

Pre-Concert Lecture: René Staar, *Gemini A 13*

by Megan Eagen

In René Staar's *Gemini A* duet series, the composer explores the relationship between two four-part chords. Each of these chords is built on the intervals of the same 'motherchord'—a process Staar refers to as 'chord realignment.' To explicate this process, if the motherchord comprised *three* notes, relating by intervals of a second and a third, two permutations or realignments may be found: one in which the second constitutes the lower interval with the third on top, and vice versa. Since the motherchord of the *Gemini A* series comprises *four* pitches, the intervals that make up this chord may be arranged in six ways, and subsequently grouped into fifteen distinct pairs. These pairs form the harmonic groundwork for each movement.

Because the intervals of these two chords may be inverted, displaced (by one or more octaves), staggered, or directly overlaid, it is unlikely that the listener will hear the underlying harmonic schema. However, it is not Staar's intent that this schema be audible, as the composer's primary objective is to surprise! What the listener will hear are nine discrete sections, each characterized by a unique mood or flavor. Various performance techniques, such as double stops, chords, *cantabile* phrases, and *glissandi*, serve to differentiate these sections. In turn, Staar's paramount distinguishing feature is the rhythm.

While Staar has been cultivating an interest in harmonic structures since the 1970s, his interest in (especially) psychological perceptions of time is more recent. "For each person," Staar holds, "time moves at a different pace." Staar's interest in time may be seen in the wide variety of tempo markings he applies in *Gemini A 13*, which begins at *Allegro vivace* (with a tactus of 144), but subsequently explores six other tempo zones (including *Rubato*, *Ancora meno*, and *Pesante*). Staar's interest in polyrhythmic folk music (e.g., *Flamenco*) also finds a sounding board in this work, particularly through his hemiola-like divisions of 3/8 meter and his atypical placement of beats in 5/8 passages (emphasizing, for instance, beats 1, 3, and 5, rather than 1 and 3 or 1 and 4).

Although René Staar completed this work in 2000, the world premiere took place on 13 June 2012.