

FORBES CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY®

School of Music

presents the

**42nd Contemporary Music Festival
Concert I**

featuring faculty and student performers and
The Madison Singers, directed by Jo-Anne van der Vat-Chromy

Gavin Higgins, *guest composer*

Monday, October 9, 2023
8 pm
Concert Hall



There will be one 15-minute intermission

Program

La salsita del Sr Ligeti (2005) Elena Riu
Tumbáo (2005) Tania León
Suy-muy-key (2005) Gabriela Ortiz
Für Elena (2005) Diana Arismendi

Eric Ruple, *piano*

La isla mágica (2013) Angélica Negrón
for bass & fixed electronics

Sam Suggs, *bass*

from Trinity Caprices (2022) Aiveen Gallagher
Vocate ad Mariam
Urbana

Aiveen Gallagher, *viola*

Three Crows (2016) John Allemeier
Megumi Kadarusman, *flute* | Will Slopnick, *oboe*
Tommy Allen, *tenor saxophone*

Endgame (2011)* Gavin Higgins
Haven Kahn, *soprano saxophone* | Tyrique Payne, *alto saxophone*
Thomas Allen, *tenor saxophone* | Dylan Royal, *baritone saxophone*

*US première

Intermission

Coronation *Agnus Dei* (2023) Tarik O'Regan

Cruelty Has A Human Heart (2021) Gavin Higgins
poetry by William Blake (1757-1827)

John Meshreky, *cello*

Program (continued)

The Fire and the Rose (2023)*

Eric Guinivan
poetry by T.S. Elliot (1888-1965)

The Madison Singers

Jo-Anne van der Vat-Chromy, *director*

Amy Robertson, *collaborative pianist*

Nikos Myrogiannis-Koukos, *graduate conductor*

Addison Walton, *graduate conductor*

TJ Oxbrough, Ashley Seminaro, *TMS Managers*

Abby Wilson, Annie Urmanski, Cara Ainge, Gillian Saunders, Hailey Wilson,
Josephine Suwanpoh, Kayleigh Manners, Madi Gilleland, Meghan Willey,
Millie Morris, Morgan Brown, *sopranos*

Addison Walton, Ashley Seminaro, Eva Pierce, Erica Taylor, Georgia
Orfanides, Meredith Scarboro, Nicole Dudley, Sophia Castro, *altos*

Drew Dodson, Devonte Garcia, Nick Gomez-Colon,
Ricky Goodwyn, TJ Oxbrough, *tenors*

Daniel Klein, Darien Roby, DeJuan Woods, Jr., Elijah Keys, Mac Creswick,
Nikos Myrogiannis-Koukos, Roman Leonard, *basses*

*World première

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Program Notes

The piano pieces tonight are taken from the collection *Salsa Nueva: vibrant salsa beats meet contemporary classical piano music*, commissioned and edited by Elena Riu, 2005. Below, each of the four women composers speak about their music and background.

La salsita del Sr Ligeti reflects my own eclectic background. As I grew up I was surrounded by music ranging from Wagner and Dvorák to flamenco and Venezuelan folk music. I was also passionate about ballet and contemporary dance and studied literature at university. When I moved to London to study music, I discovered the music of Boulez, Penderecki and Messiaen ... and fish and chips. Of the people who most influence and inspire me, some are totemic in their permanence like Lorca, Mompou, the Marz Brothers, Granados, Sculthorpe, Pärt, Ligeti, my yoga teacher, Jean Anouilh, Alexander Satz, Peter, Arrau, Rothko, Goya. Others are like relentlessly multiplying fleeting clouds: Salif Keita, Ali Farka Toure, Gubaidulina, Ustvolskaya, Janáček, various children, Bergman. But my main musical influences are Bach, Mozart, Albéniz, Manitas de Plata, Paco de Lucía, Hector Lavoe, Ismael Miranda, Celia... (Elena Riu)

Tumbáo – Like everything in life, we are all reinventing ourselves constantly. Cultures have emerged from the influences of people travelling around the planet. The same could be said for the evolution of music. In a hundred years from now, we may have a hybrid developed from the pollination that is going on in the world of music at this moment. I draw my inspiration from my ancestors and all of those I have been able to learn about or learn from in all walks of life. My early influences were Bach and Cervantes. The piano was the first instrument I touched as a baby – Grandma gave me a toy piano before I was one year old. I began my music studies, on the piano, at four. In Tumbáo, I enjoyed being able to release some of my most vital roots into my composing mix. (Tania León)

Suy-muy-key – The vertiginous technological developments of recent times have had an overwhelming impact in all fields of music making. The ways of listening to music, new collaborative possibilities, the infinite arsenal of compositional tools available and the direct contact with the media has driven us towards an eclectic universe of sound languages which define today's musical world. For myself, I aim to refine day by day those techniques which facilitate my imperative need to communicate through music. I grew up surrounded by Latin-American music and love dancing salsa, which is something that comes naturally to me. Writing this piece, I tried to let this joy filter through in my writing so that it would be a personal portrayal of me and not just a literal approach to salsa. But I trained as a classical pianist and also love Ravel, Bartók and Stravinsky. (Gabriela Ortiz)

