

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 8 July 2023
11.30am

The World in America

Brooklyn Rider

Johnny Gandelsman violin
Colin Jacobsen violin
Nicholas Cords viola
Michael Nicolas cello

Kinan Azmeh (b.1976)

Dabke on Martense Street (2020)

Gabriela Lena Frank (b.1972)

Kanto Kechua No. 2 (2018)

Reena Esmail (b.1983)

Zeher (2019)

Evan Ziporyn (b.1959)

Garden from *Qi* (2014)

Kyle Sanna (b.1975)

Sequence for Minor White (2012)

*I. Ice at Water's Edge • II. Frost •
III. Mercury Mind Messenger • IV. X •
V. When there is no further down to go, the bottom
drops out on up • VI. Movement Study •
VII. Walking on Water • VIII. Tetons, Wyoming*

Colin Jacobsen (b.1978)

Mirror for a Prince (2015)

Busalik • Golestan • A Walking Fire

CLASSIC *fm*

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Kinan Azmeh Dabke on Martense Street

This piece belongs to a series of compositions I have been working on in which I try to articulate my connection to spaces. Some of these pieces attempt at documenting personal experience in a given location, some are inspired by the look and the sound of a city, and some (like this piece here) are inspired by fictional characters at imaginary parties, a sort of gathering that I hope will take place sometime in the near future. Martense Street is a quiet street in Brooklyn where my home-base is. During the months of March and April 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic diminished my physical surrounding to just this one street and little beyond that. The shrinking of the real world outside brought a pleasant surprise: an expansion in my imaginary world which had to grow exponentially to compensate. This piece is inspired by an imaginary Dabke dance (a circular dance common in my other home: Syria) on Martense Street, a fictional party of strangers and neighbors who are willing to hold hands again and dance. Thank you Brooklyn Rider for your friendship, dedication and trust.

© Kinan Azmeh

Gabriela Lena Frank Kanto Kechua #2

In my early 30s, after receiving a devastating diagnosis of a life-threatening autoimmune disease, I paradoxically entered the most uniquely creative period of my life. Looking back, I believe I might have been grasping at what was most life-affirming to me, terrified of impending surgeries, radiation, drugs and pain. Over several months, I composed hours of chamber music, wrote bilingual poetry and a fantasy novel of time-travel back to my ancestral homeland of pre-Conquest Perú, knitted and sewed, mastered the tarot and intricate origami, dove into the alchemy of homemade soaps and face creams, interned in bee-keeping, cultivated sourdoughs and learned to make cheese.

This was quite the prelude, bright and desperate both, to several years of treatment when most of my creative endeavors were muted. Now, a number of years later, scarred but healthy and working actively as a composer, I still carry around melodies born from that time; and in 2017, fashioned a quartet from this oddly luminescent wellspring into the first movement of *Walkabout: Concerto for Orchestra*, somewhat simplified for its symphonic weight. When I was approached by the brilliant string quartet Brooklyn Rider for a work on the theme of healing, I found my chance to hear these ideas for the nimbler string quartet, my original conception. The result is *Kanto Kechua No. 2* ('Quechua Song', Quechua being the dominant language of post-Inca Perú) now with all of its ornamental intricacies and string-crossing whirls

under an aching high if brief violin line. Throughout, motifs from native Andean folk music proliferate.

I'm exceedingly grateful to be able to, at long last, bring this music to life as I step now in wellness and creative abundance.

© Gabriela Lena Frank

Reena Esmail Zeher (Poison)

In September 2018, I developed an infection in my throat that wouldn't subside. For two weeks, it became increasingly difficult to swallow, to breathe and especially to speak. During this time of intense, painful silence, I thought about what this loss of voice represented for me. Of how many times in my life I had been rendered voiceless - either by others or by my own doing. Healing, in this case, was not about enduring the pain, but about releasing the poison I have always swallowed - that didn't belong to me. It was only when I felt myself begin to release that poisonous energy that I felt the physical infection begin to subside.

This piece was conceived during those dark weeks, and is simply about that release. It uses two incredibly beautiful Hindustani raags: the dark and mysterious Todi and the mournful Bhipalās. While working on this piece, I was also working on a setting of a beautiful Hafez poem which ends 'When the violin can forgive / every hurt caused by others / the heart starts singing.' That is very much the spirit of this piece, too.

