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Icarus Quartet, October 15, 2021 [program]

University of Northern Iowa

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SCHOOL OF MUSIC



iCARUS QUARTET

PROGRAM

Big Things (2014, rev. 2018).....Michael Laurello
(b. 1981)

Tangents (2015)Brad Lubman
(b. 1962)

INTERMISSION

Textures (2013) Paul Lansky
(b. 1944)

- I. Striations
- II. Loose Ends
- III. Soft Substrates
- IV. Slither
- V. Granite
- VI. Points of Light
- VII. Aflutter, On Edge
- VIII. Round-Wound

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Like the mythological figure from which it draws its name, the half piano/half percussion **icarus Quartet** dares to fly towards the sun, aspiring to new heights of artistry. Following their Carnegie Hall debut, composer Paul Lansky simply remarked, "This is music making of the highest order."

Winner of the 2019 Chamber Music Yellow Springs Competition and laureate of the 2017-18 American Prize, icarus has given new life to old masterpieces as well as the future of their instrumentation. What started as a graduate school project that Yale composition chair Martin Bresnick regarded as "one of the best student performances of any work I have ever heard, played with great energy, sensitivity, and precision" has now toured professionally throughout the United States. The quartet

was the first ensemble to hold the Klinger ElectroAcoustic Residency at Bowling Green State University and past engagements include appearances at the Horowitz Piano Series, Queens New Music Festival, Adalman Chamber Series, and a Lansky tribute concert at Princeton University held in honor of the emeritus professor's 75th birthday.

Their 2021-22 concert season includes performances at the Kennedy Center, the University of Northern Iowa, Music in the Valley, Delaware County Community College's New Music Concert Series, the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music, Florida State University, Community Concerts at 2nd, as well as at the Vienna Summer Music Festival for their international debut. Fostering the development of new works through commissioning and collaborating with composers is at the core of the iQ mission, and this season will see the culmination of some of these endeavors with world premieres by David Crowell, Scott Lee, and Douglas Knehans. icarus also continues their iQ Tests, a program that incites collaboration and furthers the careers of gifted student composers, with current fellows Christian Quiñones and Lila Meretzky. *Wilderness Suite*, an ongoing intermedia project combining iQ with the forces of composer Ruby Fulton, video artist Benjamin James, and geographer Teresa Cavazos-Cohn, unveils new vignettes in Spring 2022, further examining the unique anti-development of the 2.4 million-acre Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness site through still imagery, data, film, recorded interviews, natural sound samples, and live music.

Passionate about educating and engaging with the next generation of musicians, iQ often works in school and university settings. They have given classes and coachings on chamber music, as well as composition seminars on writing for their instruments at institutions including the Peabody Conservatory, the University of Massachusetts Amherst, Bridgeport University, the University of Florida, Yale College, Wright State University, and the University of Idaho's Lionel Hampton School of Music, in addition to presentations for grade school and Pre-K students.

Larry Weng, Yevgeny Yontov, Matt Keown, and Jeff Stern are all celebrated soloists in their own rights, and together they have found a special chemistry and inimitable joy playing chamber music. They are dedicated to the discovery, creation, and performance of new music, but what distinguishes their approach to contemporary music is a strong training and background in the classical genre. icarus Quartet is committed to performing new works with a studied and convincing interpretation that mirrors the validity of works with performance practices developed over centuries.

icarus Members:

Jeff Stern, percussion
Matt Keown, percussion
Larry Weng, piano
Yevgeny Yontov, piano

Michael Laurello is a composer and recording/mixing engineer based in Northwest Ohio. His compositions reflect his fascination with temporal dissonance and emotional immediacy, and have been presented at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, MATA, PASIC, Bang on a Can Summer Festival, Norfolk Chamber Music Festival, Carlsbad Music Festival, Music from Angel Fire, NASA, National Conference of the Society of Composers, Inc., and other venues and festivals. He has collaborated with ensembles and soloists such as icarus Quartet, Nashville Symphony, Sō Percussion, arx duo, HOCKET, Grand Valley State University New Music Ensemble, and Yale Percussion Group.

His engineering work focuses on contemporary classical music, and can be heard on labels such as New Focus Recordings, Red Piano Records, and MSR Classics featuring collaborative partners including Vic Firth/Zildjian, icarus Quartet, Elaine Lillios, David Bixler, Cole Burger, Nick Zoulek, and many others. He believes deeply in the capacity of the production approach to enhance the conceptual framework of a musical composition or interpretation.

