

The Mills College Music Department and the
Center for Contemporary Music present

Mills Music Now 2021-2022

Nicole Mitchell

Jean Macduff Vaux Composer-in-Residence

**Jeannik Méquet Littlefield Concert Hall
February 5, 2022 8:00 pm**

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Jean Macduff Vaux Composer-in-Residence

Procession Time (2017)

- I. carnival at the cliff
- II. ritual conception
- III. ancestral rites
- IV. jubilation resistance

Stacey Pelinka: alto flute, Ben Goldberg: bass clarinet, Brett Carson: piano,
Ben Davis: cello, Steed Cowart: conductor

Cult of Electromagnetic Connectivity (2020)

Stacey Pelinka: flute, Ben Goldberg: Bb clarinet/bass clarinet,
Kate Stenberg: violin, Ben Davis: cello, William Winant: percussion,
Steed Cowart, conductor

Intermission

Interdimensional Interplay for piano, pre-recorded flute and video (2016)

Brett Carson: piano

Improvisation

Nicole Mitchell: flute, Brett Carson: piano

Jean Macduff Vaux Composer-in-Residence

Jean Macduff Vaux (Class of 1933) was a Mills alumna who went on to earn a secondary teaching credential at the University of California at Berkeley. She lived a life of community service. During World War II, for example, she was a civilian volunteer with the 3rd Fighter Command and worked with the Red Cross. She was an active supporter of Mills' Alumnae Association and served as the National Branch Chair, over-seeing thirty-four branches in the 1950s. Jean and her husband Henry Vaux were founding members of the Cyrus and Susan Mills Society.

The Vaux family has established The Jean Macduff Vaux Composer-in-Residence Fund at Mills in Jean's memory. The endowed fund is used by the Music Department to invite distinguished composers to teach at Mills in residencies which culminate with concerts of their works.

The Mills College Music Department is very grateful for the vision and generosity of the Vaux family.

Procession Time
carnival at the cliff
ritual conception
ancestral rites
jubilant resistance

Procession Time, for alto flute, bass clarinet, cello and piano, was inspired by a painting entitled "Ritual" by Norman Lewis, a lead visual artist during the Harlem Renaissance who utilized abstract expressionism to comment on social issues through his art. I was most interested in his fixation on the timelessness of ritual and procession, which we often see as ancient, but is actually a collective human activity that has continually expressed itself in a cyclic spectrum from celebratory to horrific. These rituals have manifested throughout the ages as carnival, parade, protest, funeral march, dance party, birth ceremony, riot, lynch mob and even witch-hunt. Procession Time is informed by Lewis' ability to intricately articulate human movement and the emotions of jubilation and rage through texture, color and geometric form.

This summer, while I was working on this composition, I was disturbed by the impact of multiple hurricanes and fires that ravaged communities in the U.S. and throughout the world, within a few weeks, leaving thousands of people in desperation. A thought came to mind of what an engineer friend of mine said: "The heat energy accumulated in the atmosphere is due to the excess of CO₂ released from burning coal, oil and natural gas. Hurricane Harvey was releasing the energy of CO₂ sun heat energy trapped in the atmosphere." I thought to myself, we are at a crisis with the Western consumptive way of living. Our human actions of churning natural and human resources into monetary value for the goal of profit has more and more extreme consequences for us, and yet we are still collectively sleepwalking into our shopping malls as if all will be OK. That was the inspiration that much informed Procession Time and especially the first movement, "carnival at the cliff." It's joyous, yet off the mark, as I feel our delusions are, while we continue to participate in our own destruction.

I am very moved by the colors in Norman Lewis's "Ritual" painting. The vividness and flame-like shapes seem to dance around the piece. I focused on the dance of these shapes especially in movement two, "ritual conception." I also thought about, in spite the intellectual thrust of humanity, the fact that we are still acting on our nature, just as much as any other creature on the planet. It's just that it seems that the nature of humans seems to have a drive to control everything around it. And in my case, writing this piece which is through composed with no improvisation, represents my manifestation of this human nature.

In movement three, "ancestral rights," I was informed by the call and response and the circular patterns present in Lewis' painting. I also thought much about the process inherent in rituals — how there is a preparation, then the actual official event of ritual, followed by a conclusive event where the formalities and roles which were rigid during the performance of the ritual now dissolve into a transformation of roles, and a release of energy. Often times in a ritual, there may be some mystery involved, or a happening that cannot be clearly explained. I wanted to make the music in the vantage point of being witnessed from a

distance, with blurring between clarity and confusion for the viewer to understand or not understand the events as they unfold.

I am a believer of “good news,” that we as people have the power to transform our circumstances, and that our power comes through joy. That said, movement iv, “jubilation resistance,” is informed by the buoyancy of the human spirit to elevate beyond our own ignorance, and to hopefully move towards a new approach of living where technology can embrace and not fight nature.