Für Elena – The piano is a wonderful instrument and it is, in fact, the only one with which I have a relationship of near intimacy. All my early influences come from my days as a beginner pianist. In spite of my Latin-American origins, neither salsa nor popular music have been my natural language. But in writing Für Elena, salsa has combined with my usual musical language, communicating some of the happiness of Latin America. (Diana Arismendi)

The **Trinity Caprices** are a set of three pieces for solo viola, which can be performed individually or as a set. Completed in 2022, the aim of the caprices is to demonstrate virtuosity and technical brilliance whilst embodying elements of artistic self-identity. They also seek to explore the multi-faceted nature of the viola and enrich the catalogue

Program Notes *continued*

of virtuosic viola repertoire. Each of the caprices incorporate Western classical and global approaches to string playing whilst maintaining a distinct classical impression in spirit and sound.

“Vocate ad Mariam” (Call to Mary) is a Marian devotion inspired by the music of the Catholic Church. The music blends contemporary string techniques, amplification and electronic effects, and early sacred music aesthetics. Opening with a musical cryptogram for Maria, the music takes on the form of a spiritual meditation. The closing notes resolve in the distance, symbolizing the divine mystery of Mary’s Coronation and the paradise of the next life.

“Urbana” is edgy in nature, with a distinct minimalistic influence weaved into the fabric of 1980’s multicultural, popular, and global genres. The music fuses aspects of bluegrass, rock, and Western classical string performance, incorporating a multitude of textures, timbres, and percussive effects. (Aiveen Gallagher)

Three Crows is based on the Appalachian folk song “Three Ravens.” Originally composed for clarinet trio, it has been reworked a number of times for different instrumentations. The present instrumentation (flute, oboe, and tenor saxophone) was arranged for a performance with choreography by Rubén Graciani at the Sofia Sofia Museum in Madrid, Spain. (John Allemeier)

Endgame is the final phase of a game of chess in which only a few pieces are left on the board. It is also the name of the Samuel Beckett play from which the inspiration for this work is drawn. The play focuses on a group of four people in the endgame of their own lives; cyclical existences that are trapped in perpetual loops of repeated actions, phrases, minute movements, strange rituals, and static routines. References to beginnings and endings litter the work: Mentions of Jesus (who we are told died and was reborn, starting a new religion), the killing of a flea over fear that humanity might ‘start from there all over again!’, and the sighting of a boy that Clov fears may be a ‘potential procreator’ all add to the feelings of cyclical stasis in which we, the characters and audience, are trapped. The theme of repetition and the need to start again is at the root of my composition. The opening outburst is recycled throughout the piece, continuously restarting when each section is completed, whilst rows of notes are looped, recapped, and collide. (Gavin Higgins, London: June 2011)

Premiered on May 6, 2023, and met with uniform critical praise, Tarik O'Regan's **Coronation *Agnus Dei*** (Lamb of God) was one of five new works presented in the coronation service of Charles III and Camilla in Westminster Abbey. The king commissioned O'Regan after hearing his music at Lincoln Cathedral in 2006; his setting of the Agnus Dei, *Coronation Agnus Dei*, was performed during the Eucharist. O'Regan said of the piece, “I wanted to explore influences from my own varied heritages within the context of the Agnus Dei in the British choral tradition: a unison melody is slowly fragmented to create myriad timbres, much as one might hear in some Arab or Irish traditional music. This melodic shifting is also reminiscent of ‘phase music,’ strongly connected with San Francisco, where I wrote this work. Finally, there is an alternating verse anthem structure: a nod to Orlando Gibbons, who became Organist of Westminster Abbey exactly 400 years ago.” (Jo-Anne van der Vat-Chromy)

Cruelty Has a Human Heart – Composer Gavin Higgins recounts, “Cruelty Has a Human Heart was written as a response to ‘How falsely doth the world accuse,’ Chorale 38 from Bach’s St. Matthew Passion.” With text taken from William Blake’s poem “A Divine Image” from *Songs of Experience*, Higgins fashions his response as an exploration

Program Notes *continued*

of the human shadow, as expressed through angular homophonic writing that, combined with harmonic density, rhythmic tension, and a mournful cello obligato, magnify the painful nature of Blake's writing. (Jo-Anne van der Vat-Chromy)

Cruelty has a Human Heart
And Jealousy a Human Face
Terror the Human Form Divine.
And Secrecy, the Human Dress

The Human Dress, is forged Iron
The Human Form, a fiery Forge.
The Human Face, a Furnace seal'd
The Human Heart, it's hungry Gorge.

