

Vanishing Point Ensemble

Intersecting Planes

Tuesday, April 21, 7:00pm | Dorothy
Tuesday, April 28, 7:30pm | Chapel at Rosehill Cemetery

Program Notes

American Haiku (Paul Wiancko, b. 1983)

The first piece on our program, Paul Wiancko's duo for viola and cello, is one of his earlier works and draws inspiration from his own Japanese and American roots. The piece is richly textured, interweaving elements of percussion, fiddle traditions, and simpler melodies. Wiancko describes the work as a "*fusion of the broad earthiness that is Appalachian music, with the tender, sparse rhythms of Japanese folk song.*"

In traditional Japanese haiku, each of the characters in the poem often possesses multiple meanings, allowing for a seemingly simplistic form to contain a universe of interpretations. These three short movements evoke scenes from the natural world, juxtaposing Wiancko's Japanese and American heritage to explore the complex - or perhaps deceptively simple - relationship between them.

The first movement, "Far Away", opens with grandiose, sweeping chords, evocative of vast mountain ranges and awe-inspiring vistas. The cello takes over with a driving percussive rhythm, initiating our journey onward. Intimate melodic gestures, punctuated by brief flirtations with dissonances, close out the movement on a more pensive note.

The second movement, "In transit", begins with a breathless, acrobatic interplay. It moves into a more rugged fiddle style, emulating the sounds of Appalachian musical traditions. The viola provides grounding stability, acting as a joyful foundation for the cello's soaring melodies, before settling into a lilting, unhurried conclusion.

The third movement, "Home", offers a reworking of the opening chords of the piece, this time in a gentler, more intimate pizzicato reminiscent of the strumming of a guitar or mandolin. It also brings back the same

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percussion effects in the cello as the first movement. The piece ends with a quiet, nostalgic melody. It elicits the wistful feeling of returning home, yourself changed, to a place that seems to have remained exactly the same.

This is It - selected movements (Reena Esmail, b.1983)

We've selected a handful of movements from Reena Esmail's *This is It* as palate cleansers and transitional moments, based on similarities or contrasts in harmonies and textures between each of the longer pieces on the program.

Much of Esmail's work is informed by Indian/Hindustani musical tradition, reflecting her own heritage, and is underpinned or influenced by melodic frameworks called ragas. Similar to keys or modes, each raga has its own unique emotional and musical feeling, and pieces often include a period of improvisation at the beginning or end to ground the listener's ear in the raga.

"Expand / Contract" takes a single melodic gesture and passes it between each of the players, allowing for individual interpretative nuances to be heard more clearly in contrast. While one musician takes over the melody, the other three maintain a continuous, organic motion underneath, reminiscent of gentle breathing.

"Warp / Weft" plays with different and evolving patterns of interweaving between the players, allowing for a uniformity and seamlessness throughout the movement that, upon a closer listen, reveals a world of minute changes and variations. The plucked melodies form a light, joyful texture, winding around each other in a carefree manner.

"Push / Pull" brings the listener to a place of friction and fragmentation. While the quartet is locked into a shared rhythmic momentum, the voices take turns manipulating volume and dissonance, moving in and out of alignment with each other like an image coming in and out of focus. It then devolves into an improvisatory gesture, dissolving the tension and creating a sense of release.

On *This is It*, Esmail wrote: *"In John Kabat-Zinn's seminal book on meditation Wherever You Go, There You Are, he speaks of how we are always encouraged to look forward, to think into the future — but what if this is it? What if we sat with each moment, savoring it as if it was that special, unique, pinnacle moment?"*

This set of miniatures asks the musicians to explore being present with one another. Each miniature invites a different type of interaction — whether passing off a flexible and mellifluous melody seamlessly between one another, locking in with each other in a tight, shimmering holding pattern, or taking turns pushing one another off a musical cliff and then catching each other at the bottom. Each movement opens up a tiny, mutually created universe for just a few precious breaths."

We hope these short movements will provide you with brief moments of reflection and presence as we move through the evening.

Aroma Foliado (Gabriela Ortiz, b. 1964)

Gabriela Ortiz was born in Mexico City, to parents who were deeply involved with Mexican folk music. This was the music she grew up with, before proceeding to more formal classical studies in composition.

This work was commissioned as a celebration of Mozart's 250th anniversary, and is an intriguing mix of deconstructed parts. Ortiz fragments moments of Mozart's *Prussian Quartet* (No. 21 in D Major K. 575), layering motifs and harmonic structures piecemeal alongside rhythmic impulses and influences from Mexican and Afro-Cuban musical traditions. More specifically, she utilizes driving but irregular rhythms to destabilize the listener's sense of meter and pulse, with these sections interleaved between meandering, quasi-improvisatory melodic fragments. The piece was inspired in part by a silk sculpture from artist Suzanne Bocanegra. Ortiz writes:

"In the summer of 2005, I had the opportunity to see the work of North American visual artist Suzanne Bocanegra. I was especially intrigued by her work: All the Petals from Jan Brueghel the Elder's Sense of Smell, 1618, 2002. As its title indicates, this work uses Jan Brueghel's The Elder's Sense of Smell as its source."



