

Hopkins Center for the Arts

at Dartmouth

presents

This is America: Part III

Johnny Gandelsman, violin

Tuesday, April 2, 7:30 pm

The Church of Christ at Dartmouth College • 2024

Funded in part by the Marion and Frederick B. Whittemore '53 T'54 Distinguished Artists Series Fund and the Roesch Family Fund.

From Johnny Gandelsman

To say that 2020 was a difficult year for the United States would be an understatement. COVID-19 took the lives of 385,000 people. Racism and police brutality took the lives of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, igniting nationwide and eventually worldwide protests. In California, the 4.2 million acres burned in 2020 were the most in a single year since records were kept, and more than the previous three years combined. Vicious election cycle rhetoric was boiling over, and conversations dominating cable news focused on what this country was, is or should be. Unemployment skyrocketed. People were isolated, sick, scared and exhausted.

My family and I had the opportunity to spend the first six months of the pandemic in the idyllic White Mountains region of New Hampshire. Although we were safe, I missed our home in New York and felt disconnected from our Brooklyn community. It was strange to sit on the sidelines and be an observer as our world was falling apart.

In thinking about ways one person could make a small difference, it occurred to me that in many ways amplifying voices of others, whether it's those of centuries past, or ones of today, is an essential part of being a classical musician.

I decided to commission new works for violin from American and US-based composers, asking each one to reflect in some way on the time we were all living through. Some, like Kinan Azmeh, Layale Chaker and Christina Courtin, have been dear friends for decades; others like Maya Miro Johnson, Eburn Oguntola, and Anjna Swaminathan, were new connections; all were musicians whose artistry I respected and admired.

I reached out to presenters across the country, looking for commissioning partners. One of the very first presenters who came on board was Dartmouth's Hopkins Center, commissioning a new work from

Kojiro Umezaki, an alum of Dartmouth College, and another dear friend. Having the trust of one of the country's most respected presenting organizations gave me the needed push to pursue the idea further. As more parties signed on, the project grew—22 new works were funded, written and recorded. Rising to the surface were themes like loss and uncertainty, but also joy, friendship, gratitude and love.

Presenting *This Is America* in its entirety at the Hop over the course of this season for a live audience (something that was so abruptly taken away from us during the pandemic) has been a wonderfully fulfilling and eye/ear-opening experience. Four years have passed, yet the works which encapsulated moments of 2020 are still relevant today. Being together in a room, listening to the composers' own thoughts, feelings and journeys, created a therapeutic place for individual reflection in a collective space, filled with only sound. Adding this to the very long list of surprises from this project.

I'm deeply grateful to Mary Lou Aleskie and Karen Henderson for their support in bringing this project to life, as well as for expanding the collection further by commissioning new works from Gonzalo Grau, Gabriel Kahane and Carla Kihlstedt, which are all receiving their world premiere performances during the 2023–2024 season.

Over the course of developing this project, I've come to think of it as an anthology, a snapshot in time, documenting a tiny slice of the creative thought and output in this country. I invite you to stop listening to pundits, extend your ears, open up your imagination, and trust the music to guide you into a challenging, complicated and thrilling sound world—*This Is America*.

Johnny Gandelsman

Program

Approximate duration: 110 minutes

<i>Stroon</i>	Christina Courtin
<i>withdraw</i>	Aeryn Santillan
<i>Surrender to the Adventure</i>	Anjna Swaminathan
<i>Stones</i>	Conrad Tao
<i>A City Upon a Hill?</i>	Rhea Fowler & Micaela Tobin
<i>Dólii</i>	Bojan Louis
<i>Body Language (Three Folk Dances for Solo Violin)</i>	Gabriel Kahane

A Hopkins Center and Vail Dance Festival 2023 Co-Commission and World Premiere

Order of program subject to change

Program Notes

Stroon

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 16th 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.

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

Christina Courtin

Program Notes *continued*

withdraw

withdraw verb

transitive verb

1 a: to take back or away: REMOVE

b: to remove from use or cultivation

c: to remove (money) from a place of deposit

d: to turn away (something, such as one's eyes) from an object of attention

e: to draw (something, such as a curtain) back or aside

2 a: to remove from consideration or set outside a group

b (1): TAKE BACK, RETRACT

(2): to recall or remove (a motion) under parliamentary procedure

intransitive verb

1 a: to move back or away: RETIRE

b: to draw back from a battlefield: RETREAT

2 a: to remove oneself from participation

b: to become socially or emotionally detached

3: to recall a motion under parliamentary procedure

withdraw is a work reflecting on the state of society in 2020 through an intimate lens. Taking to heart the statement “the personal is political,” I reflected on my own journal entries, past conversations with close family and friends, and witnessing their struggles through the past year. The various definitions of “withdraw” capture many of these experiences. There have been too many lows to count this year but, also highs, and even moments of calm and clarity. A lot of what is important has been put in focus through the chaos around it and I have attempted to capture all those feelings into the following piece. aerynsantillan.com

withdraw was generously commissioned by the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts (Beverly Hills, California).

