



# Desert Visions

SAN DIEGO NEW MUSIC

Christopher Adler, piano and celesta  
Allison Adams, saxophones  
Dustin Donahue, percussion

Song for a Form Carved by Water (2001)

Christopher Adler

I stood on the shore and looked up at the birds (2014)

Jeff Herriott

Strata (2011)

Christopher Adler

— *intermission* —

Walk in Beauty (1989)

Peter Garland

1. 1. "Walk in Beauty" (opening song) / ...a Cuban dance...
  2. Turquoise Trail (In Memoriam: Louise Varèse) (sunset song)  
(...a visitor: Satie...)  
sunset, last night of fiesta (de Santa Fe), Sept. 10, 1989
  3. A Peyote Fan (for Lou Harrison and William Colvig),  
"It is passed on..." (night song) / (full moon)
2. A Pine-Pitch Basket (for Susan Otori) (midnight song) / (nearing equinox)
3. 1. Lightning Flash (rumba (*not really...*)), for Conlon "El Ray" Nancarrow  
(night song) / (another full moon)
  2. Walk in Beauty (Calling Home My Shadow)  
(sunrise song) / (this one's for PG)  
"It is finished in beauty..."

Hikari (1986)

Somei Satoh

Thursday, March 16, 2017, 7:30 p.m.  
Athenaeum Music and Arts Library  
Joan & Irwin Jacobs Music Room

## Program notes, by Christopher Adler

San Diego's eastern escarpment plunges into the vast and forbidding Sonoran desert—a true land of drought interrupted by rare and precious deluge. The desert climate lays bare the earth and its history; the vastness of time and space impress upon the senses with ecstatic clarity. *Desert Visions* is a journey through the desert sublime, a hallucinatory passage through geologic and spiritual time, with visions at the edge of prehistoric seas and in cavernous valleys.

When I moved to San Diego in 1999, I arrived by car through the desert. The stark landscape made a powerful impression on me, and I spent many weekends in subsequent years hiking around the Anza-Borrego desert and beyond. I wrote *Song for a Form Carved by Water* for the extraordinary saxophonist Alan Lechusza. Hiking towards Calcite Mine along a wash framed by imposing sandstone walls, a bend in the wash forms a natural amphitheater with a resonant acoustic. Although we never performed this piece out there, it is in this space I imagined hearing the music as I wrote the piece.

While seeking music for *Desert Visions*, the title of Jeff Herriott's piece struck me immediately, because I, myself, have spent plenty of time standing on the shore and looking up at the birds—at the vast Salton Sea in Imperial County. I suspect Jeff was thinking not of the desert but of the shores of the Great Lakes near his home in Wisconsin, but his piece is to me a vivid evocation of the vast desert landscape.

*Strata* was composed for glockenspiel virtuoso Trevor Saint, to be played on the uncommon extended-range glockenspiel, or on celesta—a set of bells played by keyboard. Tonight's performance will be the first time this work is played on celesta. *Strata* is an homage to geological time and the inevitable accumulations of entropy and decay, inspired by the works of artist Robert Smithson whose vast earthworks, such as the famous *Spiral Jetty*, are built from and in the deserts of the American west. His materials were of the earth but his subject was the immensity of geologic time. His works are a hallucinatory meditation on imagining the unimaginable. Here, musical composition is a geologic 'sedimentation of the mind'. Structures arrayed in crystalline perfection comprise an inclined basement overlaid by layers of derived materials. Musical crystals erode, conglomerate and metamorphose under the pressure of surrounding materials and the relentless entropic forward progression of time.

... NO LONGER A FAITHFUL IMITATION OF ETERNITY, BUT A CONSTANT STATE OF EROSION  
... LANGUAGE AND SOIL BLOWN AWAY  
... SEA BUTTERFLIES FALL INTO A NAMELESS OCEAN  
... MEMORY AT THE CHTHONIC LEVEL  
... THE PILING UP OF DEBRIS  
... STALE TIME  
... ABSENSE OF OXYGEN

from STRATA: A GEOPHOTOGRAPHIC FICTION, by Robert Smithson (1970)

Peter Garland studied at CalArts with James Tenney in the early 1970's, and founded and edited SOUNDINGS Press that for twenty years provided a voice for American experimental, minimalist and post-minimalist composers. He also edited the collected player piano studies of Conlon Nancarrow. He is, like me, an ethnomusicologist-composer, and his fieldwork in Mexico and the American southwest informs his music. While the other works on tonight's program evoke the landscape of the desert, Garland's *Walk in Beauty* evokes its people—real and imagined—from Native American voices (such as the peyote fan, a religious implement of the Peyote Way, a Native Christian faith), to composer friends and even local Sante Fe coffee roaster Susan Ohori (who was also an ethnomusicologist and pioneer in world music broadcasting). Garland's scores are reminiscent of Erik Satie, handwritten and inscribed with evocative messages to the performer, including words of encouragement at spots of difficulty ("go for it!"). I have

included many of these on the program to illustrate how Garland's work is a narrative of time, of place, of community and a personal music journey. They appear sometimes at the beginning, middle or end of movements and do not necessarily delineate separate sections or movements of the work.

In the desert, there is an abundance of light (*hikari*, in Japanese). Somei Satoh is one of Japan's most internationally-recognized living composers, whose works make expressive use of minimalistic repetition and simplicity, and evoke an expansive sense of time and space.