

## **Cristina SPINEI**

MUSIC FOR DANCE

MEET ME UNDER THE CLOCK BOOTLEG SUGAR LIPS SOME BREAKING PERSPECTIVES SYNCHED FROM Voxare String Quartet Pala García, violin Joan Plana, violin Amanda Verner, viola Aleisha Verner, cello Sari De Leon Reist, cello Colleen Phelps, marimba St Michel Strings José Serebrier

## **COMPOSER IN THE LOOP**

by Cristina Spinei

I've always felt that I was somehow destined to become a composer. I share my quirky birthday - 29 February - with one of my favourite composers, Gioacchino Rossini. Growing up in an Italian-American household, I got to know his music as part of an eclectic soundtrack that has influenced my work today. I had easy access to the arts in my hometown of Stamford, Connecticut, and its supportive community helped to shape my musical development. As a young student I was able to attend rehearsals of the Stamford Symphony Orchestra and the Connecticut Grand Opera. Those behindthe-scenes experiences were invaluable in learning about how music is constructed. While in high school I was accepted into the Juilliard Pre-College Division and the New York Youth Symphony conducting programme. My weekends were filled with performances, piano and composition lessons, theory, ear-training, music history and conducting. Instead of making the trip back to Connecticut, I would spend the weekends with my grandmother, who lived in the Bronx. It was during this extended time in New York that I started to develop my love for rhythmic music and ostinatos. The energy of the city began to work its way into my compositions. I decided to continue my education at Juilliard, going there for six additional years and receiving both my B.M. and M.M. in composition as a student of Christopher Rouse.

Upon graduating from Juilliard, I co-founded a new-music/new-technology ensemble with fellow composer Jakub Ciupinski: Blind Ear, a collective of composers and musicians which presents technology-driven concerts. Jakub wrote software that makes it possible for our musicians to perform reading from laptops while a composer sends them their music in real time. For our system to work, we had to devise a new way to write music so that it could be read and processed quickly by the musicians. We have found it most effective to write loops: short musical phrases intended to be repeated and combined to make a larger musical structure. Blind

Ear uses loops as the basic building blocks for a musical piece. Our composers act as DJs, sending their loops out to musicians during performances. With our software we are able to change the tempo, dynamics, synchronisation and duration of a work in real time. We've collaborated with choreographers Adam Weinert and Andrea Miller of Gallim Dance, and with visual artist Ali Houssaini. Blind Ear has been featured at three World Technology Awards, on 'Spotlight on Music' on YouTube, on the BBC radio programme *World Today*, in *The Strad* and at TEDxGowanus.

For me the favourite part of being a composer is the ability to collaborate with artists across genres. My music has been much influenced by dance and movement, and I have been fortunate to work with choreographers and ensembles with a similar aesthetic. I have developed close relationships with choreographer Kathleen Dyer of Kathleen Dyer Dance New York, the New York Choreographic Institute, MuSE, the Metropolis Ensemble, Trio Céleste, Écouter Ensemble and the Gateway Chamber Orchestra. Most recently I've partnered with the Nashville-based new-music ensemble Intersection as its composer-ambassador. In addition to writing a new work for Intersection, I've participated in community-outreach talks and events. The mission of Intersection is to demonstrate that contemporary music is a vital and thriving form of art. It has been inspiring to work with a group that so highly values outreach. My next projects include a wind-ensemble arrangement and a multimedia song-cycle. In both pieces I'll be able to workshop the music and work closely with the musicians.

My involvement with classical music was a physical one from the start: it began at the Stamford City Ballet under former Balanchine ballerina Allegra Kent. For three years I happily jetéd, relevéd and pliéd my way towards my dream of becoming a prima ballerina. My favourite part of lessons was listening to Chopin being played on the piano during warm-ups. At some point I realised that I wanted to study and play the music that I had been dancing to. I traded in my ballet shoes for piano lessons and took my knowledge of movement with me when I started composing – and movement has become an essential part of my compositional process. When I work on a new piece, I look to develop themes and motifs that I can dance to. If an idea doesn't make me move

in some way, it gets set aside in a scrap file. Composers tend to have a kind of writing ritual, and mine involves a lot of dancing around the music studio.

