

CLARICE ASSAD · KINAN AZMEH · LAYALE CHAKER · CHRISTINA COURTIN
OLIVIA DAVIS · NICK DUNSTON · ADELIA FAIZULLINA · RHEA FOWLER & MICHAELA TOBIN
RHIANNON GIDDENS · MARIKA HUGHES · MAYA MIRO JOHNSON · BOJAN LOUIS
DANA LYN · ANGÉLICA NECRÓN · EBUN OCUNTOLA · TOMIKA REID
TERRY RILEY · MATANA ROBERTS · AERYN SANTILLAN · TYSHAWN SORÉY
ANJNA SWAMINATHAN · CONRAD TAO · AKSHAYA TUCKER · KOJIRO UMEZAKI

THIS IS AMERICA
AN ANTHOLOGY
2020-2021

COMMISSIONED AND
PERFORMED BY
JOHNNY GANDELSMAN

THIS IS AMERICA

AN ANTHOLOGY

To say that 2020 was a difficult year for the United States would be an understatement. Covid 19 took the lives of 385,000 people. Racism and police brutality took the lives of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor, igniting nationwide and eventually worldwide protests. In California, the 4.2 million acres burned in 2020 were the most in a single year since records were kept, and more than the previous three years combined. Vicious election cycle rhetoric was boiling over, and conversations dominating cable news focused on what this country was, is or should be. Unemployment skyrocketed. People were isolated, sick, scared, and exhausted.

In thinking about ways one person could make a small difference, it occurred to me that in many ways amplifying the voices of others, whether it's those of centuries past or ones of today, is an essential part of being a Classical musician. I decided to commission new works for violin from American and US-based composers, asking each one to reflect in some way on the time we were all living through. Some, like Kinan Azmeh, Christina Courtin, and Kojiro Umezaki have been dear friends for decades; others like Maya Miro Johnson, Ebun Oguntola, and Anjna Swaminathan were new connections; all were musicians whose artistry I respect and admire.

I reached out to presenters across the country, looking for commissioning partners. As more parties signed on, the project grew; 22 new works were funded, written, and recorded; rising to the surface were themes like loss and uncertainty, but also joy, friendship, gratitude, and love.

The process of getting to know these new works was illuminating. I found comfort in works I knew how to approach; others required skills I wasn't good at, or never tried before, pushing me into directions I never thought I'd be exploring, and at times stretching my comfort level to what seemed like its absolute limits. My first reaction to those works was trepidation, and the old saying "you fear what you don't understand" rang in my head. I feel incredibly lucky to have had the composers gently guide me into their process, easing my worries with encouragement and allowing me to find my own way to bring their works to life. I'm definitely not a singer, nor can I play the guitar, but I'm glad I had the chance to try. I wish for all of us to experience that kind of thoughtful guidance when encountering things, people, or ideas we don't understand.

My dear friend Justin Messina's work is the most recent commission, delivered in early 2022 – and as such, is not included on the album – I simply ran out of time to record. Sorry, Justin. However, three works that weren't originally part of this commissioning project are included: Layale Chaker, Dana Lyn and Akshaya Avril Tucker wrote about isolation, climate change, and recovery in 2018 – these universal themes will undoubtedly resonate for centuries to come.

Over the course of the last 18 months, I've come to think of this project as an anthology, a snapshot in time, documenting a tiny slice of the creative thought and output in this country today. I invite you to stop listening to pundits, extend your ears, open up your imagination, and trust the music to guide you into a challenging, complicated, and thrilling sound world – This Is America.

—Johnny Gandelsman

CLARICE ASSAD "O"

At the beginning of the 2020 Covid 19 pandemic, violinist Johnny Gandelsman approached several composers to collaborate on a commissioning project.

There were no limits imposed on our creative process, though he made a critical remark: "I would like composers to reflect on the moment we are living now."

– It was quite a suffocating moment. And so I fixated my attention on what seemed to be a recurring theme, the crucial character of several dramas that would ensue through the year that ironically left so many breathless: Oxygen.

O, the symbol representation of one of the most abundant elements in the universe without which we die, is the inspiration for this piece. As we withdrew from the social arena, we watched in horror a newly discovered virus take down thousands of people from acute respiratory failure every day. Some succumbed from complications of the disease, others for lack of respirators. Preventive measures required the whole of humanity to wear masks, to protect each other from an infection that could spread through the air. Soon after, another tragedy. This time, oxygen would take center stage and be violently obstructed, by force, from entering the lungs in George Floyd's body, whose last words, "I can't breathe," echoed through the four corners of the world, causing pain, anger, outrage. The air was thick with doubt and fear.

Confined in an apartment without working windows in the middle of the winter, I could not help but feel a sense of entrapment in my own body. Bouts of anxiety attacks plagued me, and it was challenging to work or concentrate. But thinking about the miracle of life while not taking the gift of breathing for granted, singing was the way out of despair. For processed vocal overdubs and solo violin, "O" is a recollection of that fragmented time, undoubtedly filled with sentiments of distress. But it too, portrays a sense of hope. –Clarice Assad

"O" was generously commissioned by San Francisco Performances (San Francisco, CA)

KINAN AZMEH "SAHRA BE WYCKOFF"

I moved to New York City in 2001, and shortly after I found myself surrounded by some incredibly creative minds who became dear friends and collaborators over the years. Sahra is the arabic word for party, and Wyckoff is a street in Brooklyn where few of these friends lived in a beautiful and slightly bohemian loft and used to host gatherings on a semi-regular basis to have a drink, discuss life and most importantly, jam together. The musical landscape of these jam sessions included whatever instruments are present at a given moment. Violinists, clarinetists, cellists, singers, rappers, pianists, dancers, visual artists, film makers and electronic music producers. It was in these gatherings where I have witnessed the birth and growth of many projects that I ended up being closely associated with: Brooklyn Rider, the Knights Orchestra, Silkroad Ensemble and many others.

