

Two Studies After Seurat



for Woodwind Quintet

Kirk O'Riordan

Two Studies After Seurat (2010)

Kirk O’Riordan (b. 1968)

Program Notes:

Painter Georges Seurat (1859-1891) is perhaps best known for his *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* (1884-86) which hangs in the main stairway of the Art Institute of Chicago. Executed in tiny dots of many different colors, the work is an early example of what later became known as pointillism. More accurately, the work is an example of what Seurat termed “Chromoluminarism,” which strived to create maximum luminosity of color by separating the colors with white space—dots surrounded by blank canvas.

Additionally, Seurat believed that color could create harmony and emotion in much the same way as music: that as the composer uses counterpoint, chords, variation, and form to create harmony (to be understood here in the more general sense, i.e. all components working together to create a unified whole), so the painter uses color.

For this piece, I chose to approach the placement of notes in time in a manner similar to how Seurat used color: I have attempted to surround musical events with the blank canvas of silence; to blend colors into luminescent combinations; and to ask the listener to hear the sounds the same way as he or she might view Seurat’s work—creating images by subconsciously blending and balancing the sounds into interesting and satisfying composites. The Woodwind Quintet is a terrific ensemble for this experiment in that the five instruments that comprise it have such widely diverse sonic properties.