It was a natural progression for me to start collaborating with choreographers. My first commissions upon graduating from Juilliard were for dance companies. One was an evening-length piece for Mary Seidman and Keystone Dancers. The work, MAMA (2008), was a surreal folk-tale with guest artists and company dancers. Much like writing for specific musicians, I learned how to write music to fit a particular dancer's style. The second dance that I wrote was for the choreographer Kiyon Gaines and the Pacific Northwest Ballet. Kiyon and I had a successful partnership at the New York Choreographic Institute, and we went on to create a three-movement dance, M-Pulse (also 2008). I have worked with six different choreographers since those first early commissions. Writing for dance has allowed me to explore the relationship between movement and sound on a large scale, and collaboration with these and other choreographers has influenced my sense of time and form. The unfolding and development of themes have become elongated, giving dancers more time to finish phrases before moving on to a new musical idea. The resulting works examine repetition through ostinato rhythms, pulsing textures and gradually building melodies.

One of my most frequent collaborators is the choreographer Kathleen Dyer. We have worked on ten dances together over the span of five years. The string quartets From 1, Perspectives 2, Some Breaking 4 and Bootleg Sugar Lips 5 are representative of our synergic partnership. The works were created in tandem; sometimes I would deliver a few minutes of music to rehearsals and other times Kathleen would create a dance phrase that I would later match musically. All four of the quartets explore intertwining patterns over static repetition. Meet Me Under The Clock 3 was composed with the rhythms and movement of New York as inspiration.

From  $\square$  opens with a halting recitative between the viola and cello. The first eight notes of the viola represent a sighing gesture that forms the main motif of the piece. There is space between each utterance of the motif until it gradually builds momentum with all of the players joining in. It isn't often that I use silence in my music, but this

piece called for a reflective tone. The mood of *From* remains sombre throughout, with a few bright spots provided by a climbing melody in the first violin.

Perspectives 2 unfolds slowly, with the viola playing a descending two-note motif. Pizzicato cello notes punctuate the ends of the viola part, as if responding to a musical question. I structured this piece to be a conversation between all four instruments. When the second violin enters, it presents a repetitive gesture that sounds as though it's completing the viola's musical thought. The entrance of the first violin is a sustained, quiet note that almost sneaks into the conversation. From there the first violin plays a low, repetitive quaver (eighth-note) melody that becomes the catalyst for the rest of the work. The quavers turn into semiquavers (sixteenth notes) and the melody is transformed into a fast, swirling gesture punctuated by accents in the low strings. Gradually the music unwinds and regains the calm of the opening.

There are three distinct sections that make up *Some Breaking* 4. In the dance, a quartet finds itself lost in a forest of heartbreak where the magic of connection inspires the realisation that some breaking is building. I wanted to represent that sense of desolation by a soaring, minor melody in the first violin. It is accompanied by mournful countermelodies in both the second violin and viola. The cello alternates between *pizzicato* notes and a *legato* descending line that echoes the music of the first violin. Section two of *Some Breaking* is almost all *pizzicato*. I wanted to create a pointillistic effect, and so the melody is divided up between the players. The third section is contrastingly bright and rhythmically intricate. There are extended passages where the viola imitates the melodic lines of the cello before they eventually play the same music. The minor theme from section one is brought back at this new faster tempo, representing the transformation that happens at the end of the dance.

