



Friday, June 10, 2022 | 11:00am

Libbey Bowl

EASTMAN

Emi Ferguson *flute* | Miranda Cuckson *violin* | Seth Parker Woods *cello* | Doug Balliett *double bass*
Conor Hanick *piano* | Davóne Tines *bass-baritone* | Zack Winokur *director*

Julius EASTMAN

Our Father

Gay Guerrilla

Buddha

Stay On It

Prelude to the Holy Presence of Joan d'Arc

This concert is made possible
with the generous support of
Ida and Glenn Mercer

There is no intermission
during the concert.

Julius EASTMAN (1940-90)
Our Father (1989)
Gay Guerrilla (1979)
Buddha (1984)
Stay On It (1973)
Prelude to the Holy Presence of Joan d'Arc (1981)

EASTMAN is a continually developing concert that reflects the performers' consideration of Julius Eastman's art and the larger context of his life, creativity, and humanity. The project came out of the proposition: "What is possible if all members of a performing ensemble are present for every step of the creation of a performance?" This led to a commitment each collaborator made to meet weekly, for over a year, to discover and digest Julius Eastman's work, share personal stories about what his absence from our educations has meant, play his music and the music of his contemporaries, and build a collective knowledge and informed performance practice together. This work has culminated in more than just a concert, but a way of working collegially and collaboratively — with care and holistic engagement of material that seeks to honor it through deep contextualization. This is our effort to pay homage.

—DAVÓNE TINES

A Wandering Monk

The rediscovery of Julius Eastman that has been unfolding in recent years entails more than bringing an unjustly neglected composer to light. It has implications as well for the dominant narrative of America's new music scene in the last decades of the 20th century. To what extent did systemic racism and homophobia — realities Eastman confronted head-on in his work — prevent artists from receiving proper recognition for their contributions? How does a fuller understanding of the diversity of composers engaged in Minimalism, for example, challenge our understanding of that revolutionary style as a reaction to Modernism? And how does Eastman's unapologetic, fiery, tangled intensity complicate the standard reception of this turning point in music history?

Initially given a traditional musical education — he grew up singing in church

and studied piano and then composition at the Curtis Institute — Eastman won renown as a pianist and singer, immediately gravitating to New York's experimental scene in the later 1960s and the 1970s. He joined Meredith Monk's ensemble, was championed by Lukas Foss, and even sang under the baton of Pierre Boulez. And, in the midst of his life as a performer, sometime teacher, and political activist, Eastman composed — wrestling his wildly original, provocative, militant, ecstatic musical visions into existence.

During the Reagan-era 1980s, Eastman succumbed to addiction and became homeless on New York's Lower East Side. His death at the age of 49 went unreported for eight months, until Kyle Gann published an obituary in the *Village Voice*. But the tragic facts of his final decade's downward spiral should not distract from the creative exuberance of

the singular phenomenon that was Julius Eastman. His defiance of conventional aesthetic boundaries encouraged the kind of innovative intersections that are a model for AMOC*, so it follows that the company feels a particular kinship with Eastman. This program celebrates the wide range of Eastman's achievement and its special resonance for the present moment.

Even if his transgressive life story hints at the trope of the misunderstood, individual Romantic genius, Eastman rejected the division of labor that historically relegated the composer to "the role of the unattended queen bee," as he wrote in his 1979 text *The Composer as Weakling*, instead urging the composer to "become the total musician." One aspect of his music that is especially inspiring, according to Zack Winokur, is

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A WANDERING MONK

that it “changes each time it is realized in performance and, as such, is a radically collaborative creation.”

Stay On It, for example, the earliest piece on the program, has no fixed instrumentation and is fueled by an improvisatory, communal energy that rejects linear control in favor of ad lib, repetitions, and reconfigurations of small cells. Its pop-tinged joyousness makes for a fascinating contrast with the inward-directed serenity of *Buddha*, the score of which consists of a single page of 20 lines (instrumentation again unspecified) contained within a sketch of a large egg.

Eastman’s musical language in the early 1970s, observes Ryan Dohoney, “combined a collage aesthetic of multiple unsynchronized layers, electronic manipulation, repetition, and the quotation of popular song,” while he later focused more intently on Minimalist processes in works of more-expansive dimensions. At the same time, Eastman infused his

experimentalism with the passion of political engagement. “What I am trying to achieve is to be what I am to the fullest,” he proclaimed in an interview in 1976. “Black to the fullest, a musician to the fullest, a homosexual to the fullest.”

The Stonewall Riots were only a decade in the past when Eastman created *Gay Guerrilla*, which he premiered in a 1980 concert in a realization for four pianos. The piece radically reclaims religious associations as it layers bell-like sonorities into ever-more-ecstatic constellations, eventually quoting Luther’s iconic hymn tune *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*.

Eastman referred to himself as “a wandering monk,” and his spiritual quest as it relates to his music is a rich, complex topic. AMOC*’s program is framed by powerfully ritualistic pieces from his final decade that set Eastman’s own texts, echoing prayers and litanies that seem to amalgamate the fragments of a long-lost religion into a newfound revelation.

Both *Our Father*, a compelling plea in spare harmonies and his last-known score, and the *Prelude to the Holy Presence of Joan d’Arc* call for the commanding, foundation-shaking deep voice for which Eastman was acclaimed. *The Holy Presence of Joan d’Arc* is an extended instrumental work for 10 cellos, for which Eastman later decided to write the a cappella vocal *Prelude*. He was working on his recording of the *Prelude*, which he never performed live, around the time he was forced out of his New York apartment and rendered homeless.

In part of a spoken prelude Eastman also recorded for *The Holy Presence*, he addressed the daring saint directly: “Dear Joan, I have dedicated myself to the liberation of my own person firstly. I shall emancipate myself from the materialistic dreams of my parents; I shall emancipate myself from the bind of the past and the present; I shall emancipate myself from myself.”

—THOMAS MAY

This concert is approximately 80 minutes.