

COMPOSITION DEPARTMENT

HAN LASH
*ON BECOMING
TRANSPARENT*

Monday, October 21, 2024
Hatch Recital Hall
7:30 PM



EASTMAN
SCHOOL OF MUSIC
UNIVERSITY of ROCHESTER

PROGRAM

On Becoming Transparent (2024)

Han Lash
(b. 1981)

- On Composing
- On Dancing
- On the Nature of Harmony
- On the Nature of a Line
- On Form
- On Gesture
- On Rhythm
- On Complexity
- On Instrumentation
- On the Body
- On Performance
- On Becoming Transparent

Performed by Han Lash

World Premiere

PROGRAM NOTES

On Becoming Transparent (2024)

Han Lash

I wrote this piece to honor my friend and former teacher, Bob Morris. It is a meditation on what it means to compose, and how for me, the act of composing has come to encompass so much more than the organization of musical sounds. Throughout the decades of my life as an artist, my understanding of tension, proportion, meaning, and time have evolved enormously as relational matters in almost any aspect of being. I have found that the greatest obstacle to creativity I face is the self. Ideas about self and all of what we consider to be essential aspects of self—proclivities, opinions, viewpoints, identity—are limitations, keeping us confined to our own perspectives which often become beliefs, values. I have come to feel that the shedding of these constructions is far more conducive to being than their accumulation. I engage in a continual practice of disengaging from belief.

Bob was one of my earliest composition teachers, and the teacher with whom I studied for the longest period of time in all of my training. Among many other things, I found his knowledge of and relationship to Buddhism and Buddhist thought to be enormously inspiring. I have found my own relationship to some of these ideas and have come to embrace a kind of radical detachment as an artist and human that feels to me like the most untroubled manifestation of love of which I am capable.

This piece is dedicated with enormous appreciation to Bob, and also to my own students. It is my expression of the striving for profound detachment from and transparency of self which, when I am able to glimpse it, feels to me transcendent.

The text for this work consists of eleven original poems and a quote from Walter Benjamin's essay, *The Task of the Translator*.

—Han Lash

TEXT

On Becoming Transparent (2024)

Han Lash

On Composing

It isn't really about making a sound anymore,
As you can tell.
Proportions, tensions, timings,
Can show up in any number of different ways.
What happens where and when was always a matter of great
Contingency.
I can't teach you how to be happy,
You once told me.
I was grateful for that lesson,
As with so many others when hope was dispensed with.
False relations and
Cross purposes
Involve an invisible will, handed down
By word of mouth as the passing of germs,
Which can become powerful if left unchecked.

On Dancing

When you come right down to it,
Everything is a dance
In the sense that friction (which is subjective: defined in relation to a scale
for degrees of intensity)
Is what you use to propel yourself:
Your form within, on, against others,
Moving or still.
A sweep of the hand against nothing but air feels
Frictionless,
But this, as you understand once you know a little about the air,
Is false.
Even when you are moving in unison or parallel with another body
(Animate or otherwise),
You are still in tension, not one thing left un-vibrating.
It is hard to say when we imbued these scales with such magic.
When you come right down to it,
They are nothing but a measure.

TEXT

On the Nature of Harmony

The rub

Is this:

What is beautiful (is, being, of course, a thing of your own fashioning)

Seals and stamps a memory

Whose shadowy form beckons you onward till you reach the edge;

Many times, plummeting before you think to turn around and look.

Which is not to suggest

That those shadows are no longer beautiful

Once you know

They cannot love you back.

On the Nature of a Line

A line, supposedly

Is a rope or a road (leading to roam)

Or a lead for an actor or a dog;

A line, supposedly

Is a thing to follow

To a point

Which you make,

Or which you go up to.

But these things too,

While seemingly true

Fall apart

In time

The point

Of the line

Is to stray.

TEXT

On Form

I'll remind you of that line, and what wasn't said.
It's length, you know, from start to finish
Or at least, from where you found it to where you
Left it.
Did you wind it into a ball to hold in your hands?
Or was it an hour, fifteen minutes, a day?
A kilometer, a yard?
A skein you held for spell, or a fortnight's worth of yarn
I spun in the span of a season.
Or maybe, like Plato, you had it all wrong,
Tying up your faith to an essence:
Nothing more than a smell.
Lashed to the rocks against the tide,
Dashed to shreds and returned to the sea.
Oh, cruel moon, untying the world's tears
And setting them loose to swell and overflow
Like the breathing of a minotaur.

