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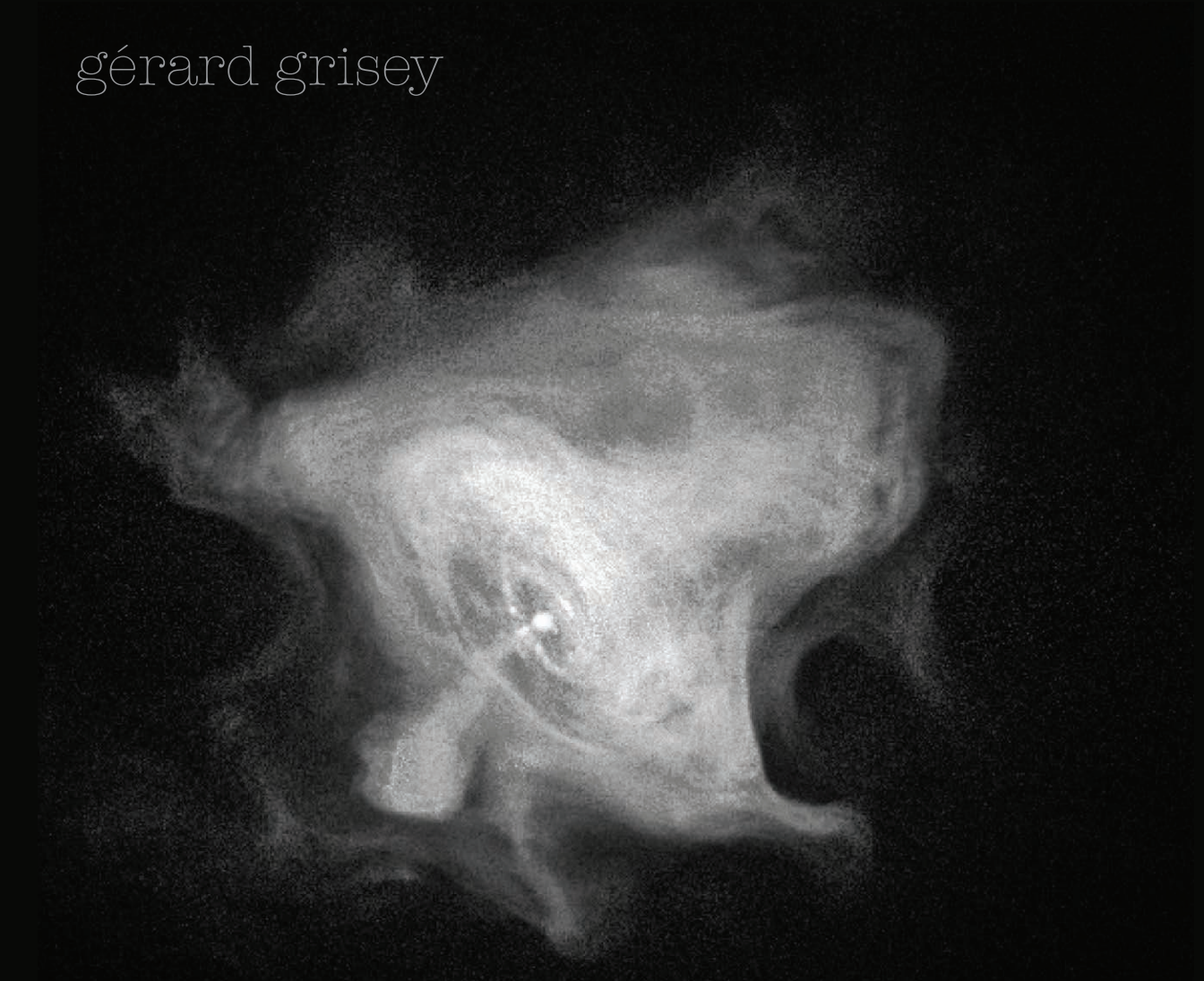
le noir de l'étoile

gérard grisey



redfishbluefish

Thursday, February 7, 2013 - 8:00 p.m. • Mandeville Auditorium

The University of California San Diego • Division of Arts and Humanities • Department of Music

PRESENTS

red fish blue fish

Leah Bowden
Eric Derr
Dustin Donahue
Jonathan Hepfer
Ryan Nestor
Steven Solook

PROGRAM

Gérard Grisey (1946-1998) *Le Noir de l'Étoile* (1989-1990)