Jan Brueghel, The Elder's Sense of Smell, 1618

In his painting, Brueghel presents us with a garden where a female figure is inhaling the fragrance of a large bouquet of flowers. Bocanegra captures the essence of the flowers through a series of painted petals; the number matching the number of visible petals on the Brueghel painting. Each one of the petals is tied with a black ribbon on white wall forming a floral map, with the final effect a series of textures of great expressive and visual force.



*Suzanne Bocanegra, All the Petals from Jan Brueghel the Elder's Sense of Smell, 1618, 2002
(Gouache, beeswax, paper, fabric, and pins)*

The interesting part of this work is the way in which an artist creates her work from the appropriation, interpretation or fragmentation of images of another artist to build new units, creating new languages in quite different environments.

Undertaking the writing of a piece to celebrate Mozart's 250th anniversary called for some decisions to be made, one of them whether or not to incorporate fragments of the Mozart pieces. But what was important was to have thoughts about the intersection points of his music with mine. That was the reason I decided to write my piece in a format very similar to a rondo, in which the musical language could flow with lightness and absolute freedom. So I used some fragments of the Mozart String Quartet No. 21 in D Major K. 575; these fragments link the sections, which are my memory, time and personal musical history.

The process used by Bocanegra inspired me and I used it like a platform for the reinterpretation and redevelopment of another artist's material, but it gains its own life in my music without losing its essence. The main aspect is not the musical origin in itself, but how the new composition incorporates, develops and acquires new meanings and aesthetic values."

The piece begins with a distant, quiet violin line, as though the listener is in a slow-moving vehicle approaching the scene, before erupting with brash, almost rude interjections and increasingly energetic exchanges. Several times, a groove attempts to establish itself, only to be usurped by rhythmic departures in other voices, resulting in what feels like overlapping conversations. It ends as each instrument establishes a rhythm and then settles into stasis, leaving the violin increasingly isolated until all four voices fade away.

Ortiz captures the life, playful energy, and movement of Mozart's work, incorporating fragments and formal similarities, while infusing it with a new flavor and energy from the rhythms and dissonances of her own Mexican and Afro-Cuban folk influences. The contrast of the rustic, seemingly unrefined passages with the source material of Mozart, all within the greater context of a classical concert performance, lends a new sense of meaning to the musical language and the environment. As in Bocanegra's work, Ortiz removes the recognizable elements of Mozart from their original environment, carefully deconstructing them and placing them somewhere completely different. By changing the context in which we hear these musical parts, she changes their meaning and ultimately creates something entirely new.

String Quartet No. 3 (Kevin Lau, b. 1982)

Kevin Lau is a Canadian composer, born in Hong Kong, who frequently writes interdisciplinary and cross-genre works. His *Quartet No. 3* is an ecstatic whirlwind of musical tastes, and is ultimately as much fun for the performers as it is for the audience.

Lau writes: *"My Third String Quartet represents a broad attempt to weave some of my cherished musical influences into a coherent whole. In an effort to explore the roots of my musical identity, I have tried to find common ground among a diverse array of perspectives. The first movement, "Gliding," follows an arch-like structure in which a lyrical melody, part Far East folk song and part Renaissance chorale, bookends a middle section inspired by the driving rhythms of progressive heavy metal. These disparate elements are united by an ever-shifting ground of odd meters; and with it, a sense of free-flowing spontaneity and abandon.*

The second movement, "Winds of Change," is based on an earlier work of mine that I have adapted many times for different ensembles. In this version, the theme -- a buoyant, minor-key dance in 6/8 -- competes with wry quotations from Christian Petzold's famous Minuet in G against the backdrop of an aggressive drone suggestive of world-music-inflected electronica. At times these references collide uneasily, threatening to blow apart the entire discourse; ultimately, however, the movement is a celebration of the joyous urgency which lies beneath the surface of all music-making.

Skratch Bastid's remix, Skrtch my Bach, playfully riffs on the Minuet quotation, both in spirit and title (as the tune is often misattributed to Bach.) My response -- Second Wind -- brings the world of the DJ and the quartet into intimate proximity. The tension inherent in the dialogue between both traditions is dramatized by a fiery duel between the first violinist and her sampled counterpart."

The piece is full of cheeky inside references, and gives us a tasting menu of different soundscapes and musical techniques. Lau introduces a strong undercurrent of prog rock, metal, and jazz to the lighter, more agile maneuvers of the string quartet, facilitating a mischievous and sometimes volatile conversation between musical traditions.

