

Program Notes

New Thread Quartet presents Explorations, Vol. 8: Energy Flows, featuring music by Marilyn Shrude, Georg Friedrich Haas, Hannah Kendall, James Tenney, and a world premiere by Hong-Da Chin. The quartet's annual Explorations Series, now in its 8th iteration, is dedicated to programming important works of our time. The unifying element that brings this afternoon's works together is the undulation of sonorities.

Additional program notes are courtesy of the composers. Please enjoy the concert!

***energy flows nervously . . . in search of stillness** was written for the Assembly Saxophone Quartet, who commissioned the work and premiered it at the 17th World Saxophone Congress in Strasbourg, France (July 10, 2015). The piece begins with dense intensity as quietly as possible. The tension gradually increases as the dynamic level rises and eventually reaches fff. At this point, with the harmonic language at its loudest and most dissonant moment, the search for stillness begins and ultimately finds its destination in calmness and silence. The work was recorded by the Assembly Saxophone Quartet and is available on AMP Recordings.*

***Gilt** takes its title from Hew Locke's 2022-2023 facade commission for The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York; four super-sized, gold, trophy-like sculptures that were displayed on the front of the building after having taken inspiration from artifacts within The Met's collection, revealing wonderfully curious, unrecognizable, striking objects. Locke describes them as "a facade on the facade," as whilst they look like gloriously opulent, reimagined articles, they are in fact propped up by poles from behind. "Gilt" is a play on the word "Guilt," and I was drawn to this piece because Locke is actively exploring the undercurrent of a confluence of things. Also, I liked the symbolism of the four saxophones representing each sculpture; two instruments become fragmented with absent mouthpieces in the same way that two of Locke's trophies are broken "half faces." Like me, Locke is British and of Guyanese heritage, where gold mining is prevalent and resources are rich; at the same time, it is also a place still affected by its history of slavery, colonialism, and indentureship.*

*The postal pieces [by James Tenney], written between 1965 and 1971...are a series of ten short works printed on post cards. Several of the pieces were written in and around 1971 for a few of Tenney's friends at Cal. Arts. His explanation of the set is that he hated to write letters, and since had a number of very short compositions, what could be easier than to make postcards out of them...Most of the pieces deal with one of three fundamental ideas; Intonation; the swell idea...the unadorned use of musical structures which will produce the meditative perceptual states. **Swell Piece** for Alison Knowles, N.Y. artist, sculptor, composer and poet, is perhaps the expression of the swell idea in its simplest form. — edited from a monograph by Larry Polansky*

*The title of this work, "wishing doesn't make it so" is borrowed from the movie/novel "Hearts in Atlantis", a work by Stephen King. The saying intrigues me in a sense that our minds run like a child in a world full of wonder but it is when we put our thoughts in an action that gives the ideas a meaning. As a composer, it resembles the process of transferring a musical idea onto a manuscript with engraved notes as close to what I imagine as possible. **Wishing Doesn't Make it So** aims to create an ebb and flow sonic effect with sine-wave like sounds of the saxophones with trills. It has been one of my compositional goals to make my music sound harder than it looks and trill is one of the techniques that is easy to perform but sounds technically difficult.*

New Thread Quartet was formed with the mission to develop and perform impactful new music for the saxophone, and to provide high level ensemble playing to feature today's compositional voices. In 14 seasons, the quartet has commissioned and premiered over 150 new works at such venues as Carnegie Hall, Roulette, Dance Theatre of Harlem, Morgan Library, Bang on a Can Summer Festival Benefit, and Monadnock Music. New Thread has performed its annual fall Explorations and spring Electric Sax Series at Manhattan's Dimenna Center and Cell Theater. Based in New York City, New Thread regularly conducts masterclasses, residencies, and performances for student saxophonists and composers at Peabody Conservatory, University of Virginia, Berklee Conservatory, the University of California Los Angeles, Amherst College, and New York University. The quartet has recorded on New World Records, Innova, and New Focus Recordings, which published New Thread's latest album in January 2025. New Thread is a presenting partner of Composers Now.

Composer Bios

The music of composer **Marilyn Shrude** is characterized by its warmth and lyricism, rich timbre, multi-layered constructions, and complex blend of tonality and atonality. The result is a bright, shimmering and delicately wrought sound world that is at once both powerful and fragile. Her concentration on color and the natural resonance of spaces, as well as her strong background in Pre-Vatican II liturgical music, give the music its linear, spiritual, and quasi-improvisational qualities. Shrude received degrees from Alverno College and Northwestern University, where she studied with Alan Stout and M. William Karlins. Among her more prestigious honors are those from the Guggenheim Foundation (2011 Fellow), American Academy of Arts and Letters, Rockefeller Foundation, Chamber Music America/ASCAP, Meet the Composer, Sorel Foundation (Medallion Winner for Choral Music 2011), and the National Endowment for the Arts. She was the first woman to receive the Kennedy Center Friedheim Award for Orchestral Music (1984) and the Cleveland Arts Prize for Music (1998). Her work for saxophone and piano, *Renewing the Myth*, was the required piece for the 150 participants of the 3rd International Adolphe Sax Concours in Belgium (2002).

