The 2016/2017 season is my final one as director of the Barbary Coast Jazz Ensemble. This is my 40th year—a nice round number. It’s only right to bring back four distinguished guest artists—two in fall, two in winter—whose music and lives have meant a lot to me, the students in the Coast and our audiences.

Our concert October 22 features flutist Nicole Mitchell and multi-instrumentalist Peter Apfelbaum: master musicians, composers, improvisers and visionary leaders, creating music from many sources.

Nicole Mitchell’s music celebrates African American culture while integrating elements of jazz, pop, gospel, experimentalism and African drumming. Jazz legend Anthony Braxton calls Nicole “the greatest flute player I have ever heard, bar none. State of the state of the state.” Downbeat’s International Critics Poll agrees, selecting Nicole as “Rising Star Flutist” 2005-2010, then winner in the prestigious “Flute” category, 2010-2016. Nicole also won “Top Flutist of the Year” in the Jazz Journalists Association’s Jazz Awards 2010-2016. She was the first woman president of Chicago’s legendary Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM). In 2006, Nicole was named “Chicagoan of the Year” for her impact within the city’s music and arts education communities by the Chicago Tribune.

For my money, Nicole is the most extraordinary instrumentalist I’ve ever heard. For example, she can sing along with herself on flute, saxophone, piano, melodica, percussion, African flutes, etc.—his music, like Nicole’s, is about something. Peter’s compositions are evocative, intuitive, organic, imaginative, with titles like Shotgun Bouquet, Walk to the Mountain (And Tell the Story of Love’s Thunderclapping Eyes), I’ll Look for You, Hanging Gardens and The Hard Way.

“Music is a means of spiritual transformation. Both Peter and Nicole’s music asks us to see the world differently, to move us toward different, better realities.”

Nicole’s music has strong social and ethical components. Her music is “about” something, often “other worlds.” Kalamu ya Salaam’s poem about Nicole begins, “I never dreamed of being a part of what already was; I dreamed of other worlds.” When asked to describe her artistic vision, she responded: “My mother loved to paint and write creatively. She was constantly expressing ideas of other worlds through her art.”

“I love to improvise, because improvisation allows you not to be focused on the smallness of who you are and your reality, but to actually experience the greatness of possibility and surprise and spontaneity. With composing there’s the idea of creating music that can be transformative and inspirational. I draw my inspiration from visionary art, especially African American artists or Black artists whose work is inspired by history and reality.”

Nicole Mitchell’s music also includes collaborations with jazz artists such as saxophonist Mal Waldron, the late trumpeter Miles Davis, and the legendary John Coltrane. Her work often incorporates elements of jazz, pop, gospel, reggae, blues, Latin, African, jazz, funk, Middle Eastern and Indian bands and, for as long as I can remember, I’ve been fascinated by how sounds can be fitted together.”

Peter Apfelbaum

“Music is a means of spiritual transformation. Both Peter and Nicole’s music asks us to see the world differently, to move us toward different, better realities.”

Please join us on October 22 in Spaulding for a night of memorable music and alternative realities. Two visionary artists, performing music from the heart, with the help of the 24 students in the Barbary Coast and my good friend, percussionist William Rodriguez.

Don Glasgo


“A lot of people ask me about my use of the voice in my playing. I sing into the flute, I sing with the flute, I sing and then I just play the flute…. Part of that comes from the desire to leave evidence that a woman was here.” Nicole Mitchell