

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Joan La Barbara

La Barbara is a composer, performer, sound artist and actor renowned for developing a unique vocabulary of experimental and extended vocal techniques (multiphonics, circular singing, ululation and glottal clicks; her “signature sounds”), influencing generations of other composers and singers. Awards, prizes and fellowships include The Foundation for Contemporary Arts John Cage Award (2016); Premio Internazionale Demetrio Stratos; DAAD-Berlin and Civitella Ranieri Artist-in-Residencies; Guggenheim Fellowship in Music Composition; seven National Endowment for the Arts awards (Music Composition, Opera/Music Theater, Inter-Arts, Recording, Solo Recital, Visual Arts), and numerous commissions for multiple voices, chamber ensembles, theatre, orchestra, interactive technology, and soundscapes for dance, video and film. Her multi-layered textural compositions were presented at Brisbane Biennial, Festival d’Automne à Paris, Warsaw Autumn, MaerzMusik Berlin and Lincoln Center, among other international venues. She has collaborated with visual artists Matthew Barney, Judy Chicago, Ed Emshwiller, Kenneth Goldsmith, Bruce Nauman, Steina, Woody Vasulka and Lawrence Weiner, and has premiered landmark compositions composed for her, including Morton Feldman’s *Three Voices*; Morton Subotnick’s chamber opera *Jacob’s Room* and his *Hungers and Intimate Immensity*; the title role in Robert Ashley’s opera *Now Eleanor’s Idea* and his *Dust*; Philip Glass and Robert Wilson’s *Einstein on the Beach*; Steve Reich’s *Drumming*; and John Cage’s *Eight Whiskus* and *Solo for Voice 45* from *Song Books*. Recordings of her works include *ShamanSong* (New World), *Sound Paintings* and her seminal works from *Voice is the Original Instrument* (1970, Lovely Music). In addition to her internationally acclaimed discs of Feldman and Cage, she has recorded for A&M Horizon, Centaur, Deutsche Grammophon, Nonesuch, Mode, Music & Arts, MusicMasters, Musical Heritage, Newport Classic, Sony, Virgin, Voyager and Wergo. Exploring ways of immersing the audience in her music, La Barbara’s *Journeys and Observable Events* allowed the audience to unveil theatrical and sonic events, with the American Composers Orchestra around and among the audience in Carnegie’s Zankel Hall for her sound painting *in solitude this fear is lived*, inspired by Agnes Martin’s minimalist drawings. La Barbara’s *A Murmuration for Chibok*, commissioned by and for The Young People’s Chorus of New York City, honors the 200 plus girls kidnapped from their school in Nigeria over two years ago, many of whom are still missing. The work had text by award-winning novelist Monique Truong and was premiered in New York City in November 2016. La Barbara is Artistic Director of the multi-year Carnegie Hall series “When Morty Met John” and co-founder of composers-collective Ne(x)works. She serves on the composition faculty at New York University and the performing arts faculty at Mannes/The New School. La Barbara is composing a new opera inspired by the lives and work of Virginia Woolf and Joseph Cornell. joanlabarbara.com.

Maria Murphy

Maria Murphy is a Ph.D candidate in musicology at the University of Pennsylvania. Her research considers the relationship between music technologies and body politics through the work of multimedia artists Laurie Anderson, Yoko Ono and Karen Finley.



Joan La Barbara

Voice is the Original Instrument

PROGRAM

There will be an intermission.

September 28, 2017 at 8 PM

Bruce Montgomery Theatre

Pre-concert talk: Extended Vocality: Joan La Barbara’s Original Instrument

Featuring Maria Murphy, Ph.D. candidate in musicology at the University of Pennsylvania



Co-presented by the University of Pennsylvania’s Department of Music and Annenberg Center Live.

PROGRAM NOTES

Solitary Journeys of the Mind (2011) explores real-time composition, reflecting the in-the-moment expression of sound and the decision making process of the composer/performer. Thus, although there are specific essential elements that form the overall structure, each performance is a unique event. Many of La Barbara's signature extended vocal techniques form the basis for this work, which opens with a startling vocal gesture and travels through imaginary languages and phantasmagorical forays.

ShamanSong (1991, revised 1998) is a concert suite comprised of selected excerpts from a film score La Barbara originally composed for *Anima* (Elizabeth Harris Productions). The film reveals a woman's journey into the desert, carrying the baggage, literally and emotionally, of a lifetime. There, she performs the labors and rituals necessary to enter "the world where magic happens". As there was no dialogue in the film, La Barbara wanted to create music that would correspond to its visual perspective (filmed on location in New Mexico's White Sands National Monument). Most of the voice and percussion recordings were done high up in the rocky cliffs of Diablo Canyon, New Mexico, utilizing the natural acoustical situation with ravens and echoes, birds and thunder. Reflecting the film's extensive use of symbolism, La Barbara chose to relate certain instruments to a particular character, event or feeling and used specific sonic motives to signal symbolic image references. Thus, the voice is a comforting spirit ("The Voice of The Land"); the cello reflects the main character's somewhat Victorian nature; the raven is a messenger; the drums mirror the exuberant youthful energy of a young stallion, the woman's sole companion on her journey; and the music box waltz is memory. In creating "The Voice of The Land," La Barbara referenced the softly undulating landscape with microtonal *melismas* reflecting the complicated shifting terrain. She used a series of resonating plucked sounds in cello, harp and music box to refer to specific image material- crystals and stones, stars twinkling and falling. For some of the memory scenes, La Barbara electronically manipulated sounds to alter their quality and change any lingering references. She modified a metal rod strummed across the ridges of a cut glass crystal bell to heighten and soften the edges of the sound and extend its sonic character, and stretched and twisted a sharply heaved sigh to reveal its innate otherworldliness. Plaintive descending chords of soft hammers striking a *gender* (percussion instrument) from an ancient Balinese gamelan. *Tar* and *dumbek* drums, *shakuhachi* samples, music box tines and calliope strains all are blended with the strange mysteries of breath, sighs, ululations, distant calls, cries and whispers.

