



The New York Flute Club

NEWSLETTER

November 2020

Claire Chase and the Density 2036 Project



Claire Chase, with insets of *Density 21.5* and Edgard Varèse

About the Density 2036 Project

In 2014, Claire Chase started Density 2036, a 23-year project to commission an entirely new body of repertoire for solo flute each year until 2036, the 100th anniversary of Edgard Varèse's groundbreaking *Density 21.5* for solo flute. Claire will give each year's commissions (designated Density 2014, Density 2015, etc.) a premiere, followed by the release of the recording, score, and performance notes for use as educational resources for the flute community. Six hours of repertoire have been created to date.

More about the Density 2036 project here: www.clairechase.net/densityoverview.

About the pieces on the program

(See page 5)

About Claire Chase

Claire Chase is a soloist, collaborative artist, curator, and advocate for new and experimental music. Over the past decade she has given the world premieres of hundreds of new works for the flute in performances throughout the Americas, Europe, and Asia, and she has championed new music throughout the world by building organizations, forming alliances, pioneering commissioning initiatives and supporting educational programs that reach new audiences. She was named a MacArthur Fellow in 2012, and in 2017 was awarded the Avery Fisher Prize.

A deeply committed educator, Claire is professor of the practice in the department of music at Harvard University.

(Cont'd on page 5)



November 5 Solo Series:

The Evolution of Density 21.5
Event details, p. 3; related articles, p. 2, 4, 6, and 7.

November 12 Education Event:

Zooming into Virtual Teaching; event details, p. 3.

Claire Chase and the Density 2036 Project

Sunday, November 15, 2020, 5:30 pm

Visit www.nyfluteclub.org/calendar prior to the event for Zoom connection details.

Program

Video excerpts from

An Empty Garlic (2014)
for bass flute and electronics

Du Yun (b. 1977)
[Density 2036: part ii (2014)]

Pan (2017)
for solo flute, live electronics,
and mass community participation

Marcos Balter (b. 1974)
[Density 2036: part v (2017)]

Lila (2015)
for flute, bass flute, and contrabass flute

Dai Fujikura (b. 1977)
[Density 2036: part iii (2015)]

Bertha's Lair (2016, rev. 2018-19)
for flute and percussion

Tyshawn Sorey (b. 1980)
[Density 2036: part vi (2019)]

Intensity 20.15 – A tribute to Grace Chase (2015)
for Claire Chase and the Expanded Instrument System (EIS)

Pauline Oliveros (1932–2016)
[Density 2036: part iii (2015)]

Q & A with Claire Chase (viewer questions via Zoom Q & A)

Program subject to change

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2020–2021

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Newsletter

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 Jessica Yang, NYFC Social Media Chair

Density: The Plot Thickens

by Nancy Toff



From the President

Our November programs are devoted to an activity that has helped define the New York Flute Club for a century: the fruitful collaboration of performers and composers. Many of the 200 premieres presented at the club have resulted from such working relationships. This month, we highlight the collaboration of Georges Barrère and Edgard Varèse, *anciens amis* from Paris.

If I had to pick two pieces that define Barrère’s legacy, they would be the Griffes *Poem* and Varèse’s *Density 21.5*. When I wrote my biography of Barrère, I was extremely frustrated that I was unable to access Varèse’s papers, which were at the time held by the Columbia professor and composer Chou Wen-chung. Out of reach were not only the *Density* manuscripts, but also the accompanying correspondence, appointment books, and other documents directly relevant to the work’s creation.

Unbeknownst to me, at the time I was completing the book, the Sacher Foundation in Switzerland was in the process of purchasing the Varèse papers, and I began to receive discreet queries from its distinguished director, Felix Meyer, about Barrère, *Density*, and the platinum flute. I provided any information that I had, without knowing exactly why he was interested. Eventually I learned why he was asking so many questions, and in 2006 I was delighted to receive a very large package in the mail containing the catalogue of the major exhibition on Varèse that he organized at the Sacher. The size of the Manhattan phone book (in the days when we had phone books), this magnificent hardcover volume contains new essays by leading scholars on every aspect of Varèse’s career, including Felix’s own article on *Density* and one by Anne Shreffler, a flutist and musicologist at Harvard, on *Ionisation*.

