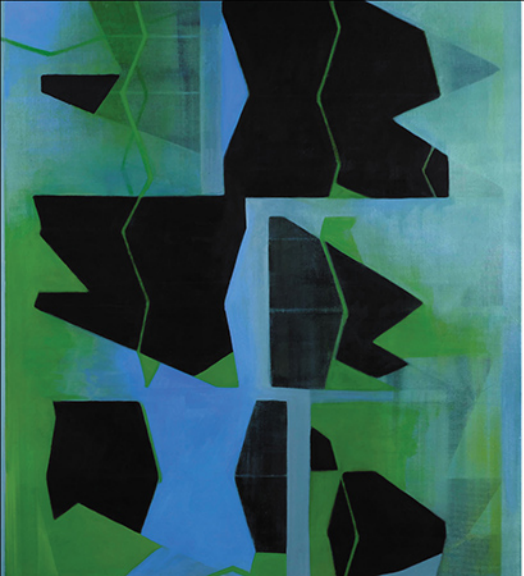


**MAX GITTECK DUYSKERS FOLDING MUSIC ENSEMBLE IPSE**



# *Max Giteck Duykers and the Malleability of Pierrot in the Early 21st Century*

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**T**he so-called “Pierrot ensemble” (a.k.a. “Pierrot plus percussion,” “Pierrot sextet,” or merely “P6”) has been a ubiquitous instrumental combination for a great deal of contemporary-music groups for more than fifty years. This extremely versatile and relatively compact micro-orchestra takes its name from Arnold Schoenberg’s 1912 song-cycle, *Pierrot lunaire*, which featured a then virtually unprecedented quintet of flute (doubling on piccolo), clarinet (doubling on bass clarinet), violin (doubling on viola), cello, and piano to accompany a vocalist whose revolutionary *sprechstimme* technique was the cause of the work’s notoriety. (The closest antecedents to the “Pierrot” instrumental combination were a series of Rococo quintets scored for flute, oboe, violin, cello, and harpsichord by Johann Christian Bach, J.S.’s youngest son, originally published in 1780.) Aside from a few now forgotten curiosities, such as Benjamin Britten’s 1936 score for the film *Dinner Hour* (which might be the earliest music scored for a “Pierrot” quintet plus percussion), Schoenberg’s idiosyncratic blending of sonorities did not start to become the repository for a wide range of repertoire until the late 1960s, after two British composers, Harrison Birtwistle and Peter Maxwell Davies, formed the Pierrot Players, later renamed The Fires of London. This pioneering new-music consort served as an archetype for countless iterations that have sprung up around the world in the decades since (from the Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble to Eighth Blackbird). Given this ensemble’s flexibility—and the fact that subsets include a wide range of piano plus one combinations as well as

piano trios (with both strings and winds)—plus by enlisting only a couple of guest musicians you could additionally perform string trios, string quartets, and piano quartets—it is no wonder that this formation has proven to be so popular. Testimony to P6’s durability are seminal compositions in a staggering variety of musical styles—from Donald Martino’s Pulitzer Prize-winning *Notturmo* (1973) and Elliott Carter’s *Triple Duo* (1983) to Kamran Ince’s *Waves of Talya* (1989), Daniel Bernard Roumain’s *Fast BLACK Dance Machine* (2002), and Jennifer Higdon’s *Zaka* (2003).

Yet despite this specific instrumental configuration serving as the de facto sonic blueprint for a great deal of late-modern contemporary chamber music, in much the same way that the string quartet and the piano trio had for chamber music throughout the Romantic era and beyond, surprisingly few composers have been inspired to compose multiple works for it. Aside from Barbara White and Fred Ler Dahl, who have each composed several formidable works in this medium, **Max Giteck Duykers** (born 1972) stands out for his ongoing dedication to the sound worlds made possible by this emblematic ensemble. Therefore it is fitting that the first commercially-released CD recording devoted exclusively to Duykers’s music should feature two of the four “Pierrot sextets” he has composed this far, that the remaining four works on the disc are playable by P6/P6+ subsets, and that everything here (except for the one vocal work which adds guest soprano Zen Wu) is performed by members of Ensemble Ipse, the P6 ensemble he co-founded in 2016 and for which he continues to serve as co-Artistic Director.