Gérard Grisey was born in Belfort on June 17th, 1946. He studied at the Trossingen Conservatory in Germany from 1963 to 1965 before entering the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique in Paris. Grisey's music is often considered to belong to the genre of spectral music, which he is credited with developing at IRCAM along with fellow composer, Tristan Murail. He was intrigued by musical processes which unfold slowly, and he made musical time a major element of many of his pieces. The music of the spectral composers grows not from motifs, rhythms, or harmonies but from the structure of complex sounds. Such an approach to composition can seem coldly analytic, but to dismiss Grisey as a mere technician would be wide of the mark. His real concern is the human subject and how it relates to time. In Grisey's view, music can rescue the listener from the splintered and distracted time-flow of our age by focusing on transformational processes whose "wintry slowness will be the reversed echo of a stress-filled world rushing towards its end."

In 1967, a young astronomer detected in the sky a rapidly varying radio signal in the form of periodic impulses coming every 1.3 seconds. The discovery caused a sensation. The pulsations were so regular that for a time they were seriously thought to be coming from some extra-terrestrial civilization. The astrophysicists then revealed an equally surprising fact: the signals were actually emitted by a pulsar, a fantastically compact residue generated in the explosion of supernovae that had caused the disintegration of massive stars long ago. Pulsars have a radius of no more than 15 km for a mass equivalent to that of the Sun. They are made of such compact matter that their atoms are literally crushed into a solid mass of neutrons. A thimble made of neutron star matter would weigh 100 billion tons on earth. Pulsars are huge magnetized spinning tops. Some rotate several dozen times per second, and their magnetic field is 1,000 billion times greater than that of the Earth. The pulsar's lines of magnetic force canalize the electrically charged particles of interstellar space along its magnetic axis, producing a beam of light that rotates with the star like a cosmic lighthouse. With each rotation, the beam sweeps the line of sight of the earth and astronomers record a light pulsation. Part of this radiation is emitted within the radio wave band, and can thus be picked up by large radio telescopes. Radio telescopes are sophisticated radar instruments, built to detect radio signals of low intensity such as those coming from distant stars. They consist of a huge smooth metal or wire mesh surface on which radio waves are reflected. Antennas turn the waves into electric signals. These signals can be amplified and used to excite the membrane of a large speaker, making them audible to the human ear as the humming of pulsars. In the electromagnetic tornado unleashed by a pulsar, the radio emission represents no more than a whisper. It is this whisper that the instruments pick up. For an astronomer, attempting to understand the essence of a pulsar is like trying to fathom the working of a huge machine hidden inside a factory simply by listening to the occasional muffled noises it lets out. The energy collected is an infinitely small quantity; in 50 years of observation, all the energy collected by all the radio telescopes in the world represents less than the strength you need to turn over a single page of your program. The first pulsar you will hear has been recorded on magnetic tape. It can only be observed in the southern hemisphere. It is called the Vela Pulsar, the residue of the explosion of a supernova that primitive man probably saw in broad daylight some 12,000 years ago. It spins on its axis 11 times per second. The second pulsar is being picked up at this very moment by the great Bernard Lovell radio telescope at Jodrell Bank Observatory in Great Britain. It is known as 0329+54. The figure indicates its position in the sky: 3 hours 29 minutes right ascension and +54 degrees declination. It rotates 1.4 times per second. The supernova that generated it exploded five million years ago and its radio pulsations take 7,500 years to reach the earth. Vast lighthouses of the sky, the two pulsars will be guiding our musical voyage. Listen closely to the ticking of these cosmic clocks; we have a rendezvous with the keepers of eternal time. Open the window, and wait.