Felix’s article was a revelation—and although I confess to a wee bit of envy at his access to those much-sought archival materials, I am immensely grateful to him for the careful analysis of the original *Density* manuscripts and for piecing together the backstory of the piece’s long evolution. For our November installment of the Solo Series, I invited Molly Barth, who was high on the wishlist of the program committee, to play both the original 1936 version—which had not been heard by anyone now living—and the published version we all learned. Felix Meyer will join us by Zoom for discussion of the manuscripts and their fascinating history.

All this is by way of prelude to Claire Chase’s concert, in which she will present four works from her *Density 2036* project, a series of annual commissions of works for solo flute, launched in 2014 and intended to conclude on the centenary of the original (see <http://www.clairechase.net/densityoverview>). Claire shares Barrère’s entrepreneurial spirit, and we are looking forward to hearing some of the newest additions to our solo repertoire on November 15.



Photo courtesy of Curtis Institute Archives

NY FLUTE FAIR 2021: A Virtual Toolbox Update and request for proposals from Flute Fair Program Chair Deirdre McArdle



As we pivot from our traditional one-day flute fair in Manhattan to an online two-day weekend event this spring (tentatively April 10-11), we are seeking proposals for concerts, lecture-recitals, interactive workshops, and flute choir performances. The possibilities are endless with a virtual format, and we are very excited to embark upon this journey with you. Be creative!

Two weeks before the fair, presenters and corporate sponsors will have the option of sharing materials and/or instructions related to their session through the NYFC website and Facebook page.

For additional details and a link to the online proposal form (deadline December 31, 2020) visit the Flute Fair page on the Club’s website (nyfluteclub.org/concerts-events-and-more/flute-fair). Questions, comments, and/or suggestions? Please contact Flute Fair program chair Deirdre McArdle at deirdremcardle49@gmail.com.

Member Profile

Lily R. Wu

NYFC member since 2018



Employment: Retired from 40-plus years in national nonprofit work as a writer, editor, speaker, and advisor.

A recent recital/performance: The NYFC's "100 Flutes for 100 Years" concert at Governors Island on September 15, 2019 ("A lovely, meaningful occasion!").

Career highlight(s): Lily's career with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), now the seventh largest religious body in the US with 3.3 million members in 9,000 congregations, has encompassed efforts in intercultural community building, Asian American empowerment, refugee resettlement, women's equality, and racial justice. Serving as a workshop leader, panelist, TV/radio interviewee, or speaker has taken her to half the states in the US (many times being told, "You are the first Asian person I've ever talked with in my life!"). Highlights include being (i) the first Asian American elected to the ELCA's board of directors (serving from 1997-2003), (ii) the moderator of a "Bold Women" panel for 2,100 attendees at the ELCA women's convention (Utah, 2008), and (iii) the first woman, first lay leader, and first Asian commencement speaker for the 700 graduates and guests of the Lutheran School of Theology (Chicago, 2011).

Current flute: A used student flute (Yamaha 221) purchased from her first flute instructor in 2010.

Influential flute teacher: Lily says, "I had always wanted to play the flute. But my junior high school ran out of flute seats, and assigned me to play clarinet for a semester. This did not qualify me enough to try for flute in high school, and private music lessons were beyond my reach... Seth Carper, a professional jazz saxophonist, was my first flute teacher when he directed the New Horizons beginner concert band at Third Street Music School in New York

City from 2009-2012. New Horizons (newhorizonsmusic.org) is a wonderful organization for fostering music-makers over 50 years old."

High school: Seward Park High School in New York, NY (in lower Manhattan).

Degrees: BA in English literature (Pace University, 1974); master of library science (Queens College, 1976).

Most notable and/or personally satisfying accomplishment(s): As a musician: starting as a first-time flutist in her 50s, and then, in 2012, attending a New Horizons Summer Band Camp for a week in Bend, OR ("I came alone, not knowing anyone and think I did okay, even though the music was far above my level."). She also enjoys the NYFC's ensemble program ("I love the music Denise [Koncelik] and Mark [Vickers] select and how they make flute players of every level feel welcome."). As an "intercultural ambassador" in her own country, the US: being able to use her lifelong love of words for social change and social good.

Favorite study/practice routines: Lily marks her practice duration times and exercises on a monthly calendar "to chart my progress and remind me to practice more." She really likes Trevor Wye's *Practice Book for the Flute* series, thinks Nancy Toff's *The Flute Book* is a marvel, and has learned a lot from YouTube videos of flute performances, music theory, and technique.