Aeryn Santillan

Surrender to the Adventure

When Johnny Gandelsman asked me to create a piece for *This is America*, I was torn. After creating several projects centering on oppression and attempting to foster hope while sharing the stories of marginalized people, I was ready to write about something joyful and pure: love. And more specifically, my experience of love with my beautiful fiancée Shannon. As much as I'd liked it to be pure and unadulterated, our inspiring, abundant, “restoring faith in humanity” love does not exist in a vacuum. It coexists with and against the anguish of being intersectional beings in America, in a country that values profit over humanity. Our Black, Brown, immigrant, neurodivergent, mentally ill, disabled, queer, trans, femme love cannot be pure, for its mere existence is a constant revolution against the circumstances in which it was planted.

Surrender to the Adventure is the inscription on Shannon's engagement ring. We set it as an intention each day to *Surrender to the Adventure* that is our love, the adventure that is this country, the adventure that is navigating the joys and pains of being in love in America. Ours is a dynamic existence. It is a constant dance, moving fluidly from heartache to concern, to abundance, to fear, to scarcity, to radical self-love, to grief, to anger, to complacency, to hope and every minute and massive feeling in between. I invite you to dance with us as Johnny does, improvising and responding in this moment to the coexistence of our love and whatever America is right now. For some, this may feel like home, for others, this may feel uncomfortable. Whatever comes up for you, *Surrender to the Adventure*.

Surrender to the Adventure was generously commissioned by Washington Performing Arts (Washington, DC).

Anjna Swaminathan

Stones

In 2020, on most days, I took a walk north along the Hudson River. About two-thirds of the way up is a bank of mysterious stones. Stones stacked on top of each other, forming elegant, gravity-defying piles. I'll never forget the first time I encountered these stones, on my first walk up the river. The feeling of another person, the feeling of another, was very evident. When I first came across these stones, I wasn't sure if this was the effort of many people, or just one, but regardless—the feeling of somebody's hands, someone desiring to express, someone desiring to leave a trace of themselves—that was so palpable. So palpable, and so moving, especially at that time, when it was difficult to connect with people. And as I kept taking these walks, throughout the summer and fall, I observed change within the stones. Sometimes, they would nearly disappear, only a few shallow piles left that you could see if you looked hard enough. Sometimes they would evolve and change.

I later learned that these stones were the work of a local self-taught artist named Uliks Gryka. I was excited to learn this information, but there was a part of me that didn't necessarily care that much about who it was on the other side of these sculptures, because, at least, at the time I discovered the stones, they were unmistakable but fairly anonymous. Gryka wasn't leaving a signature—I believe he has in the past, but when I encountered the work, he wasn't. There was something in that too. There was something about the simplicity and the confident humility of leaving the work there, to be seen, to be discovered, to be experienced; perhaps the trace was enough, and credit was secondary.

This piece was written for Johnny Gandelsman, in December of 2020, and Johnny specifically asked for a piece that was reflecting on the, uh, [cue frantic hand-waving] recent time period, and this piece is a tribute to those Sisyphus Stones, to Uliks Gryka's

Sisyphus Stones. It is a love letter to them, a note of appreciation for what they provided for me during this most tumultuous time.

Stones was generously commissioned by Bay Chamber (Rockport, Maine).

Conrad Tao

A City Upon a Hill?

A City Upon a Hill? is our reaction to the events at the Capitol on January 6, 2021. The main theme is based on the infamous slogan, "Make America Great Again," in which each variation of the Americana-inspired theme becomes increasingly dissonant on the arrival of the word "again." Distorted and detuned electronic samples of politicians chanting the phrase, combined with sounds of protest, police helicopters and stampeding animals circle and crowd the violin solo, culminating in a frenzied, sonic chaos that inevitably collapses in on itself.

The sonic dissonance is meant to echo the cognitive dissonance of the far right movement itself, as the piece chronicles the gradual radicalization of an individual who holds an idealized, nostalgic memory of a freedom and equality that has never truly existed in America; someone who believes themselves to be a true patriot while simultaneously undermining basic democratic values and American institutions.