Georg Friedrich Haas was born in Graz on August 16, 1953. Between 1972 and 1979 he studied composition at the University for Music and Performing Arts Graz, with Ivan Eröd and Gösta Neuwirth, and later with Friedrich Cerha in Vienna. Haas taught composition at the Kunstuniversität Graz and the Musikakademie Basel, and in 2013 was appointed Professor of Music at New York's Columbia University. In 2007, he was awarded the Grand Austrian State Prize, in 2013 he was appointed member of the Akademie der Künste in Berlin, and was awarded the Salzburg Music Prize in the same year. In 2017, Italian journal *Classic Voice* named him the most important living composer. In the 2023/24 season he was the 'Capell-Compositeur' of the Sächsischen Staatskapelle Dresden, for which he wrote the orchestral work *I don't know how to cry*, which premiered in 2024 under the direction of Susanna Mälkki.

Known for her attentive arrangements and immersive world-building, British composer **Hannah Kendall**'s music looks beyond the boundaries of composition. Her work bridges gaps between different musical cultures, both honouring and questioning the contemporary tradition while telling new stories through it. Contrasting fine detail with limitless abandon, she has become renowned both as a composer and a storyteller, confronting our collective history with narratively-driven pieces centred on bold mission statements. Marked by striking and often polarising dynamics, her large-scale work simmers on the surface, and is upturned by the briefest moments of bombast. Ensemble pieces subvert audience expectations of 'quiet and loud', 'still and moving'; scattering those musical opposites unexpectedly. The sounds are visceral, but their placement is complicated, disclosing the detail that exists beneath. While hinging on intense moments, Kendall's music is also staggeringly intricate, manoeuvring tiny decisions that reveal themselves on further listens.

James Tenney (1934-2006) was born in Silver City, New Mexico, and grew up in Arizona and Colorado, where he received his early training as a pianist and composer. He attended the University of Denver, the Juilliard School of Music, Bennington College, and the University of Illinois. His teachers and mentors included Eduard Steuermann, Chou Wen-Chung, Lionel Nowak, Carl Ruggles, Lejaren Hiller, Kenneth Gaburo, Edgard Varèse, Harry Partch, and John Cage. A performer as well as a composer and theorist, he was co-founder and conductor of the Tone Roads Chamber Ensemble in New York City (1963-70). He was a pioneer in the field of electronic and computer music, working with Max Mathews and others at the Bell Telephone Laboratories in the early 1960s to develop programs for computer sound-generation and composition. He wrote works for a variety of media, both instrumental and electronic, many of them using alternative tuning systems. A teacher since 1966, he was Distinguished Research Professor at York University (Toronto), where he taught for twenty-four years, and last held the Roy E. Disney Family Chair in Musical Composition at the California Institute of the Arts. His music is published and distributed by Sonic Art Editions (Baltimore), Frog Peak (Lebanon, New Hampshire), and the Canadian Music Centre, and has been recorded extensively.

Malaysian composer **Hong-Da Chin** enjoys immersing himself in the process of translating images and words into music. His musical voice draws inspiration from poetry, novella, and visual arts. Chin was a winner of the Bent Frequency 2022 Call for Scores and a finalist of the ASU Gammage Beyond and ASU Symphony Orchestra Commission Competition in 2018. Chin's music has been performed in the United States, Germany, France, Hungary, Czech Republic, Romania, Austria, Poland, Israel, Mexico, Malaysia, Japan, the Philippines and Singapore. The ensembles and performers that have performed his music include the Toledo Symphony Orchestra, No Exit New Music Ensemble, Khasma Piano Duo, Ogni Suono Saxophone Duo, Bent Frequency, Patchwork, Cleveland Chamber Symphony, Altered Sound Duo among others. His music has been featured at the Spoleto Festival USA, World Saxophone Congress, Asian Composers League Festival and Conference, Society of Composers National Conference, Electronic Music Midwest, Society of Composers National Conference, WIU New Music Festival, University of Nebraska at Kearney New Music Festival, Bowling Green New Music Festival, NEOSonic Festival, Threshold Festival, Electroacoustic Barn Dance, Rasquache Artist Residency, Avaloch Farm Institute among others.