Carrot Revolution (Gabriella Smith, b. 1991)

On her piece, *Carrot Revolution*, American composer Gabriella Smith writes:

"I wrote Carrot Revolution in 2015 for my friends the Aizuri Quartet. It was commissioned by the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia for their exhibition The Order of Things, in which they commissioned three visual artists and myself to respond to Dr. Barnes' distinctive "ensembles," the unique ways in which he arranged his acquired paintings along with metal objects, furniture, and pottery, juxtaposing them in ways that bring out their similarities and differences in shape, color, and texture. While walking around the Barnes, looking for inspiration for this string quartet, I suddenly remembered a Cézanne quote I'd heard years ago (though which I

later learned was misattributed to him): “The day will come when a single, freshly observed carrot will start a revolution.” And I knew immediately that my piece would be called *Carrot Revolution*. I envisioned the piece as a celebration of that spirit of fresh observation and of new ways of looking at old things, such as the string quartet – a 250-year-old genre – as well as some of my even older musical influences (Bach, Perotin, Gregorian chant, Georgian folk songs, and Celtic fiddle tunes). The piece is a patchwork of my wildly contrasting influences and full of weird, unexpected juxtapositions and intersecting planes of sound, inspired by the way Barnes’ ensembles show old works in new contexts and draw connections between things we don’t think of as being related.”

We close out our program with yet another patchwork masterpiece, combining musical traditions, quotations, noises, and rhythms in an unexpected and delightful way. It opens with a nearly pitchless, but carefully choreographed rhythmic ensemble, then fracturing off into soundscapes of improv and jazz. She tosses in quotes from Perotin and The Who, gradually intensifying the ensemble to a fever pitch, but allows a moment to meditate, breathe, and center ourselves, before bringing us all back to where we began.

The Musicians



Violinist Carmen Abelson (she/her/hers) works throughout the Chicagoland and Midwest areas as an orchestral, chamber, and solo performer and music educator. Currently assistant principal 2nd violin of the West Michigan Symphony and a tenured member of the Illinois Philharmonic and Elgin Symphony orchestras, Abelson recently won a position with the Chicago Sinfonietta.

As well, she teaches violin through the People's Music School SLAM program, at Glenbard East high school, and maintains a private studio.

Abelson holds degrees from Rice, Sam Houston State, and DePaul Universities where she pursued interests in music history, period performance, and pedagogy in addition to violin playing. Having performed chamber music throughout Chicago as a Civic Fellow during her three-year stint with the Civic Orchestra of Chicago, Abelson is a current member of Varo String Quartet. Outside the world of classical music, she performs in the family band "Susan and Sons" with her mother and sister and with the Bristol Busk 'n' Frolic at the Bristol Renaissance Fair.



Dylan Feldpausch is a violinist and composer from Austin, Texas with degrees in violin performance from Rice University and Arizona State University. They were a Chicago Civic Orchestra Fellow from 2021 to 2023, and they are currently the Program Manager and Head Teaching Artist for Apollo's Fire Baroque Orchestra's Side-by-Side strings program in Matteson, Illinois. Whether they're teaching or performing, Dylan seeks to adapt musical convention to best serve whichever audience or community they're bringing their experience to. They are a founding member of Hot Second, a genre-bending violin and percussion duo based in Chicago, and are a core member of Ensemble Mycelium.



Rebecca Miller is a violist with extensive experience across a variety of genres, both onstage and in the pit. She performs with a number of orchestras throughout the greater Midwest, including Northwest Indiana Symphony, Des Moines Metro Opera Orchestra, Orchestra Iowa, Camerata Chicago, Elgin Symphony, and Chicago Sinfonietta. Rebecca has been a top prizewinner at Glenn Gould School Chamber Music Competition with the Highwood Quartet.

An enthusiastic advocate for contemporary music, she was part of a 2024 performance of Steven Takasugi's Sideshow, and has premiered works by many young composers, most recently alongside cellist Anssi Karttunen, violist Steven Dann, and composer Magnus Lindberg as part of Creative Dialogue France. She has taken part in Chicago's NUNC Festival,

Toronto's 21C Festival, and enjoyed multiple seasons with the NEXT Festival of Emerging Artists. Rebecca holds degrees from Northwestern University's Bienen School of Music, the Glenn Gould School, and the Boston Conservatory.



Cellist and educator J Holzen is in constant pursuit of musical collaborations of all kinds, including contemporary chamber music, pop and jazz shows, and working with students to achieve their artistic goals. Their enthusiasm and sincerity as an artist and performer encourages audience members and students alike to join J on their artistic journey or begin their own. J is a current Fellow with the Civic Orchestra of Chicago, and a member of Orchestra Iowa and the Sioux City Symphony. Engagements as an educator include serving as a Teaching Associate in Music at Lake Forest College, teaching early childhood music classes through outreach teaching programs in the Chicago Public Schools, and maintaining a private cello studio. J grew up in a musical family in St. Louis, Missouri, and holds a Master of Music in Cello Performance from DePaul University and a Bachelor of Music in Cello Performance from Oberlin Conservatory. Their primary teachers include Brant Taylor, Darrett Adkins, and Ken Kulosa.