As such it is an excellent introduction to Duykers’s compositional aesthetic. While he has composed a great deal of multimedia work as well as orchestral music, chamber music forms the core of his catalog. Duykers’s music revels in hovering somewhere between graspable tonality and a chromatic tetrachordal harmonic vocabulary that is usually associated with atonal pitch organization, unisons between players as well as a kind of motivic heterophony where players play similarly contoured but different lines simultaneously, constant metric shifts that still somehow groove, trippy microtonal interludes that do not in

any way seem theoretically systemic but serve a purpose that is much more than merely ornamental, cadential silences, and—what for lack of a more readily comprehensible term could be described as—“temporary ostinatos”: single notes or chords that repeat incessantly for a period of time but then unexpectedly veer off into something else. Most of Duykers’s pieces also exhibit a high degree of playfulness and exuberant joy. It is telling that Duykers concludes the program notes for several of them with an admonition to the players to “have fun” or “enjoy.”

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The first piece on the present recording, *Folding Music* (composed for and premiered by Ensemble Ipse in 2017 and subsequently revised in 2018), clearly revels in many of the benefits of the “Pierrot sextet.” Duykers frequently focuses on various subsets of the instrumentarium, creating constant timbral shifts. Aside from the usual flute/piccolo, clarinet/bass clarinet doublings and a percussion arsenal comprising membranophones, aerophones, and idiophones of both precise and indefinite pitch (marimba, glockenspiel, Almglocken, temple blocks, toms, kick drum, medium tam tam, and a wine bottle that’s blown into), everyone else is required to double on percussion as well: The flutist plays a wooden slap stick, the clarinetist a single crotales, the violinist a rubbed wooden box, the cellist a suspended cymbal, and perhaps, most dramatically, the pianist a set of glass wind chimes. While the harmonic material is clearly post-tonal, it is also post-atonal; it is chock full of tonal allusions and minimalist repetitions as well as numerous inexact repetitions.

*Folding Music* begins with juxtapositions of two tetrachords stated repeatedly (albeit with shifting metrical patterns) in the piano and echoed by the other instruments. Although the eight distinct pitches forming these two tetrachords could very well be two-thirds of a tone row, this is not serial music; the remaining tetrachord never appears. Instead, as the other instruments explore various permutations of this peculiar incomplete row, the flute finally utters a new

pitch which culminates in an ensemble unison on it spanning six octaves. Then two new tetrachords are introduced in the piano with quasi-heterophonic echoes on clarinet, violin, cello, and flute. But this collection features only six distinct pitches, yielding hexatonic harmonies until the glockenspiel joins in. The rhythm then shifts to triple meter, but it is hardly waltz-like. Instead, toms and kick drums suggest an almost military hue, then duple meter returns as the intensity further builds. There’s a brief percussion solo on temple blocks that’s gradually joined by the others; eventually everyone’s back in, sharing and contrasting melodic material. Following brief contrapuntal sections that suddenly end on cadential pauses is perhaps the most intriguing section of the entire piece: Pizzicato cello and percussion, alternating between marimba and two almglocken, set up a jagged syncopation over which a flute cadenza shifts between clean and breathy tones and introduces some quarter-tonal pitch alterations. It sounds like a field recording of traditional music from an alternate universe. While every detail is completely written out, the idea is to create an improvisatory vibe, which Duykers reinforces in his notated score by encouraging the percussionist to “make a lot of space” and to “drop out a beat occasionally.” The flute solo comes to an end on a tremolo as the piano re-enters with a series of clusters accompanied by rubbed box. Then the cellist captures center stage with a forceful melody, which Duykers suggests interpreting “dark and wrong” and with “different timbres for repeated notes.” A frenetic unison trio of piccolo, violin, and piano is then followed by another intense tutti. But it all ends very mysteriously with tones from the blown-in wine bottle answered by the suspended glass wind chimes.

