



DownEast New Music

PRESS RELEASE – Program Info

DOWNEAST NEW MUSIC announces its inaugural season July 7-15, 2023.

Tickets available now at <https://www.tickettailor.com/events/downeastnewmusic>.

Program I: Isolation/Togetherness

Isolation/Togetherness examines our relationships with each other and ourselves. With a single musician alone on stage, **Isolation/Togetherness** opens with Pulitzer Prize-winning composer **Caroline Shaw's** (b. 1982) solo cello work *in manus tuas* (2009), which depicts the sensation of hearing a 16th-century Thomas Tallis motet in a beautifully resonant church. Though the Tallis' motet is performed by a choir, *in manus tuas* looks inward and explores how a single person receives and absorbs the music.

While *in manus tuas* looks at an individual's moment of reverie in life, ***Evil's Peak*** (2019) by **Mikhail Johnson** (Jamaica, b. 1989) brings us together in death. Written for soprano and double bass, *Evil's Peak* is a *Totentanz* (Dance of Death), where the soprano embodies Death, calling everyone to her dance. Singing in Jamaican, the soprano portrays Death as gleefully vengeful while summoning the corrupt and immoral, but also tender as she regretfully must also call the innocent and pure.

Soprano and double bass are joined by violin and cimbalom (the Hungarian hammered dulcimer) for **György Kurtág's** (Romania, b. 1926) monumental *Scenes from a Novel*. Full of colorful expressivity and emotion, this song cycle explores the reflections and loneliness of one woman, using text by Russian-born poet Rimma Dalos. While dark humor comes through at times, the world depicted remains cold and desolate.

After contemplating the profound effects of isolation, we end our program with its antidote: a celebration of friendship in **Jessie Montgomery's** (b. 1981) *Duo for violin and cello* (2015). Written in four movements, Montgomery describes the duo as “an ode to friendship [that] characterizes laughter, compassion, adventure, and sometimes silliness.”

Program II: Celestial Bodies

Celestial Bodies was largely inspired by **Brett Dean's** (Australia, b. 1961) substantial work for piano quintet, *Voices of Angels* (1996). Dean prefaces the piece with the Rilke quote: ‘Angels (it's said) are often unable to tell whether they move amongst the living or the dead.’ Written in two movements titled ‘Evocation’ and ‘Different Realms,’ *Voices of Angels* explores familiar and unfamiliar sounds from this ensemble (piano, violin, viola, cello, bass), conveying a multitude of sonic environments that evoke the presence of otherworldly beings and feelings of mystery, beauty, frenzy, and stillness.

If *Voices of Angels* depicts beings beyond the familiar and tangible, ***King of the Sun*** (1988) by **Stephen Hartke** (b. 1952) for piano quartet stands in contrast as a celebration of physical bodies from the world around us. With movement titles like “Personages in the night guided by the phosphorescent tracks of snails” and “The flames of the sun make the desert flower hysterical,” the music evokes embodied experiences of flora and fauna that shift from minute and comical gestures to depictions of the sublime.

In between natural and supernatural realms lies **Libby Larsen's** (b. 1950) *Up Where the Air Gets Thin* (1985) for cello and bass, a minimalist expression of sound on Mount Everest, at the limits of natural heights on Earth. Larsen reflects: “Up where the air gets thin, music takes on a new meaning...[there] lies the acoustic horizon, the elusive line at the extreme range of audibility.” The piece depicts Everest as a landscape that is not only majestic and awesome but fragile, reflecting the imposing threat of climate change.

Lastly, **Celestial Bodies** will include the **world premiere of a new work** by DownEast New Music's pianist **Danny Holt** (b. 1981) who recently relocated to East Machias, Maine, after living and working in Southern California for nearly two decades. Holt's quartet (for viola, cello, double bass, and piano) is a tribute to the awesome natural beauty of coastal DownEast Maine.