Although not written specifically for a dance company, *Meet Me Under The Clock* 3 was inspired by the intricate choreography of navigating New York's Grand Central Terminal during rush hour. This duo for marimba and cello was commissioned by New York new-music collective MuSE for its 2013 Sounds of Arts Festival. The famous clock in the middle of Grand Central has been a popular meeting place for people commuting into New York for decades. I have many memories of standing by it, waiting for my

sister's train from Connecticut to arrive on her weekly visits. Although surrounded by waves of people, I was able to stand absolutely still and observe that motion from a fixed point. I wanted to juxtapose that sense of fixed observation and swirling movement in *Meet Me Under The Clock*. Throughout the piece, I alternate between using  $\frac{3}{4}$  and  $\frac{6}{8}$  time-signatures. I love the lilting effect that is created when switching between those two metres. The marimba maintains a steady, driving beat that sounds somewhat chaotic under the cello's lyrical lines. The cello does have instances where it participates in the aggressive rhythm, but it mostly represents the static observer. There are spots in the music where the movement comes to a sudden halt, as if taking a breath before charging on to the end.

In one of the early rehearsals of *Bootleg Sugar Lips* [5], Kathleen had already started setting new choreography to John Adams' string septet *Shaker Loops*. She had wanted the same gesture of the quivering strings in Adams' septet to be in my yet-to-be-composed piece. As a joke I gave the first sketches of the quartet the title 'Bootleg Shaker Loops'. Through a misunderstanding by the dancers the name morphed into 'Bootleg Sugar Lips' and the absurdity of it was catchy enough for a permanent title.

The quartet is divided into three sections. It begins with all of the musicians playing oscillating semiquavers in the lowest register of each instrument. The motion is propelled forward constantly by their frenetic gestures. At times the first violin embellishes the semiquaver motif with snippets of a short melody. Gradually, the cello and the viola climb up to a higher register while the motif of the two violins condenses. The tension increases until they all join in on the same pulsing rhythm. Section two lets the music sit back and breathe a little more. There is a slight pause in long, drawn-out chords before another pulse develops. This time it's an unhurried crotchet (quarter-note) beat that acts as a foundation for this section. The first violin plays a sustained, lyrical melody that floats above the occasionally syncopated chords. This break in motion does not last very long before the cello launches into the third section of the piece with a tongue-twister of a theme. Although it is written in <sup>4</sup>/<sub>4</sub>. I wanted to break up the rhythm of this phrase by placing unexpected accents on the off-beats. The viola and second violin take up the theme in an imitative way while the cello plays a *staccato* counter-melody under it. This

section is a juxtaposition of those two ideas – an intense rhythmic line and a simpler *staccato* accompaniment. Single melodies emerge out of the overlapping textures, while at other times all four players are in synch with the same rhythm.

Synched 6 was conceived in a slightly different way from my other music for dance. It began as an aleatoric piece for string octet and electronics, and the first performance was in collaboration with Gallim Dance as part of Juilliard's celebrated Beyond the Machine festival. Because of the controlled improvisation in Blind Ear concerts - the tempo, dynamics and articulation of the music can be altered while musicians perform - Synched was never performed the same way twice. I decided to take elements from the octet and notate it in a fixed version for string orchestra. The basic structure of *Synched* remains loops: four- or eight-bar phrases that repeat. Each loop is a building block used in different combinations. Every instrument has its own set of loops that occasionally overlaps with those of other instruments. These loops are split into two contrasting sections. The beginning of Synched is slow and sustained. Its opening two-note motive gets passed around the string orchestra and grows as it is taken up in register. The second section, which is rhythmic and syncopated, is characterised by loops that accent the last semiquaver (sixteenth note) of a beat. The cello and violin both have a soaring melody over these bubbling rhythmic gestures. By limiting the musical material in Synched, I am able to play with rhythm, syncopation, register and stereophonic effects with the same loops.

