

About the Music.

Is music conceived for aloneness different than that intended for public performance?

Music for Solitude was born out of the extended lockdowns and tumult of 2020 and 2021. These periods of isolation and upheaval led me to rediscover my deeply personal relationship with playing music, detached from performance. Music in solitude became a form of therapy, bolstering me against the outside world. It freed me to consider a piece less from an audience's perspective and more from that of a person alone with their instrument. My focus became the delight of making the violin ring in a rich acoustic space. I hoped that any eventual performance would seem an act of witnessing an artist in a personal moment and not a public declaration.

As the piece neared completion, I realized it was strongly rooted in an earlier large-scale series I had been unable to finish to my satisfaction. In 2014, I had embarked on a field recording project at the Channel Islands in Southern California. The centerpiece was Painted Cave, one of the largest sea caves in the world. Its unique acoustics and sounds contribute to a sacred atmosphere and, at the time, proved too daunting for my own music. Instead I recorded a violinist playing excerpts of Bach's cello suites there.

Music for Solitude is the piece I was unable to write then, and as such, completes the series. I'm indebted to my close friend Johnny Gandelsman

for commissioning the work and allowing me to finish this journey.

— **Justin Messina**
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Music for Solitude was generously commissioned by Linda Burrows.

Sinekemān, commissioned and written for violinist Johnny Gandelsman, is a study on solitude. I 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, it creates 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**
layalechaker.com

Sinekeman was generously commissioned by the Portland Chamber Music Festival (Maine).

For more information on **Tyshawn Sorey**, visit tyshawnsorey.com.

Capriccio for Violin Alone was generously commissioned by Penn Live Arts and Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts.

In ***a current took her away***, the “her” is a plankter (singular for plankton). Plankton are micro-organisms 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**
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A current took her away was generously commissioned by the Portland Chamber Music Festival.

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. In ***Sahra be Wyckoff***, *sahra* is the Arabic word for party, and Wyckoff is a street in Brooklyn where a 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 were present at a given moment. Violinists, clarinetists, cellists, singers, rappers, pianists, dancers, visual artists, filmmakers, 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, the 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 **فاو اب اة** (“A party at Wyckoff for all”).

— **Kinan Azmeh**
kinanazmeh.com

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

Pallavi, A 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 now. 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. I studied the Odissi style of Classical Indian dance for twenty years under Guru Ranjanaa

Devi. Pallavis are abstract pieces that 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 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. I've also 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. Furthermore, the violin occasionally imitates the timbre of the buzzing cassette tapes we practice dance to, recordings made in India during the 1980s by friends of my dance Guru. 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.

— **Akshaya Avril Tucker**
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Pallavi, A Meditation On Care was generously commissioned by the Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music (Boonville, CA).

Reflections examines our emotions and reactions to the multifaceted, chaotic introduction of the new decade from 2020 onward. It begins with a 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. Constant usage of fourths creates a contemplative and pensive tone, while also displaying tonal ambiguity and 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, a flashback begins, conveying our anticipation, excitement, and curiosity for what the future might hold in this new decade. However, the fourths soon shift to tritones, our anticipation woefully misled. Tension arises like the tension within our communities, accumulating until its energy snaps our state of sanity, as the tonal center of the music becomes unintelligible; sixteenth notes drive rampantly to describe the boundless commotion, and double stops show our multilayered circumstances.

In the third section, we slightly ease our hyperventilations and reflect upon what has happened. Musical ideas are repeated, though altered, as we analyze our predicaments and circumstances through a mournful perspective. The fourth section,

a recapitulation of the beginning, signals the end to this flashback. Subtle differences allude to details previously overlooked, 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; our story isn't finished yet. We are still being affected by these events, but we will take steps to resolve them.

— **Èbùn Oguntola**
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Reflections was generously commissioned by Chamber Music Pittsburgh.

Rhapsody was commissioned for violinist Johnny Gandelsman. 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. But the piece ends with a sort of resolve that is neither sad nor without hope.

— **Tomeka Reid**
tomekareid.com

Rhapsody was generously and jointly commissioned by the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society and the Portland Chamber Music Festival in partnership with the Maine College of Art.

Tyshawn Sorey's *For Courtney Bryan* was generously commissioned by the 2021 Vail Dance Festival; Damian Woetzel, Artistic Director.

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**
christinacourtin.com

Stroon was generously commissioned by the 2021 Vail Dance Festival; Damian Woetzel, Artistic Director.

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 US 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 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), but allows the performer to contextualize the self in all that has been happening and beyond, as cadenzas truly are about the individual. I have provided the performer with multiple endings, but regardless of which the performer chooses, the ending 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**
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Steeped was generously and jointly commissioned by the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society and Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music (Boonville, CA).

Because I began my fiddling journey as an apprentice to a dance musician, and pretty late in life, as violinists go, 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 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**
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New to the Session was generously commissioned by the 2021 Vail Dance Festival; Damian Woetzel, Artistic Director.