UC SANTA BARBARA

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A Musical Sampler

Given the season that's approaching, the term "sampler" likely brings to mind a box of chocolates. But on Saturday afternoon, the Department of Music is offering a different sort of sampler — one that features a variety of musical treats.

At 4 p.m. Nov. 23 in Santa Barbara Junior High School's Marjorie Luke Theatre, the department will present its sixth annual "Montage" program. It's an hour-long series of back-to-back performances from faculty members, students and alumni, designed for both children and adults. Admission is free, and no tickets are required.

"I chose contrasting tempi, styles and genres to keep the concert fascinating for all audience members," said professor of flute Jill Felber, who curated the program. "Because the performances are mostly under 5 minutes long, the concert will move along quite quickly."

The program will kick off with a performance by the UCSB Percussion Ensemble, and end with the UCSB Jazz Ensemble, both directed by Jon Nathan. In between will be short works by Schubert and Schumann; two of Dvorak's "Gypsy Songs," sung by soprano Isabel Bayrakdarian; a tango-tinged piece by Astor Piazzolla, played by the UCSB Clarinet Ensemble; and an arrangement of Mozart's lively overture to "The Marriage of Figaro," featuring the UCSB Cello Squad.

The program will also feature several unconventional works, including an excerpt from the "Suite for Flute Beatbox" by alumnus Azeem Ward. His senior flute recital became a viral sensation in 2015, earning Ward a tour of the U.K. and a spot on the

Jimmy Kimmel Show.

“Hearing and seeing a percussion ensemble, a quintet of clarinets, eight cellos all performing together, 14 flutists (including a bass flute), a jazz combo, a string quartet, faculty chamber music, solo piano performances, and a solo beat boxing flutist all on one concert — and in an hour — will certainly be intriguing for the audience,” Felber said. “I do hope we will inspire young audiences to be curious about the instruments and the composers.”

Speaking of composers, Sarah Gibson, the newest member of the music department faculty, will perform her own 2018 work, “our eyes once watered.”

“Sarah is a ‘rock star’ in the composition world, and we are so fortunate to call her a colleague,” Felber said. “She has a plurality of compositional styles. The piece programmed for Montage is dreamy and meditative.”

Gibson was born and raised in the Atlanta area, where she began studying piano and writing music at age 7. She is no stranger to Santa Barbara, having studied collaborative piano at the Music Academy of the West one summer a decade or so ago.

She has a tendency to write down phrases that strike her as evocative and could later be used as titles of musical pieces. She found the term “our eyes once watered” in a line from Tom Stoppard’s play “Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead.”

Well, sort of: Later checking revealed the actual phrase in the text is “once our eyes watered.” But her misquote proved inspiring.

“Very often, phrases will strike a certain sound world,” she said. “The phrase ‘our eyes once watered’ makes me think of a watery texture that’s kind of atmospheric. So the piece starts out in a very ethereal way, with a simple, understated pulsing rhythm.”

If that description sounds Debussy-like, it’s for good reason: The piece was commissioned by Los Angeles-based pianist Mark Robson for a recital in which he played 12 Debussy etudes along with 12 companion pieces written by contemporary composers.

Gibson wrote the work both to complement the revered impressionist composer and to stand on its own. “I don’t think the piece uses Debussy-like harmony,” she noted.

“That said,” she continued, “I have played a lot of Debussy; he’s one of my favorite composers. I had French piano teachers, so I feel a connective thread to that language, and that world. It feels at home to me.”

The Marjorie Luke Theatre is the latest home for “Montage,” which in previous years has been held in Lotte Lehmann Concert Hall and at Trinity Lutheran Church. This year’s concert is sponsored by the Community Arts Music Association, which is presenting its 100th season of concerts by visiting orchestras and other touring artists.

“CAMA’s Centennial Celebration Committee and the CAMA board of directors wished to present a free, family-friendly classical music concert for our community,” Felber said. “The Department of Music is honored to partner with CAMA this year in this special event.”

The Marjorie Luke Theatre is located at 721 E Cota St. in Santa Barbara.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.