According to Duykers, “*Folding Music* makes a structure from seemingly incongruous musical materials. The materials are folded into themselves, cut up and repeated, and eventually reach a kind of logical cadence. Then the music switches to another section which follows a similar kind of logic. I am increasingly interested in presenting musical ideas from which I do not demand typical

development, but which can exist peacefully as their own moments. These ideas are simply presented in contrast with each other.”

Compared to the wild, hurly-burly that is *Folding Music, Scatterloop* (composed for violinist Esther Noh in 2016) *almost* feels musically conservative. At the onset, Duykers instructs the violin and piano duo to play “bright and with movement, but drunken.” A cool jazz atmosphere is belied through hazy cluster chords in the piano and maqam-like flourishes in the violin. In his program notes, Duykers writes “imagine you’re trying to walk but your legs are numb.” Completely new material is then introduced: The violin plucks through a rush of notes which is then answered in the piano as the violinist resumes bowing—a series of declamatory double-stops each ending on upwards slides, described in the score as “like ‘yip!’.” Halfway through there’s a nearly two-minute violin cadenza contrasting double-stops and melismas. A much shorter piano cadenza follows in which rippling cascades spew out. Then as the piano maintains this flow in the right hand, the left hand introduces a chain of ascending parallel fifths soon joined by more of those aforementioned “yips” on the violin. A more proper melodic unison between the duo ensues, then some material more akin to solo and accompaniment, culminating with a series of frenetic violin double-stops and a descending B-flat major scale on the piano ending decisively on a B flat, despite Duykers’ claim that “the piece ends without any kind of resolution.”

Duykers describes *Scatterloop* as “a wild, fun, and virtuosic piece that presents repetitive fragments and explores how to obfuscate their coherence using seemingly disparate textural and harmonic elements.” If at times you’re not sure whether you’re listening to standard repertoire or a thorny modern piece, it’s by design. Duykers is “interested in how traditional music syntax is comprehended by the listener, and how a piece of music can live on the edge between expected logic and experimentalism.”

Perhaps the most magical of Duykers’s works included here is the song “The Way In” (composed in 2015), which is the only vocal composition: It is scored for soprano solo with piano and obbligato cello. The text is Robert Bly’s wonderful English translation of the enigmatic poem “Eingang” by Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926), the opening poem of his collection *Das Buch der Bilder (The Book of Pictures)*, originally published in 1902.

Duykers’s very sensitive setting opens with a lengthy piano prelude appropriately hinting at the extended chromatic harmonies of late Romantic music which hover on the edge of tonality. Amidst more ambiguous collections of pitches, there are occasional triads and several seventh chords that give the music various tonal pulls

before a clear cadence in C. At about a minute in, the voice enters, ghostlike, as similar harmonic escapades continue in the piano. Then the cello enters with a countermelody underscoring the pivotal words “take a step from your house which you know so well.” Duykers then conveys the steps taken outside with a completely new sonic environment of various motivic shards played in the upper register of the piano and plucked on the cello that are in constantly shifting jagged rhythms (e.g. 7/8 to 15/16 to 9/16 to 11/16 to 13/16 etc). Following the text “your house lies where it begins,” there is an arioso bowed cello figuration. There are several unisons of voice and cello, which serve to emphasize key phrases in the poem, such as on “tear themselves” and “stands against the sky.” The meanings of the words are further enhanced through the singer’s angular melisma on “sloping” and the exaggerated slow-descending glissandos on repetitions of the word “sky,” which Duykers has described as “a wild wailing sound to invoke the struggle of making this lonely move towards groundedness.” According to him, “The phrase ‘lift one black tree up, so it stands against the sky, skinny, alone’ is the most salient image—a heroic gesture of power and strength in the face of solitude.” The cello has a brief solo before one last unison with the voice, perhaps the most poignant one, on “with that you have made the world.” After that, a monophonic piano solo is joined by pizzicato cello to usher in the final two sentences of the poem, which ends accompanied by a sequence of very quiet dyads (double-stops bowed on the cello and incessantly ringing major thirds in the upper register of the piano).