Johnny was one of these wonderful hosts, and he and I continue to refer to these early creative years in the city as The Wyckoff Years!

This piece is an homage to a place of gathering, and to the spirit of that collective that continues to live on. The lyrics at the end of the piece are:

ةبواف

A party at Wyckoff for all

This piece is dedicated to Johnny Gandelsman, a wonderful violinist, producer, collaborator, human, and a dear friend. –Kinan Azmeh

"Sahra be Wyckoff" was generously commissioned by Matthew Van Besien & Rosie Jowitz, in partnership with the University Musical Society (Ann Arbor, MI)

LAYALE CHAKER "SINEKEMĀN"

Sinekemān, commissioned and written for violinist Johnny Gandelsman, is a study on solitude.

As I had wished to depict one's relationship with solitude, the ultimate condition of being faced with incomprehension, and an ongoing flux of moments of self-sufficiency and struggle, lucidity and confusion, power and despair, already depicted by the aloneness of a solo instrument, I wished to embody it by invoking the sinekemān, an Ottoman ancestor of the violin, characterized by its' seven sympathetic strings ; creating a contrast between the wholeness of the sound and the sustained resonance of these strings, and the fragility of the textures of its' gut strings. –Layale Chaker

"Then stirs the feeling infinite, so felt
In solitude, where we are least alone;
A truth, which through our being then doth melt,
And purifies from self: it is a tone,
The soul and source of music, which makes known
Eternal harmony, and sheds a charm
Like to the fabled Cytherea's zone,
Binding all things with beauty;—'t would disarm
The spectre Death, had he substantial power to harm."

—Lord Byron (1788-1824), from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage: Night and Tempest*

"Sinekemān" was generously commissioned
by the Portland Chamber Music Festival (Portland, ME)

CHRISTINA COURTIN "STROON"

When I was given the task to write Stroon, the reflection period was a heavy one. I was on a journey to find a path that would somehow lead me to another. Needless to say, I hit many dead ends. For me the piece has landed in two worlds of mine, the lyrical and the searching. The singing aspect is throughout, but especially at the beginning and, of course, with the help of the dancers. The flowing sixteenth notes are just a vehicle for the endless searching and questioning of what anything/ everything means, not unlike so many other pieces of music out there today.

The last year and a half have been absolutely devastating for so many reasons, and for me personally it made me very quiet. I did not write, I did not sing, I just read the news with an anxious mind. I was so grateful for the opportunity from The Vail Dance Festival because it forced me to get into music again, to try and reconnect with myself, and to try and put music to the madness that is still our reality. –Christina Courtin

"Stroon" was generously commissioned by the 2021 Vail Dance Festival,
Damian Woetzel – Artistic Director (Vail, CO)



OLIVIA DAVIS "STEEPED"

Steeped is a personal reflection and response to the time that we live in, including but not limited to the pandemic that has flipped "normal" upside down, and a political and social climate in the United States that have done the same. The concept of steeping – whether it be tea or something else entirely – as a representation for these situations surrounding us acts as the catalyst for this piece's inspiration. Each movement's title draws from more traditional Italian musical terms, while playing on the meanings of each of those terms in a way that corresponds to "steeping" situations in my world. The piece begins with an impromptu – not unlike how our pandemic began, in addition to its sharing similarities with the responses to social and political movements (however, those had been 'steeping' for much longer prior). The second movement is full of constant motion, a literal representation of the mental stress and exhaustion I can speak to having felt throughout the pandemic as

well as in response to political and social events. The final movement is a cadenza, which not only plays with the traditional structural placement of a cadenza (now it is ending a piece), implying that we are not truly finished with any of the aforementioned situations – we are only so far going – but allows the performer to contextualize the Self in all that has been happening and beyond, as cadenzas truly are about the individual. The ending – regardless of which ending the performer chooses (as there are multiple endings I have given the performer to choose from), is meandering and somewhat lost (as I have sometimes felt during this last year); it is expressionist; it is exhausted, yet there is potential for and yearning for hope and betterment. –Olivia Davis

"Steeped" was generously and jointly commissioned by the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society (Philadelphia, PA) & Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music (Boonville, CA)

NICK DUNSTON "TARDIGRADES"

Originally, I considered the title of this piece – Tardigrades – to be a bit of a misnomer. Tardigrades are some of the toughest living animals on the planet. They can survive lack of food or water for up to three decades, can withstand extreme temperatures, are highly resistant to physical harm, and have even been reported to be able to survive the vacuum that is outer space. The place inside of me from which this piece comes, on the other hand, is a meditation on the fragility of the modern human. From that same place comes a buried desire: the desire to survive as well as tardigrades, to be as protective not only on a physical level, but, if this is not asking too much, on emotional and mental levels as well.

But it turns out, Tardigrades is not entirely a misnomer. For one, tardigrades are microscopic-their immediate world is more than enough for a space of endless wonder for the unknown. Additionally, their toughness comes with a price-they often must slow down their metabolism in a way that shuts them down, shields them, and renders them to nothing more than simply being alive. This piece was written during my biggest and most drastic life change. A change that was informed by a force that every human on the planet is currently dealing with, a global pandemic. With so many unnecessarily prompt endings of lives, and a worldwide rethinking of "life as we know it", it is easy for me to get overwhelmed to the point of feeling helpless, perhaps longing for the survival skills of tardigrades. And while humans aren't as good at surviving, simply surviving is not the only part of our genetic programming. We thrive, we create, we share our vulnerabilities with each other, and sometimes, a global catastrophe is the only thing that can remind us of how fragile we are.