Other interests: Lily's central interest is changemaking: language learning; race and gender issues; and celebrating introverts. She also enjoys travel (videowalks to London, Paris, and Asia), music (soundscapes, Latin dance, British and American 1960s, baroque), reading (Irish women novelists, Victorian-Edwardian mysteries, and nonfiction), arts (drawing and simple arts and crafts projects), and writing tribute songs for special occasions.

Advice for NYFC members: From her long-ago piano teacher: "Especially when you're starting out, it is fine to play a simple piece well. And if a particular style or ability is not your forte, look to find your own strength or talent, because we all have at least one. Finally, know that you can excel by working hard even if you are not gifted musically."

FLUTE HAPPENINGS

OCTOBER '20

Nov. 5 Thursday 7:30 pm

MOLLY BARTH will perform Varèse's *Density 21.5* in its original 1936 and c. 1951 versions, joined by **FELIX MEYER** and **NANCY TOFF** in a discussion of the manuscripts and their history. A NYFC 2020-21 Solo Series event.

• Zoom webinar. • Access is free. • Info and connection details, visit nyfluteclub.org.



Nov. 12 Thursday 7:30 pm

"Zooming into Virtual Teaching," a panel discussion with master teachers **LEONE BUYSE**, **TERESA PAYNE**, and **RANSOM WILSON** on virtual teaching, chaired by **JEFF MITCHELL**. A NYFC 2020-21 Education and Enrichment event.

• Zoom webinar. • Access is free. • Info, visit nyfluteclub.org.



Remember to renew your NYFC membership for the 2020-21 season!

Visit nyfluteclub.org to join/renew online or via a downloadable membership form for mailing to the NYFC Membership Secretary:

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Flute Happenings Deadlines

Issue	Deadline	Mail Date
December 2020	10/29/2020	11/30/2020
January 2021	12/10/2020	01/11/2021
February 2021	TBA	TBA
March 2021	TBA	TBA
April 2021	TBA	TBA
May 2021	TBA	TBA

Density 1.0 and 21.5: A Performance History

by Nancy Toff

It is an oft-told tale that Edgard Varèse wrote *Density 21.5* for the debut of Georges Barrère's new Haynes platinum flute in 1936. Barrère's friendship with Varèse, like that with Rousel, dated to Barrère's last years in Paris and Varèse's first (1903-5). When Varèse fled the First World War in 1915, he found a warm welcome among the French émigré community in New York.

Both men became involved in the Franco-American Music Society; with harpist Carlos Salzedo, Varèse founded the International Composers Guild, and with Cowell, Ruggles, and others, the Pan American Association of Composers (PAAC), under whose auspices Barrère premiered Henry Brant's *Concerto for Flute with Orchestra of Ten Flutes*. Barrère's own Little Symphony gave the second New York performance of Varèse's *Offrandes* in 1928. Barrère told the audience, "You must listen to the music your sons and grandsons will like."¹

In 1935, Barrère asked Varèse to write a piece to inaugurate his new platinum flute, made by Wm. S. Haynes, the first platinum flute made in the United States and the first all-platinum flute made anywhere. The result was itself a landmark: *Density 21.5*, named for the density of pure platinum, was premiered at a benefit for the Lycée Français of New York at Carnegie Hall on February 16, 1936. The published edition does not bear a dedication, but the manuscript does, and the fact was widely publicized at the time of the premiere.

Density was the first piece in the literature to employ audible key slaps, and it has become a veritable cornerstone of the twentieth-century flute literature. But at its debut it was incongruously sandwiched between the Hüe *Serenade* and the Godard *Allegretto* on a program that also featured Lily Pons, Léon Rothier, and pianists Gaby and Robert Casadesus, and it was all but ignored. The *Herald Tribune*, for example, reported, "This pleasant rhapsody took three minutes to play in the latter part of the program."²

This description did not really fit the *Density* most of us learned, but the comment begins to make more sense now that scholars, notably Felix Meyer, have been able to study the original manuscript, part of the Varèse archive acquired in 2003 by the Paul Sacher Foundation in Switzerland. The original version was far different than the published one. (Most unfortunately, the archive was not yet at the Sacher when I was writing my Barrère biography, and the previous owner would not permit me access to it.)

Felix Meyer, the director of the Sacher Foundation, published a detailed article on the *Density* manuscripts in the catalog of the Varèse exhibition held there in 2006.³ The article includes a facsimile of the original manuscript from 1936 and a subsequent 1946 revision, and reveals that the original was indeed a short ditty of only 32 measures, rather than the 61 of the 1956 Ricordi edition. Our Solo Series performance by Molly Barth will, we think, be the first performance of the original version since 1939, when Barrère played it on a WQXR radio program.