On Gesture

A polite gesture,
Good turn,
Gesture to convey what's too delicate for language,
Gesture for underneath silence,
Where a trespassing voice might be too costly.
Or else an angry gesture whose soundless report rings far more
Potent than a snarled curse.
To gestate what is born in gesture,
Or to ingest a poison that couldn't be spilled without casualty,
Gesture suppressed, digest bile silently,
A miscarried thought.
A gesture lost,
Forgotten.
Made without meaning in mind,
Free and meaningless.

Remember that smell? What was that smell?

TEXT

On Rhythm

The swing that hung from a branch some twenty feet above the ground
Sweeping you away as if it loved you
Cradled in its nape against the wind
Passionately filling your mouth to the point of breathlessness—
There's joy in the surrender of knowing that if anything were to break,
You'd be crushed by sheer momentum,
Your body nothing more than the wings of a
Butterfly: beautiful.

On Complexity

We've reached the edge of the weeds.
Here is where you can poke with trowel or
Pickax, jab and
Curse at roots—
Complex of vines with leaves, gesturing polyphony farther and farther
Outward:
Leave us alone and take your leave:
Your leaves choked and drowned out by our loud and complicated
Proliferation of lines autonomous and yet connected by a single
System.
Their plan is simple. As one root.
With allusion to chaos,
Clever foil.
Twofold, threefold, fourfold,
Trefoil, turmoil.
And what about the many? The duckweed and the asexual salamanders
with cycles in sevens,
The crop rotations and modulations
Whose roots are many and feed on time and seed themselves,
And cede themselves.
Don't be confused by the Devil's Tails,
Heterophony notwithstanding.
Green mass for the wanting,
Blessed are the meek.

On Instrumentation

Translated by Harry Zohn

In the appreciation of a work of art or an art form, consideration of the receiver never proves fruitful. Not only is any reference to a certain public or its representatives misleading, but even the concept of an “ideal” receiver is detrimental in the theoretical consideration of art, since all it posits is the existence and nature of man as such. Art, in the same way, posits man’s physical and spiritual existence, but in none of its works is it concerned with his response. No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the listener...

...what does a work... “say”? What does it communicate? It “tells” very little to those who understand it. Its essential quality is not statement or the imparting of information. Yet any translation which intends to perform a transmitting function cannot transmit anything but information—hence, something inessential.

—Walter Benjamin, *The Task of the Translator: An Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire’s Tableaux Parisiens*

On the Body

Once,
Having had a song in mind,
I bought a banjo.
I took it home and could hardly wait to hop aboard,
To hitch my heart to its twangy chords that could convey my words and wails.
At my table, I yanked the banjo out of its box and set to learning where to pull
And press and pluck and slide, confronted front and center and all around
by the body:
My banjo's and mine, bumping and jostling until the heart I'd been
sporting, stylish on the sleeve Of songful dreaming receded, probably
degraded or disintegrated by degrees;
Scaling back my expectations, reeling in refrains and realizing certain turns
along the line would Remain hard: hazard reported ahead.
I bent my head and curled my fingers, capped with metal on the right, and
on the left with skin—
I said to my banjo,
You and I are hurting each other right now but it isn't a matter of incompatibility.
And for days we bumped and jostled our bodies together.
After a time—weeks or so—a glinting thing caught my eye and I noticed
that a song had slipped A bud through the skin of my arm, quite different
than the one I'd had before I bought the banjo.

On Performance

When I was a child,
I made pictures or bead necklaces for the adults
I adulated.
Indulged, I loved to see a necklace worn, a picture hung.
Soon after, stung with shame at a stray line or a broken chord,
I vowed to make something better, or nothing at all.
When I was a child,
I cried, “look! Look at what I can do!” when I learned to turn a cartwheel.
And then, when I saw others do the same, I burned with shame,
Watching mothers peel themselves, reluctant, from books or chats to
watch the performance in the grass,
Clap, and say—“yay!”—
You can hear their weary spirits, answering from obligation, another bid
for attention.
And when I grew serious and hellbent, barking up the wrong tree, I became
Yet
Another
Young Composer
Just Trying to
Get
Ahead.
It’s possible, now, that I have never learned how to hold my tongue or
wait my turn or keep my Cartwheels to myself.
I go on making pictures, stringing beads or crying “look!”
Knowing that the shame has come to yield
Bitter, potent milk—
Which limb by limb dissolves my outline,
Leaving me
Free.