Tardigrades does not attempt to provide a solution nor reconciliation for the death and damage that we have faced, and that which we will continue to face throughout 2020 and beyond. Rather, it is an offering, a gentle reminder, that we are not indestructible. It is a humble piece of encouragement to continue to try our best, to acknowledge our mortality just a little bit more, and to strip our wants down to the bare essentials of what we need to be nourished and fulfilled. Each and every one of my works are, in part, declarations of self worth and self love. I find that when we don't try to protect ourselves the way tardigrades do, that we are opening ourselves up to levels of pain that could be simply unimaginable. But in many cases, we also have the choice to be as vulnerable as we will let ourselves be and the levels of beauty and joy that that brings are also unimaginable. Personally, I'd pick that over being able to survive in space. Every time. –Nick Dunston

"Tardigrades" was generously commissioned by the Baryshnikov Arts Center (NYC, NY)



ADELIIA FAIZULLINA "DEW, TIME, LINGER"

Dew, Time, Linger is about how the pandemic sounded to me. The piece represents the few months I spent by myself in Los Angeles, when I saw people online but no one in person. The only people I could sense around me were people on the streets when I went on a walk or to the grocery store. This piece is about listening to the space where I was. All of a sudden I would hear tiny sounds from outside: the sirens, the clock, the tap dripping. Time slowed down to me, while I would ask myself when I would see my family and what is next, and where the world is going.

In my space, I visited places in my memory. My mind would travel to the places that I visited and people I love, and I would hang on these soothing memories. But then, the sounds in my environment would call me back to the present.

I see time as a fragile drop of dew, like nature's ticking clock. It is fragile, and the pandemic made that even clearer. This tiny drop of dew reflects the whole world. You hold it, and you try to keep this little water drop and save it, but it melts down and evaporates – it is already in the past. –Adeliia Faizullina

"Dew, Time, Linger" was generously and jointly commissioned by Art of Elan (San Diego, CA) & Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music (Boonville, CA)

RHEA FOWLER & MICAELA TOBIN

"A CITY UPON A HILL?"

"A City Upon a Hill?" is our reaction to the events at the Capitol on January 6, 2021. The main theme is based on the infamous slogan, 'Make America Great Again,' in which each variation of the Americana-inspired theme becomes increasingly dissonant on the arrival of the word 'again.' Distorted and detuned electronic samples of politicians chanting the phrase, combined with sounds of protest, police helicopters, and stampeding animals circle and crowd the violin solo, culminating in a frenzied, sonic chaos that inevitably collapses in on itself.

The sonic dissonance is meant to echo the cognitive dissonance of the far right movement itself, as the piece chronicles the gradual radicalization of an individual who holds an idealized, nostalgic memory of a freedom and equality that has never truly existed in America; someone who believes themselves to be a true patriot while simultaneously undermining basic democratic values and American institutions.

The piece ends with the violin soloist slowly unraveling their D-string until their sound fades into obscurity. So, in this gaping silence of this detuned violin, we ask you, was America ever really great? –Rhea Fowler & Micaela Tobin

"City Upon a Hill?" was generously commissioned by the Philharmonic Society of Orange County (Irvine, CA)

RHIANNON GIDDENS' "NEW TO THE SESSION"

I began my fiddling journey as an apprentice to a dance musician, and pretty late in life, as violinists go – so my repertoire and style is rhythmic and melodically simple, and always with a dancer in mind. They say write what you know – so when this opportunity came to create a piece for Johnny Gandelsman, I was thrilled to see what came out of my strings and off my bow. It's called "New to the Session" because as a beginner fiddler I would sit in on Irish sessions sometimes and feel like I was in a whirlwind – no more than twice through each tune and it seemed like everybody knew everything but me; I wanted to capture a bit of that feel with the journey through the melodies. –Rhiannon Giddens

"New to the Session" was generously commissioned by the 2021 Vail Dance Festival, Damian Woetzel – Artistic Director (Vail, CO)



MARIKA HUGHES "WITH LOVE FROM J"

Jewlia Eisenberg was a composer, singer, bandleader, ritual and resistance worker, scholar and a dear friend who worked at the intersection of voice, text and diaspora consciousness. Her mission: make a lovely noise about complex ideas. Jewlia died at the age of 49 on March 11, 2021 after a long fought illness. With her life and ideas in mind, I wrote this song for Johnny, With Love from J.

I asked myself a number of questions as I began to write: What would I like Johnny's audience to consider? How do we attempt to understand others separated from us by space, time, experience, and race? Can a song offer resistance and love all at once?

This is a folk song at its core. Its resistance lies in the questions asked, the compassion lives in the consideration of others and the love echoes throughout as the audience is encouraged to sing along with Johnny.

The chorus sings: "The sky above us, the ground below, 360 support around us, cut discursive thought". These are the words Jewlia offered her band before walking onstage each night; hands held in a circle, a deep breath together, a wink and a smile from Jewlia and off we would go to perform. My hope is that With Love from J will keep Jewlia's life and ideas alive as we all sing together wherever and whenever we can. —Marika Hughes

"With Love From J" was generously commissioned by Stanford Live (Stanford, CA)

With Love From J

Music & Lyrics by Marika Hughes

Have you heard?	Remember
Our muse left word	No false pretender
No time to waste	Hushed voices
This is our great unlearn	Crescendo in resistance
Dear friends	We should know
Waste no time	That we just don't know
Take a step into the unknown	Look, look, look
Once in a while	Look what our comfort has sown
Make sure to see a sunrise	How do we care?
Be sure to sing a song	The sky above us
Consider	Ground below us
A child	360 support around us
A black girl playing	Cut discursive thought
Swinging in the park	Can you hear
Be sure	What we've learned
To protect her	Through the years?
Look out	That love, sweet love
For her brother	Reminds us
Do we know how?	What to listen for