The piece ends with the violin soloist slowly unraveling their D-string until their sound fades into obscurity. So, in this gaping silence of this detuned violin, we ask you, was America ever really great?

City Upon a Hill? was generously commissioned by the Philharmonic Society of Orange County (Irvine, California).

Rhea Fowler & Micaela Tobin

Program Notes *continued*

Dólii

Dólii is a poem and solo work for guitar. The words and music are intended to be woven together like a helix strand. The written poem forms its own structure of couplets and tercets that shift the rhythm and cadence of the lines.

For Diné, *dólii* is a bluebird, guide and bringer of storms. The poem and composition are for my daughter.

Dólii was generously commissioned by Tippett Rise Art Center (Fishtail, Montana).

Bojan Louis

Body Language (Three Folk Dances for Violin)

I first met Johnny Gandelsman sometime in 2003 when we were both playing with the Mark Morris Dance Group Music Ensemble. At the risk of getting in trouble for airing dirty laundry in a program note, I feel it's worth mentioning that our friendship did not exactly begin on the right foot: I was tremendously underqualified to be playing the Schumann Piano Quintet (to which Morris had choreographed his masterpiece, *V*) and Johnny was rightfully scratching his head as to what I was doing amidst much more seasoned chamber musicians. But some years later,

I invited his quartet, Brooklyn Rider, to appear on my Carnegie Hall recital debut, and a lasting friendship began to take shape. Over the years since, my admiration for Johnny's singular musicianship and incredible humanity has only grown. It is with great pleasure that I offer this piece as a token of my deep admiration for his artistry.

Body Language (Three Folk Dances for Solo Violin), co-commissioned by the Vail Dance Festival, was written with movement in mind, which gives rise to the motoric sense in two of the three pieces. The first is a paraphrase of a song of mine, *We Are the Saints*, which appeared on my album *Magnificent Bird*. The second dance is in a ternary form, a glacial A section contrasted with an effervescent B section. Finally, the third is a gigue (or jig), inspired by Johnny's crystalline playing of Bach, which is always infused with a rarified rhythmic vitality: swung, but not too much, with a dry wit that cannot conceal the tenderness simmering beneath the surface. These pieces are dedicated with love and gratitude to Johnny Gandelsman.

Body Language (Three Folk Dances for Violin) was generously co-commissioned by The Hopkins Center for the Arts (Hanover, New Hampshire); and the Vail Dance Festival 2023, Damian Woetzel, Artistic Director (Vail, Colorado).

Gabriel Kahane

About the Artists

Grammy award-winning violinist and producer **Johnny Gandelman**'s musical voice reflects the artistic collaborations he has been a part of since moving to the United States in 1995. The *New Yorker* has called Johnny "revelatory," placing him in the company of "radically transformative" performers like Maurizio Pollini, Peter Serkin and Christian Zacharias. As a founding member of Brooklyn Rider and a former member of the Silkroad Ensemble, Johnny has closely worked with such luminaries as Bela Fleck, Martin Hayes, Kayhan Kalhor, Yo-Yo Ma and Mark Morris. Gandelman integrates a wide range of creative sensibilities into a unique style amongst today's violinists. Johnny's recording of the complete Bach Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin, which reached #1 on the Billboard Classical Chart, and made it onto *NY Magazine* and *NY Times Best of the Year* lists. A passionate advocate for new music, Johnny has premiered dozens of new works and has been producing records since starting his label, In a Circle Records in 2008. Recent credits include the Silkroad Ensemble's critically-acclaimed recording of Osvaldo Golijov tone poem in voices *Falling out of Time* (In a Circle Records); Brooklyn Rider's *Healing Modes and The Wanderer* (In a Circle Records); and *Sing Me Home*, a Grammy-award winner for Best World Music album (Sony). Johnny also produced music for Ken Burns, Lynn Novick and Sarah Bottstein's film *The U.S. and the Holocaust*. Johnny was born in Moscow into a family of musicians. His father Yuri is a violist, his mother Janna is a pianist, and his sister Natasha is a violinist as well. He lives in New York.