On Becoming Transparent

I need—I used to say—

To find myself.

I don't fit; I have lost

Who I am.

And I shed tears, grieving my absence, resenting the nips and tucks I had
found to be

Mandatory.

And I am told: you will find your niche, your

Place. You just haven't yet.

You will find your

Self.

This promise

Looks nice in the pictures I have been shown—all the amenities.

But the thing is this:

The roof will always leak, and around the edges of windows,

There are impossible gaps that will make heating and cooling bills

Soar.

And I will always be bumping my head on something. Stubbing a toe,

Cutting a hand reaching.

What no one says is this:

Don't buy the house.

Nothing is yours, least of all when you pay for it.

MEET THE COMPOSER

“Lash’s compact sequence of pale brush strokes, ghostly keening and punchy outbursts was striking and resourceful; you hoped to hear it again” —Steve Smith, *The New York Times*



Hailed by *The New York Times* as “striking and resourceful...handsomely brooding,”

Han Lash’s music has been performed at Carnegie Hall, Los Angeles’ Walt Disney Concert Hall, Lincoln Center, the Times Center in Manhattan, the Chicago Art Institute, Tanglewood Music Center, Harvard University, The Aspen Music Festival & School, The Chelsea Art Museum, and on the American Opera Project’s stage in New York City. Commissions include The Fromm Foundation, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Carnegie Hall, Chamber Music Northwest, the McKim Fund in the Library of Congress, Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music, American Composers Orchestra, Columbia University’s Miller Theatre, The Naumburg Foundation, the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, the Arditti Quartet, the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival, the Colorado Music Festival, and the Aspen Music Festival and School, among many others.

Han Lash began studying music and dance at an early age and was a serious performer and composer by their early teens. They were accepted to the prestigious Eastman School of Music at the age of 15 and enrolled in the bachelor’s program at age 16. After studies in harp and composition at Eastman, Lash received an Artist Diploma in harp from the Cleveland Institute of Music, a PhD in composition from Harvard University, and an Artist Diploma in composition from Yale University.

Lash has received numerous honors and prizes, including the ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composer Award, a Charles Ives Scholarship (2011) and Fellowship (2016) from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a Fromm Foundation Commission, a Chamber Music America Classical Commissioning Grant, a fellowship from Yaddo Artist Colony, the Naumburg Prize in Composition, the Barnard Rogers Prize in Composition, the Bernard and Rose Sernoffsky Prize in Composition, and numerous academic awards. Han Lash’s orchestral work *Furthermore* was

MEET THE COMPOSER

selected by the American Composers Orchestra for the 2010 Underwood New Music Readings. Lash's chamber opera, *Blood Rose*, was presented by New York City Opera's VOX in the spring of 2011.

The New York Times music critic Steve Smith praised Lash's work for the JACK Quartet, *Frayed*: "Lash's compact sequence of pale brush strokes, ghostly keening and punchy outbursts was striking and resourceful; you hoped to hear it again..." Esteemed music critic Bruce Hodges lauded Lash's piece *Stalk* for solo harp as being "appealing...florid, and introspective."

In addition to performances in the USA, Lash's music is also well known internationally. In April of 2008, Lash's string quartet *Four Still* was performed in Kiev in the Ukraine's largest international new music festival, "Premieres of the Season," curated by Carson Cooman. In the summer of 2010, Han Lash's piece *Unclose* was premiered by members of Eighth Blackbird at the MusicX festival in Blonay, Switzerland. In 2016, the chamber orchestra work *This Ease* saw its German premiere and was selected as "audience favorite" in performances by the Philharmonisches Staatsorchester Mainz, conducted by Hermann Bäumer.

