

Program Notes and Bios:

Program Notes: *Unsoftly, to the Night*

The concluding event of the symposium is the premiere of a new work by Matt Curlee entitled *Unsoftly, to the Night*. Eastman School of Music students will perform alongside the projected film and still photography of Mr. Nicklin. In addition, Rochester-based dance company BIODANCE will perform choreography by Missy Pfohl Smith, and UR students in the Program of Dance and Movement will perform a structured improvisation by Mariah Steele.

The piece, scored for 5 strings, 5 improvisors, and an 8-part chorus, provides extended frames for improvisation which are structured in a manner inspired by current research into the sonic lives of whales, including the work of Flip Nicklin, Jim Darling, and others in the field. The gradual development of granular sound elements, punctuated by more dramatic turns associated with the injection of new thematic material, reflects a process thought to be happening on the timescale of months and years for humpbacks in the Pacific. In alternation with these improvisatory episodes, the chorus performs a text meditation on the evolution of consciousness by poet and Eastman alum Wendy Eisenberg.

Note from the Choreographers

In preparation for this performance, students enrolled in DAN160: Dance Improvisation have been participating in a collaborative process under the direction of instructor Mariah Steele to explore the creation of improvisational movement scores in conversation with science (in this case, whales) topics. The process has involved thinking about how different approaches to translating the scientific material into movement – modeling versus essencing versus inspiration – change what is communicated to the audience.

BIODANCE draws from material developed for a work in 2017 choreographed by Missy Pfohl Smith that parallels the content of this work, with themes of the origins of life on the planet both on land and in the sea, adapting the material to create this new work for Matt Curlee's music. The choreographic vignettes are influenced by the research on whale behavior, and imaginations of ways in which whales exist in relationship to one another.

Text

Before there was a body
Wendy Eisenberg, 2014 (Villanelle)

*Before there was a body was a night
the hidden earth possessed a naked grace
and flowed its love half-silent into light*

*to cry out in the darkness is a right
unhindered by the limits of the face
the wisest reach unsoftly to the night*

*the heart beats through the world with all its
might
setting forth the waves unmeasured pace
against the blushing heave of early light*

*and as light grows to our cool delight
in the truth of our limbs, the limit of our space
breathes danger to the hiding place of night*

*To wrest the soul from darkness is a fight
a circle is a process is a race
and as the runners fall, so falls the light*

*All mired in the silt of earth
we might upend ourselves in hearts we cannot
face*

*Before there was a body was a night
whose silent heart floats ghosts into the light*

Symposium Bios

Equal parts educator, composer, and performer, **Matt Curlee** has taught in the Department of Music Theory since 2007. As an advocate for, and avid practitioner of improvisational music, Curlee has a particular interest in ear-brain interactions and the intuitive processes that unify composition, improvisation, and performance. This area of study has fed directly into his work at Eastman, where he has designed advanced skills curriculum for the undergraduate honors theory program and for graduate conductors, and has worked with many populations of students to develop real-time cognitive skills for performance.

As a composer, Curlee's recent work has focused on the interplay between modern physics and cosmology, and the arts. Notable among these projects, *Histories* is a continuing set of collaborations with physicist Regina Demina (UR/CMS experiment at CERN), musically exploring the fundamental narratives, at various scales, that form the fabric of reality. Recent commissions have included works for the U.S. Air Force Band, the Eastman Percussion Ensemble, RPS Collective, and many other solo performers, ensembles, and collaborators of all kinds, including visual artists, dancers, animators, scientists, and filmmakers. Recent performances have spanned three continents, and his setting of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's seminal short story "The Yellow Wallpaper," created in collaboration with theatrical percussionist Nikki Joshi, was recently produced as a short film in association with the Rebanks Family Foundation.

James Darling has led research programs on whales for over 30 years. His studies include investigations of social behavior, communication, migration and ecology. Current primary studies focus on humpback whale and their unique songs, and particularly 'singers' in the North Pacific, as well as the behavioral ecology of gray whales off British Columbia. Since his Ph.D. from University of California, Santa Cruz, Jim has served as Executive Director and Research Director with non-profit research and education organizations in Canada, and is one of the founders of Whale Trust in Maui, where his song studies are based. Jim has written numerous scientific and popular articles as well as several books on this work. His most recent publications involve comparisons of humpback whale songs between populations spanning the North Pacific, and the results of a collaborative project which sent an autonomous robotic Wave Glider across the Pacific to search for singing humpback whales. Jim works out of Maui in the winter, and lives the rest of year in a village on the outer coast of Vancouver Island where he can study whales from home.

