

Solo Violin with Alternating Currents

**Karen Bentley Pollick, Violin & Piano
Charles Norman Mason, Technical Director**

**Thursday, March 11, 2010 at 6:00 pm
Steiner Auditorium
Birmingham Museum of Art**

Capital Spheres, for Violin and Soundfiles (2010) Michael Angell
World Premiere

Impossible Animals, for Violin and Computer-synthesized Voices (1989)
David A. Jaffe

Duetto con Bobik, for Solo Violin and Electronics (2010) Brian C. Moon
World Premiere

Metaman, for Violin with Digital Sound and Video (2009)
World Premiere Video by Sheri Wills
Music by Charles Norman Mason

Vista, for Violin with Prerecorded Electronics (2005) Alex Shapiro

Fantasia for Karen Alone, for Violin Solo with Digital Sound (2010)
World Premiere Dorothy Hindman

Sole Injection, for Violin and Computer-generated Sounds (1996)
Zack Browning

Solo Blues, for Violin and Piano (2007) Dan Tepfer

Karen Bentley Pollick has performed as violinist with Paul Drescher's Electro-Acoustic Ensemble since 1999. She performs a wide range of solo repertoire and styles on violin, viola, piano and Norwegian hardangerfele. With Australian pianist Lisa Moore, Pollick formed the duo Prophet Birds in spring 2009. A native of Palo Alto, California, she was concertmaster and conductor of the Palo Alto Chamber Orchestra and studied with Camilla Wicks in San Francisco. While attending Indiana University she studied violin with Josef Gingold, chamber music with Rostislav Dubinsky, and received both Bachelors and Masters of Music Degrees in Violin Performance. She has several recordings of original music, including *Electric Diamond*, *Angel*, *Konzerto and Succubus* and *Ariel View*, for which she has received three music awards from Just Plain Folks, including Best Instrumental Album and Best Song. On her own record label Ariel Ventures she has produced *Dancing Suite to Suite*, *<amberwood>* and *Homage to Fiddlers*. Pollick was concertmaster of the New York String Orchestra at Carnegie Hall in 1984 and has participated in the June in Buffalo and Wellesley Composers Conferences. She has performed in recital with Russian pianist/composer Ivan Sokolov at the American Academy of Rome, Seattle and New York City, throughout the Czech Republic with cellist Dennis Parker in the 2007 and 2008 American Spring Festivals, and in England at the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival. She has appeared as soloist with Redwood Symphony in the world premiere of Swedish composer Ole Saxe's *Dance Suite for Violin and Orchestra*, the Alabama Symphony, and orchestras in Panama, Russia, Alaska, New York and California. Pollick received a grant from the Alabama State Council for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts for her March 2010 Solo Violin and Alternating Currents concerts in Birmingham and Seattle and performs on a violin made by Jean Baptiste Vuillaume in 1860.

www.kbentley.com

Capital Spheres is the second work that Michael Angell has written for Karen Bentley Pollick. The performance forces are violin and computer generated and manipulated soundfiles. The work is an analogue concerning the nature of personal identity and place. In one's life, one may travel and live in various different places, maintaining the distinction and sovereignty of their identity within a sphere. One may move abruptly from place to place or transition, as through a pipe. The score is organized in an unusual fashion. A board is divided into six sections, two rows of three. The performer chooses six out of eight score sections to play in the space. These eight sections consist of a sphere and pipe for each of four cities: Washington DC, Birmingham, Chicago, and San Francisco. In addition to these six sections, the performer has the option of utilizing any of three more traditional written segments for unaccompanied violin: Introduction, Detour (which may be played at any point in the middle), and Parking (at the very end). Many of the concrete sources were recorded during a sound hunting expedition in Washington, DC in June of 2008.

www.mikeangell.com

Impossible Animals is a fanciful exploration of the boundary between human and animal expression and behavior, and between the realms of nature and human imagination. An antiphonal interplay is set up between the live performer and the synthesized voices, with the violin assuming the role of narrator of an abstract story, while the computer voices serve as actors, taking on improbable voices of unthinkable animals, emoting in an unknown language. As the piece progresses, the violin takes on more and more animal characteristics. The "story" is concerned with animals seen while looking at clouds, and concludes with a description of a more familiar (though no less absurd) beast with its own special vocalization.