--Nicole Mitchell

Cult of Electromagnetic Connectivity

In a dimension humans cannot perceive, the outpouring of electromagnetic radiation from digital technology excites invisible creatures into a frenzied dance as they begin to redesign our physical reality. For better or worse?

--Nicole Mitchell

Interdimensional Interplay for piano, pre-recorded flute and video.

What if there are other realms of existence beyond the space-time continuum that we focus on in our waking state? Inter-dimensional Interplay is a duo composed for a pianist who is physically present and a flutist who only exists as a memory penetrating into the present through recorded sound and video. I am curious about exploring the psychological concept of communication between our realm of reality and other dimensions that are invisible to us. Perhaps we have inter-dimensional experiences that we are not even consciously aware of. My interest in this piece is to explore the possibility of creating a performance where the audience experiences the concert as spontaneously active through the improvisational elements, and that the interplay between musicians transcend the structural aspects of the piece that are fixed and preplanned.

My hope is that my essence can be experienced, almost as if I had visited the audience in the room. Can I demonstrate my spirit through sound and visuals, and through inspired musical interaction with a pianist, and express a presence that transcends a flat screen and disembodied sound? Will the audience walk away feeling that they experienced a duo or a solo?

--Nicole Mitchell

Video, flute and composition by Nicole M. Mitchell
camera work by Chantal Eyong.

Nicole Mitchell

Nicole M. Mitchell is an award-winning creative flutist, composer, bandleader and educator. She initially emerged from Chicago's innovative music scene in the late 90s, where she became a member of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) and eventually served as the first woman president. Called the “greatest living jazz flutist of

her generation” (Peter Margasak, Chicago Reader), Mitchell has repeatedly been awarded #1 Jazz Flutist by Downbeat magazine and the Jazz Journalists Association each year from 2010-2020. A United States Artist Fellow (2020), a Doris Duke Artist (2012), and a recipient of the Herb Alpert Award (2011), Mitchell’s research centers on the powerful legacy of contemporary African American culture. For over 20 years, Mitchell’s critically acclaimed Black Earth Ensemble (BEE) has been her primary compositional laboratory, with which she has performed throughout Europe, Canada and the U.S. As a composer she has been commissioned by the French Ministry of Culture, the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, the Newport Jazz Festival, the Art Institute of Chicago, the French American Jazz Exchange, Chamber Music America, the Chicago Jazz Festival, International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE), and the Chicago Sinfonietta. Mitchell is a professor of music, the William S. Dietrich II Endowed Chair in Jazz Studies and the Director of Jazz Studies at University of Pittsburgh. Previously she was a Professor of Music for UC Irvine’s program in Integrated Composition, Improvisation and Technology (ICIT).

Upcoming Concerts

Signal Flow Festival March 11-12, 2022

Samantha Ege (Dewing Piano Recital)

A recital of piano solo works by African American women composers, including Florence Price and Margaret Bonds.

Sunday, April 3, 2022

Music From the Fault Zone: Experimental Music at Mills College (1939 to the present) Thursday to Sunday, April 21-24, 2022

To receive email music events notices, please contact concerts@mills.edu. Find information about Mills music events online at: <https://performingarts.mills.edu/>

To purchase tickets online, please visit: <https://www.eventbrite.com/>

Follow us at Instagram [@millsmusicnow](https://www.instagram.com/millsmusicnow)

ABOUT MILLS COLLEGE

Mills College was founded in 1852 in Benicia, California, as a Young Ladies Seminary. Cyrus and Susan Mills purchased the site of the present 127-acre campus and built Mills Hall in 1871. Mills became a chartered college for women in 1885. Mills offers a bachelor's degree in music with emphasis on Performance, Composition, Electronic Media, or History/Theory as well as master's degrees in Composition, Electronic Music and Recording Media, and Performance and Literature. The Music Department includes the world-renowned Center for Contemporary Music. At Mills students can study traditional and contemporary music in a creative environment that fosters experimentalism. The Department's faculty includes composers Tomeka Reid, James Fei, Zeena Parkins, Laetitia Sonami, Steed Cowart; scholars David Bernstein and Nalini Ghuman; and performers including William Winant, Jennifer Ellis, Kate Campbell, Molly Holm, Robert Schwartz, Hrafnhildur Atladottir, Hank Dutt, Kala Ramnath, and Gianna Abondolo. For information on studying music at Mills, phone (510) 430-2135 (Undergraduate Admission) or (510) 430-3309 (Graduate Studies), or contact the Music Department Administrative Assistant, Kristian Dahlbom, at (510) 430-2171. Brendan Glasson (510) 430-2336 is Technical Director of the Center for Contemporary Music. The Concert Coordinator is Steed Cowart, (510) 430-2334.