Charles "Flip" Nicklin is widely regarded as the world's leading cetacean photographer. Nicklin grew up around his father's small dive shop on the California coast. He ultimately went on to become National Geographic's premiere whale photographer and marine mammal specialist. In the past 40 years, Flip has photographed more than thirty species of whales and dolphins. Through photography, he has chronicled sperm whales in the Indian Ocean; minke whales off the Great Barrier Reef; belugas, bowheads, and narwhals in the High Arctic; right whales off Patagonia; blue whales in the Pacific; and notably, multitudes of humpbacks off Maui. In 2001 he co-founded Whale Trust, a non-profit organization dedicated to research and public education. Through 20 National Geographic articles since 1982, he has worked closely with top whale researchers from around the world. In 2012, Flip was named Outstanding Photographer of the Year by the North American Nature Photography Association--among their highest honors.

Gary Paige is Professor Emeritus of Neurology and Chair Emeritus of Neurobiology and Anatomy, University of Rochester. Gary graduated high school from the Interlochen Arts Academy, majoring in music, while also spawning a lifelong passion in photography. A change in career path led to a prolonged educational journey through college at the University of California, Irvine, (Biology, 1970), followed by the University of Chicago's MD-PhD program (sensory-motor neuroscience and adaptive plasticity, 1981). Internship in Chicago was followed by residency in Ophthalmology at the University of California, San Francisco (1985). He then joined the Otolaryngology faculty at Washington University (St. Louis). In 1990 he was then recruited to the University of Rochester, serving as Unit Chief of Sensory-Motor Neurology.

From 1998 through 2014 he served as Chair of Neurobiology & Anatomy, during which he founded the Center for Navigation and Communication Sciences, the Schmitt Program on Integrative Brain Research, and the MD-MS Program in Medical Neurobiology. Research has focused on how the brain integrates and adapts sensory inputs from the outside world (visual and auditory) with the internal senses (vestibular and somatosensory) to guide meaningful behavior through our cluttered environment. A new endeavor is the Arts in Mind project, whose goal is to connect students of all stripes with the performing arts wherever poignant topics resonant and align with academic relevance.

Mark E. Powell, DMA, a Ford Foundation American Conductor's Award winner, serves at the Aaron Copland School of Music at Queens College in New York as Associate Professor of Orchestral Studies. He is the founding music director of the American Radio Chamber Orchestra (ARCO) and served on the faculty of the Eastman School of Music's Institute for Music Leadership. Guest conducting and teaching activities have recently taken him to the Interlochen Arts Academy, the University of Alabama, the Boston Conservatory, and the Eastman School. His recent pedagogy research has yielded a book length commentary and annotation of Nicolai Malko's first text: *The Conductor and His Baton: Fundamentals of the Technic of Conducting*, while his most recent conducting students have gone on to successes at Peabody and the Cincinnati College Conservatory. Powell trained at Interlochen, the University of Michigan, Tanglewood, and Eastman.

The Plain Dealer praised his "exceptionally vivid" Cleveland debut, while Buffalo Philharmonic Music Director JoAnn FalleEa has called Powell "a musician's conductor" of "deep musical understanding and insight." The NRC Handelsblad (Amsterdam) noted at his Concertgebouw debut his "impressively expressive final movements of the Mussorgsky cycle [*Pictures at an Exhibition*]." A veteran of both the Malko and Besançon conducting competitions, he was the only American featured twice in the Kirill Kondrashin Series with the Netherlands Radio and Chamber Orchestras. As guest conductor, he has led the Fort Worth Symphony, the Korsholm Music Festival Orchestra (Finland), the Rochester Philharmonic, and the Cleveland Chamber Symphony. He counts among his mentors Brad Lubman, Jorma Panula, Peter Eötvös, and Elizabeth Green.

Missy Pfohl Smith directs the Program of Dance and Movement and Institute for the Performing Arts at the University of Rochester, as well as the collaborative repertory company BIODANCE. Her teaching practice draws from somatic dance practices and an active and collaborative creative and choreographic practice with a social consciousness.

Mariah Steele is a Lecturer in the Program of Dance and Movement at the University of Rochester and the Artistic Director of Quicksilver Dance, a modern/contemporary dance company founded in 2010. Steele has performed professionally in the companies of James Martin and Beth Soll in New York City, and with Peter DiMuro's Public Displays of Motion, Sokolow Now!, the Anna Sokolow Archival Company, and Rebecca Rice Dance in Boston. She was on faculty at Endicott College in Beverly, MA for several years and has also taught courses at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Santa Clara University. Her current research interests involve combining dance and science in numerous ways, including an interdisciplinary collaboration funded by the National Science Foundation to explore teaching high school Physics through choreography and movement. Steele holds a BA in Anthropology and Minor in Dance from Princeton University, a MA from Tufts University's Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy (where she wrote a thesis about using dance in peacebuilding) and an MFA in Dance from Hollins University. In 2013, *The Boston Globe Magazine* named Steele a "rising talent" in the arts.