MAYA MIRO JOHNSON "DANCE SUITE"

This piece is the first in a series of upcoming works exploring the translation, or transliteration, of movement concepts from Ohad Naharin's Gaga dance language into musical and sonic aesthetic forms. I've been interested in Gaga, which is explicated further on the following page, for quite some time, but in the past year it has become a true necessity for me. Gaga has a fundamentally healing quality to it, in that it exists in the fissured space between the mind and the body. For example, I was in a car accident last September in which I suffered a traumatic brain injury, and Gaga class is sometimes the only space in which my physical pain and symptoms abate. The piece comprises five movements (described below) which each excise particular linguistic concepts and tenets from Gaga, and explore them along a violinistic pathway reminiscent of 17th century dance suites. Each one contains the foundational concept of "describing curves and overlapping circles in interior and exterior space", which is one of the defaults in Gaga.

Movement I: composed; meditative

-negating gravity on a molecular level -floating to grabbing through letting go
-the pleasure of speed

Movement II: improvised; absurd

-traveling textures
-the virtue of lightness
-connecting to the groove and silliness
-connecting to a fantasy of ___ (ballerina, toreador, tap dancer, fencer, gymnast, martial artist, etc.)
-the beginnings of a secret smile/smiling throughout your flesh

Movement III: composed; grieving

-sensing the distance between things
-dead flesh vs. igniting distant engines
-shaking vs. quaking
-surrendering to your tiredness
-blocking the flow vs. connecting to the flow of energy

Movement IV: improvised; paroxysmic

-the availability for rotating (ball) movement
in our joints and to change our minds
-finding the groove through weakness
-moving vs. being moved
-getting rid of your skin/shaking off the unwanted
-moving larger and smaller at the same speed vs.
changing speed in order to change size

Movement V: composed; celebratory (dance party!)

-plenty of time/piece of cake in the effort
-collapsing into movement by letting go
-the pleasure of stretch
-the passion to move
-being decorated from the inside/delicacy
-overwhelming the senses with tasks
-the beautiful spirit

I tried to be highly specific with these selections, and each movement reverse-engineers the resultant sound from the physical concepts of Gaga, on different levels of explicitude. Some movements function as a guided improvisation focusing on internal sensation of the distance and form of the body in space, exactly like a Gaga technique class, and others are abstract or programmatic musical depictions of linguistic concepts developed by Ohad Naharin (“floating the bone in the flesh”, etc.). The goal was to derive sound from movement, beginning with the action of motion itself and seeing the sound as a result rather than the directive, accomplished through the conduit of the instrument as an extension of the body. Two other traditions informed the praxis of this piece: analog filters applied to traditional and popular Jewish folk music, and obligatory idioms of the virtuoso violin repertoire. For example, the pitches and pitch classes of the three notated movements are derived from three folk songs from the diaspora, respectively:

Abi Gezunt (If you have your health...) (Yiddish, secular, 1930s)

Echad Mi Yodea (Who knows one?) (Hebrew, religious, 15th century)

Ale Brider (All brothers) (Yiddish, secular/pro-labor, 1920s)

And the gestures themselves are derived from the canonical solo repertoire, such as large leaps, down/upbow, staccato, large intervals such as tenths and above, bariolage bowing, trills and ornamentation, perpetual motion, etc. This all relates to the theme of the This Is America project in several ways. First, Gaga was a retreat and a salvation for many across the globe in 2020, from professionals unable to rehearse and first-time dancers who were lonely by themselves at home, and it became a visceral release in a time of being emotionally and physically shut in, trapped, suspicious, guarded, and frightened.

Second, Gaga’s maxims are inherently liberating; they are scriptural without being dogmatic. One can practice Gaga as a spiritual endeavor without needing to lose one’s curiosity, dubiousness, or skepticism. It is a science and a philosophy and a theology all at once. One doesn’t have to be trained as an improviser in order to understand and internalize Gaga. The only prerequisite is that you abandon your preconceptions, your judgements, and your inhibitions, and commit yourself fully to the idea, to yourself, to the moment, and to each other. This just might be the mentality that ultimately will save our broken society and our dying planet, in my opinion. Third, Johnny’s and my Jewish ancestry and the presence of dance and dancers in our lives provoked a sense of relevance to the impossibly optimistic Ashkenazi maxim that “if you have your health, you can be happy”, which is present in the healing, celebratory, and communal side of Gaga.

Last of all, I want to conclude these notes with an image from the final scene of Bela Tarr’s film *Damnation* (Karhozat): www.youtube.com/watch?v=feaHmMMDAw

In this scene, about which I’ve been thinking a lot during the pandemic, the cyclical chaos of the rain, the desperate pacing of the starving dog, and the tired steps of the damned man are a kind of counterpoint that devastates the soul by providing it a mirror. The sequence is so uncanny because it is alien and familiar at the same time. As we navigate this postmodern world in which death is preventable yet disregarded, I think the key, especially for thinking Americans, is to always keep alive the sensation that the world is uncanny, strange, and horrifying. When we become desensitized to darkness, we damn our own souls and our futures. Simultaneously, the absurd in the self’s smallness and insignificance is to be celebrated, as Gaga requests, with total commitment and without taking oneself too seriously. —Maya Miro Johnson

“Dance Suite” was generously commissioned by Digital Daruma (NYC, NY)

BOJAN LOUIS "DÓLII"

Dólii is a poem and solo work for guitar. The words and music are intended to be woven together like a helix strand. The written poem forms its own structure of couplets and tercets that shift the rhythm and cadence of the lines.