Performers on Tape:

Joan La Barbara voice, percussion, computer, electronic keyboard, synthesizer

Polly Tapia Ferber hand drums: *tar* and *dumbek*

Erika Duke Kirkpatrick cello

Kristina Melcher gamelan: *gender*

Composed by **Joan La Barbara**

Location and studio recording engineers **David Dunn and Joan La Barbara**

Film Score Engineer **Tom Lazarus**

Additional material recorded and produced by **Joan La Barbara and Michael Hoenig** at Metamusik Productions in Los Angeles

Recorded for New World Records 80545-2

Intermission

Circular Song (1974-75) was inspired by the circular breathing technique used by wind players. In adapting the technique for singing, La Barbara chose to vocalize both the inhale and exhale, designing a circular mirror-image graphic score that displayed the directionality and breath changes on a progression of descending and ascending glissando patterns. The repeating patterns, broken at specified points, progress through a series to the mid-point figure, an ascending set of inhaled and exhaled multiphonics (double-stops for the voice), returning in reverse order to the beginning figure. Conceived in 1974 and premiered in 1975, it is one of La Barbara's earliest solo compositions,

an étude exploring particular extended vocal techniques that she had discovered while exploring the expanded sonic potential of the voice. It is also a very clear "process piece," reflecting the theoretical concerns, which she and other like-minded composers were dealing with in the early 70's. *Circular Song* is included on the double cd-set *Voice is the Original Instrument/Joan La Barbara: Early Works* (Lovely Music LCD 3003) and was one of three compositions on the 1976 LP (RVW 2276) of the same title on La Barbara's self-produced label, Wizard Music. On the cover of that LP, La Barbara's photograph is surrounded by the graphic score for *Circular Song*. This original LP recording was recently released on vinyl by Arc Light Editions ALE005.

Windows ... (2013 – in-progress) is a new work for amplified voice and sonic atmosphere. Into the sonic atmosphere, La Barbara has woven many voices and instruments and natural sounds, layering them in geographic strata in shifting tectonic relationships, meandering along the curving lines connecting the architectural dream-works of Antoni Gaudí and Frank Lloyd Wright. In addition to her own voice are the past and present musicians of Ne(x)tworks, the collective of performing composers with whom she has worked since 2002, along with pianists Kathleen Supové and Gaylord Mowrey. La Barbara has created a collage of many portions of live and studio recordings taken from 2003 through the present and, in the case of the bowed piano, from 1986. Inspired by fragments of dreams from Joseph Cornell's journals as well as his magical, mystical sculptures, and by fragments of Virginia Woolf's writings, *Windows ...* is a shape-shifting exploration of mind, memory, the internal dialogue and our voyeuristic impulse to look into windows, what we observe from the inside looking out ... and is an opera-in-progress.

Only (1947) (Note by Joan La Barbara)

In 1988, the Holland Festival presented a John Cage circus of musical events from various locations around Amsterdam. I was asked to sing several of Cage's works. Morton Feldman had died the previous autumn and because of Cage and Feldman's long friendship, it was decided a short work of Feldman's would be included in memorium. *Only* was sent to me on June 14, 1988. I sang it for the first time on June 23, from the roof of the State Opera House on the Leidseplein, at midnight in the rain. I am sure only the angels heard it since it was unamplified (although broadcast as part of a radio production). It is so uncharacteristically brief and so openly poignant that afterwards I tried to find out more about the circumstances surrounding its composition. The manuscript I had listed the publishing copyright date as 1976 but Feldman composed *Only* in 1947, when he was just 21 years old. It is an elegant elegy, a fleeting few seconds of solitary beauty.

In 1946, Feldman began to study with the composer Stefan Wolpe who introduced him to the works of the abstract expressionist painters Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline, Mark Rothko and Philip Guston. One can already see, in this early work, the influence in his use of silence as negative space, setting off the entire work by beginning and ending with a measure of silence, as well as inserting silent moments within his setting of the text.

Rainer Maria Rilke's text is an eloquent epitaph for a soul flown too soon:

Only when flight shall soar not for its own sake only
up into heaven
lonely silence,
and be no more
merely the lightly profiling, proudly successful tool,
playmate of winds, beguiling time there,
careless and cool:
only when some pure Wither outweighs boyish insistence
on the achieved machine
with who, has journeyed thither be, in that fading distance
all that his flight has been.

Only is included on the recording *Only: Works for Voice and Instruments by Morton Feldman* (New Albion NAO55).