After the premiere, Barrère himself played *Density* only occasionally. There are only two such definitively documented performances: a 1936 recital at the Maverick in Woodstock and one on WQXR in 1939. I've been told that he also played it at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia and in Mexico City, and as a sometime encore, but we have no proof.

The piece did not have the instant, revolutionary effect on the flute repertoire that legend would indicate. It was not published until 1946 (after revisions, in the July 1946 issue of *New Music*), and Barrère apparently did not mention nor teach it to many of his students.

The key slaps—which have been a leading part of *Density*'s landmark status, appeared only in 1946; Felix Meyer surmises that Varèse might have consulted with Ruth Freeman, a former Barrère student; Varèse's appointment book indicates

that she visited him on June 19, 1946, and she then played it on her Town Hall recital on November 18 and at the New York Flute Club on January 28, 1947.⁴ But, says Meyer,

The more likely "begetter" of the key-slap was, however, the renowned French flutist René Le Roy, who had already paid a visit to Sullivan Street on 4 April 1946 (while the piece was being decisively reworked), and who again visited Varèse on 31 May 1946, shortly before the abovementioned letter of acceptance from the New Music Edition. Varèse had long been on friendly terms with Le Roy. Indeed, *Density 21.5* was to remain closely associated with him in the years that followed: Le Roy made the first gramophone recording of the piece (issued in 1949), and also figured as soloist on the second recording, the much-touted all-Varèse LP issued by EMS in 1950.⁵

In 1951, New Music and the American Music Center published a revised edition, hand-written by Chou Wen-chung and with several changes by Varèse; Ricordi then re-engraved an edition that was issued in 1956, and subsequently taken over by Franco Colombo and then Colfranc.

The piece remained virtually unheard until scattered performances began in the 1950s; the *New York Times* records five in that decade in New York (by Frances Blaisdell, Thomas Benton, and Samuel Baron), and two by Severino Gazzelloni in Europe. Only in the 1960s did *Density* begin to appear on concert programs with any frequency, with some 20 mentions in the *Times* during that decade, including concerts by Harvey Sollberger (3), Samuel Baron (2), Sebastian Caratelli, Robert Willoughby, and Sue Ann Kahn (1 each).

There were 11 mentions in 1970s, 7 in the 1980s, 2 in the 1990s (only one performance in New York City, by Don Hulbert), and 7 in the first decade of this century. This is not a scientifically valid analysis of actual frequency, particularly given the decline in press coverage of classical music, but it does give some indication of relative interest. In other newspaper archives, however—I took Los Angeles and Boston as test cases—*Density* showed up in the papers with similar frequency: 7 times in the '60s, 9 in the '70s, mostly in flute recitals.

It is notable that many of the performances were in a new-music context, including quite a few Varèse memorials and commemorative concerts, rather than part of traditional flute recitals. But that did begin to change. One of those was a 1974 Los Angeles concert by the Brandenburg Players, with 31-year-old James Galway in the Mozart Quartet K. 285 and the Debussy Sonata for flute, viola, and harp, as well as *Syrinx* and *Density*.

The entry of *Density* into the standard repertoire was perhaps best proclaimed by critic Theodore W. Libbey in a 1981 review: "Mr. Sollberger opened the program by playing Varèse's '*Density 21.5*,' that marvelous, groundbreaking essay for solo flute that now sounds so conventional and appears so lucid in its design."⁶

1. Nancy Toff, *Monarch of the Flute: The Life of Georges Barrère* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 236.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 278.
3. Felix Meyer, "Flute Piece with a Past: Density 21.5 Revisited," in Felix Meyer and Heidi Zimmermann, eds. *Edgard Varèse: Composer, Sound Sculptor, Visionary* (Bern: Paul Sacher Foundation/Boydell Press, 2006) 247-56. The article is posted at nyfluteclub.org/concerts-events-and-more/concert-season under the event date.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 253-54.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 254.
6. Theodore W. Libbey, "Music: Some Contemporaries," *New York Times*, Nov. 5, 1981.

