HANOVER, NH—Before the arrival of Europeans, the land on which Dartmouth College stands was a virgin forest of majestic white pine trees. Now only remnants of that forest remain, in a riverside strip of land north of campus called Pine Park.

Those lost trees’ presence—their reality as sensate individuals and as a linked community—will be evoked in Understory, an immersive, interactive work composed by adventurous young composer Carla Kihlstedt and performed by the Brooklyn Youth Chorus. The work premieres on Tuesday, April 16, 5:30 pm, in the Atrium of the Hood Museum of Art. The performance is free and unticketed.

An internationally recognized violinist, singer, improvisor and composer, Kihlstedt is the Hop’s fourth STEM Arts composer, following composers who were in residence in the Dartmouth Departments of Biology and Mathematics and the Thayer School of Engineering. Over the past year, Kihlstedt met with students and faculty in the Environmental Studies Program, developing ideas that then she shaped into Understory. Kihlstedt recently completed a song cycle about challenges to the ocean due to climate change, overfishing, and pollution; the project was guided by input from scientists from Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution.

Made up of about 50 young people between the ages of 10 and 14, the Brooklyn Youth Chorus is “a polished ensemble of miniature professionals” (The New York Times) that fluently delivers authentic performances across stylistic languages, including more than 120 original works and world premieres by contemporary composers. The chorus has performed or recorded with major orchestras in the US and abroad and artists ranging from Arcade Fire to Sir Elton John to Beyoncé and Jay-Z.

In Understory, chorus members will begin the performance scattered around the space, intermingling with the audience before finding their places (flash-mob style) to begin the show. Performing a cappella and without a conductor, the kids will come together in groups of threes throughout the Atrium, with each trio representing a tree. The audience will be encouraged to walk through this “forest” to hear from the individual “trees” while also perceiving the “forest” as a community. Giving the sense of a forest vibrating with energy and sensation, the performers combine make wordless sounds, speak short spoken phrases and sing lyrics, some derived from the poetry by father and son Abenaki poets Joseph and Jesse Bruchac.

Understory relates to numerous ongoing themes in Hop programming. For one, it continues the STEMArts series which, since 2013-14, has paired emerging young composers with scholars in the “STEM” disciplines
(science, technology, engineering and mathematics) to create new musical works that relate to STEM concepts. The project also acknowledges that Dartmouth stands on Native land and furthers the Hop’s interest in programming work that foregrounds Native American experiences and history. In addition, the project aligns with a Dartmouth-wide interest in what’s being called the “environmental humanities”—the idea that the arts and humanities are as essential as science and technology in responding to the challenges like climate change.

Environmental Studies faculty who helped guide Understory through conversations with Kihlstedt include: Environmental Studies Professor Andy Friedland, on the topic of forest life/evolution as waves of energy; writer and Environmental Studies Lecturer Terry Osborne, on the importance of engaging young people in environmental ideas; and Associate Professor of Environmental Studies and Native American Studies Nick Reo, whose scholarship blends ecological, anthropological and Indigenous methodologies.

MORE ABOUT...

Carla Kihlstedt is a composer, songwriter, improviser, singer and violinist. She is veteran of folk/pop, contemporary/classical, and improvised/experimental music. She is a founding member of the bands Sleepytime Gorilla Museum, Tin Hat, Rabbit Rabbit Radio, The Book of Knots, Minamo and 2 Foot Yard. She enjoys writing large-scale collaborative song cycles that pull from her various musical influences and explore a single idea from many angles. Her most recent compositions, including Black Inscription (written with Jeremy Flower and Matthias Bossi) and Herring Run, investigate our connection to the natural world. Kihlstedt has also recorded and performed with many of her favorite musicians, including Fred Frith, Tom Waits, Ben Goldberg, Lisa Bielawa, and Colin Jacobsen. Though the cornerstone of her musical vocabulary comes from her classical training as a violinist, Kihlstedt's world now comfortably reaches far beyond the concert hall, as she has spent much of the last dozen years traveling in the U.S. and abroad with her many bands, playing in concert halls, rock clubs, and theaters, for rock, classical, and experimental audiences. “Violinist, vocalist, and composer Carla Kihlstedt has traversed styles and defied hierarchies for her entire career.” —Chicago Reader

Kihlstedt is on the faculty of the Contemporary Improvisation Department of the New England Conservatory, and of the MFA composition program of the Vermont College of Fine Arts.

The Brooklyn Youth Chorus is a Grammy Award-winning collective of young voices led by visionary Founder & Artistic Director Dianne Berkun Menaker. The chorus has performed or recorded with major orchestras and artists such as New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, Barbra Streisand, Arcade Fire, Sir Elton John, The National and Grizzly Bear. Recordings of the chorus have been featured in major motion pictures, commercials, and live events, including a work by Radiohead’s Thom Yorke for rag & bone’s Spring 2016 collection as well as Beyoncé and Jay-Z’s OTR II World Tour. As a bold commissioner and producer of new music, the chorus has introduced into the repertoire more than 120 original works and world premieres by contemporary composers, including collaborations with Pulitzer Prize-winner Caroline Shaw, Blues and R&B powerhouse Toshi Reagon, iconic British DJ Bishi, The National’s Bryce Dessner, and ubiquitous indie-classical superstar Nico Muhly.

Tree communication and cognition as an area of study has come into the popular spotlight in recent years. Some landmark books in its widespread recognition include the 2016 international bestseller The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate, by Peter Wohlleben and the 2018 New York Times bestseller novel The Overstory, by Richard Powers.

The Hopkins Center for the Arts
Founded in 1962, “the Hop” is a multi-disciplinary academic, visual and performing arts center dedicated to uncovering insights, igniting passions, and nurturing talents to help Dartmouth and the surrounding Upper
Valley community engage imaginatively and contribute creatively to our world. Each year the Hop presents more than 300 live events and films by visiting artists as well as Dartmouth students and the Dartmouth community, and reaches more than 22,000 Upper Valley residents and students with outreach and arts education programs. After a celebratory 50th-anniversary season in 2012-13, the Hop enters its second half-century with renewed passion for mentoring young artists, supporting the development of new work, and providing a laboratory for participation and experimentation in the arts.

**CALENDAR LISTING**

*Understory, a work by Carla Kihlstedt, performed by the Brooklyn Youth Chorus*

The versatile and polished Brooklyn Youth Chorus gives voice to the forests that once stood on and around the Dartmouth campus in this work created in collaboration with Dartmouth’s Environmental Studies and Native American Studies programs. An internationally recognized violinist, singer, improvisor and composer whose collaborators have included Tom Waits, Fred Frith, Colin Jacobsen and the International Contemporary Ensemble, Kihlstedt is the Hop’s fourth STEM Arts composer, following composers who were in residence in the Departments of Biology and Mathematics and the Thayer School of Engineering. This performance is the work’s world premiere.

Tuesday, April 16, 2019, 5:30 pm
Russo Atrium, Hood Museum of Art
Free