Formed in 2008, the **Voxare String Quartet** – Emily Ondracek-Peterson and Galina Zhdanova, violins, Erik Peterson, viola, and Adrian Daurov, cello – has attracted attention for its inventive programming, technical prowess, attention to detail and passionate performances. *The New York Times* declared that Voxare plays with 'penetrating tone and lucid textures', and has on numerous occasions chosen Voxare as its Classical Pick of the Week. Voxare performances have included



appearances at Avery Fisher Hall with the New York Philharmonic, the Guggenheim Museum, Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center. The Quartet has had performing residences at Dartmouth College and Columbia University, among others; additionally, it has been the prestigious quartet-in-residence at Bargemusic in New York. It has been featured live on Soundcheck (WNYC) and its concerts broadcast on WQXR. At its residency series, 'Dig It! New Music', at Teachers College, Columbia University, Voxare performs works by living composers, bringing together a community of America's leading composers, both emerging and established. Voxare's unique performing activities earned the quartet Chamber Music America's 2010 ASCAP Award for Adventurous Programming.

In addition to performing standard repertoire, Voxare takes responsibility for presenting and encouraging interest in contemporary music, and often works with composers such as the Pulitzer Prize-winning Ned Rorem and David Del Tredici.

Voxare was accepted to study quartet repertoire with Robert Mann, founder of the Juilliard String Quartet, at the inaugural prestigious Mann Quartet Institute. Voxare has studied quartet literature with members of the Juilliard String Quartet through its exclusive String Quartet Seminar, and has also studied with members of the Kronos Quartet through Carnegie Hall.

Individually, Voxare members have performed as soloist with orchestras such as the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and orchestrally with the Cleveland Orchestra, Milwaukee Symphony and St Petersburg Philharmonic. The four musicians have amassed a number of prizes at international competitions.

The violinist Pala García is a devoted chamber musician and has performed in this capacity at various music festivals around the world, including Saito Kinen (Japan), Nymphenburger Sommermusik, Festspiele Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (Germany), Aspen and Sarasota (USA), and is a regular participant at Open Chamber Music at Prussia Cove (UK). As a former Academy Fellow of the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, she performed in this world-renowned ensemble and its conductor-less chamber orchestra on multiple tours, subscription series, radio broadcasts, and recording projects for Deutsche Grammophon. Pala García has appeared as a guest on



numerous occasions with the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, Orchestra of St Luke's, Either/Or Ensemble, SONYC and many other New York-based ensembles.

She explores music from around the world with a variety of artists of varying musical genres, including Falu, a classical Hindustani-influenced ensemble, Imani Uzuri and Slavic Soul Party!. A dedicated advocate of community engagement, Pala García is on the artist roster of the Carnegie Hall 'Musical Connections' programme, and has co-designed numerous educational concerts, led musical workshops and delved wholeheartedly into community-engagement work across the country, working with students of all ages as well as patient and inmate populations in medical facilities and correctional facilities.

Pala García made her solo orchestra debut at the age of eleven, and has since performed as a soloist with the String Orchestra of Brooklyn and Pacific Chamber Orchestra, among others. Born in San Francisco, she is an alumna of the Juilliard School, where she completed her undergraduate and graduate degrees with Naoko Tanaka and Joel Smirnoff. Her previous teachers include Dame Camilla Wicks and Elise Christianson. She teaches at Rutgers University's Mason Gross School of the Arts.

The violinist **Joan Plana** has been praised for his 'finger-knotting virtuosity' by *The Yorkshire Post*, for his 'expressive performance' by *The New York Times* and for his 'spontaneity, polish and sweet tone' by *The Boston Musical Intelligencer*. He alternates his career in the United States, Europe and Asia between the worlds of both modern and Baroque violin. An advocate of contemporary music, he has premiered and recorded several works from Spanish and American composers, some of them written especially for him. He appears in groups such as BCN 216 (Barcelona), Arcos Orchestra, Metropolis Ensemble, Blind Ear Project, Axiom Ensemble and the New Juilliard Ensemble. The recipient of several prizes and awards,



Joan has performed concerts all over Europe, Canada, USA, Japan and China. A founding member of the Baroque ensemble Concitato, he is the Music Director of L'Académie (Boston), concertmaster of Baroque Band (Chicago), the American Baroque Orchestra, Concentus New York (Japan) and guest concertmaster in other US Baroque orchestras. He has been a member

of the European Baroque Orchestra, Il Pomo D'Oro, Trinity Wall Street and The Handel and Haydn Society, among others. Born in Lleida, Catalunya, he holds degrees from the Juilliard School, the Cleveland Institute of Music and the ESMUC (Barcelona). Joan currently resides in New York, where he is pursuing a Doctorate of Musical Arts at the CUNY Graduate Center. He has been on the faculty at the 'Rethinking Bach' workshop at the Tokai University in Japan since 2014.