About the pieces on the concert program

Dai Fujjura: *Lila*

This piece is based on the solo part of the flute concerto that I have also written for Claire Chase. *Lila*, as well as the flute concerto, tells a story from the flute player's point of view, starting with a light poetic variety of sounds that are produced and related by the player's articulations, then dance-like cascades. After that there is a sensual romantic melodic line with quarter tones, then a cadenza part with bass flute (or contrabass flute) overblowing, for which I wanted to make fast rhythmic music that I thought would be an opposite to the usual impression of what a low-range big flute, like contra or bass flute, does. The title *Lila* means "play" in Sanskrit. —DF



a work for this instrument that is full of high, raucous energy—to write music that is counterintuitive to using certain 'effects' that are more customary for the instrument (that is, to avoid as much as possible the use of long, quiet, mysterious sounds, whistle tones, etc.)—and focus more on shape, line, color, texture, ritual, and, most of all, the physicality of live performance on this particular instrument. This avoidance principle is strictly adhered to until the very last system of the composition."

Du Yun: *An Empty Garlic*

Over the years, I have written quite a few pieces for Claire. In [this] piece [based on Rumi's poem that starts, "You miss the garden..."], I also looked into the orthodox chant "Xenia of Rome, and Her Two Female Slaves" (from the 5th century). In the hinted scents of Bach's famous *Sarabande* (from the A minor *Partita* for solo flute) you hear at the beginning and ever so present throughout the piece, we wordlessly discover a story [shared] between Claire and our beloved friend [Elise Mann] who passed away at this very time last year. —DY



Pauline Oliveros: *Intensity 20.15 – A Tribute to Grace Chase*

This piece is inspired by text written by Grace Chase, grandmother of Claire Chase, and by the virtuosity and flexibility of Claire Chase the performer.



In addition to the text and many small percussion instruments, the piece incorporates the use of the Expanded Instrument System (EIS), a computer controlled sound interface that I have designed and continued to evolve since 1963. Sounds are picked up by microphone and fed to different processing modules in the computer, then output to a multichannel sound array that distributes sound around the performance space. All sounds heard during the performance are originated from the sounds performed by Claire Chase. EIS transforms sounds and plays them back. EIS is performative and is played by Levy Lorenzo. —PO

Tyshawn Sorey: *Bertha's Lair*

Bertha's Lair exemplifies Tyshawn Sorey's penchant for exploring the improvisation-composition continuum. It originally featured Chase on the contrabass flute and Sorey on drum set or unpitched percussion. "One of the rarer members of the woodwind family," wrote Sorey in 2016, "the [contrabass flute] is lovingly known as Bertha (after whom this work is named). She is anything but simply a contrabass flute...I found it necessary to create



Marcos Balter: *Pan*

As described by Joshua Barone in a March 2018 article in the *New York Times*, *Pan* is a genre-defying work for Claire Chase and mass community participation. It tells the mythical story of the demigod Pan while exploring how storytelling and music can bring people together. For the work's premiere at the Kitchen, the community participants were grade-school students and retirees from the Roundtable Neighborhood Senior Center in Brooklyn.



The production eludes attachment to a specific time or place and has the feeling of a primitive ritual. By using *Lingua Ignota*—a secret language invented by Hildegard of Bingen, the polymathic medieval abbess and composer—for the libretto, he also aimed to strip the storytelling of connections to any particular culture.

The part of *Pan* is played on an array of flutes ranging from contrabass to piccolo and requires the performer to both dance and act.

More on these pieces at clairechase.net/densityoverview —Ed.

Claire Chase (cont'd from page 1)

She co-founded the International Contemporary Ensemble in 2001 and served as its artistic director until 2017. The Ensemble has premiered more than 800 works since its inception and has spearheaded an artist-driven organizational model that earned the ensemble the Trailblazer Award from the American Music Center in 2010 and the Ensemble of the Year Award in 2014 from Musical America Worldwide. Upcoming projects in the 2020-21 season include the world premiere of a new duo concerto by Felipe Lara for Chase and Esperanza Spalding, to

be premiered by the Helsinki and Los Angeles Philharmonics and conducted by Susanna Mälkki; the release of *Density 2036* (2013-2018) world premiere recordings; a collaboration with the Swiss director Julie Beauvais and the Ecuadorian anthropologist Eduardo Kohn on Pauline Oliveros' *The Witness*; and the world premiere of an evening-length work by Liza Lim called *Sex Magic* for contrabass flute and kinetic percussion.

Chase grew up in Leucadia, CA with the childhood dream of becoming a professional baseball player before she

discovered the flute. She received her B.M. from the Oberlin College Conservatory of Music in the studio of Michel Debost. She lives in Brooklyn.