Laurello studied composition at Yale School of Music and Tufts University. He holds a bachelor's in music synthesis (electronic production and design) from Berklee College of Music. His mentors include David Lang, Christopher Theofanidis, Martin Bresnick, and John McDonald. Honors include a residency at Avaloch Farm Music Institute, a commission from the American Composers Forum, a fellowship with the Nashville Symphony Composer Lab, selection for the EarShot Berkeley Symphony Readings, and a Baumgardner Fellowship and Commission from the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival. He attended the highSCORE and Etchings composition festivals, and was a composition fellow at the 2015 Bang on a Can Summer Festival. Laurello works as a freelance composer and engineer, and as Manager of Recording Services and Technical Engineer for the MidAmerican Center for Contemporary Music at Bowling Green State University.

Brad Lubman, conductor/composer, is founding co-Artistic Director and Music Director of Ensemble Signal, hailed by The New York Times as "one of the most vital groups of its kind.". Since his conducting debut in 1984, he has gained widespread recognition for his versatility, commanding technique, and insightful interpretations.

His guest conducting engagements include major orchestras such as the DSO Berlin, Netherlands Radio Kamer Filharmonie, Residentie Orchestra Den Haag, WDR Symphony Cologne, NDR Symphony Hamburg, Bavarian Radio Orchestra, Stuttgart Radio Symphony, Dresden Philharmonic, Deutschland Radio Philharmonie, Frankfurt Radio Symphony, Taiwan National Symphony, Cracow Philharmonic, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Finnish Radio Symphony, American Composers Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra, and the St Paul Chamber Orchestra, performing repertoire ranging from classical to contemporary orchestral works. He has worked with some of the most important ensembles for contemporary music, including London Sinfonietta, Ensemble Modern, Klangforum Wien, musikFabrik, Los Angeles Philharmonic New Music Group, and Steve Reich and Musicians.

He has recorded for AEON, Albany, BMG/RCA, Bridge, Cantaloupe, CRI, Kairos, Koch, Mode, New World, NEOS, Nonesuch, Orange Mountain, and Tzadik. Lubman's own compositions have been performed in the USA and Europe and can be heard on his CD, *insomniac*, on Tzadik.

Lubman is Associate Professor of Conducting and Ensembles at the Eastman School of Music since 1997, where he directs the *Musica Nova* ensemble, and is on the faculty of the Bang-on-a-Can Summer Institute. He is represented by Karsten Witt Musik Management.

There is a unique and endearing duality to the music of **Paul Lansky**. On the one hand, he employs highly sophisticated technological innovations and esoteric algorithms. On the other, Lansky employs these complex methods and media to create works that transcend their own technology and convey a highly personal, accessible, and even sentimental aesthetic. While his ingenious technical developments surely reinforce his prominence within the field of computer music, his influence owes in arguably larger part to the uninhibited curiosity and humanity that inhabit his works.

Lansky played horn during his adolescence and his undergraduate years at Queens College in the early 1960s before beginning graduate studies at Princeton; Under Milton Babbitt's tutelage, Lansky turned his attention to computer music composition. He took a particular interest in "twelve tone tonality," an idea he explored in collaboration with his former mentor from Queens College, George Perle; Lansky's *mild and leise* (1973), an electronic piece borne of this collaboration, comprised a serial and synthesized musing on Wagnerian harmony. (This piece enjoyed an unlikely resurrection decades later when Lansky allowed the band Radiohead to use a sample from it in their track "Idioteque.")

After completing his Ph.D. and joining the Princeton faculty, Lansky became increasingly interested in using technology to examine the relationship between pure sound and its aural associations -- the intersections of noise and music, speech and

meaning, melody and memory. In *Six Fantasies on a Poem* by Thomas Campion (1979), Lansky took a single text (read by his wife and frequent collaborator, Hannah MacKay) and subjected it to a variety of aural manipulations. In his numerous folk tune settings, such as *Barbara Allen* and *Pretty Polly* (both 1981), Lansky demonstrated an uncanny ability to create nostalgia, rather than anachronism, out of synthesized timbres. A number of pieces in the 1980s and 90s, many with the word "chatter" in their titles, explored the sonic contours of speech by blurring consonants, snipping words into phonemes, and filtering the resulting sounds into engaging, quasi-tonal harmonic progressions. Lansky has also used more intimate speech sounds -- recollections of a mentor, conversations with his wife, even the domestic noise of his children clearing the table -- to create dreamlike musical evocations of memory; at his best, Lansky's works are both heartwarming and heartbreaking. "Recordings of real-world sounds," says the composer, "create a nostalgic ache in that they almost capture events which are, in reality, gone forever."

