

# ConVergEnce: New Music from Norway

Wednesday March 26, 2014 4PM

Deane Carriage Barn, Bennington College; Bennington, VT

## Program

Magnar Am – “On the Banks of the Eternal Second”

Bjorn Bolstad Skjelbred – “Moves”

Bjorn Bolstad Skjelbred - “ConVergEnce”

Wolfgang Plagge – “Fractals”

Eric Despard, classical guitar – Michael Gilbert Ronstadt, cello – Rocco Anthony Jerry, bayan

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## ABOUT THE WORKS:

In “**Moves**” (1992) for solo guitar, the main idea is to juxtapose several contrasting musical situations and explore the difference between them, such as the difference between music that moves and music that represents a standstill. Can “slow” music give you a stronger impression of movement than “fast” music and what happens if two different musical situations borrow parts of each other’s characteristics? When do pure sounds turn into music, and what can make a chaotic order of events appear as logical?

“**ConVergEnce**” (2013) is the fourth in a series of pieces that are inspired by language philosophy (Wittgenstein) and theory of communication (Habermas), combined with a wish to incorporate elements from the theatre in music. This could be specific positioning of the musicians on the stage, incorporating choreography and movement in the performance and/or using spoken language as part of the musical expression.

In these pieces I see the musicians as representatives of human characters, playing roles, but contrary to actors, their language is music. The two instruments are given two very different kinds of musical material, as if they were two people speaking different languages. Instead of trying to blend these two very different instruments

I work with them as two separate characters playing simultaneously – creating a listening environment where the listener hears two “persons” talking at the same time, in two separate languages. Then the listener can choose whether to listen to one at a time or both as a totality. As the music unfolds, like a conversation, the two persons are trying to understand each other, sometimes listening to the other, sometimes arguing, sometimes they agree, sometimes they don’t. The overall form of the piece is formed from the meaning of convergence in the mathematical sense according to the “law of large numbers” as a metaphor of human behavior: “the average of the results obtained from a large number of trials should be close to the expected value, and will tend to become closer as more trials are performed”. One can come close to understanding each other, but it is not possible to fully understand another human being. Nevertheless, in the end one should learn to accept the differences instead of treating them as grounds for conflict.

Another inspiration for “ConVergEnce” is the work of the painter Jackson Pollock, who also has entitled one of his works “Convergence”.

Norwegian composer **Bjorn Bolstad Skjelbred** (b. 1970 – Norway) has produced works in a variety of styles, including contemporary classical, stage productions, and popular music. His compositions have been performed in Europe, USA and Canada in addition to the Nordic countries. He has collaborated with Norwegian percussionist Eirik Raude, the Swedish ensemble “The Pearls before Swine Experience”, The London Schubert Players, the Norwegian vocal group Nordic Voices and the Danish flutist Marianne Leth. Collaborations with Norwegian groups of actors like “The Chosen Ones”, “FaktaMorgana” and “Fabula Rasa” have resulted in several productions for the stage, which have been shown in several Scandinavian countries. Mr. Skjelbred received his Masters in Composition from the Norwegian State Academy of Music in 2006, with composers Asbjørn Schaathun and Bjørn H. Kruse as his tutors. He has also taken private lessons with the Italian composer Luca Francesconi.

For two decades, **Michael G. Ronstadt** has entertained audiences throughout North America on cello, guitar and voice. An exceptional musician-composer conversant with a wide range of styles, he not only executes captivating solo performances, but participates regularly in duo and trio situations with a diverse camp of young, innovative musician-songwriters including Lisa Biales and David Trotta. His versatile talents have been tapped for concert and studio work by such artists as David Bromberg, Linda Ronstadt, Muriel Anderson and Craig Bickhardt. As a core member of Ronstadt Generations, Michael G. displays genre-blending explorations on cello and guitar in complement to thought-provoking lyrics. In addition to his solo recordings as well as those with Ronstadt Generations, Michael G. is a much sought-after studio musician, who has appeared on more than fifty albums in the last dozen years. Dan Buckley writing for The Tucson Citizen noted his “amazing command of the typical and exotic sounds of the cello, a true virtuoso and a man of instinctive musicality.” Michael holds both a Master and Bachelor of Music in Cello Performance and studied under esteemed pedagogues Yehuda Hanani, Nancy Green and Dr. Gordon Epperson.

Heralded as a “talented classical guitarist” by the Times of Trenton, guitarist **Eric Despard** performs extensively throughout North America as a soloist and with various chamber ensembles. His dynamic solo concert programs include “The Latin Guitar” featuring Spanish, Latin and South American guitar composers and “World Guitar” featuring music and transcriptions of composers from around the world. In addition to solo classical guitar concerts, Eric regularly performs with various jazz, blues, and rock groups throughout the Northeast. His passion for accessible community music and arts education led to a five year position as the Executive Director of the Bennington Music School. Eric holds an undergraduate degree from the Hartt School of Music and a graduate



degree from the Yale School of Music. At Hartt he studied with Alan Spiestersbach and Richard Provost and at Yale he studied with Benjamin Verdery. Eric has performed in master classes for Sharon Isbin, Elliot Fisk, Eduardo Fernandez, and David Russell. He has taught guitar at the Turtle Bay Music School, Rutgers Community Music Program, the Westminster Conservatory, the Bennington Music School, and the Community College of Vermont. Eric is currently an Affiliate Artist at Middlebury College and an Instructor of Guitar at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. He also serves on the faculty and is the Music Director at Southern Vermont College where he teaches music history, music theory, concert jazz band, choir, and related performance classes.

**Rocco Anthony Jerry** is captivated by the use of the accordion by contemporary classical composers, and has focused his energy in working with composers on new works for the instrument. Mr. Jerry performs on a bayan with a range of over 7 octaves on each manual. He has given solo concerts throughout the US including New York City, Washington D.C., and Philadelphia, at venues including the National Museum of American Art at the Smithsonian Institute, the National City Christian Church (Washington D.C.), and other churches and halls in the US. He has performed with several chamber music groups including the Downtown Ensemble and the Flexible Orchestra. He has premiered new works by Daniel Goode, Conrad Kehn, Peter Machajdik, Robert Young McMahan, Arthur B. Rubinstein, Max Simoncic, and Christian Wolff, and has given the US premieres of many other pieces. In 2012, he gave the US premiere of Bjorn Bolstad Skjelbred's "The Verge of Understanding: Playing Wittgenstein", commissioned with a grant from the Norwegian Composers Fund. In 2009, Mr. Jerry premiered Conrad Kehn's multi-media work "Maximinimal" for Accordion, Electronics, and Video. In May-June 2004, Mr. Jerry worked closely with Hollywood film composer, Arthur B. Rubinstein, and performed accordion in the premiere run of Rubinstein's new musical "He Who Gets Slapped", with the next run scheduled for the Mark Taper Auditorium in Los Angeles. In 2007, Mr. Jerry began the Accordion Ensemble Project, which was awarded an SOS Grant from the New York Foundation for the Arts in 2008. In this ongoing project, Mr. Jerry is recording all parts of accordion ensemble works, so that they may be performed as a solo, accompanied by his recording of the remaining parts. To date, he has performed the accordion ensemble works of Bjorn Bolstad Skjelbred, PeterMachajdik, Magnar Am, Kjell Perder, Jacob ter Veldhuis, and Yuji Takahashi, with more works added each year.