More about Claire Chase and her projects can be found on her website (www.clairechase.net) and in Jayn Rosenfeld's interview for the *NYFC Newsletter* ("Claire Chase: Energetic Visionary," March 2015) done in connection with Claire's appearance at the 2015 New York Flute Fair.



Approaching Density 21.5

by Robert Dick (from May 1998 and March 2000 FLUTE listserv postings)

I have some insights about *Density 21.5* that came from my teacher Henry Zlotnik, who studied it with Barrère, and from Sam Baron, who told me that Varèse [had suggested] performing *Syrinx* and *Density 21.5* back to back. Sam's wife, the musicologist Carol K. Baron, followed this clue to its source and made a brilliant analysis of *Density 21.5* as modeled on *Syrinx* in a May 1982 article ("Varèse's Explication of Debussy's *Syrinx* in *Density 21.5* and an Analysis of Varèse's Composition: a secret model revealed") in the *Music Review*. Anyone who really wants to understand what's going in *Density 21.5* should read this for starters.

About vibrato: Varèse hated a non-varying, overly romantic vibrato and was very much afraid of overly romantic interpretations of the piece. Zlotnik told me that Barrère tried to vary his vibrato much more than usual when he played *Density*. There is nothing wrong with using vibrato, but it is critical that no notes ever feel static. More than two waves without some change in speed, intensity, depth, etc. is just plain anti-stylistic.

There is also a place for relatively light use of vibrato or no vibrato. But again, notes without vibrato must be in motion, changing in dynamics and color. Vibrato plays a larger role in *Density* than in most other pieces because of the need to vary it so dramatically. I've heard *Density* played without vibrato, and honestly feel it sounded awful.

About the "Are they or are they not" B-sharps in m. 23: Zlotnik never commented when I played the written triplet B-sharps, and Sam Baron told me that he played the piece for Varèse many times as written without comment from the composer. That said, I wish they were B naturals—it makes gestural sense—but it's Edgard's piece.**

Having heard this work countless times in masterclasses, there are some comments I'd like to make:

First, I wish folks would stop thinking of *Density 21.5* as "contemporary music." *Density* is a milestone in 20th century music because Varèse changed the way composers think about a solo voice with this piece. It's the first work to recognize that every note on the flute, or any other acoustic instrument, sounds different from all the other notes, has an individual timbre. Instead of the concept of homogenizing the tones to make them sound as much alike as possible, the breakthrough here is to make each note sound as unique as possible and to take each through a maximal range of dynamics and color, which includes the various ways of treating notes with vibrati.

When studying *Density*, listen to recordings of Varèse's other music. Please do this BEFORE getting to work on

Density. One hears this piece played so unstylistically so very often because the performer only has heard this one piece by the composer. How well would we play Mozart if the only piece of his we had ever heard was a flute concerto?

Most of the interpretive questions can be answered by Varèse himself in one life-changing afternoon of listening to his music. There is a reason he's considered one of the greats of the last century. His music is thrilling, gutsy, rainbow hued, three-dimensional, intensely emotional, fantastically original. The phrasing is different from that of earlier pieces in the flute tradition, but is completely natural once you've acclimatized yourself to it by listening. Most of his pieces are fairly short, so at least 10 of Varèse's works can

be heard in a single sitting, or over a few days. You'll love it once you enter into his world.

In the key click section, people sometimes do very weird things. Play it as written! Play the notes with real tone using the dynamics indicated, clicking with a smart snap on the G-key on the indicated notes. The footnote that says the notes with key clicks are to be played softly is wrong! It is a typo left over from the original 1936 edition in which the whole passage was marked double piano. In his 1946 revision, Varèse added dynamics and articulations but the footnote somehow got left in.

When learning *Density 21.5*, be very precise with the rhythms. Subdivide everywhere at first. The rhythms feel quite different than the flute music from times before *Density*. Also, play every articulation as written. None may be changed. No slurs may be broken, and none added. The articulations are composed—they're not mere suggestions. And while breaths are needed in addition to the ones marked, those that are marked must be taken; they define phrases. And my last suggestion is to remember not to breathe between the last high D natural and the first low A-flat! Breathing between these notes breaks one of the most dramatic moments in the entire history of flute music.

I hope this is useful. I love *Density 21.5*—it changed my life.

