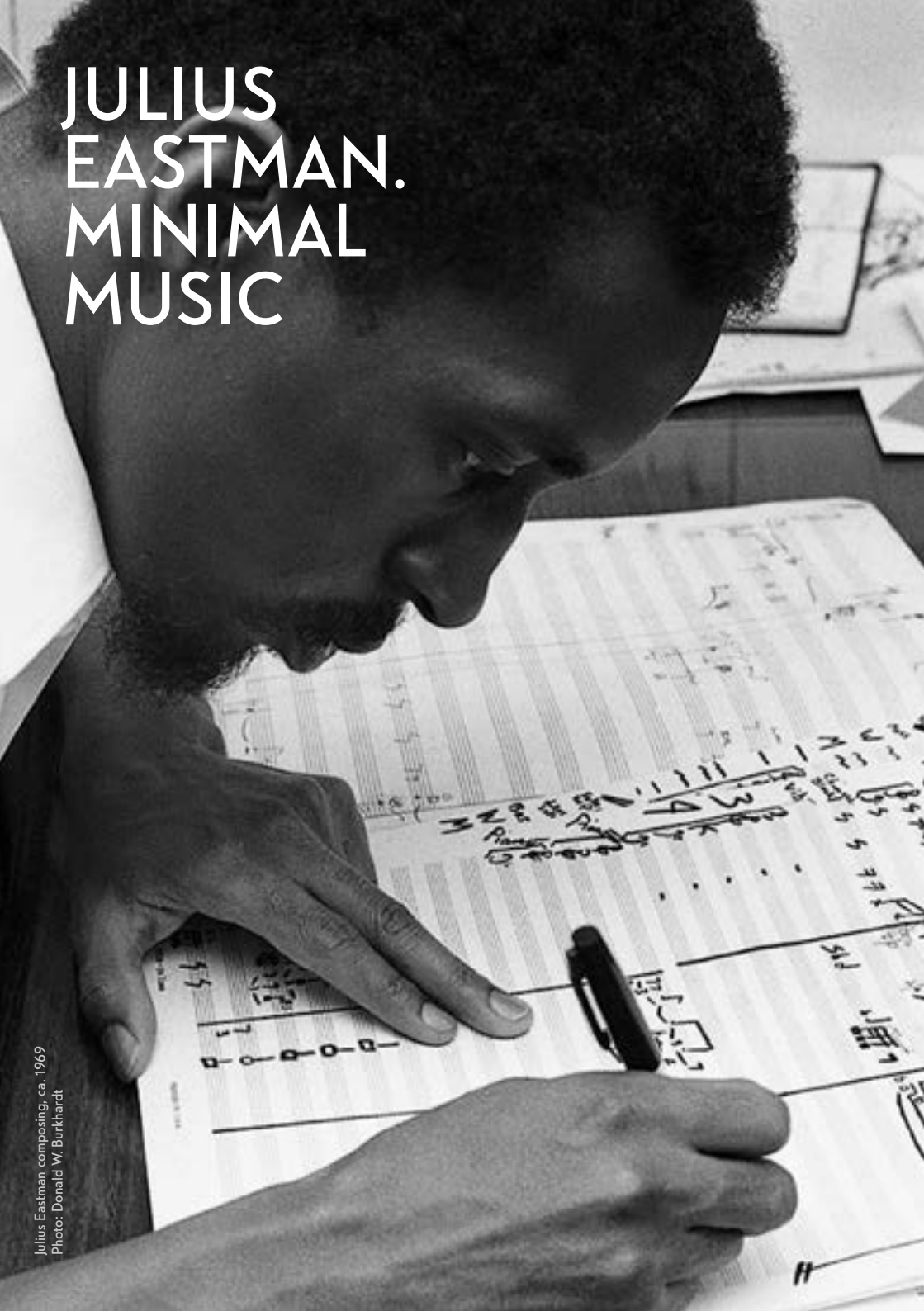


JULIUS EASTMAN. MINIMAL MUSIC

Julius Eastman composing, ca. 1969
Photo: Donald W. Burkhardt



JULIUS EASTMAN. MINIMAL MUSIC

Curated by Eva Huttenlauch und Matthias Mühling

Julius Eastman (1940–1990) was a representative of Minimal Music. His rarely performed and challenging music is an impressive example of the international and cross-genre movement of Minimalism. The concerts at Lenbachhaus are intended as a musical complement to important works of Minimal Art in the museum's collection by artists such as Dan Flavin, Marcia Hafif, Rosemary Mayer, Robert Morris, Senga Nengudi, Charlotte Posenenske, and Richard Serra.