For Diné, dólii is bluebird, a guide and bringer of storms.
The poem and composition are for my daughter. —Bojan Louis

"Dólii" was generously commissioned by Tippett Rise Art Center (Fishtail, MT)



Bluebird (Sialia sialis)

Dólii

A sweetgrass field, glistened with raw kerosene—
fumes rising in translucent overlays of orchids

—the heavens are thick with such illusory miasma;
arsenic hot winds, an aching drouth, love's inability to quell.

The mothering of your nalii wasn't picture book perfect;
a river in need of un-dammed tributaries; torrents
to trickles, floodplains to fallout, nest of the dried dead.

The apples off the tree aren't crisp anymore. The midnight
deer have ceased visiting so I don't dream of them

and they desire less, the tree's pruning. There isn't any sun,
there isn't any fun, when rays and rains become absent.

Look over at the approaching darkness, not a darkening storm
wetting the horizon, but an all sleep forever silencing. Your
light is waiting, the future waning, be cautious of promises.

In the world before we washed up here humanity lay asunder.
Beds of tinder thistle in a lion's skull and the carcasses of bees;

a hibernating queen, a deserted honeycomb. I'll rest here and wait,
strike up a forest and make a riverbed from the blindness of my eyes.

When cool gusts precede the rains that you bring, and the weak
branches of palo verde and mesquite have snapped, remember,
please remember, the love you've brought belongs to no one

remember, please remember, the love you've brought belongs to no one

DANA LYN "A CURRENT TOOK HER AWAY"

The "her" in this case is a plankter (singular for plankton). Plankton are microorganisms whose main function is to convert sunlight into chemical energy; they are the base of the marine food chain. Decreasing sea ice has caused plankton blooms to happen earlier and further north each year, affecting the feeding and migration cycles of all of the animals that depend on them for survival. This piece is describing a lone plankter, drifting along a warmer than usual Arctic current, for much longer than expected. –Dana Lyn

"A current took her away" was generously commissioned by the Portland Chamber Music Festival (Portland, ME)



ANGÉLICA NEGRÓN "A TRAVÉS DEL MANTO LUMINOSO"

"A través del manto luminoso" (Through the luminous mantle) is a piece written for Johnny Gandelsman inspired by "A Book of Stars," a collection of dark sky photographs taken in Puerto Rico and its islands by Javier Román-Nieves. "A Book of Stars" includes astrophotography showcasing night skies, sunrises and sunsets between 2011–2020. The resplendent, stunning and almost surreal image titled "Blanket of seawater on saturated sand in Luquillo" which depicts a vast field of stars reflected on the ocean during sunrise in the northeast coast of the island moved me deeply and sparked the idea behind this piece.

This specific image and the book brought back childhood memories of the tradition of stargazing with my family on the evening before Three Kings day looking to find the three bright stars that represented the Three Kings (also known as Orion's Belt) in the night sky. It also made me reflect on the night sky as an open field of possible connections to places that are distant from us while simultaneously revealing the immense distance that separates us.

The synth sounds in this piece are inspired by audio recordings of a group of ancient stars that were put together by a team of researchers from the University of Birmingham in the UK. These recordings were made using data from NASA's Kepler/K2 missions of old stars in the Milky Way's Messier 4 (M4) cluster – one of the oldest and closest globular clusters to the sun and Earth. By measuring the vibrations of these distant stars, scientists captured a low-pitched sound which they then sped up 1-million times to bring the oscillations within the range of human hearing. "A través del manto luminoso" is a piece about longing for connection and above all, holding on to the possibility of seeing light in darkness. –Angelica Negron

"A través del manto luminoso" was generously commissioned by the Chamber Music Society of Central Virginia (Richmond, VA)

EBUN OGUNTOLA "REFLECTIONS"

Reflections is a solo violin piece that reflects upon our emotions and reactions to the multi-faceted and chaotic introduction of the new decade in 2020 onward. The piece starts off with the music illustrating the vision of someone standing and staring out at vast rubble and debris, symbolizing our reflection upon the lacerating calamities we all had to endure, that has destroyed some of the sentimental treasures we cherish, that has utterly reshaped society and the way we've structured our lives across the globe. Within the first section of the piece, constant usage of fourths create a contemplative and pensive tone, while also displaying tonal ambiguity, hesitation of a tonal center, to describe how we as people have lost our centers during this time, mentally and frantically, with endless confusion.

In the second section, the flashback begins, and the story of these grievous turn of events unfold. The music at this point conveys our prior anticipation, excitement, and curiosity for what the future may hold in this new decade. However, the fourths in the music soon shift to tritones, one of the most dissonant intervals, to show how our prior anticipation was woefully misled. Tension arises to delineate the tension that arose within our communities. The tension accumulates until its energy snaps our state of sanity, as the tonal center of the music becomes unintelligible, and sixteenth notes drive rampantly, to describe the boundless commotion we encountered, and double stops reappear to show our multilayered circumstances.

In the third section, the climactic moment of chaos has declined just enough for us to slightly ease our hyperventilations, slow down, and reflect upon what happened. Musical ideas are repeated, though altered, to illustrate us analyzing our predicaments and circumstances through a

mournful perspective, that transitions us to our current state in time. The fourth section is the recapitulation of the beginning to signal end to this flashback. Although similar, slight subtleties allude to details previously overlooked, but brought back to our attention after deep reflection.