Christina Courtin's *Situation Station*, recorded four years after the release of *Varsity*, can best be described as a tapestry of her musical and life experiences. As she weaves together her dual worlds, the singer-songwriter and classically trained violinist guides listeners through somber plains and heartbreak, all the while surrounding them with warmth, joy and hope. With its stark vocals and rich arrangements, *Situation Station* seeks to stir the same depth of emotion in others that Courtin has imbued in

each of her album's songs. She has also been a collaborator and side(wo)man to many artists and groups, most recently including Bonnie Prince Billy, Planetarium, Doyle Bramhall II, Lee Ann Womack, Nico Muhly, Dr. Dog, Lisa Loeb, Sara Bareilles and the Buffalo Philharmonic. She is a featured soloist for the films *Chappaquiddick* and *Free State of Jones*, and occasionally writes music for *This American Life*. As an educator, Christina has led a Songwriting Composition Seminar at Dartmouth College for undergraduates as well as an Independent Study for graduate students, and was also a teaching fellow and performer at Sing-Sing Correctional Facility through the Musical Connections Program at Carnegie Hall. christinacourtin.com

Gabriel Kahane is a musician and storyteller whose work increasingly exists at the intersection of art and social practice. Hailed as "one of the finest songwriters of the day" by *The New Yorker*. He has released four albums as a singer-songwriter, including, most recently, the intimate *Book of Travelers* (Nonesuch Records), which *Rolling Stone* called "a stunning portrait of a singular moment in America." As a composer, he has been commissioned by many of America's leading arts institutions, including the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Carnegie Hall, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Orpheus Chamber Orchestra and the Public Theater. In 2019, Kahane was named the inaugural Creative Chair for the Oregon Symphony, following the premiere in Portland of his oratorio emergency shelter intake form, a work that explores inequality in America through the lens of housing issues. Kahane's discography includes 2014's *The Ambassador*, which received an acclaimed staging at BAM, directed by Tony and Olivier Award-winner John Tiffany; an album of chamber music, *The Fiction Issue*, with the string quartet Brooklyn Rider and vocalist/composer Shara Nova; a recording with The Knights of his orchestral song cycle *Crane Palimpsest*; as well as the original cast album for *February House*.

A frequent collaborator across a range of musical communities, Gabriel has worked with an array of

About the Artists *continued*

artists including Paul Simon, Sufjan Stevens, Andrew Bird, Phoebe Bridgers, Caroline Shaw, and Chris Thile. After nearly two decades in Brooklyn, Kahane relocated with his family to Portland, Oregon, in March of 2020.

Bojan Louis (Diné) is the author of the poetry collection *Currents* (BkMk Press 2017), which received a 2018 American Book Award, and the nonfiction chapbook *Troubleshooting Silence in Arizona* (The Guillotine Series 2012). He is an assistant professor in the Creative Writing and American Indian Studies programs at the University of Arizona. bojanlouis.com

Aeryn Santillan (she/her) is a composer, guitarist and bassist whose work is heavily influenced by the DIY punk scene and actively aims to blur the lines between band/ensemble and song/composition.

Aeryn performs bass in the New Jersey-based, internationally touring screamo quartet, Massa Nera. Along with composer/guitarist Andrew Noseworthy, she co-founded this place is actually the worst, an experimental mathcore duo, and post-genre DIY label, people | places | records.

Aeryn holds a Bachelor of Music degree from Columbia College Chicago and a Master of Music in Theory and Composition degree from New York University. Previous mentors include Gabriela Lena Frank, Michael Gordon, Julia Wolfe, Marcos Balter, David Remnick, Drew Baker and Ilya Levinson. Aeryn has been a fellow at the Bang on a Can Summer Festival, Toronto Creative Music Lab and the Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music.

Aeryn enjoys biking, skateboarding, RPGs and vegan tacos. She lives in Jersey City, New Jersey with her partner and two cats. aerynsantillan.com.

Anjna Swaminathan is a queer multidisciplinary composer, musician and theatre artist. Anjna's work exists at the nexus of multiple creative disciplines,

simultaneously leaning into the rigor available within each form while seeking release from form entirely. As an artist with a passion for social critique, community building and critical consciousness, Anjna's artistic practice is an extension of an activist spirit. Thus, her/their work uses expression and storytelling to forge connections across cultural, economic, gendered, racial and sexual identities and communities. Anjna is a disciple of the late violin maestro Parur Sri M.S. Gopalakrishnan and Mysore Sri H.K. Narasimhamurthy. In 2015, Anjna came under the tutelage of renowned vocalist and scholar, T.M. Krishna for training in Carnatic music, and vocalist Samarth Nagarkar for training in Hindustani music and accompaniment.

Informed by rigorous training in the art music traditions of India, Anjna incorporates and expands this vocabulary in original compositional work as well as the vibrant creative music and improvisatory scene in New York. Anjna is an active composer who uses both oral tradition and Western classical notation as well as combinations of both to articulate her/their visions.