Eastman was appreciated by his contemporaries as a pianist and singer, but hardly recognized as a composer, although he collaborated with figures such as Pierre Boulez, Meredith Monk, Zubin Mehta and Morton Feldman. Although well known in professional circles, his work hardly penetrated the public sphere. His younger brother Gerry, himself a jazz musician, suspects that racist reservations in the world of classical music were responsible for the fact that Julius was largely ignored. A conflict between Eastman and the older, already established John Cage became known in 1975, when he accused Cage of not making his homosexuality a political issue and the center of his art; a condition that Cage explicitly rejected—but for Eastman was an essential part of his music. As an openly homosexual Black musician, he struggled throughout his life to assert himself in the musical avant-garde. Eastman's compositions were performed in the U.S. and in Europe, but did not enter the canon of New Music. When Eastman died, most of his scores were lost, and his music fell into oblivion. Thanks to dedicated reconstructions, especially by the composer Mary Jane Leach, his work was rediscovered and has been made internationally accessible. Most recently his works have been frequently performed, and become influential for young composers.

Eastman increased his resistance to everything established, to hierarchies and institutions through provocative work titles and statements, which were often rejected by the audience. Individual pieces by Eastman are important early testimonies to the thematization of racism and homophobia in our society. Already his original work titles confront us with this theme: *With Nigger Faggot** (1978), *Evil Nigger** (1979), *Crazy Nigger** (1979) or *Gay Guerrilla* (1979), Eastman addresses racist or homophobic themes consciously and directly, in order to leave no one the possibility to escape the reality of these discriminations. Analogous to the titles, Eastman developed an aesthetic-musical correspondence to the structural racisms of his time, which still exist today. The topicality of his compositions is a sad fact in this context, as he brings before our eyes and ears that even decades later we are still far from a language and society free of discrimination. The verbal violence of the work titles is therefore an unconditional part of Eastman's aesthetic work and these must be written out in the context of the performances so as not to jeopardize the integrity of his work and his intentions. The sentence of the writer and close confidant of Eastman, Nemo Hill, is revealing: "His categorial refusal to play by any rules he suspected of even the slightest

infraction of his core principles, his refusal to obey any authority other than that which he had identified in his own conscience as the Law—this program was carried out with all solemnity of a fullblown heresy against prevailing doctrine."

The collection of the Blue Rider—a group of artists who championed the equality and mutual enlightenment of all the arts—has led to a programmatic focus at Lenbachhaus that combines visual art and music. We have been pursuing this consistently for several years with extraordinary projects. These include the first large-scale installation/performance by the Kraftwerk group in 2011, the *Playback Room* by Wolfgang Tillmans in 2016, the exhibition *Electric Ladyland* by Michaela Melián in 2016, the world premiere of *Symphony 80* by Ari Benjamin Meyers together with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra in 2017, the installation *White Circle* by raster-noton in 2018, and the world premiere of the 'precarious musical comedy' *Prekärotopia* by Beate Engl, Leonie Felle, and Franka Kaßner in 2019. Later in 2022, the sound installation *Spatial Jitter* by the electro duo Mouse on Mars will follow. Our supporting program is also repeatedly dedicated to musical themes, such as in our collaborations with the Bavarian State Opera.

Short Biography

Julius Eastman, born in New York City, grew up in Ithaca, New York, where he took piano lessons at Ithaca College at age 14. Composition and piano studies followed in 1959 at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. After making his concert debut as a pianist in 1966 at Town Hall in New York, Eastman moved to Buffalo. There he received a fellowship sponsored by the Center for the Creative and Performing Arts and taught at SUNY Buffalo beginning in the early 1970s. During this time, he composed numerous pieces for the S.E.M. Ensemble, which he and Petr Kotík founded. In 1973, Eastman created one of his key works, *Stay On It*, which is still considered one of the earliest examples of post-minimalist music that takes influences from pop music. In 1974 he created *Feminine* and *Masculine*. In 1975 Eastman's productive phase in Buffalo came to an end, and in 1976 he moved to New York, where he worked free-lance, and in a short time created several of his important compositions, such as the *Nigger Series**. There he collaborated with Meredith Monk and Arthur Russell, among others. Julius Eastman died of cardiac arrest in Buffalo on May 28, 1990, at the age of only 49, away from the musical public eye.

* This is the original title of the composer. Julius Eastman deliberately exposed the term as racist, drawing the attention of non-black people in particular to structural racism and verbal violence. We therefore decided to write out Eastman's original title in the context of the performance of his works.