It is imperative that we take methods to recuperate from such exigent experiences, and reflecting on them helps in doing so. There is no grounded resolution of the piece to show our story isn't necessarily finished yet. We are still being affected by these events, but we will take steps to resolve them. —Ebun Oguntola

"Reflections" was generously commissioned by Chamber Music Pittsburgh (Pittsburgh, PA)

TOMEKA REID "RHAPSODY"

Rhapsody for solo violin was commissioned for violinist Johnny Gandelman. Composed during the pandemic in 2021, the piece opens with an emotionally reflective yet lyrical statement that returns in various forms throughout the composition. Initially, the statement seems to ask a question. It repeats itself higher yet, there is still no response. Continuing, the theme becomes a bit manic and anxious. Throughout, there is a sensation of "wheels spinning while stuck in place" and the piece ends with a sort of resolve that is neither sad nor without hope. —Tomeka Reid

"Rhapsody" was generously and jointly commissioned by the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society (Philadelphia, PA); the Portland Chamber Music Festival (Portland, ME); Laura & David Freid, in loving memory of Christopher Marrison

TERRY RILEY "BARBARY COAST" 1955"

1. I felt extremely honored and excited when Johnny Gandesman asked me to write him something for solo violin...I chose his 5 string one which gives it the range of the viola.

2. Having nothing particular in mind I began.

3. First I wrote a piece based on a poem of Gary Snyder outlining what every good poem should consist of. Rejected that.

4. Next I wrote a piece on a beautiful rhyming poem by Michael McClure. Rejected that.

5. Then I figured out I was trying to write about my impressions of San Francisco of the 1950's...thus the title Barbary Coast which was then a bunch of seedy bars and strip joints located on the southern downhill slopes of North Beach.

6. Then I came up with an attractive South American themed melody that might have found itself drifting into

the weed scented room of a Beat poet from a house down the street.

7. Then I wrote a mystical counter theme with double stops that gave Johnny cramps in his arms and hands after a few minutes.

8. I then revised that section with the double stops to make it more playable but when Johnny played the revision for me I did not like it.

9. I then revised the section with the double stops into a mystical stripped down version all played in harmonics.

10. I decided the South American themed opening was too short and made it 4 times longer.

11. I rewrote the ending 3 times.
-Terry Riley

"Barbary Coast 1955" was generously commissioned by Arts & Letters, University of California Santa Barbara (Santa Barbara, CA)

MATANA ROBERTS "STITCHED"

I make music for the purpose of illuminating and supporting the inner lives of many different types of listeners and sound practitioners. It is service work that I feel so privileged to have in my creative life. This piece structure is a complex representation of the hope, joy and sadness we have collectively traveled through and are still traveling through, as global citizens in the midst of the Covid 19 pandemic.

Through the worst of times and the best of times, sound continuously resonates. A sob, a cry, a laugh, a whimper, a guffaw, a sigh and all the many types of joyful outbursts that are intrinsic to the human experience, regardless of the various boundaries that are used to separate and distract us. It is my hope, that in a listening or performance rendering of this piece, we are reminded that opposites exist for a reason, that any ending, no matter how painful, is a new beginning, and that the unwavering vastness of human spirit is what holds us together as a collective humanity, regardless of dire circumstance. Hope is not dependable, but the thought of it is there for the taking, whenever one might dare to ask...I wish you strength, faith and a limitless sense of hope. -Matana Roberts

*"Stitched" was generously and jointly commissioned by
Celebrity Series of Boston & Boston Symphony Orchestra (Boston, MA)*

AERYN SANTILLAN "WITHDRAW"

withdraw verb

transitive verb

- 1 a: to take back or away : REMOVE
b: to remove from use or cultivation
c: to remove (money) from a place of deposit
d: to turn away (something, such as one's eyes) from an object of attention
e: to draw (something, such as a curtain) back or aside
- 2 a: to remove from consideration or set outside a group
b (1): TAKE BACK, RETRACT
b (2): to recall or remove (a motion) under parliamentary procedure

intransitive verb

- 1 a: to move back or away : RETIRE
b: to draw back from a battlefield : RETREAT
- 2 a: to remove oneself from participation
b: to become socially or emotionally detached
- 3: to recall a motion under parliamentary procedure

withdraw. is a work reflecting on the state of society in 2020 through an intimate lens. Taking to heart the statement "the personal is political," I reflected on my own journal entries, past conversations with close family and friends, and witnessing their struggles through the past year. The various definitions of "withdraw" capture many of these experiences. There have been too many lows to count this this year but, also highs, and even moments of calm and clarity. A lot of what is important has been put in focus through the chaos around it and I have attempted to capture all those feelings into the following piece. —Aeryn Santillan

"Withdraw" was generously commissioned by the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts (Beverly Hills, CA)

TYSHAWN SOREY "FOR COURTNEY BRYAN"

"For Courtney Bryan" was generously commissioned by the 2021 Vail Dance Festival, Damian Woetzel – Artistic Director (Vail, CO)



Blossom/American Dream by Anjna Swaminathan

ANJNA SWAMINATHAN
"SURRENDER TO THE ADVENTURE"

When Johnny Gandelsman asked me to create a piece for *This is America*, I was torn. After creating several projects centering on oppression and attempting to foster hope while sharing the stories of marginalized people, I was ready to write about something joyful and pure: love. And more specifically, my experience of love with my beautiful fiancée Shannon. As much as I'd liked it to be pure and unadulterated, our inspiring, abundant, "restoring faith in humanity" love does not exist in a vacuum. It coexists with and against the anguish of being intersectional beings in America, in a country that values profit over humanity. Our Black, Brown, immigrant, neurodivergent, mentally ill, disabled, queer, trans, femme love cannot be pure, for its mere existence is a constant revolution against the circumstances in which it was planted.