The synthesized voices were created using a mainframe computer at the Stanford University Center for Computer Research in Music and Acoustics (CCRMA). It consists of a variety of grunts, exclamations and comments, including a half-human/half-bird vocalise, which represents a true hybrid between human and bird singing, as if a bird's brain had been transplanted inside a wildly-gifted human singer. It was produced by beginning with a recording of a Winter Wren and analyzing it using frequency domain tracking techniques developed by researcher Julius Smith. Using software written by the composer, frequency and amplitude trajectories were then extracted, segmented into individual "chirps" and tuned to the underlying harmonic background. In addition, the range was modified over time and the frequency axis was mapped onto an evolving set of vowels. Finally, the data was resynthesized, using human vocal synthesis, using a technique developed by researcher Xavier Rodet at IRCAM in Paris. The result is a new and greatly-transformed rendition of the original wren's song.

www.jaffe.com

Duetto con Bobik, a piece for solo violin and electronics, was written for violinist Karen Bentley Pollick in 2010. The electronics for this piece are comprised entirely of manipulated recordings of Bobik—a stray hound dog that has taken up residence at the President's home on the campus of Birmingham-Southern College. These recordings influenced the rhythmic, textural, and melodic composition of the work, resulting in a quirky, fun, and surprisingly tonal experience. Though most of the melodic material in the tape part did not need to be auto-tuned, some material was tweaked using the "I Am T-Pain" application on an iPhone.

www.solarbean.com

Composer Charles Norman Mason and NYC artist Sheri Wills continue their collaborative work with *Metaman*, created specifically for Karen Bentley Pollick. It blurs the digital with the human by turning the soloist into a visual and aural landscape: as both the source and site of the imagery and as both the source of real and imagined sound sources. The video is projected onto the soloist, who becomes the screen for the imagery – imagery that shifts as the violinist moves within the frame. The audio is a combination of live acoustic and digital audio that includes samples of recorded performances of Ms. Pollick. The title for the piece comes from Gregory Stock's book *Metaman: The Merging of Humans and Machines into a Global Superorganism*. The music for *Metaman* was completed during a residency sponsored by the Escape to Create Institute of Seaside, Florida.

www.charlesnormanmason.com & sheriwills.com

Vista, written for violinist Antonio D'Andrea, pairs the depths of electronically created soundscapes that swirl through the environment, with the beautiful purity of a violin that sings through the thick, sultry air. We can see great distances with our hearing, and hear great emotion with our heart. Each day we rise, the landscape before us is a vista of possibility. It is up to us to hear the truth in all we are shown, and to act upon it with grace and love.

www.alexshapiro.org

Fantasia for Karen Alone, for violin solo with digital accompaniment, suggests the private moment when the musician is in her practice studio, playing for herself and the joy of it alone, inspired by the fragments of music she is working up that constantly swirl through her thoughts. Written specifically for violinist Karen Bentley Pollick, the accompanying soundfile's source material is based on several of Karen's prior performances of the composer's works.

<http://faculty.bsc.edu/dhindman>

Sole Injection for Violin and Computer-generated Sounds was written during the summer of 1996 and commissioned by Carbondale Community Arts for performance at Arts in Celebration '96. The composition belongs to a series of works written over the last several years that explore the application of magic squares to musical form. Eleven routes through the 6x6 Magic Square of the Sun provide the structure in which each number within the square is paralleled in the musical score by a particular style, rhythm, density, timbre and orchestration. Inspiration for the work came from MC Hammer's 1991 tune "Adams Groove" which was featured in the film "The Adams Family". The computer part was produced using GACSS (Genetic Algorithms in Composition and Sound Synthesis) which is an original computer music software package developed by Benjamin Grosser.

www.zackbrowning.com

Solo Blues for Violin and Piano was commissioned by Liz Bacher and premiered at the Weill Recital Hall of Carnegie Hall in January 2007. It is a solo piece, as the title indicates, for violin and piano, meaning that both instruments are played by a single performer. My idea in writing the piece was to imagine an inquisitive soul, equally adept at the piano and violin, sitting down to explore the possibilities offered by the combination of both instruments. As I child, after I had been playing the piano and improvising for a number of years, I was given a clarinet by my father and I have a clear memory of going through this exploration myself. I loved how two separate problems, one geometric, the other musical, came together and grew off of each other. Hence, there is a sense of narrative to the piece, as the musician, a little tentative at first, gradually gains confidence and sees her enthusiasm grow as she discovers more and more ways to combine the two instruments. While the music is meant to stand on its own, a live performance of the piece is ultimately as much choreography as it is music. The Blues of the title refers to the harmonic framework used in the composition, which is articulated around the first, fourth and fifth degrees of the key of D, in the order of the traditional blues form: I - IV - I - V - IV - I. This makes two things possible: on the one hand, using the backdrop of the blues connects this classical composition with my background in jazz and gives a cultural and historic framework to the plaintive quality of the initial melody; on the other, it allows me to use the violin's open strings (G, D, A and E) to play the fundamental and fifth of each of the three harmonic centers of the piece. Seen this way, it's as if the violin had been made to play the blues.

www.dantepfer.com



This program has been made possible by grants from the Alabama State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts and is presented by the Birmingham Museum of Art and Birmingham Art Music Alliance (BAMA).