—William Blake

The Fire and the Rose – Taken from *Little Gidding*, the last poem in T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, fire, and roses are central main images of this poem. Roses, a traditional symbol of English royalty, also represent divine love and mercy. In the poem's broader context, fire represents the spiritual power capable of either destroying or purifying the human soul and bringing understanding. Eliot incorporates a verse attributed to renowned writer and anchoress Julian of Norwich (b. 1343), whose writings, now known as *Revelations of Divine Love*, are the earliest known surviving English language works by a woman: "And all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well," when the fire that both destroys and redeems us knots together and "the fire and the rose"—divine wrath and divine mercy—become one. Guinivan's use of organizational tempi, the wordless, musing theme in $\frac{3}{4}$ time that reappears at key moments throughout the work, and the masterful and seamless modulations all underscore the alchemical mysteries and messages of Eliot's celebrated poetry. Tonight's premiere of Eric Guinivan's *The Fire and the Rose* is made possible by the generous support of the JMU 2021-2022 Shirley Hanson Roberts '56 and Richard D. Roberts Endowment for Faculty Excellence. (Jo-Anne van der Vat-Chromy)

What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from.

Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning.
Every poem an epitaph.
And any action is a step to the block, to the fire, down the sea's throat,
Or to an illegible stone: and that is where we start.

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

And all shall be well and
All manner of things shall be well.
When the tongues of flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.

—T.S. Eliot (1942)

Guest Biography - Gavin Higgins

Described as 'boldly imaginative' [the Times], 'a talent to watch' [New York Times] and 'one of the most interesting voices of his generation' [Limelight], **Gavin Higgins** is one of Britain's most exciting and gifted compositional talents. Higgins was born in Gloucestershire (1983) and studied French horn and composition at Chetham's School of Music, The Royal Northern College of Music, and the Royal College of Music.

Significant commissions include *Der Aufstand* for the 2012 BBC Proms, *Rough Voices* for the 2020 BBC Proms, and the 'fast, exciting and brilliantly scored' [the Telegraph] *Velocity* for the Last Night of the 2014 BBC Proms; the Ivor Novello Award winning trombone concerto, *The Book of Miracles* (2019) – premiered by the BBC Symphony Orchestra and soloist Helen Vollam; and the premiere of his first opera *The Monstrous Child*, (2019) at the Royal Opera House which opened to critical acclaim, described as 'a triumph' [the Guardian ★★★★★] and 'a spectacular new opera' [Culture Whisper ★★★★★]. His biggest and most ambitious piece to date, the 'ingenuous work' [the Observer ★★★★★] Concerto Grosso for Brass Band and Orchestra was recently premiered at the 2022 BBC Proms to great acclaim; whilst his 'bold and brilliant' [the Times] cantata, *The Faerie Bride*, with librettist Francesca Simon, was premiered at the Aldeburgh Festival with Marta Fontanals-Simmons and Roddy Williams.

Higgins comes from a long lineage of working-class brass band musicians dating back to 1895 and his passion for this heritage has resulted in a number of vigorous, daring works for brass such as *Destroy, Trample as Swiftly as She* (2011), *Prophecies* (2017) and *So Spoke Albion* (2019) commissioned for the European Brass Band Championships.

Higgins was appointed Rambert Dance Company's inaugural Music Fellow in 2010, writing ballet scores including *What Wild Ecstasy* (2012) and the award winning *Dark Arteries* (2016). Higgins has received BASCA nominations for *A Forest Symphony* (2009), *What Wild Ecstasy* (2012), *Diversions After Benjamin Britten* (2013), *The Ruins of Detroit* (2015), and *A Dark Arteries Suite* (2018). *Dark Arteries* was shortlisted for a Royal Philharmonic Society Music Award (2016) and in 2019 he won an Ivor Novello Award for *The Book of Miracles*.

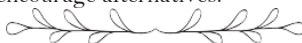
His debut album of chamber music, *Ekstasis* — 'seductively sinewy and sensuously gritty' [Limelight ★★★★★], was released in 2019 to wide acclaim. An album of chamber works that confirms 'a fastidious and arresting compositional voice' [Gramophone], with music that, 'constantly intrigues and fascinates with its combination of sophisticated instrumental writing and magical textures' [Planet Hughill ★★★★★]

His career thus far has seen Higgins commissioned by – and work with – orchestras, ensembles and soloists including the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, London Sinfonietta, Manchester Camerata, Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, Ensemble 10:10, The Royal Opera House, Rambert, the Carducci Quartet, the Fidelio Trio, the Piatti Quartet, David Cohen and Mark Simpson. Gavin is currently Composer in Association with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales.

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Difference in identity enriches our community, fosters artistic and intellectual growth, and is vital to creating thriving venues for expression in a global world. In addition to welcoming all individuals and perspectives regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, disability, socio-economic status, or citizenship status, we wish to make the following acknowledgements and affirmations, adapted from Americans for the Arts:

- In the United States, there are systems of power that grant privilege and access unequally such that inequity and injustice result. We resolve to educate ourselves, keep vigilant watch, and act to bring an end to systemic oppression.
- Cultural equity—which embodies values, practices, and policies that ensure all people have access to, and are represented in, the arts—is critical to the sustained engagement of music in society.
- Acknowledging and challenging our inequities and working in partnership is how we will make change happen.
- Everyone deserves equal access to a full, vibrant creative life, which is essential to a healthy and democratic society.
- The prominent presence of musicians in society can challenge inequities and encourage alternatives.



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