- **Jean-Pierre Luminet**, astrophysicist at the Paris-Meudon Observatory

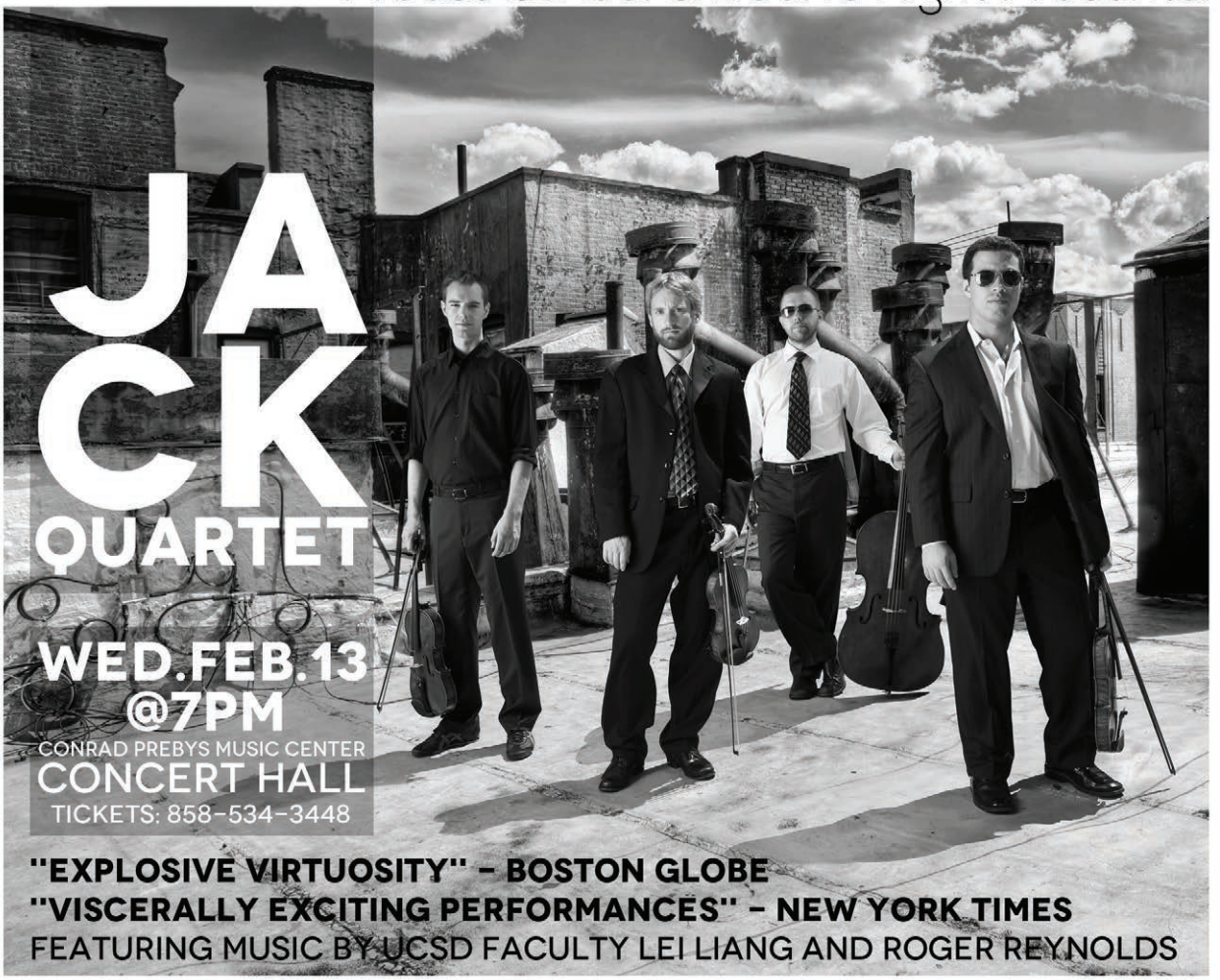
Inspired by this 1967 discovery, Gérard Grisey wrote *Le Noir de l'Étoile,* for six percussionists placed around an audience.

"And I would also like to point out:

The unprecedented and irreplaceable aspect of the live transmission in the concert hall of these imperturbable cosmic clocks which have travelled across several light years… Their unexpected confrontation with music, which not only prepares their "entry" onto a musical and theatrical stage, but whose whole temporal organisation is the product of their speed of rotation…Their integration into a spatialized form of music by the positioning of the six percussions and speakers around the audience…The staging and lighting of these extinguished stars using appropriate projection and lighting devices…The at once musical, visual, theatrical, but also festive and didactic character of a moving and exceptional event."

- Gérard Grisey

Preuss School & Dean's Night Presents:



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The Mandeville Auditorium is a nonsmoking facility.