Notable premieres include the multi-movement orchestral work *The Voynich Symphony* by the New Haven Symphony, *Form and Postlude* for Chamber Music Northwest, a new *Requiem* for the Yale Choral Artists, *How to Remember Seeds* and two additional string quartets for The Calidore String Quartet, *Three Shades Without Angles*, for flute, viola and harp, by the Boston Symphony Chamber Players, *Two Movements* for violin and piano, commissioned by the Library of Congress for Ensemble Intercontemporain, and a chamber opera, *Beowulf*, for Guerilla Opera, as well as several new orchestral works: *Chaconnes*, for the New York Philharmonic's Biennial, *Eating Flowers*, for the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music, *Nymphs*, for the Alabama Symphony Orchestra, and *This Ease*, for the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, as well as two concerti for harp premiered by the American Composers Orchestra (*Concerto No. 1 for Harp and Chamber Orchestra*) and the Colorado Music Festival (*Concerto No. 2 for Harp and Orchestra*), both with Lash as soloist.

Other recent premieres include *God Music Bug Music* (2011) with the Minnesota Orchestra, the monodrama *Stoned Prince* (2013) by

MEET THE COMPOSER

loadbang, *Subtilior Lamento* (2012) with the Da Capo Chamber Players at Carnegie Hall, and *Glockenliebe* (2012), for three glockenspiels, with Talujon Percussion. Lash's 2011 orchestral work, *Hush*, was featured on the Los Angeles Philharmonic's 2013 Brooklyn Festival. In 2016, Lash was honored with a Composer Portrait Concert at Columbia University's Miller Theatre, which included newly commissioned works for pianist Lisa Moore (*Six Etudes and a Dream*) and loadbang (*Music for Eight Lungs*). Lash's *Piano Concerto No. 1 "In Pursuit of Flying"* was premiered by Jeremy Denk and the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra; the Atlantic Classical Orchestra debuted *Facets of Motion* for orchestra, and *Music for Nine, Ringing* was performed at the Music Academy of the West School and Festival. Paul Appleby and Natalia Katyukova premiered *Songs of Imagined Love*, a song cycle commissioned by Carnegie Hall, in 2018, and in 2019, Lash's chamber opera, *Desire*, premiered at Miller Theatre to great acclaim. Lash's *Double Concerto* for piano and harp was premiered by the Naples Philharmonic, and the first movement of *Forestallings*, a musical response to Beethoven's Symphony No. 2 in D Major, was premiered by the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra in January 2020, followed by a premiere of the second movement at the Colorado Music Festival the following year. The Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra premiered the third movement of *Forestallings* in February 2022 and the Philharmonisches Staatsorchester Mainz, under the baton of Hermann Bäumer, premiered the fourth movement and complete version of *Forestallings* in April 2023 as part of a portrait festival featuring Lash's music. Lash's double harp concerto, *The Peril of Dreams* was premiered by the Seattle Symphony in November 2021, with the composer as one of the featured soloists.

Han Lash is Associate Professor of Music (Composition) at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music. Lash's music is published exclusively by Schott Music Corporation, New York.

We acknowledge with respect the Seneca Nation, known as the "Great Hill People" and "Keepers of the Western Door" of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. We take this opportunity to thank the people whose ancestral lands the Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester currently occupies in Rochester, New York.

UPCOMING EASTMAN SERIES CONCERTS

Tickets for all series concerts can be purchased at EastmanTheatre.org

FACULTY ARTIST SERIES

Sara Gazarek, jazz voice

Hatch Recital Hall

Wednesday, October 23, 2024 at 7:30 PM

EASTMAN PIANO SERIES

Yunchan Lim

Kodak Hall at Eastman Theatre

Sunday, November 3, 2024 at 3:00 PM

Since becoming the youngest person to ever win gold at the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition at the age of 18 in 2022, Yunchan Lim's ascent to international stardom has been meteoric. His performances showcase a "magical ability" and a "natural, instinctive quality" (*La Scena*) that astounds listeners around the world. His Eastman debut features works by Mendelssohn, Tchaikovsky, and Mussorgsky.

UPCOMING STUDENT ENSEMBLE CONCERTS

All student performances are free unless otherwise noted.

Eastman Philharmonia

Kodak Hall at Eastman Theatre

Wednesday, October 23, 2024 at 7:30 PM

Music of Coleman, Mahler, and Beethoven

Bach Cantata Series

Hatch Recital Hall

Sunday, October 27, 2024 at 3:30 PM

Musica Nova

Featuring Members of Ensemble Signal

Kodak Hall at Eastman Theatre

Monday, October 28, 2024 at 7:30 PM

Music of Reich



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