“I see the poem as a visceral beckoning by the soul to come out of one’s shell and move toward enlightenment,” said Duykers. “There is sadness in leaving behind our familiar trappings. This sadness is inseparable from the stillness and peace that come from the struggle, which is where I feel the piece leaves us.”

*Twilight for Adored and Breathless Moments* (composed in 2004–2005 for the Stony Brook Contemporary Chamber Players and subsequently revised in 2007 prior to

its West Coast premiere by the Seattle Chamber Players) is another “Pierrot sextet.” The piece begins with a relentlessly pounding chord involving all six players. A sudden sonic hiccup after the nineteenth time the chord pounds, offers a momentary reprieve, then it resumes but is soon interrupted by angular figuration and steadier hiccups before an ascending arpeggio in the winds and piano dissolves into silence. A new hiccup-like motive appears on piano and plucked strings, soon joined by clarinet and vibes. Then the flute briefly commands attention with a virtuoso flourish, almost instantly shadowed by clarinet. The others continue as before until everyone comes together in a series of wide leaps, which coyly resolve into a blatant G major, over which flute and clarinet offer sly, sometimes brazenly off-key rejoinders. Everyone then joins in the romp, which at one point feels firmly bitonal (in G and E). That is, if it’s possible to feel firmly in two keys at once. It soon seems to be modulating, though after the ensuing counterpoint a firm sense of any tonal center is no longer possible.

Then the piano, all alone, steadily repeats a quiet tone that almost feels like a human pulse. Everyone briefly returns, then drops out again, this time leaving the clarinet to iterate this pulse, albeit now an octave higher and twice as slow; the blood pressure has somehow simultaneously increased and decreased! Winds and strings then engage in a dirge-like chorale, eventually joined by vibes and piano, as harmonies grow denser. Suddenly the violin is completely alone, running down a scale before sustaining tones in its upper range against figurations in the winds and cello in unison. In the ensuing material, things occasionally feel like they’re ultimately going to resolve to a clear tonality, but they never do. A couple of minutes before the end of the piece, pizzicato cello initiates an almost funk-like groove over a unison run on vibes and piano. The six players then engage in a series of ever-shifting and sometimes even simultaneous duets, trios, and quartets. In the end, the clarinet and pizzicato violin share a final unison accompanied by the cello, also pizzicato, which demonstrably resolves, at last, to A.

*Twilight for Adored and Breathless Moments* is dedicated to Duykers's wife Rebecca Curinga "without whom the adored and breathless moments would be fewer and further between." Duykers describes it as "a play of extremes, contrast, love and anger: the breathless and the breath-ful. Each section, or moment, has a different kind of character to be brought out by the liveliness of the playing."

*Arborescence* exists in two versions: a 2010 Avian Orchestra-commissioned septet in which a P6 ensemble is joined by accordion; and a virtuosic solo piano arrangement of that septet which Duykers created for Stephen Gosling in 2017, which is how it is presented here.

