

Notes on the Program

By James M. Keller, Program Annotator, The Leni and Peter May Chair

Filament, for Trio, Orchestra, and Moving Voices

Ashley Fure

Ashley Fure's work explores the kinetic source of sound, often focusing on (as she puts it) "the muscular act of music-making and the chaotic behaviors of raw acoustic matter." She developed her skills at the Interlochen Arts Academy in her native Michigan, at Oberlin Conservatory of Music, IRCAM (the modern-music center in Paris), and Harvard University, studying with composers Brian Ferneyhough, Helmut Lachenmann, and Chaya Czernowin. After receiving a doctorate in composition from Harvard, she joined the faculty of Dartmouth College in 2015.

Recent awards include a Rome Prize in Music Composition and a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2017, grants from the Foundation for Contemporary Arts and the Siemens Foundation, the Kranichstein Music Prize (Darmstadt), a DAAD Artists-in-Berlin Prize, the Busoni Prize (Berlin), a Fulbright Fellowship to France, and a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowship from Columbia University. Her *Bound to the Bow*, for orchestra and electronics, was commissioned for the 2016 NY PHIL BIENNIAL and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for Music that year. She was also the subject of a Composer Portrait concert at the Miller Theatre of Columbia University in 2016.

In addition to the New York Philharmonic, Fure has fulfilled commissions for such notable ensembles as the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Ensemble Modern, eighth blackbird, the Diotima Quartet, ICE (International Contemporary Ensemble), Talea, San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, and Dal Niente. Her recent works include *Feed Forward*, for large ensemble (commissioned by Klangforum Wien for the 2015 Impuls Festival), and

Ply, a 2014 ballet featuring The Guests Company (commissioned by IRCAM, with choreography by Yuval Pick). New Yorkers encountered her large-scale work *The Force of Things: an Opera for Objects* this past August. Premiered in Darmstadt in 2016, it was presented at New Jersey's Montclair State University in 2017 and received its New York premiere this August at the Gelsey Kirkland Arts Center in Brooklyn, where it was given under the banner of the Mostly Mozart festival. She has described that immersive sonic art installation, created jointly with her brother Adam Fure (an architect), as a work that looks "for drama and pathos and expressive power in strange material sources. Essentially, it's a music drama that's not about humans."

Fure is drawn to multimedia and collaborative work, in particular, as she told the *Dartmouth News*:

I'm looking to cause a certain jolt of presence, which is why there's often a mix of

IN SHORT

Born: August 13, 1982, in Escanaba, Michigan

Resides: in Hanover, New Hampshire

Work composed: 2018 in Rome, Italy, on commission from the New York Philharmonic, Jaap van Zweden, Music Director

World premiere: September 20, 2018, by the New York Philharmonic, Jaap van Zweden, conductor, with soloists Rebekah Heller, bassoon; Nate Wooley, trumpet; Brandon Lopez, bass; and Constellation Chor, moving voices

Estimated duration: ca. 14 minutes

violence and fragility in my work. ... We're not looking for sound that's a sound track to visual experience, we're not looking for movement that's simply the staging of a script. We're looking for these synesthetic relationships where movement in one medium causes a reaction in another, where causes and effects blur across those boundaries of media.

To David Allen, who profiled her in *The New York Times*, she observed:

We're trained to hear melody, not fingernails on keys. The player behind these scores is in some ways invisible, subservient to the musical image that they produce. I'm interested in digging behind that veil, putting their exertion onstage.

The physicality of music-making is conspicuous in *Filament*. Fure's notation conveys precise sounds derived from non-traditional instrumental techniques, like the slapping of the bassoonist's tongue against the instrument's bocal (with reed removed) or the trumpeter's placing a metal sheet against the instrument's bell, "adding a snare-like buzz to the tone." At one point the voices are advised,

"Fast waves of white noise pull back and forth from the orchestra to the vocalists like they're playing tug of war with the focus of the audience and the spatial source of sound." To the solo double bass player, wielding a plastic credit card, she writes: "Violent erratic card swipes up and down strings i and ii. This should produce a wild, electric guitar-like distortion." A moment that brings together the trio, the orchestra, and the voices is described as "Saturated, thick; should make the tendons of the audience vibrate in sympathy."

Instrumentation: four flutes (two doubling piccolo), four oboes, four clarinets, four bassoons (one doubling contrabassoon), four horns, four trumpets, four trombones, two tubas, three waterphones, two ocean drums, two pieces of Styrofoam, spring drum, sizzle cymbal, two thunder sheets, whip, two large tam-tams, large bass drum, extra-large bass drum, snare drum, ratchet, sandpaper blocks, a variety of implements for attacking the percussion instruments (including bows, brushes, beaters, superball, and beads that can be dropped onto a drum), and strings; a solo group of amplified bassoon, amplified trumpet, and amplified five-string double bass; and 15 moving voices.

In the Composer's Words

Spatial effects are an essential part of Ashley Fure's *Filament*. She writes:

The soloists perform from pedestals triangulated across the audience and stage. Singers are dispersed throughout the hall, projecting their voices through custom radial megaphones that both amplify and directionally focus each vector of sound. The goal of these bodies in the space is threefold: 1) to democratize proximity and spread access to the intimacy of performance throughout the hall, 2) to create a dynamic spatialization of sound whose angles and arrays shift around the audience in real time, and 3) to activate a theater of the social — toying with the codes of access and intrusion that bind the orchestral ritual. Throughout the piece these distinct forces — orchestra, soloists, and singers — call out to each other across the void, from edge to edge, from periphery to center, tuning toward and pushing against one another as the work unfolds.

