Jeff Scott, Willem Jeths, and John Steinmetz. Akropolis commissioned two of the works, and all have been composed for its unique lineup of oboe, clarinet, saxophone, bass clarinet, and bassoon, representing additions to a chamber music repertoire that has exploded since Akropolis was founded in 2009. This program is designed to provide four different perspectives on contemporary music composition. Each composer utilizes different influences and techniques to create his music, each requiring different skills from the ensemble, ultimately providing four unique audience experiences.



Splinter

Marc Mellits

Splinter, by Chicago-based composer Marc Mellits, is probably the most popular work of the reed quintet repertoire. Composed in 2014, Mellits delivers a work suitable for introducing the reed quintet to ears which may never have heard it before. *Splinter* is comprised of short “miniatures,” each with its own personality. Combined, they each express unique emotional qualities through hocketing rhythms and colorful orchestrations. Mellits often composes for amplified acoustic instruments, including percussion, piano, and strings. Rhythmic drive and development are major components of his music, but do not overshadow his use of elongated phrases, subtle and effective harmonic motion, and beautiful textural creations.

Composed in 2014, *Splinter* consists of eight miniatures:
1. *Scarlet Oak* 2. *Sugar Maple* 3. *Linden* 4. *Black Ash*
5. *Cherry* 6. *River Birch* 7. *Weeping Willow* 8. *Red Pine*



Homage to Paradise Valley was commissioned by and composed for Akropolis in 2019, with support from the Chamber Music America Classical Commissioning Program, and with generous funding from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Paradise Valley, a now-displaced neighborhood in Detroit, Michigan, became of interest to Jeff Scott after he and Akropolis visited the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit, while Scott’s quintet, Imani Winds, was passing through Detroit on tour. *Homage to Paradise Valley* utilizes Scott’s diverse musical background as a jazz and studio musician in New York City. The composer provides these notes about the work’s four movements:

1. *Ghosts of Black Bottom*

Black Bottom was a predominantly black neighborhood in Detroit, Michigan. The term has sometimes been used to apply to the entire neighborhood, including Paradise Valley, which reached from the Detroit River north to Grand Boulevard. In the early 20th century, African-American residents became concentrated here during the first wave of the Great Migration to northern industrial cities. Informal segregation operated in the city to keep them in this area of older, less expensive housing. The name of the neighborhood is often erroneously believed to be a reference to the African-American community that developed in the 20th century, but it was named during the colonial era by the early French settlers because of its dark, fertile topsoil (known as river bottomlands). Black Bottom/Paradise Valley became known for its African American residents’ significant contributions to American music, including Blues,



Homage to Paradise Valley

Jeff Scott

Big Band, and Jazz, from the 1930s to ‘50s. Black Bottom’s substandard housing was eventually cleared and redeveloped for various urban renewal projects, driving the residents out. By the 1960s, the neighborhood had ceased to exist.

2. *Hastings Street* ran north-south through Black Bottom and had been a center of Eastern European Jewish settlement before World War I, but by the 1950s, migration transformed the strip into one of Detroit’s major African-American communities of black-owned businesses, social institutions, and night clubs. Music was the focal point of Hastings Street, with world-famous jazz and blues artists visiting almost daily.

3. *Roho, Pumzika kwa Amani* (Spirits, Rest Peacefully), from the Bantu language of Swahili, is a lullaby. Scott writes, “It is my humble offering to the many souls who came before me, and persevered through the middle passage, decades of slavery, disenfranchising laws, and inequality. I am who I am because of those who stood before me. May their spirits rest peacefully.”

4. *Paradise Theater Jump* Orchestra Hall, where the Detroit Symphony Orchestra now performs, closed in 1939 but reopened in 1941 as the Paradise Theater. For ten years it would then offer the best of African-American musicians from around the country. Duke Ellington opened Christmas week with his big band, admission was 50 cents, and patrons could stay all day. There were three shows every day and four on weekends. “B” movies were shown between acts. During the glory days of jazz, the Paradise Theater saw Ella Fitzgerald, Billy Eckstine, Billie Holiday, and many more. *Paradise Theater Jump* is dedicated to this famed theater and harkens to the up-tempo style of “jump blues,” usually played by small groups and featuring saxophone or brass instruments. One can learn more about this part of Detroit’s history by visiting the Detroit Historical Society website at detroithistorical.org.



Maktub

Willem Jeths

The word “maktub” appears throughout the international best-selling book, *The Alchemist*, by Brazilian author Paulo Coelho, and is the inspiration for Dutch composer’s Willem Jeths’ reed quintet composition. “Maktub” is first used in *The Alchemist* by a crystal merchant, who, when giving advice to the book’s main character, Santiago, introduces to him the idea of his “personal legend” or Maktub. Maktub means, “it is written,” and it becomes the subject of Santiago’s journey to discover his personal legend. *Maktub* is the concert’s most meditative composition. Rather than specific images, Jeths paints a landscape in one through-composed movement that allows listeners to fill in their own images and ideas, considering the meaning of “Maktub” and their own personal legends. *The Alchemist* asks the timeless and basic question, “Are we in control of the

events in our lives, or are they written by fate?” In the novel, Santiago encounters circumstances which make it plain to him that the universe is conspiring so that he can achieve his personal legend, but he also makes key choices along the way.



***Sorrow and
Celebration:
The Space
Between Us***

*For reed quintet
and audience*

John Steinmetz

Sorrow and Celebration for reed quintet and audience is a work teeming with optimism even as it grieves. Akropolis commissioned composer John Steinmetz in 2014, during a summer brimming with tension and uncertainty in many American communities. The composer describes his early influences and how the piece evolved from them:

"This piece imitates a ceremony or ritual, calling people together to mourn and rejoice. As I began composing, the deaths of two young African American men, Michael Brown and Eric Garner, were on my mind. The sorrow in this music started there, but it is meant to honor any grief, whether individual or shared.

"After mourning, the music changes mood, eventually becoming dance-like. Sometimes sorrow, in bringing people together, can cut through the illusion of separateness, and that is cause for gratitude and celebration. And a Wendell Berry poem advises, 'Be joyful though you have considered all the facts.'

"When the music was nearly finished, I read about Apollo 14 astronaut Edgar Mitchell's transformative experience while returning from the moon. He described looking out at the earth and the vastness of space. 'I became aware that everything that exists is part of one intricately interconnected whole.'"