ABOUT THE MUSIC OF JULIUS EASTMAN

Isaac Jean-François

It is a treat to have the opportunity to share program notes for the Munich performances of works by Julius Eastman. A dynamic, black, queer, American composer, performer, vocalist, and ascetic eccentric, Eastman's extant body of work crosses the dimensions of classical, minimalist, jazz, and pop genres. Music and art, especially when near each other, are in constant communication. I can only imagine Eastman's sounds curling behind works of American Modern and Conceptual artists, like the electro-chromatic work of Dan Flavin and skin-stretching woven nylon tights of Senga Nengudi. Visual works by the Blue Rider, especially alongside figurations of the face by Alexej von Jawlensky, cohere transnational aesthetic questions about the body, emotional expression, and color. With these artistic images in mind, I ask: where is Julius Eastman positioned in his music? How does he face us—and with what does he face us? What questions about our own fragile presence in the world emerge out of his unsteady yet persistent archive?

Julius Eastman was born in New York City and soon after moved upstate to Ithaca, New York. He studied at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. He spent time on the Faculty at the University of Buffalo in the early 1970s. At this point, Eastman was a member of the S.E.M. Ensemble (now led by Petr Kotik in NYC) and the Creative Associates, both avant-garde performance groups of composers specifically interested in art music beyond Minimalism (as in, John Cage or Harold Budd). He traveled throughout Europe with colleagues of modernist sound, and we have a portion of that sonic adventure preserved in his 1980 Zurich concert recording. Eastman shifted between Buffalo and New York City at the end of his life, participating in Free Jazz and Gay House music scenes along the way. Eastman passed away in 1990. A revival of his work has hit the mainstream in our present moment, in part, because of the pathbreaking scholarship of Ellie Hisama (now Dean of Music at the University of Toronto) who, in 2014, was the first to publish a long-form chapter about Eastman's sonic universe titled, "Diving into the Earth: the Musical Worlds of Julius Eastman" (in *Rethinking Difference in Music Scholarship*, edited by Olivia Bloechl, Melanie Lowe, and Jeffrey Kallberg).

This performance in Munich features works from the period in Eastman's life when his output was most significant. The concerts are all lyrical looks into Eastman's writing primarily for piano and strings, though the *Prelude's* hauntingly insistent writing for voice and *Femenine's* sonic thrust is held by vibraphone and sleigh bells. I cannot be too firm with the instrumentation, however, as many of Eastman's scores, including *Buddha*, are written for "unspecified instrumentation." This is a special feature of Eastman's oeuvre: contemporary performers are constantly invited to reinvent his artistic corpus.

Though I am not a musicologist, I appreciate reading the handwritten scores still available from Eastman's archive; after this performance, I encourage you to search for them online. In his 1979 "The Composer as Weaking" Eastman argues against the image of the isolated and distant composer. In this light, my engagement with the score as aesthetic object aims at shifting the immense weight of musical notation: scores vibrate on the register of the visual. So much of listening to Eastman is driven by a fundamental search for disparate parts of a larger unknowable whole and I have been inspired by the scholarship of Ellie Hisama to think with the fragments of sound and biography.

Femenine is one of the longest pieces in Eastman's extant archive of compositions. A presumed companion piece to the still-unrecovered *Masculine* (1974), its dazzling repetitive energy has been described akin to the work of Terry Riley's *In C* of 1964. Though the bells and vibraphone repeat the same phrase (which is no small task), there are so many points of entry for performers to jump in and add their own flavor; Eastman at one point notates "create new pattern." I learned from Chris McIntyre, Director and Co-Founder of TILT Brass based in Brooklyn that Eastman made his own music machines. The original sleigh bell sound was created by a noisy contraption of Eastman's own design.

Fugue No. 7, *Evil Nigger*, *Gay Guerrilla*, all works for piano, highlight some of his most spectral works. It would be curious to think about the latent texts that may oscillate behind Eastman's *Fugue No. 7* in the Early and Baroque music traditions, with examples in the work of Joseph Haydn and J. S. Bach. The crash of sound at various parts in *Fugue* adds an unsettling edge to the interwoven material. *Gay Guerrilla* and *Evil Nigger**, infamous for their hotly debated performance at Northwestern University in 1980, are some of the most militant pieces in Eastman's archive. I have written extensively about *Evil Nigger* elsewhere (*Current Musicology*, July 2020), yet I will emphasize that Eastman's interrogations of who and what gets to be included within the classical-adjacent art music tradition (and some might even say canon) continues to be tested with these works for multiple pianos. These two works are like booming waves of sound with repetitive figures that recede and return with overwhelming intensity; could this be a sonic articulation of how race, and ongoing violence against minoritized subjects, iteratively manifests in the present?