Surrender to the Adventure is the inscription on Shannon's engagement ring. We set it as an intention each day to Surrender to the Adventure that is our love, the adventure that is this country, the adventure that is navigating the joys and pains of being in love in America. Ours is a dynamic existence. It is a constant dance, moving fluidly from heartache, to concern, to abundance, to fear, to scarcity, to radical self love, to grief, to anger, to complacency, to hope and every minute and massive feeling in between. I invite you to dance with us as Johnny does, improvising and responding in this moment to the coexistence of our love and whatever America is right now. For some, this may feel like home, for others, this may feel uncomfortable. Whatever comes up for you, Surrender to the Adventure. —Anjna Swaminathan

*"Surrender to the Adventure" was generously commissioned
by Washington Performing Arts (Washington, DC)*



Fenestration/All Men Are Created Equal by Anjna Swaminathan



Inflorescence/The Pursuit of Happiness by Anjna Swaminathan

CONRAD TAO "STONES"

In 2020, on most days, I took a walk north along the Hudson River. About two-thirds of the way up is a bank of mysterious stones. Stones stacked on top of each other, forming elegant, gravity-defying piles. I'll never forget the first time I encountered these stones, on my first walk up the river. The feeling of another person, the feeling of another, was very evident. When I first came across these stones, I wasn't sure if this was the effort of many people, or just one, but regardless – the feeling of somebody's hands, someone desiring to express, someone desiring to leave a trace of themselves – that was so palpable. So palpable, and so moving, especially at that time, when it was difficult to connect with people. And as I kept taking these walks, throughout the summer and fall, I observed change within the stones. Sometimes, they would nearly disappear, only a few shallow piles left that you could see if you looked hard enough. Sometimes they would evolve and change.

I later learned that these stones were the work of a local self-taught artist named Uliks Gryka. I was excited to learn this information, but there was a part of me

that didn't necessarily care that much about who it was on the other side of these sculptures, because, at least, at the time I discovered the stones, they were unmistakable but fairly anonymous. Gryka wasn't leaving a signature – I believe he has in the past, but when I encountered the work, he wasn't. There was something in that too. There was something about the simplicity and the confident humility of leaving the work there, to be seen, to be discovered, to be experienced; perhaps the trace was enough, and credit was secondary.

This piece was written for Johnny Gandelsman, in December of 2020, and Johnny specifically asked for a piece that was reflecting on the, uh, [cue frantic hand-waving] recent time period, and this piece is a tribute to those Sisyphus Stones, to Uliks Gryka's Sisyphus Stones. It is a love letter to them, a note of appreciation for what they provided for me during this most tumultuous time. –Conrad Tao

"Stones" was generously commissioned by Bay Chamber (Rockport, ME)

AKSHAYA TUCKER
"PALLAVI - A MEDITATION ON CARE"

"Pallavi (Puh-la-vee), Meditation on Care" is about recovery. It takes inspiration from two sources: one is a bhajan (devotional song) about the biggest moment of transformation in our lives. The first line of this song roughly translates from the Hindi to, "One day, Mother [Goddess] Kali, we will go together in light." "Ek din Kali Maa" has been present, always, for my family as we've grieved our own dear ones; and present again in 2018. It is more than a comfort; it is a presence that restores and embraces. If the music in Pallavi feels like a dear friend giving you a hug as you listen, then I will be very happy!

I created a fantasy on this melody, treating it like the theme in Odissi 'Pallavi' form. The Pallavi genre within Odissi dance repertoire is the second inspiration behind the piece. I studied the Odissi style of Classical Indian dance for 20 years under Guru Ranjanaa Devi, and learned and performed about eight compositions of this type. Pallavi's are named for their Raag, and are abstract pieces that contain no particular narrative. They involve the repetition of one melody over evolving musical and gestural elements. They move from slow and sensuous, to fast and trance-like, even virtuosic. For me, dancing a Pallavi provides a sense of care and well-being. They are pure sweetness; a means of becoming absorbed by the raag; and feeling proud and comfortable in my own skin as a woman. This is what I've tried to represent musically. This Pallavi extolls the strength of women, especially my mom. The performer is welcome to direct this musical spirit of restoration to whoever needs it in their own life.

I had an image of balancing, physically, emotionally – even on different strings of the instrument! – that worked its way into the violin writing. There are certain other particularities of learning Odissi dance that came into the music as well. I've used some rhythmic manipulations that dress up the melody in a new suit of clothes each time it appears, as you find frequently in Odissi music. The violin also occasionally imitates the timbre of the buzzing cassette tapes we practice dance to. These are some not particularly high-tech recordings made in India during the 1980s, by friends of my dance Guru – the instruments included a voice, pakhawaj (two-headed drum), drone, and flute or sitar. The static was always noticeable during the opening alap (slow improvisation on the raag), and, true to form, it appears at the opening of this piece too.

I would like to thank Gabriela Lena Frank and Johnny Gandelman for their mentorship, excellent advice and musical presence. This music is made more full by their generosity. –Akshaya Tucker

"Pallavi - A Meditation on Care" was generously commissioned by the Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music (Boonville, CA)

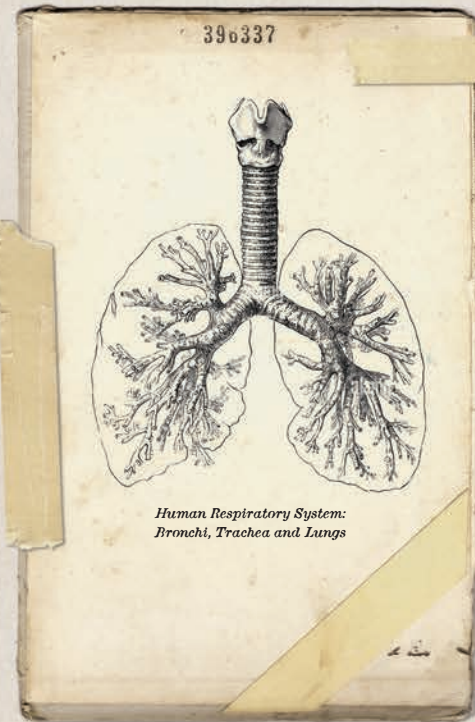
KOJIRO UMEZAKI "BREATHE"