** Though I had long felt that changing the B-sharps was absolutely out of the question, the B naturals become very credible given Varèse's penchant for reworking his music and Thomas Nyfenger's assertion that Varèse wanted them changed to B natural (making it the inversion of Debussy's motif). [See more on this from Patricia Spencer, p. 7—Ed.]

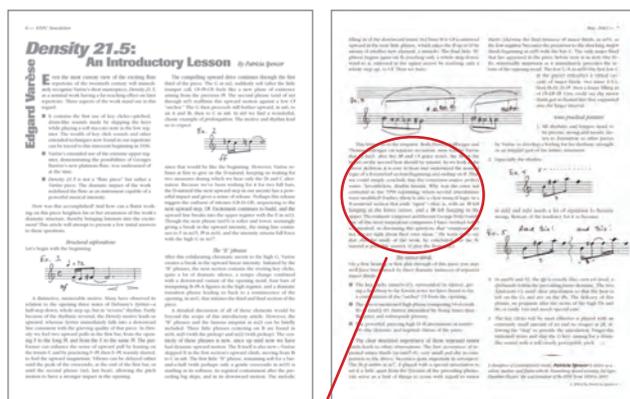
Flutist/composer Robert Dick is the author of The Other Flute. He teaches at NYU and the CUNY Graduate Center.



The 1946 version of *Density 21.5*, as published in the *New Music Quarterly*

From the NYFC Newsletter Archives: “Density 21.5: An Introductory Lesson”

by Patricia Spencer (May 2002)



This brings us to the misprint. Both Harvey Sollberger and Thomas Nyfenger, on separate occasions, were told by Varèse that in m23, after the B-sharp and C-sharp grace notes, the Bs in the triplet on the second beat should be natural. As we look at the above skeleton, it is easy to hear and understand the musical logic of a B-centered section beginning and ending on B. Thus we could simply conclude that the correction makes perfect sense. Nevertheless, doubts remain. Why was the error not corrected in the 1958 reprinting, when several articulations were modified? Further, there is also a clear musical logic in a B-centered section that ends “open”—that is, with an A-sharp left hanging in the lower octave, and a B-sharp left hanging in the upper. The eminent composer and theorist George Perle (surely one of the most meticulous composers I have worked with!) commented, in discussing this question, that “composers are not always right about their own music.” He went on to say that after his study of the work, he concluded that the B-natural is probably correct. (I play the B-natural.)

Density 21.5 (1936): A performer’s perspective

by Molly Barth

(Background for the November 5, 2020 Solo Series event, see p. 3 Flute Happenings listing for details)



It has indeed been an exciting journey to become acquainted with the original 1936 version of *Density 21.5* by Edgard Varèse. The 1936 work begins on a slightly higher pitch level (A-flat rather than F) and slightly lower dynamic level (*mp* rather than *mf*) than the most recently published edition, which encourages me to begin the piece with a comparatively gentle tone. The 1936 score has fewer dynamic markings, and many of the features that are associated with the *Density 21.5* that we all know, such as key clicks and an extended passage containing high D’s, are absent from the 1936 composition. Therefore, the original piece, though quite impactful, is comparatively muted. The end of the 1936 manuscript utilizes fast ascending passages, sounding more high-spirited and less ponderous compared with the revised piece. The 1936 manuscript is half the length of the revised piece (32 measures vs. 61), so his development of musical ideas is limited. I found it intriguing to read the original hand-written manuscript; to view corrections that Edgard Varèse scrawled in the score; and to observe the breath and phrasing marks of Georges Barrère (which gave me a feeling of traveling 85 years back in time).

I feel humbled to be the first person (as far as we know) to perform this original manuscript since Georges Barrère performed the work in the late 1930s. Recording the 1936 work on a Burkart platinum flute, generously on loan from Burkart flutes, increased my awareness of the inherent differences between platinum and silver. As an experiment, I recorded a portion of each version of the piece on each type of Burkart flute, platinum, and silver, to compare sonic qualities. These two metals respond to air in extremely dissimilar ways, and channel the air into the performance space with a drastically different sonic impact. I found the platinum flute to have a laser-beam focus, while the silver flute disperses the sound into the performance space.

I feel deeply honored that Nancy Toff contacted me to embark on this exciting and historic adventure!

NYFC ENSEMBLES PROGRAM

UPDATE

Twenty-one NYFC flutists (17 returning and 4 new) convened via Zoom for a virtual meet-up on Saturday, October 17, at 2 pm, calling in from locations in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania. Organized by co-directors Denise Koncelik and Mark Vickers (and moderated by Denise), each participant let the group know what they had been up to since our last Zoom meeting in May.