*Arborescence* starts off with a series of identical tetrachords that speed up, grow louder, and transpose across the full chromatic scale, alternating between ostinatos and angular cascades for more than two minutes. Melodic figurations gradually emerge and are juxtaposed with these chords in a kind of otherworldly homophony. New tetrachords are gradually introduced, some sounding like harmonies in a serial composition, while others seem decisively tonal and a few even hint at pentatonicism (though in reality, they're tetratonic). Halfway through, following a blatant resolution to B major, the chords dissolve entirely into Lisztian cascades that race up and down the lower half of the keyboard, eventually serving as accompaniment to a declamatory angular melody that is in no way related to those cascades, at least from a tonal point of view. Admittedly any attempt to straightjacket Duykers's harmonic language is ultimately an exercise in futility. Yet, according to him, there is a clear game plan here:

The piece is based on a row of 89 pitches, divided into 14 pitch collections. I attempt to portray a kind of fractal growth—reaching out from a center spine or trunk. Grand and still music emerges from burgeoning and ephemeral music—

we begin to hear unique and unrepeated shapes among a clustery centerpiece. The piece has three large sections and so moves through the row three times, each time cadencing on F# with a clear melodic motive to mark the sections.

Towards the very end, an unaccompanied diatonic melody quietly cries out, after which a series of simpler and frequently diatonic chords progress almost silently, landing finally, but unambiguously, on a B-major triad.

*Dark Body* (composed in 2015 for violinist Esther Noh and premiered by the New York Composers Circle) is scored for a Pierrot subset: a quartet of flute, violin, cello, and piano. It begins in a steady duple meter with a spare muted violin solo before the piano enters with diatonic cluster chords in an undulating rhythm evocative of a heartbeat. Cello and flute enter, initially reinforcing a firm G-major tonality hinted at by the piano's diatonic cluster, though not heeded by the erratic chromaticism in the violin. Then the flute also veers off and ultimately joins the violin in unison, though throughout an aura of G remains. At about two minutes into the piece, things take a surprising turn. As the cluster continues in the piano, strings, now pizzicato, attempt to establish an elusive groove against an ever-shifting meter while the flute blurts out bluesy slides. Strings, now bowed, play phrases half a beat off from each other, though eventually flute and piano join in unison with violin, reinforcing its off-kilter melody. Then everyone moves in parallel back on the downbeat as the piano's diatonic clusters now constantly change key. As those clusters venture higher and higher up the keyboard, the flute very gradually slides down. After a series of more and more agitated outbursts in piano and strings, once again in strict duple meter, flute and piano cascade across their ranges in lockstep. Then, in what is probably the work's strangest passage, strings strum a tonally ambiguous chord over an extended flute solo combining breathy tones, straight tones, and flutter-tonguing,

ending on a series of sustained pure tones, after which piano and then bowed strings blurt out a sequence of lush C-major triads, before shifting to a euphoric F across four octaves on the piano. A return to ambiguous chromaticism ensues, and then the flute introduces quartertones in a series of declamatory pulsations. Later on, a short piano solo is followed by cello/piano duo, piano trio, and then flute, piano, and violin in unison. Toward the end, we're in unabashedly groove-oriented territory despite the frequently shifting meters. A series of ascending G-major scales in the flute are then echoed in octaves on the piano, ultimately joined in a third octave on the violin, which all end triumphantly on G.

According to Duykers, "*Dark Body* takes the form of several stylistically diverse episodes which explore visceral experiences, and portrays the seeming discontinuity as we switch between them. The body may be the least understood of our faculties: In one moment, a single touch may be comforting and threatening, giving and kept. Here we may feel great power; also great need, pleading and invitation, telling and quelling of fears: our sensuous reach toward all that is known and also ephemeral."

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"The sensuous reach toward all that is known and also ephemeral" could actually be an apt description for all of this music by Max Giteck Duykers. It combines intellectual rigor with sheer physical pleasure as well as metaphysical transcendence. It is music that is deeply conscious of all the music that has come before it, but is very clearly music of our time while also offering some intriguing suggestions about where the music of the future might beckon.

—Frank J. Oteri

*ASCAP award-winning composer and music journalist Frank J. Oteri is the Composer Advocate for New Music USA and the Co-Editor of its web magazine NewMusicBox, which he founded in 1999. He also serves on the Executive Committee of the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM).*

**Max Giteck Duykers** (born 1972) is a composer whose work is dedicated to unusual beauty, unique forms, and collaborative projects. He frequently incorporates technology in a manner that gives performers room for individual expression. A veteran of multidisciplinary performance, Duykers is also interested in reworking developmental processes for artists to find their collective "sweet spot" and produce work which is personal, confronting, and starkly beautiful.