It's hard to imagine one living through the year 2020 without stopping for moments to contemplate the act of breathing, and the struggle to do so freely, without obstruction. During this period, countless others surely produced works similarly or even identically titled "Breathe." Movements in American social justice and protests against systemic racism rallied around and indelibly memorialized those who were deliberately and forcibly denied breath and therefore life. Raised were deep questions on how best to elevate the human condition; amplified was the rhetoric fueling the dynamics of similarity and difference. All of this against the backdrop of the world being indiscriminately and repeatedly brought to its knees by an inconspicuous peril replicating exponentially (and paradoxically) through the life-giving/sustaining act of breathing.

The twenty modules in "Breathe" (each on average loosely around one minute in duration) are designed to be resequenced and reordered. Any number of them can be played/omitted, depending on the occasion. For this album, a sequence of select modules was assembled. All the modules on this recording focus on the open strings and the natural harmonics of the violin. As if the instrument were an organism, perhaps. The electronic part—an optional yet critical element of the work—echoes in its output, not repeating/fading identical copies of the input, but previously played and captured passages that lie on a continuum between most similar and most different.

I am truly grateful to The Hopkins Center for the Arts at Dartmouth College for commissioning and supporting this work. And, equally so to Johnny Gandelsman — a dear friend — to and for whom this work is dedicated and written. —Kojiro Umezaki

*"Breathe" was generously commissioned by the
Hopkins Center at Dartmouth College (Hanover, NH)*



DISC 1

-1-
Clarice Assad - *O*
for violin & voices 5:22
Virtual Artists Collective Publishing (ASCAP)

-2-
Kinan Azmeh - *Sahra be Wyckoff*
for violin 8:20
Kinan Azmeh (SACEM)

-3-
Layale Chaker - *Sinekemān* for violin 11:47
Layale Chaker (SACEM)

-4-
Christina Courtin - *Stroon* for violin 8:19
Christina Courtin Publishing (ASCAP)

-5-7-
Olivia Davis - *Steeped* for violin 13:51
I. Impromptu 4:03
II. Moto perpetuo 3:04
III. Cadenza 6:44
Olivia Davis (BMI)

-8-
Nick Dunston - *Tardigrades*
for violin 5:31
Nick Dunston Music (ASCAP)

-9-
Adeliia Faizullina -
Dew, Time, Linger for violin 10:21
Faizullina Publishing (ASCAP)

-10-
Rhea Fowler & Micaela Tobin -
A City Upon a Hill?
for violin & electronics 7:08
Rhea Fowler (BMI) &
Micaela Tobin (ASCAP)

-11-
Rhiannon Giddens -
New To The Session for violin 6:58
Children of Llyr (BMI)

DISC 2

-1-
Marika Hughes - *With Love From J*
for vocals & tenor guitar 3:52
Hopscotch Dreams (ASCAP)

-2-6-
Maya Miro Johnson -
Dance Suite for violin 24:21
Movement I:
negating gravity on a
molecular level (meditation) 4:26

Movement II:
the virtue of lightness 4:19

Movement III:
surrender to your tiredness (tragedy) 4:57

Movement IV:
getting rid of our skin 5:25

Movement V:
the sense of plenty of time (generosity) 5:54
Ciphers & Constellations (ASCAP)

-7-

Bojan Louis - *Dólii* for voice
& electric tenor guitar 5:17
Bojan Baldwin Louis (BMI)

-8-

Dana Lyn -
a current took her away for violin 8:00
Early Opener Productions (ASCAP)

-9-

Angélica Negrón - *A través del manto
luminoso* for violin & electronics 7:55
Big Branch Publishing (ASCAP)

-10-

Ebun Oguntola - *Reflections* for violin 9:59
EAO Muse (ASCAP)

-11-

Tomeka Reid - *Rhapsody* for violin 5:35
People's Child Publishing (ASCAP)

-12-

Terry Riley - *Barbary Coast 1955*
for 5-string violin 12:21
Ancient Word Music (BMI)

DISC 3

-1-

Matana Roberts - *Stitched* for violin 4:25
Caprustha (BMI)

-2-

Aeryn Santillan - *Withdraw* for violin 8:15
Aaron Garcia Music (ASCAP)

-3-

Tyshawn Sorey - *For Courtney
Bryan* for violin 10:28
Tyshawn Sorey (BMI)

-4-7-

Anjna Swaminathan -
Surrender to the Adventure
for musician, tape and projections 18:31

I. Blossom /
American Dream 3:57

II. Fenestration /
All Men Are Created Equal 4:28

III. Inflorescence /
The Pursuit of Happiness 5:14

IV. Propagation /
A More Perfect Union 5:34
Entangled Memory Music (ASCAP)

-8-

Conrad Tao - *Stones* for violin 10:12
Conrad Tao Music (ASCAP)

-9-

Akshaya Tucker - *Pallavi - A
Meditation on Care* for violin 13:53
Lilac Point Publishing (ASCAP)

-10-

Kojiro Umezaki - *Breathe*
for violin & electronics 13:18
Healthy Boys (ASCAP)

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THIS IS AMERICA
- AN ANTHOLOGY
[2020-2021]