Born in Wellington, New Zealand, the violist **Amanda Verner** began her training in her hometown before earning a Bachelor of Music in viola performance from the Cleveland Institute as a student of Jeffrey Irvine. She received an Artist Diploma from the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, under the tutelage of Misha Amory, Roberto Diaz and Michael Tree.

Amanda's recent performances include her solo debut at Carnegie Hall, performing Steve Mackey's Ground Swell as part of the 21st Century American Contemporary Ensemble workshop by John Adams and David Robertson; collaborating on a European tour with violinist Pamela Frank and violist Roberto Diaz; and a Chamber Music New Zealand tour with the MELERensemble, which was described as 'four outstanding talents, blending them into a noteperfect, seamless ensemble' by The Northern Advocate (New Zealand). She has appeared at the Aspen Music Festival, Seiji Ozawa International Academy and since 2008 has been a member of the Verbier Festival Orchestra and Chamber Orchestra



An experienced orchestral musician, she has served as principal viola of Symphony in C and the Akron and Curtis Symphony Orchestras, and guest principal of the Melbourne and New Zealand Symphony Orchestras and the Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra. She has travelled with the Australian Chamber Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, the Royal Concertgebouw and with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.

Cellist Aleisha Verner, born, like her sister Amanda, in Wellington, began to study the cello at he age of twelve. She completed her Bachelor of Music at the University of Michigan with Richard Aaron and continued her Master of Music at the Juilliard School of Music with Joel Krosnick, graduating in 2011. Currently Aleisha is completing her Konzertexam with Claudio Bohorquez in Stuttgart.

As a chamber musician, Aleisha has performed with the Axiom New Music Ensemble in New York, the New Juilliard Ensemble and with members of the Staatskapelle Berlin as part of their Chamber Music Series. Aleisha was featured on ABC news with her performance with Condoleezza Rice at the Aspen Music Festival; she has also collaborated with Simon Trpčeski as part of the Artists Faculty Recital Series.

Aleisha Verner is a graduate of the Academy of the Staatskapelle Berlin and since 2014 has been on contract with the Staatskapelle Berlin. She has recently been appointed to the cello section of the Staatskapelle Dresden.

Sari De Leon Reist performs regularly with some of Nashville's finest musicians and ensembles on stage and in the recording studio. She is a member of Alias, a Grammy-nominated chamber ensemble based in Nashville. Sari has appeared as soloist with the Nashville Chamber Orchestra and is a frequent guest musician for the Nashville Symphony. In the popular realm, she can be heard on the recordings of Lady Antebellum, Faith Hill, Martina McBride, Ben Folds, Train, Carrie Underwood and countless others.

Sari received her Bachelor of Music degree in cello performance from San Francisco Conservatory of Music under the tutelage of Irene Sharp. Sari received her Suzuki



Certification through an intensive, two-year programme at School for Strings in New York City, where she later joined the faculty. She was also formerly on the faculty of Mannes College of Music and The Children's Orchestra of New York, as well as the Governors School for the Arts in Tennessee. In Nashville Sari maintains a private studio in addition to teaching at Lipscomb University. She resides in East Nashville with her husband, Joel Reist, and two daughters.

The award-winning percussionist Colleen Phelps is based in Nashville. Her recitals frequently include new and experimental works, especially her own. Her combinations of percussion, spoken word, singing and theatre are quickly becoming in demand within the new-music scene. She has appeared as a percussion soloist with the Charlotte Civic Orchestra and Nashville Philharmonic. Colleen recently earned her Master's Degree in Conducting at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, where she previously completed Bachelor of Music degrees in Percussion Performance and Music Education.