Duykers was recently commissioned by The National Parks Service, New Music USA, and the JFunds Commission to create an electro-acoustic chamber opera, *Both Eyes Open*, with the Paul Drescher Ensemble. Featuring a libretto by acclaimed playwright and filmmaker Philip Kan Gotanda, the piece is a comment on the internment of Japanese-Americans during WWII. Other commissions and premieres include the Avian Orchestra, the Stony Brook Symphony Orchestra, the Oakland Youth Orchestra, the Seattle Chamber Players, Third Angle New Music, the BEO String Quartet, the Glass Farm Ensemble, PUBLIQuartet, and numerous individual performers. Duykers's *Glass Blue Cleft* was released by Stony Brook University and the Escher String Quartet on Bridge Records in 2010. This and other pieces have been featured at music festivals throughout the U.S. and abroad.

Duykers is a founder and co-director of Ensemble Ipse, a contemporary-music ensemble based in New York, which is committed to commissioning and performing works from emerging and under-represented composers. He has also been commissioned to compose music for more than thirty-five theatrical, dance, film, and multimedia projects. With the theater group, Prototype, he was an artist-in-residence at HERE Arts Center in 2002–2004, and in 2000–2001 he worked for Philip Glass's The Looking Glass Studios and Dunvagen Music Publishers. He completed his Ph.D. at Stony Brook University where he was honored with the 2012 Ackerman Award for Excellence in Music. He lives in Brooklyn with his wife Rebecca and sons Quinlan and Liev.

**Ensemble Ipse** is a contemporary-music ensemble dedicated to showcasing the wide variety of practices in the current new-music scene. The ensemble presents concerts of recent music that transcends aesthetic categorization and strives to create a forum for composers on the edges of the mainstream of contemporary music. With this in mind, Ensemble Ipse is committed to performing and commissioning the music of emerging composers, as well as composers who have been traditionally underrepresented in the larger new music community, including women, LGBTQ, and people of color. In its first three seasons, Ipse has premiered eighteen works, five of them commissions, and received support from New Music USA, the Queens Council on the Arts, the Brooklyn Arts Council, and The Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University.

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I'm thrilled to have the chance to put this album together of music from the last fourteen years. Thank you to the brilliant musicians of Ensemble Ipse, everyone at New World Records, the many teachers and mentors who have guided me, and my loving family and friends for their dedication and support. —Max Giteck Duykers

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**MAX GITECK DUYKERS** (b. 1972)  
*FOLDING MUSIC*  
 ENSEMBLE IPSE



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1. *Folding Music* (2017) 13:06  
 Margaret Lancaster, flutes; Christa Van Alstine, clarinets; Esther Noh, violin;  
 Caitlin Sullivan, cello; Matt Ward, percussion; Geoffrey Burleson, piano;  
 Benjamin Grow, conductor
2. *Scatterloop* (2016) 8:52  
 Esther Noh, violin; Geoffrey Burleson, piano
3. *The Way In* (2015) 8:47  
 Zen Wu, soprano; Caitlin Sullivan, cello; Geoffrey Burleson, piano
4. *Twilight for Adored and Breathless Moments* (2007) 12:37  
 Margaret Lancaster, flute; Christa Van Alstine, clarinet; Esther Noh, violin;  
 Caitlin Sullivan, cello; Matt Ward, percussion; Geoffrey Burleson, piano;  
 Benjamin Grow, conductor
5. *Arborescence* (2010, arr. 2018) 10:54  
 Geoffrey Burleson, piano
6. *Dark Body* (2015) 14:48  
 Margaret Lancaster, flute; Esther Noh, violin; Caitlin Sullivan, cello;  
 Geoffrey Burleson, piano

TT: 69:04



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