© Reena Esmail

Evan Ziporyn Garden from *Qi*

The string quartet always makes me think in elemental terms - perhaps the combination of the repertoire (Bartók and Beethoven, tough acts to follow), the instruments themselves, and the intense intimacy with which groups like Brooklyn Rider work together. So while many of my pieces have programmatic titles and/or narrative content, my string quartets tend to focus on forces of nature: water (*Eel Bone*), breath (*Breathing Space*), and now *Qi*, the traditional Chinese character for life force, a concept as ubiquitous and difficult to precisely define as analogous principles in all cultures and religions. Gaining awareness of and control over *qi* is a central, lifelong pursuit in many meditative and martial practices, including tai chi and qi gong. In my own experience, it seems that even in everyday life there are certain heightened states in which all of us become aware of *qi* flow - dreams of flying, repose with nature, and those rare moments in which intense engagement with something or someone allows us to briefly 'break on through to the other side.'

© Evan Ziporyn

Kyle Sanna Sequence for Minor White

Minor White (1908-1976) was one of the most influential American photographers of the mid-20th Century. He broadened the expression of the medium and was an important teacher, incorporating elements of Eastern philosophy into both his teaching and his creative process. He was also a mentor to my father, photographer Anthony Sanna, who gave me Minor White's first book, *Mirrors, Messages, Manifestations* (1969). I have been struck by the depth and originality in these photographs, and by White's ability to capture a sense of spirit and the spiritual in his work, no matter what the subject.

Important to White was the arrangement of individual photographs into sequences. He called these sequences 'little dramas of dreams with a memory', and writes that 'to engage a sequence we keep in mind the photographs on either side of the one in our eye.' In *Sequence for Minor White*, I wanted to translate this visual multiplicity into aural terms. My own sequence is comprised of several movements that each begin and end with a repeated section (or fermata) played by a solo instrument, or in some cases, two instruments. This allows for a deliberate overlapping of the movements and also for a mobile form.

Certain movements were inspired by specific photographs, and others were inspired by Minor White's writing on the creative process or by his poetry. Part of the magic of photography is to create a sense of movement in a still image. Much of this music has the opposite aim: to suggest stasis within the passing of time.

© Kyle Sanna

Colin Jacobsen Mirror for a Prince

I have had a love affair with Persian classical and folk music ever since meeting kamancheh virtuoso and composer Kayhan Kalhor in the summer of 2000 at Tanglewood during The Silkroad Ensemble's first workshop. There's something in this music that seems to speak to an epic sense of time and history, but is always grounded in an intensely personal and poetic state of mind. *Mirror for a Prince* is a suite of

three pieces adapted for quartet but originally concocted for a prince of a person and cellist, Yo-Yo Ma, and his cello colleagues, Giovanni Sollima, Mike Block and Monika Leskovar. (Incidentally, 'mirrors for princes' were conduct manuals created for rulers that constructed models of kings to emulate or avoid. Machiavelli wrote perhaps the most famous western version, *Il Principe...*)

The first two pieces in the suite are from a collection of 16th- and 17th-century music from the Ottoman court, which apparently contained quite a number of Persian musicians, as, according to Kayhan and some other authorities, the renown of Persian musicians had spread to Istanbul. In fact, the word *Ajam* (an Arabic/Turkish scale whose western equivalent is Major and Persian is *Rast Panjgah*) was used in Ottoman music culture to describe not just the scale, but referred to 'Old Iran' and its musicians. Kayhan shared with me the melodic skeletons for these pieces, which were reconstructed (much as someone like Jordi Savall will do with old European music) by an Iranian musician and scholar named Arash Mohafez. So, in a certain sense, there's a big game of telephone over the centuries going on here, as Mohafez himself says that his aim wasn't purely to attempt playing these melodies as they were done in the Ottoman/Safavid era, but to bring them to life using his own taste and modern Persian music values. In turn, in making a string quartet out of them, I had to use the resonance and qualities of that rich sonority to make choices about how these melodies could sound in yet another context.

One interesting feature is that they are often in lengthy rhythmic cycles (in the case of *Busalik*, 48 beats). This is because they evolved out of sophisticated poetic forms, and it's beautiful to hear how this rhyming scheme plays itself out melodically and rhythmically. I wrote *A Walking Fire* (the third piece in the suite) originally as part of my *3 Miniatures for String Quartet*. Its title comes from a line of poetry by the 13th-century Sufi mystic Rumi, in which he is praising his friend and mentor Shams-i Tabrizi, saying that he is a living embodiment of love, literally 'a walking fire'.

© Colin Jacobsen