Grammy-winning conductor and composer **José Serebrier** is one of the most recorded classical artists in history. He has received 37 Grammy nominations in the past few years: all his recent recordings have received multiple Grammy nominations.

When José Serebrier was 21 years old, Leopold Stokowski hailed him as 'the greatest master of orchestral balance'. After five years as Stokowski's Associate Conductor at Carnegie Hall in New York, Serebrier accepted an invitation from George Szell to become the Composer in Residence of the Cleveland Orchestra for Szell's last two seasons. Szell discovered Serebrier when he won the Ford Foundation American Conductors Competition (together with James Levine). Serebrier was music director of America's oldest music festival, in





Worcester, Massachusetts, until he organised Festival Miami, and served as its artistic director for many years.

Serebrier has made international tours with the Juilliard Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony, Philharmonia Orchestra, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Toulouse Chamber Orchestra, National Youth Orchestra of Spain and others.

His first recording, of Charles Ives' Fourth Symphony with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, won a Grammy nomination, and his many subsequent recordings have continued to gather one international award after another. He currently records for Naxos, BIS, RPO Records, Sony/BMG and Warner Classics; this is his second appearance on Toccata Classics. Having recorded the complete symphonies and concertos of Glazunov for Warner Classics, he recently completed a cycle of the Dvořák symphonies for the same label.

As composer, Serebrier has won most of the important awards in the United States, including two Guggenheims (as the youngest in that Foundation's history, at age nineteen), Rockefeller Foundation grants, commissions from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Harvard Musical Association, the BMI Award, Koussevitzky Foundation Award, etc. Born in Uruguay to Russian and Polish parents, Serebrier has composed more than a hundred works, published by Peer Music, Universal Edition, Kalmus, Warner Music and Peters Corp. His First Symphony was premiered by Leopold Stokowski (who gave the first performances of several of his works) when Serebrier was seventeen, as a last-minute replacement for the then still unplayable Ives Fourth Symphony; and since then his music has been recorded by a number of other conductors. Serebrier made his US conducting debut at nineteen with the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, performing his Symphony No. 2, Partita. His Third Symphony, Symphonie Mystique, received a Grammy nomination for 'Best New Composition of 2004' and was premiered at Carnegie Hall in 2005. His Carmen Symphony CD, with the Barcelona Symphony Orchestra, won the Latin Grammy for 'Best Classical Album of 2004'. José Serebrier: Un chef d'orchestre et compositeur à l'aube du XXIe siècle, by the French music-critic Michel Faure, was published in 2002 by L'Harmattan, Paris.

St Michel Strings, based in the city of Mikkeli in eastern Finland, is a professional string ensemble of twelve full-time musicians. The group dates back to 1903, when the local music-association of this small town of only a few thousand residents founded an orchestra. From the very beginning the ensemble had far higher aspirations than its amateur status. It eventually became a full-time professional ensemble, and in 1990 became one of the cultural organisations publicly funded by the city of Mikkeli.



St Michel Strings has won acclaim for its innovative programming and has also become known for its eagerness to collaborate with young composers from Finland and abroad. In order to diversify its concert offerings, the ensemble engages in numerous other partnerships as well, regularly performing joint concerts with other groups. Its chamber configuration allows for easy mobility while still providing a full and authentic concert experience, sometimes without a conductor

Among its recent accomplishments, St Michel Strings participated in the prestigious Great Mountains Music Festival in South Korea in summer 2013, and its recording *Adagio*, conducted by José Serebrier, won a Latin Grammy Award nomination. Recently St Michel Strings has collaborated with soloists such as violinists Clara-Jumi Kang and Zia Hyunsu Shin, cellist Jian Wang and pianist Olli Mustonen. Celebration of the 150th anniversary of Jean Sibelius included a tour in South Korea and China in March 2015 with Sibelius' music.



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