

PROGRAM NOTES

Awards include the BBC Jazz Award for Innovation in 2004, a Fellowship in Jazz Composition by the Arts Foundation in 2006, the 2009 SWR German Radio Jazz Prize, the 2014 German Record Critics Quarterly Award, Downbeat Annual Critics Poll Rising Star Soprano Saxophone (2015), Rising Star Tenor Saxophone (2018) and Herb Alpert/Ragdale Prize in Composition 2019. She is also a recipient of the 2019 Herb Alpert Ragdale Prize in Music Composition and the 2021 Berklee Institute of Gender Justice Women Composers Collection Grant.

Described as a “New Jazz Power Source” by *The New York Times*, cellist and composer **Tomeka Reid** has emerged as one of the most original, versatile, and curious musicians in Chicago’s bustling jazz and improvised music community over the last decade. Her distinctive melodic sensibility, always rooted in a strong sense of groove, has been featured in many distinguished ensembles over the years.

Reid is a Foundation of the Arts (2019) and 3Arts Awardee (2016) and received her doctorate in music from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign in 2017. She released her debut recording as a bandleader in 2015, with the Tomeka Reid Quartet, and has been a key member of ensembles led by legendary reedists like Anthony Braxton and Roscoe Mitchell, as well as a younger generation of visionaries including flutist Nicole Mitchell, vocalist Dee Alexander, and drummer Mike Reed.

Lesley Mok is a New York City-based percussionist and interdisciplinary artist who works in sound, installation, film, and theater. Their work is guided by a continual search for the connection between the mundane and the divine through a refined musical approach that includes a distinct rhythmic language inspired by Afro-Cuban folkloric music, subtle textural percussion, Free Jazz, ambient, and electronic music.

Mok is a recipient of the 2024 ASCAP Fred Ho Award, 2022 Resident Artist at Roulette Intermedium, 2021 Herb Alpert Young Jazz Composer Award, 2021 Van Lier Artist at the Asian American Arts Alliance, and a member of the inaugural cohort of Mutual Mentorship for Musicians. Their work has been commissioned and performed by International Contemporary Ensemble, Metropolis Ensemble, and JACK Quartet.

THE 47th ANNUAL FESTIVAL OF NEW AMERICAN MUSIC

MYRA MELFORD'S FIRE AND WATER QUINTET

MONDAY, OCTOBER 28, 7:00 P.M.

Interlude II Myra Melford (b. 1957)
Interlude I
Insertion 3a and 3b
Insertion 4
Insertion 1
Interlude III
VII
Insertion 2
Insertion 5
Chalk

Fire and Water Quintet

Mary Halvorson (guitar)

Ingrid Laubrock (tenor and soprano saxophones)

Tomeka Reid (cello)

Lesley Mok (drums)

Myra Melford (piano and melodica)

*Special thanks to Marilyn Araki Isenberg for her generous support
of Myra Melford's Fire and Water Quintet concert,
in loving memory of Phil Isenberg.*

In the world of improvised music, so-called supergroups sometimes feel almost quotidian. After all, there are so many remarkable artists in the space and understandably, they often want to collaborate.

Yet the group that acclaimed pianist and composer Myra Melford has assembled here invigorates that tired cliché with fresh meaning. Each has an impressive catalog as a bandleader and collaborator, and Melford had worked with all of them previously, but never together. The result is a gathering of some of the most compelling improvisers working today.

The idea to create the ensemble occurred to Melford while planning a June 2019 residency at The Stone, the storied New York avant-garde venue. “It just felt like there was a lot of potential for good chemistry,” she says. The response to the quintet’s debut, one-off performance, a minimally rehearsed amalgamation of composed ideas, text directions for interaction and collective improvisation, was so enthusiastic that Melford was asked to record and tour with the music and this new ensemble.

Throughout her life in music, the pianist and keyboardist **Myra Melford** has pursued a creative vision that is both wholly distinctive and all-embracing. Composition and improvisation interact seamlessly and ingeniously in her work, one side strengthening the other. Guided by that same compelling spirit, divergent idioms and eras coalesce—from jazz, blues, and global folk styles to various corners of the classical tradition and the avant-garde. Extramusical influences—for instance, the poetry of Rumi or the spirituality of Indian meditation, yoga, and the Huichol Indians of Mexico—have also figured into the mix. In the end, Melford’s efforts are probably best served by labels like “contemporary music,” “new music” and other tags that signify artistic freedom and daring more than any boundaries of genre.

Beyond her life in the studio and onstage, Melford has become a dedicated and influential educator. She relocated to the Bay Area from New York in 2004, to join the music department at the University of California, Berkeley. Over the past 14 years, as a Professor of Composition and Improvisational Practices, she’s pursued a philosophy that honors jazz and new-music traditions while emphasizing ongoing developments in musical technique, theory, technology, and performance.

Along the way, Melford has received some of the most prestigious honors in contemporary music, including numerous *DownBeat* poll placings, a 2012 Alpert Award in the Arts for Music and, in 2013, a Guggenheim Fellowship and the Doris Duke Performing Artist Award. In 2016, Snowy Egret was named Midsize Ensemble of the Year in the Jazz Journalists Association’s annual Jazz Awards. More recently, Melford was commissioned by the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players to helm a largely improvisational 30-minute piece for an 11-piece ensemble, electronics and Melford as soloist.

Melford’s press has been plentiful and glowing. The *New Yorker* called her “a stalwart of the new-jazz movement”; the *New York Times* wrote that she was “justly regarded as a fixture of the avant-garde”; and the *Guardian* described her as “a gifted descendant of the high-density Cecil Taylor school,” invoking one of Melford’s most profound influences.

Guitarist and composer **Mary Halvorson** has been described as “a singular talent” (*JazzTimes*), “NYC’s least-predictable improviser” (*City Arts*), “one of the most original jazz guitarists of our time” (*Bandcamp Daily*), and “one of today’s most formidable bandleaders” (*Village Voice*). In recent *Downbeat Critics Polls* Halvorson has been celebrated as guitarist, rising star jazz artist, and rising star composer of the year, and in 2019 she was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship.

One of New York City’s most in-demand guitarists, over the past two decades Halvorson has worked with such diverse musicians as Tim Berne, Anthony Braxton, Taylor Ho Bynum, John Dieterich, Trevor Dunn, Bill Frisell, Ingrid Laubrock, Myra Melford, Jason Moran, Joe Morris, Tom Rainey, Jessica Pavone, Tomeka Reid, Marc Ribot, Ches Smith, and John Zorn. She is also part of several collaborative projects, most notably the longstanding trio Thumbscrew with Michael Formanek on bass and Tomas Fujiwara on drums.

Ingrid Laubrock is an experimental saxophonist and composer, interested in exploring the borders between musical realms and creating multi-layered, dense and often evocative sound worlds. A prolific composer, Laubrock was named a “true visionary” by pianist and *The Kennedy Center’s* artistic director Jason Moran, and a “fully committed saxophonist and visionary” by the *New Yorker*.