

# if you were with me

A Virtual Degree Recital  
Bachelors of Music - Composition

Wednesday June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020  
7:30 PM, CST

George Papajohn

Student of Alex Mincek, Hans Thomalla,  
and Jay Alan Yim

George Papajohn (1998-)

*Catechumen* (2019)

*Northwestern University Contemporary Music Ensemble*  
*dir. Victor Minke Huls*

*Three Distortion Études* (2019)

- I.
- II.
- III. after Philippe de Vitry

*George Papajohn, Clarinet*  
*Brandon Quarles, Saxophone*  
*Ruud Roelofson, Percussion*  
*Hans Thomalla, Piano*  
*Matthew Arrellin, Violoncello*

*..for Soprano Saxophone* (2020)

*Cameron Roberts, Saxophone*

*Children's Pieces* (2020)

- I. Chorale in Major Chords
- II. Melody in Descending Scales
- III. Little Piece in Minor Chords
- IV. Siciliano
- V. Folksong

*Michael Slattery, Piano*

*Andante Scherzoso* (2020)

*Ensemble Dal Niente*  
*dir. Michael Lewanski*

### **Curatorial Note:**

The title of this recital comes from the first line of the second part of *On a Mountain*, a poem by Frank O'Hara that I set to music in late 2018. This eponymously titled work, while barely over three minutes, marked a significant turn in my compositional mindset—from a metaphorical desert, into a metaphorical jungle. If an in-person recital were possible, you would all be hearing the premiere of this work and many others tonight. This is of course not the case.

However, what you will hear tonight is a selection of recordings of some of my favorite works that I have created since *On a Mountain*. On that topic, I would like to offer my gratitude to those whose new recordings will be premiering tonight; their work is a testament that, while difficult, we can still make music together during these times. Thank you for tuning in, for reading, and above all for listening. I hope you enjoy this proxy as much as we might "if you were with me."

-George Papajohn

### **Catechumen**

The term catechumen refers to a person undergoing instruction in the doctrine of a faith to which they are converting, most often in the context of Christianity.

More generally however, it can mean a person receiving an elementary education in any subject.

The word itself comes from the Greek *katēkhōmenos*,

"being instructed," in turn from both *kata* (κατά) and *ēkhos* (ἤχος) meaning "downward" and "sound" respectively.

The entire piece can be seen as an invention on two antipodal versions of this idea: two percussive impulses descending a semitone and a tremolo hairpin-swell glissando traversing the same interval.

*Catechumen* was composed for the Northwestern University Contemporary Music Ensemble.

### **Three Distortion Études**

Written around the same time as *Catechumen*, these studies explore the nature of distortion with purely acoustic means. Each of the studies takes a different approach:

In the first, the exceeding of various thresholds, much like a speaker clipping or the human scream, is foregrounded.

The second in many ways achieves the opposite, as it centers on failing to meet certain sonic thresholds. Additionally, certain phenomena, paired with a sonic double, may negate each other's effect.

In the third, 'distortion' becomes more of a distortive-interference. Much of the surface pitch material comes from a fourteenth-century motet by Phillipe de Vitry. This particular motet was chosen because of its textual emphasis on split personae.

The full text of *Cum statua Nabucodonasor/Hugo, Hugo principes invidie/Magister Invidie*.can be found at:  
<http://arrow.latrobe.edu.au/store/3/4/5/4/2/public/MMDB/Composer/H0028008.htm>

The *Three Distortion Études* were composed for Professor Hans Thomalla's Contemporary Compositional Praxis seminar.

### **..for Soprano Saxophone**

Even though every parameter of *for Soprano Saxophone* is precisely notated, it is likely my most indeterminate piece written in the past two years. This owes itself largely to the sheer amount of (what we call) silence in the piece. In some ways, the tone seems to be articulating silence as much as it articulates itself.

Nevertheless, it is above all a melodic piece. The challenge comes from what we are able to hear as melody. It is as much a slowed down drifting melody as it is the fragments of a more linear structure. The silences are as much a rupturing of the melody as they are further notes in the melody.

Or perhaps it isn't a melody.

It is a melody if we hear the silence as beginning when the tone stops and ending where it begins. But often, the silence can continue as a pedal tone beneath. Memories of centuries of diatonic gestures and implied harmonies are equally likely to infiltrate.

Maybe it is a contrapuntal piece after all.

*for Soprano Saxophone* was composed for Cameron Roberts.

### **Children's Pieces**

For some time this winter, I had been occasionally playing through Schumann's *Album for the Young*. This was music I thoroughly enjoyed and could easily sight-read—and one of its amazing aspects was that it sacrificed none of what makes Schumann's music beautiful, except for some virtuosity.

Then, in the spring of 2020 with coronavirus forcing much of the world into prolonged self-isolation, I began to reconsider domestic existence. The only in-person music one could experience is that which they could make themselves. It was this that inspired me to create music for children and amateurs alike.

The pieces themselves, like much of my recent music, are concerned with re-contextualizing tonal structures in the hopes of finding new modes of hearing this material.

### **Andante Scherzoso**

The title of the piece would seem to be a simple reiteration of the score's tempo marking, as is often the case with de facto movement titles of large scale works. Here however, *Andante Scherzoso* carries both mimetic and structural implications.

Structurally, this reflects the often diametrically opposed inner movements of a multi-movement work: the slow movement and the Scherzo. The title could also be taken literally in its connotations of both walking (*Andante*) and facetious jest (*Scherzoso*.)

*Andante Scherzoso* was composed for Ensemble Dal Niente.