PROGRAM NOTES

Big Things:

Big Things was originally composed in 2014 as a quintet for piano, guitar, bass, vibraphone, and drum set. This work was revised in 2018 and reorchestrated for icarus Quartet, with its virtuosity amplified due to the reduced instrumentation. Additional percussion setups are now placed around the mallet instruments so that each player fulfills both a melodic and punctuating role. The sonic possibility of the ensemble is enhanced and augmented through light preparation of the pianos and the inclusion of a synthesizer. Through these various avenues, the diversity of the original quintet is achieved with one less player. Within this single movement work, three large formal sections guide the listener through the narrative of the piece. The light sway of the opening mixed meters is outlined by pizzicato bass notes from the synthesizer. This music is propelled toward the second section through the increased regularity of simple meters and orchestrated punctuation. The second

section abandons the mixed meters from the beginning yet turns maintains the quality of unpredictable syncopation. Now completely in common time, moments of regularity emerge around the initial syncopation to offer context. The deeply rooted sense of pulse then dissipates into the floating, resonant material that closes the piece. The synthesis of powerful rhythmic motives with careful orchestration of color and melodic pattern grants *Big Things* a character that defies genre and appeals to numerous musical sensibilities.

Tangents:

"I have always been fascinated by the types of complex and sometimes nonsensical or irreconcilable narratives one may find in certain dreams. Additionally, I enjoy the various odd or extraordinary coincidences that sometimes occur in everyday life. Along those lines, I construct much of my music to avoid following a given or predictable narrative. Here's an example: You think you're about to bite into a steak but it actually turns out to be peanut butter ice-cream which, as you're eating it, turns into a beautiful salad that turns out to taste like the steak you thought you were about to eat, when you realize it's none of the above and you're simply holding a glass of sherry which as you sip it turns out to be a review textbook for algebra which you then drop onto the table in shock, noticing that it was actually a stack of pancakes. My idea is to enter a world of dreams, where the imagination flows freely from moment to moment, so that each turn of events is about the moment we enter the moment."

—Brad Lubman

Textures:

"I love writing percussion music. It's a lot like making computer music (which I did full-time for more than 35 years). On the machine you work with spectral balance, envelope, timbre difference, etc. In the percussion world this near infinitude of possibility is matched by the vast potential among percussion's families of woods, metals, mallets, skins, toys, etc. To make matters even more interesting, there is no guarantee that one doumbek will sound just like every other, or that there is a

standard for cowbells. And then we come to the matter of percussionists themselves, one of the most interesting and lively group of musicians working today.

It is now rare that a music school doesn't have a percussion ensemble class; there is a growing number of professional percussion groups; and it's axiomatic that part of their job description is to generate literature, which they do with evangelical zeal and fervor.

Textures, for two pianists and two percussionists, was written in 2012–2013. It was commissioned by the group Hammer/Klavier. They premiered it at Bowling Green State University on October 3, 2013 and at Oberlin College on October 5.

This unusual instrumental combination, first used by Bartók in his Sonata for two pianos and percussion, begs for scoring that brings the instruments to the edge of their respective sonic potentials. Pianos can function as percussion instruments, and percussion can explore its tuneful side, particularly through mallet instruments. The idea of “textures” occurred to me almost as soon as I started work. I didn't first decide on a specific texture and then compose with that in mind. Rather, I jumped in, arms flailing, and then found the focus for a movement once its texture and musical ecology became clear. Basically, the piece celebrates the unique sonic potential of this unusual combination.

It's been interesting to start something new as a 'senior citizen'. One of the reasons I gave up a promising career as a French horn player fifty years ago was that I wanted to do something where I'd be at the top of my game at the age I am now (70). I reasoned that were I to stay in performance I would be closing shop about now. But life is full of surprises. I had no idea that I would spend the best part of 35 years banging my head against the machine and then, when I just about had it figured out, I'd change my major and basically become a newbie again, writing music the old-fashioned way, this time for bows, lips, sticks, and fingers.”

—Paul Lansky

UPCOMING EVENTS

GUEST MASTER CLASS: ICARUS QUARTET
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 16 AT 1 P.M.
GRAHAM HALL, RUSSELL HALL

UNI BASS STUDIO RECITAL
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 20 AT 6 P.M.
DAVIS HALL, GBPAC

GUEST RECITAL: NORTHERN LIGHTS DUO
MONDAY, OCTOBER 25 AT 6 P.M.
DAVIS HALL, GBPAC

THE SCHOOL OF MUSIC CALENDAR OF EVENTS IS
AVAILABLE ONLINE AT [MUSIC.UNI.EDU/EVENTS](https://music.uni.edu/events).

In consideration of the performers and other members of the audience, please enter or leave a performance at the end of a composition. Cameras and recording equipment are **not permitted**. Please turn off all electronic devices, and be sure that all emergency contact cell phones and pagers are set to silent or vibrate. In the event of an emergency, please use the exit nearest to you. Please contact the usher staff if you need assistance.

This event is **free** to all UNI students, courtesy of the Panther Pass Program.

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