Denise’s choice for the best takeaway phrase of the day was “Technology Fatigue!” That said, we learned that several attendees had participated in outdoor concerts and that three group members had changed jobs. People recounted their experiences with various methods of playing in virtual ensembles, including Music Minus One arrangements and apps such as Tomplay (tomplay.com). Most of those present expressed interest in the possibility of putting together a NYFC Ensemble virtual flute choir performance for the 2021 NY Flute Fair, though many details have yet to be worked out.

All members of the NY Flute Club are welcome to participate. Questions? Contact Denise or Mark directly at ensembles@nyfluteclub.org. Dates and connection details for future meetings will be emailed to previous attendees and posted in the NYFC’s online calendar (nyfluteclub.org/calendar) when the information becomes available.



Denise Koncelik



Mark Vickers



From the Zoom meeting of October 17, 2020. Not shown: Lauren Klasewitz.



The New York Flute Club
Park West Finance Station
P.O. Box 20613
New York, NY 10025-1515



Sunday, November 15, 2020

A virtual concert (connection details at www.nyfluteclub.org)
Claire Chase and the *Density 2036 Project*

101st Season

2020- 2021 Events

October 22, 2020 (SS) • Thursday, 7:30 pm
Patricia Spencer plays Noel Da Costa

October 25, 2020 (C) • Sunday, 5:30 pm
McGill & Wincenc play Gabriela Lena Frank;
Discussion hosted by Jayn Rosenfeld

November 5, 2020 (SS) • Thursday, 7:30 pm
Density 21.5 with Molly Barth

November 12, 2020 (E) • Thursday, 7:30 pm
Leone Buyse, Tereasa Payne & Ransom Wilson
on virtual teaching. Chaired by Jeff Mitchell.

November 15, 2020 (C) • Sunday, 5:30 pm
Claire Chase and the *Density 2036 Project*

December 3, 2020 (SS) • Thursday, 7:30 pm
John Heiss interviewed by Meg Griffith

December 13, 2020 (C) • Sunday, 5:30 pm
Winners of the 2020 NYFC Competition

January 14, 2021 (SS) • Thursday, 7:30 pm
Emily Beynon on Marius Flothuis

January 24, 2021 (C) • Sunday, 5:30 pm
Performers to be announced

February - May 2021 • TBA

All events will be virtual; SS = Solo Series, C = concert,
E = Education and Enrichment. Visit the NYFC website
at www.nyfluteclub.org for additional information and
connection details.



From the Editor

Greetings! November brings us an amazing three Club events, all virtual. This month's "concert" (on November 15) will feature Claire Chase and her *Density 2036* project. Her aim is to have 24 hours worth of new flute music (from the leading composers of our time) available to the flute community by 2036, the 100th anniversary of Edgard Varèse's *Density 21.5*. On p. 5, you can read a bit about the pieces from the project that will be sampled, but I hope readers will also check out Claire's website (clairechase.net) for the details I had to leave out (among them, the text of Rumi's very affecting "Empty Garlic" poem).

Nancy Toff's "From the President" ("Density: The Plot Thickens") fits in with the primary focus of this issue, which is how Varèse's *Density 21.5* has evolved since its 1936 premiere. In addition, we have a performance history from her (p. 4), a personal study guide for the piece from Robert Dick (p. 6), and a performer's perspective from our November 5 Solo Series presenter, Molly Barth (p. 7).

If you look hard (hint: p. 7) you can even find an excerpt from a 2002 *NYFC Newsletter* article on *Density 21.5* by Pat Spencer (our October 22 Solo Series presenter). Incidentally, we think we have resolved the audio issues our viewers experienced with this event; everyone who attended (or didn't) is encouraged to check out the videos on the event's online calendar page (or the Club's YouTube channel) to see the content again with better quality audio.

Don't overlook our first Education and Enrichment event of the season: "Zooming into Virtual Teaching," organized by Jeff Mitchell (Thursday Nov. 12, details on p. 3).

Lily R. Wu, a semi-retired social justice activist active in the NYFC ensembles program, is this month's member profile subject. I enjoyed learning about her activities in intercultural community building and her journey as a flute student starting in her 50s.

Anyway, all for now.

Katherine Saenger (klsaenger@yahoo.com)