Towards the end of his life, Eastman became an almost ascetic figure. His life offers no insight into a single spirito-religious disposition yet his sound continues to pour into a sort of ephemeral zone. *Prelude to the Holy Presence of Joan d'Arc*, for voice, *The Holy Presence of Joan d'Arc*, first performed during Eastman's time at The Kitchen, in New York City, is a hauntingly insistent work. Composed in 1981, the piece's arrival is part of Eastman's striking collaboration with the Gay House music group Dinosaur L alongside with other work by Arthur Russell. "Speak boldly," are lyrics that emerge throughout the solo voice in the *Prelude*. *The Holy Presence*, for ten cello, drifts between a fugue-like layering of several phrases and the spine-freezing motif on an oncoming emergency vehicle. I hear the works playing with the imagined-distance

between performers, everyday street sounds, and a layer-cake of earthy stringed instrumentation. *Buddha* is one of the last-known pieces that Eastman created. Written without a guiding key signature, its score features a large sketched image shaped like an egg on the manuscript paper. The piece blurs the boundary of score, loose experimental sketch, and curves the paper inward.

Listening to Julius Eastman is like being close to the water's edge; his music's cool reach brings objects, smells, and tactile sensations to your body that stick long after you hear it. Echoes of a quote from *Brother to Brother: New Writings by Black Gay Men*, edited by poet Essex Hemphill, swing into my thoughts about Eastman and his unfinished archive: "I also found our old beach ball, but I could not let the air out—his breath was in it" (Kenneth McCreary's "Remembrance"). So much breath remains within these sonic objects that stick to our frame and we must keep listening to these fugitive, unsettling, and dazzling sounds.

Isaac Jean-François is Ph.D. Student in African American and American Studies, Yale University.

Julius Eastman's spoken introduction to the concert at the Northwestern University, January 16, 1980

– Transcript

I want to say a few words about the music. Number one is, there are three pieces on the program. The first is called *Evil Nigger*, and the second is called *Gay Guerrilla*, and the third is called *Crazy Nigger*. Now these are three pieces that can be played by any number of instruments. We have pianos here because for practical reasons, one can therefore play these pieces with four people with four pianos. But if melody instruments were playing probably a good number would be somewhere in the area of maybe ten instruments, ten to eighteen instruments, usually of the same family, so therefore another version could be for let's say eighteen stringed instruments. These particular pieces formally are an attempt to what I call make "organic music," – that is to say the third part of any part, so the third measure of the third section, the third part, has to contain all of the information of the first two parts and go from there. So therefore, unlike Romantic music or Classical music where you have actually different sections and you have these sections which, for instance, are in great contrast to the first section or to some other section in the pieces, these pieces, they're not exactly perfect, but there is an attempt to make every section contain all of the information of the previous section or else taking out information at a gradual and logical rate.



Now, there was, there was a little problem with the titles of the pieces. There were some students and one faculty member who felt that the titles were somehow derogatory in some manner, being that the word "nigger" is in it. These particular titles, the reason I use them is because I use them, there is a whole series of these pieces. They are called the *Nigger Series*. Now the reason that I use that particular word is because for me it has a, what is, what I call a "basicness" about it, that is to say that I feel that in any case the first niggers were of course the field niggers and upon that is really the basis of the American economic system, without the field niggers we wouldn't really have such a great and grand economy. So that is what I call first and great nigger, the field niggers, and what I mean by niggers is that thing which is fundamental, that person or thing that obtains to a basicness, a fundamentalness and eschews that thing which is superficial, or, what can we say, elegant. So that a nigger to me is that kind of thing which attains himself or herself to the ground of anything. You see, and that's what I mean by nigger, so there are many niggers, many kinds of niggers. There might be, there are of course 99 names of Allah and there are 52 niggers. And so therefore we are playing two of these niggers.

Now the reason I use *Gay Guerilla*, G-U-E-R-R-I-L-L-A, that one, is because these names, let me go in a little subsystem here, these names, either I glorify them or they glorify me. In the case of "guerilla" that glorifies "gay," that ist to say there aren't many gay guerillas, I don't feel that gaydom has, does have that strength, so therefore I use that word in the hopes that they will. You see, I feel that, at this point I don't feel that gay guerillas can really match with Afghani guerillas or PLO guerillas, but let us hope in the future that they might. You see that's why I use that word "guerilla," it means a guerilla is someone who is in any case sacrificing his life for a point of view and you know if there is a cause, and if it is a great cause those who belong to that cause will sacrifice their blood, because without blood there is no cause. So therefore that is the reason I use *Gay Guerrilla* in hopes that I might be one of them, if called upon.

