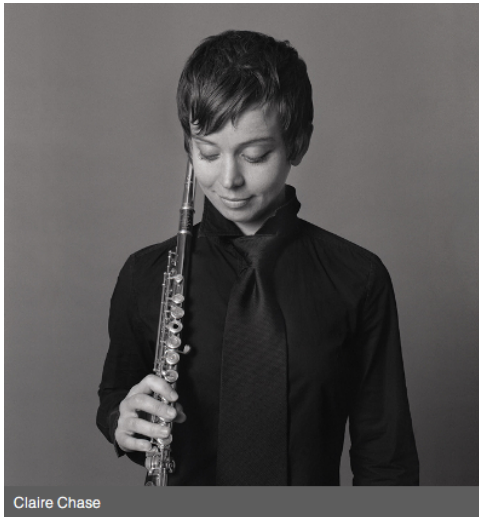


October 7, 2013



## Claire Chase lights up The Kitchen in Chelsea, NYC



Claire Chase

The flute is one of the most venerable musical instruments we have (the earliest archaeological records have been dated to over 35,000 years ago), and as Claire Chase proved Thursday night at The Kitchen in Chelsea, it retains an energy that ensures it will continue to play a vital role in the future of concert music.

The oldest piece on the program, and the only one from the first half of the 20th century (written in 1936 and revised in 1946), Edgard Varèse's *Density 21.5 for flute alone*. So named for the density of platinum (in grams per cubic centimeter), the piece was originally written for the première concert of George Barrere's

platinum flute. Now, nearly 80 years later, "Density" was a fitting name for the solo concert for many reasons, not only for Chase's truly virtuosic performance of the seminal *Density 21.5*. The majority of works presented included as many as ten prerecorded flute tracks, played alongside the singular Chase, who sometimes gave the impression that she was in at least three places at once, overlapping condensed ghosts playing impossible harmonies.

While the Varèse was clearly the concert's focus both historically and thematically, Mario Diaz de Leon's *Luciform* and Marcos Balter's *Pessoa* (both 2013) nevertheless gave crisp, fresh definition to the modern flute idiom. *Luciform*, a concerto for flute and electronics written for Claire Chase herself, hit hard with a veneer of Stockhausen, circa *Studie I* and *II*. The seats rumbled with sub-bass whose speakers must have been placed under the risers themselves; the shifting and colored lights came within a fog machine and Hollywood celebrity images of an immersive Universal Studios ride. The lighting design by David Michalek shone most brightly here, as the three-by-three arrangement of horizontal fluorescent lights formed a cross, and sharp blue and pink ceiling lights flooded the stage area. Balter's *Pessoa*, written for six bass flutes, came off remarkably

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well, with five other flute parts recorded and played back using the impeccably executed sound design of Levy Lorenzo. In contrast to Leon's brazenly electronic concerto, *Pessoa* let Chase draw out veiled and breathy sentiments from the relatively uncommon bass flute. Du Yun's *Gradient Density* began the program with atmospheric algorithmic music, the only piece solely for electronics.

The main stream of the program leading up to *Density 21.5*, though, flowed through the idea of process music. The Reich and Glass works (1982 and 1967, respectively) are epitomes of this genre, and Alvin Lucier's *Almost New York* (2002) carried into the current era the same courage of concept and deliberateness of pacing that characterizes those earlier minimalists. In fact, Claire Chase's solo performance itself, unbroken by applause or even a moment to catch her breath, underscored the strength of conviction not only of the performer, but of every composer, of the lighting and sound director, even the author of the program notes (abstracted strings of words "in homage to Octavio Paz").

In light of this thematic continuity, it is worth explaining the concept of *Almost New York*. Two independent pure sine tones begin the piece, one in a very high register, and one extremely low. Over the course of the piece the tones gradually slide toward each other and eventually switch places. Over this basic voice exchange, the five flutes ranging from piccolo to contrabass match one or the other pitch. Because the tones never stop moving, however, the steady flute tone is almost never exactly "on" pitch, resulting in difference tones between flute and sine wave that are simultaneously bare and elegant.

In what was most likely another nod to the mechanism and flow of process music, Varèse was performed last, and best. After over an hour of grueling performance without a single break from the stage, Claire Chase still managed to give *Density 21.5* more energy and virtuosity than any other work that evening. The fluorescent lights behind her flickered low, and the silhouette of one of the best flutists in the world hurled the canonical past into the musical future as deftly as she jogged off stage.