

Strings and Serpents • Bio Release

About:

Strings and Serpents is an international collaboration featuring two pianos, two kotos and animation. Projected during the performance is an animated film depicting The Rainbow Serpent Mythology. Created by Andy Milne and commissioned by The Herb Alpert School of Music at CalArts, the project premiered in October 2014 at New York's Lincoln Center. It features Milne with French pianist Benoît Delbecq, Japanese koto masters Tsugumi Yamamoto and Yoko Reikano Kimura, and Japanese animator Saki Murotani. The ensemble grew out of the **Crystal Magnets Piano Duo** that Milne and Delbecq formed in 2007 upon receiving The French-America Jazz Exchange from Chamber Music America. After seeing Yamato's **TsuguKaji-KOTO Duo**, Milne was inspired to combine their duos and explore the potential of two iconic instruments that symbolize the roots of Western and Eastern music respectively.

The music blends traditional and modern koto textures with the language of jazz and contemporary improvisation. A synthesis of Japanese and Western structures in terms of melody, form, improvisational language and rhythm, the work merges musical and visual forms into a unified experience. The animation employs 2-D and 3-D computer-generated imagery (CGI) inspired by the music. The story is told visually, without dialogue or subtitles, and elegantly projects a visual composition that experiments with color, shape, texture, light and motion to enrich the relationship between the pianos and kotos. Strings & Serpents was created through the support of The Japan Foundation and New Music USA. In 2019 they will release their debut recording and tour North America.

Musicians:

Andy Milne

Andy Milne has been one of the most respected voices at the heart of New York's creative jazz scene for over 30 years. A former student of Oscar Peterson, Milne is actively composing for orchestra, chamber ensembles, and scoring for film and television. He collaborates with dancers, visual artists, poets and musicians spanning jazz, classical, pop, folk, rock and world music. In the 1990s, Milne was at the center of the M-BASE Collective as a core member of saxophonist Steve Coleman's bands, as well as performing with Cassandra Wilson and Greg Osby. He has recorded and toured throughout the world with Ravi Coltrane, Ralph Alessi, Carlos Ward and Carla Cook, and has performed with a range of artists including Andrew Cyrille, Sekou Sundiata, Avery Brooks, Bruce Cockburn, Fred Hersch, Ben Monder, Grégoire Maret, Jen Shyu, Tyshawn Sorey and Jamie Baum.

Tsugumi Yamamoto

A native of Kobe, Tsugumi Yamamoto was drawn to the koto from listening to her grandmother perform. She studied 13- and 17-string koto, as well as shamisen and now holds master teaching licenses with the Ikuta-ryu Shingen-sha. Yamamoto specializes in playing the dynamic 25-string koto, which she studied during an internship with the Japanese Ministry of Cultural Affairs' Artist Training Program. She began her performance career in Tokyo in the 1990s while studying under Katsuhiko Yoshizaki, graduating with the 39th class of the NHK (Japanese Broadcasting Corporation) training program for young musicians of traditional Japanese instruments. Since that time, Yamamoto has actively produced concerts, while commissioning and performing new works at festivals and other events. She has collaborated with numerous contemporary composers including Akira Ifukube, Minoru Miki, Yoshiro Irino, Keizo Mizoiri, Takatomi Nobunaga and Kazuyuki Taguchi. In 2001, Yamamoto formed TsuguKaji-KOTO Duo Ai Kajigano. Together they performed internationally for a decade, presenting a range of koto tones with spoken word and song. She also leads the traditional music ensemble "Ho," with whom she has performed several new compositions. While not tied to a particular genre, Yamamoto is most interested in the freedom of expression that improvisation, song and spoken word bring to her music.

Benoît Delbecq

Pianist/composer Benoît Delbecq figures prominently among the innovators of the international contemporary jazz scene who have built their own musical language. Described by The New York Times as *“an original and unconventional pianist who expertly invents a serene music,”* Delbecq is a dynamic contributor to the new aesthetic thrusts in today’s music. An inspired adventurer and visionary poet, he has released 38 CDs under his name or as part of collectives. His 2013 Songlines release, “Fun House,” featuring his double trio with pianist Fred Hersch, was highly acclaimed, and appears on the Best of 2013 lists for New York City Jazz Record and JazzMan Magazine. Delbecq is a former student of Mal Waldron, Muhal Richard Abrams, Alan Silva, Solange Ancona and Steve Coleman, among others (Banff Centre, IACP Paris, Versailles Conservatory.) He performs solo piano, solo electronics, leads and co-leads a number of bands and collectives, and is involved in many multi-disciplinary productions incorporating theater, dance, visual arts, poetry and cinema. His music features mesmerizing grooves that reveal the sparkle of lunar melodies - an invitation to a voyage into a magic land.

Yoko Reikano Kimura

Based in the US and Japan, koto/shamisen performer and vocalist Yoko Reikano Kimura has performed around the world. A frequent soloist, she has concertized in New York, Chicago and other major cities in the US with a wide range of repertoire from classical Japanese music to improvisational pieces. The San Francisco Examiner described her as *“an elegant refined presence perfectly poised, she played with precision, beauty and the utmost confidence.”* Kimura graduated from the Tokyo University of the Arts and Music, where she was awarded the top prize for her final recital. In 2000, she began collaborating with classical violinist Yuiko Tomita as “Y’s Sound” and won the Debut Concert Audition at Tokyo’s Toppan Hall, which was broadcast throughout Japan on digital satellite radio. Since 2008, she has concertized with cellist Hikaru Tamaki as Duo YUMENO. In 2014, they were awarded Chamber Music America’s Classical Commissioning Program grant, and in 2015, the Aoyama Baroque Saal Award. Kimura is an enthusiastic supporter of contemporary music, collaborating with The Euclid Quartet, Ciompi Quartet, Freimann Quartet, Prairie Ensemble and The Texas Festival Orchestra. She has performed numerous new works, including a premiere for the Japan Society for Contemporary Music and in 2016 she played shamisen with American Symphony Orchestra in Pietro Mascagni’s opera Iris.

Animation:

Animator **Saki Murotani** brings stories to life with her “eye candy graphics” and animation. Originally from Asahikawa, Hokkaido in Japan, she now lives in Canada, working as a Motion Graphics Designer. In 2008, Murotani collaborated with Andy Milne & Benoît Delbecq when she worked in the Film & Media department at The Banff Centre (Banff, AB) as an Animator/Interactive Designer (2008-2010). Driven by her passion to create visually engaging art in motion to tell stories, she has collaborated with other animators, filmmakers, musicians, designers, artists and academics. Her short films have been screened at film festivals in Canada nationally and internationally.

Contact:

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