Anjna envisions art as an extension of our deepest spiritual, political and personal questions. Her/their work emerges from her/their intimate relationship with the violin and engages performers in deepening their technical and emotional vulnerability. Anjna's compositional process is dynamic, loving and expansive, all while rooted in years-long research in Indian classical ornamentation for Western Classical string artists. Anjna offers decades of mastery and a loving spirit, collaborating as a friend, mentor and visionary with those in her/their orbit. anjnaswaminathan.com

Conrad Tao has appeared worldwide as a pianist and composer and has been dubbed a musician of "probing intellect and open-hearted vision" by *The New York Times*. He is the recipient of the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant and was named a Gilmore Young Artist—an honor awarded every two years highlighting the most promising American pianists of

the new generation. As a composer, he was also the recipient of a 2019 New York Dance and Performance “Bessie” Award, for Outstanding Sound Design / Music Composition, for his work on *More Forever* and his collaboration with dancer and choreographer Caleb Teicher.

Tao has recently appeared with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra, New York Philharmonic and Boston Symphony. In 20-21, he was the focus of a series of concerts and interviews with the Finnish Radio Symphony, performing Beethoven’s Piano Concerto No. 4 with Hannu Lintu and Andrew Norman’s *Suspend* with Sakari Oramo, live on television. While most performances in the 20-21 season were canceled due to the COVID epidemic, he appeared with the Cincinnati Symphony and Louis Langrée, and returned to the Seattle Symphony to perform Beethoven Concerto No. 4. Further invitations included the National Symphony Orchestra, the San Francisco Symphony, New Jersey Symphony, and St. Paul Chamber Orchestra. His creation with Caleb Teicher, *More Forever*, commissioned by Works & Process at the Guggenheim, was planned for tours across the US, including Dance Cleveland and Fall for Dance, Toronto. Tao and Teicher’s latest collaboration for Works & Process, *Rhapsody in Blue*, kicked off the Guggenheim’s return to in-person performances and was lauded by *The New York Times* as “monumental.” The duo also gave the inaugural virtual recital of the season for Concerts from the Library of Congress. conradtao.com

Rhea Fowler is a multi-instrumentalist, composer and teacher based in Los Angeles. Rhea performs regularly in live theater productions and is an active recording artist. Recent projects include *The Lion King*, *When They See Us*, and Ringo Starr’s latest single, *Grow Old With Me*. Rheafowler.bandcamp.com

Micaela Tobin is a soprano, sound artist and teacher based in Los Angeles, who specializes in experimental voice and contemporary opera, composing under the moniker “White Boy Scream.” Within this project, Micaela dissects her operatic and extended vocal techniques through the use of electronics. She has performed extensively throughout the western United States, most notably as a guest with hip-hop experimentalists clipping. during their 2017 tour in support of The Flaming Lips. Micaela’s most recent full-length release, *BAKUNAWA* (Deathbomb Arc) is part sonic ritual, part diasporic storytelling. Of the album, Steve Smith of *The New Yorker* asserts that “opera would do well to pay attention.”

As an opera composer, Micaela premiered and earned a five-star review for her first original experimental opera, entitled *Unseal Unseam*, at the world’s largest art festival, the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, in summer 2016; the work was described as “hypnotic” and “paralyzingly beautiful,” by *New Classic LA* after its US debut in October 2017. Her most recent opera, *Belarion: A Space Opera*, which premiered at the American Legion Center in Pasadena in February 2019, is about the magical practices of JPL founder Jack Parsons. Tobin hopes to perform the opera again at the Mount Wilson Observatory in 2021. micelaetobin.com

Arts in the Curriculum & Community

Johnny Gandelsman is a year-long Hop resident artist. This term, he takes part in a public talk held in collaboration with the Center for Entrepreneurship at Tuck on making socially engaged art that is financially sustaining for its creators. During his time on campus, he is joined by composer Gabriel Kahane to visit a Dartmouth class on processing new experiences. Johnny also performs the third part of his anthology at Next Stage on April 3.

Spring at the Hop

3/16, 29 & 30

Sandglass Theater
puppetry, dance and spokenword

3/25 & 26

Monica Bill Barnes
Many Happy Returns
a memory play

4/2 & 7/20

Johnny Gandelsman:
This Is America
resident artist & violinist

4/6

The Tallis Scholars
Renaissance choral music

4/11

Tomeka Reid
resident artist & cellist

4/14

Ensemble Schumann
works by Beethoven, Bruch, Foote and White

4/17

Coreyah
Korean folk and psychedelic rock

4/21

23 Skidoo and the Secret Agency
hip hop for the whole family

5/1

Isidore String Quartet
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Tomeka Reid
4/11



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