February 8, 2022, 8 pm

Femenine (1974)

Musicians of The Munich Philharmonic

March 5, 2022, 8 pm

Buddha (1984 / Version for string orchestra by Philip Bartels, 2022)

Prelude to The Holy Presence of Joan d'Arc (1981)

The Holy Presence of Joan d'Arc (1981 / Version for string orchestra)

Münchener Kammerorchester

MARCH 11 AND 12, 2022, 8 PM

FUGUE NO. 7 (1983)

EVIL NIGGER* (1979)

GAY GUERRILLA (1979)

MUSIC FOR FOUR PIANOS WITH THE KUKURUZ QUARTET

PHILIP BARTELS, PIANO

DURI COLLENBERG, PIANO

SIMONE KELLER, PIANO

LUKAS RICKLI, PIANO

Additional concert as part of the International Weeks Against Racism

March 14, 2022, 8 pm

Julia Amanda Perry (1924–1979), *Prelude* (1962)

Julius Eastman (1940–1990), *Prelude to the Holy Presence of Joan d'Arc* (1981)

Julius Eastman, *Piano 2* (1986)

Sofia Jernberg (*1983), *Improvisation* (2022)

Arnold Schönberg (1874–1951), *Die Kreuze* (1912)

Jessie Marino (*1984), *Slender Threads* (2020)

Julius Eastman, *Buddha* (1984)

Irene Higginbotham (1918–1988), *Good Morning Heartache* (1945)

Sofia Jernberg, vocals / Simone Keller, piano

All concerts take place in the Kunstbau of the Lenbachhaus.

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LENBACHHAUS

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Editor: Eva Huttenlauch

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Kukuruz Quartet is equally at home on theater stages, in concert halls, clubs, bars, and workshops. It was founded in 2014 on a corn field (“Kukuruz” means corn in many languages, and in Switzerland the idiom “to make corn” means “to cause trouble”). The four pianists could be seen and heard for the first time in a production by the musician and theater maker Ruedi Häusermann at the Zurich Schauspielhaus—at that time on four “well-prepared one-handed pianos,” on which preparations and constructions had been worked out in long joint rehearsal phases. In 2015, Kukuruz Quartet was invited to the Roter Salon of the Berlin Volksbühne, and then played in a concert series in the Zurich clubs Exil and Hive, and at various unusual concert venues in Amsterdam, such as a brewery, a printing house, and an old gymnasium. This was followed in 2016 by the music theater production *piano forte* by Häusermann, which was shown 20 times at the Zurich Schauspielhaus, featuring Kukuruz Quartet at its center.

At documenta 14, Kukuruz Quartet presented music for four pianos by Julius Eastman at the Megaron in Athens in 2017, and subsequently recorded it for the Intakt Records label. The recording appeared on a wide range of lists, among others, the Boston Globe’s “Best classical albums” and The New York City Jazz Records’ “Album of the year 2018.” The release tour started in a prison with a joint concert with young criminals, and had around 20 other stops in banks, bars, second-hand shops, train stations, hospitals, clothes shops, and galleries; during the whole tour the four musicians transported the four pianos themselves.

Kukuruz Quartet works closely with composers and media artists. In 2015 and 2016, two music theater productions were staged at the Zurich Architekturforum with electro-acoustic music by Marcel Zaes, for which the Quartet experimented with a variety of instruments; the pianists combined self-made metronomes into a virtuoso quartet or made everyday objects sound with self-soldered contact microphones. Other extensive collaborations ensued, with Lara Stanić, who illustrated the aftertaste of Julius Eastman’s music with four e-cigarette smoking machines, with Martin Lorenz, who arranged an adaptation of Balinese music for the prepared pianos, and with Léo Collin, who developed a scenic quartet for four stylophones. In 2019, Kukuruz Quartet toured the U.S., was invited to Providence for a residency at Brown University, and played at the Italian Academy of Columbia University in New York, and the Manhattan School of Music. In 2020, Kukuruz Quartet developed an interdisciplinary production at the Kaserne Basel with director Boris Nikitin and choreographer Lee Meir, which was then invited to the Wiener Festwochen, and will be performed again in 2022 at the Théâtre Vidy in Lausanne.

Also for 2022, the Quartet has been invited for a residency at Stanford University in California. Composers Clara Allison, Julie Herndon, Hassan Estakhrian, Seán Ó Dálaigh, Manuel Pessôa de Lima and Marcel Zaes are writing six new pieces for the Kukuruz Quartet. At the initiative of the American Composers Forum, this collaboration will result in a recording to be released by innova Recordings.

www.kukuruzquartet.ch