

# **Hopkins Center for the Arts**

at Dartmouth

presents

## ***This is America: Part I***

Johnny Gandelsman, violin

**September 27, 7:30 pm**

Avaloch Farm Music Institute, Boscawen, NH • 2023

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*Funded in part by the Class of 1961 Legacy: The American Tradition in Performance Fund.*

# From the Hop's Executive Director

*This is America* is a unique and powerful project that responds to an unprecedented period in our lives: the turbulent year of 2020. Throughout this project, the Grammy award-winning violinist, Johnny Gandelsman, invited a compelling group of contemporary composers to reflect on this shared moment in time through the lens of America's rich and often challenging cultural landscape. *This is America* was born here in New Hampshire during the pandemic when so many artists were isolating and unable to perform. Our state, as the seat of the nation's first primary inspired us to be the first, and maybe only, place to present the entire collection over the course of a year. We invite you to enjoy the exceptional music while finding your own new insights and joy in our renewed sense of unity and understanding.

*Howard Gilman '44 Executive Director*

*Mary Lou Aleskie*

# From Avaloch Farm's Artistic Director

As an organization that has been dedicated to supporting musicians representing a breadth of styles and genres, Avaloch Farm Music Institute is pleased to partner with the esteemed Hopkins Center for the Arts to present a captivating program of new works written for violinist Johnny Gandelsman by some of our generation's most compelling compositional voices. Having a shared passion for pushing artistic boundaries and creating transformative experiences, we have set the stage for an unforgettable, sensory-immersive evening that will encourage the audience to interact with both the music and each other in our intimate setting amidst the breathtaking beauty of rural New Hampshire.

*Avaloch Farm Executive & Artistic Director*

*Ashley Bathgate*

# Program

*Approximate duration: 90 minutes*

## ***Steeped***

**Olivia Davis**

- I. Impromptu
- II. Moto Perpetuo
- III. Cadenza

## ***Reflections***

**Ebun Oguntola**

## ***Sinekemān***

**Layale Chaker**

## ***For Courtney Bryan***

**Tyshawn Sorey**

## ***Perhaps We'll Thank What Breaks Us***

**Carla Kihlstedt**

(for Johnny Gandelsman, after a poem by Ingrid Goff-Maidoff)  
World Premiere, a Hopkins Center Commission

## ***Sahra be Wyckoff***

**Kinan Azmeh**

# Program Notes

## **Olivia Davis, *Steeped***

*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 United States 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 piece begins with an impromptu—not unlike how our pandemic began, in

addition to its sharing similarities with the responses to social and political movements (however, those had been “steeping” for much longer prior). The second movement is full of constant motion, a literal representation of the mental stress and exhaustion I can speak to having felt throughout the pandemic as well as in response to political and social events. 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—we are only so far going—but allows the performer to contextualize the Self in all that has been happening and beyond, as cadenzas truly are

## Program Notes *continued*

about the individual. The ending—regardless of which ending the performer chooses (as there are multiple endings I have given the performer to choose from), 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*

*Steeped* was generously and jointly commissioned by the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) and Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music (Boonville, California)

### **Ebun Oguntola, *Reflections***

*Reflections* is a solo violin piece that reflects upon our emotions and reactions to the multi-faceted and chaotic introduction of the new decade in 2020 onward. The piece starts off with the music illustrating the 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. Within the first section of the piece, constant usage of fourths create 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, the flashback begins, and the story of this grievous turn of events unfolds. The music at this point conveys our prior anticipation, excitement and curiosity for what the future may hold in this new decade. However, the fourths in the music soon shift to tritones, one of the most dissonant intervals, to show how our prior anticipation was woefully misled. Tension arises to delineate the tension that arose within our communities. The

tension accumulates until its energy snaps our state of sanity, as the tonal center of the music becomes unintelligible, and sixteenth notes drive rampantly, to describe the boundless commotion we encountered, and double stops reappear to show our multilayered circumstances.

In the third section, the climactic moment of chaos has declined just enough for us to slightly ease our hyperventilations, slow down and reflect upon what happened. Musical ideas are repeated, though altered, to illustrate us analyzing our predicaments and circumstances through a mournful perspective that transitions us to our current state in time.

The fourth section is the recapitulation of the beginning to signal an end to this flashback. Although similar, slight subtleties allude to details previously overlooked, but 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 to show our story isn't necessarily finished yet. We are still being affected by these events, but we will take steps to resolve them.

– *Ebun Oguntola*

*Reflections* was generously commissioned by Chamber Music Pittsburgh (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)

### **Layale Chaker, *Sinekemān***

*Sinekemān* (2019), commissioned and written for violinist Johnny Gandelsman, is a study on solitude.

As I had 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; creating 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

“Then stirs the feeling infinite, so felt  
In solitude, where we are least alone;  
A truth, which through our being then doth melt,  
And purifies from self: it is a tone,  
The soul and source of music, which makes known  
Eternal harmony, and sheds a charm  
Like to the fabled Cytherea’s zone,  
Binding all things with beauty;—’t would disarm  
The spectre Death, had he substantial power to harm.”

– Lord Byron (1788-1824),

*from Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage: Night and Tempest*

*Sinekemān* was generously commissioned by the Portland Chamber Music Festival (Portland, Maine)

### **Tyshawn Sorey, *For Courtney Bryan***

*For Courtney Bryan* was generously commissioned by the 2021 Vail Dance Festival, Damian Woetzel, Artistic Director

### **Carla Kihlstedt, *Perhaps We’ll Thank What Breaks Us* (for Johnny Gandelsman, after a poem by Ingrid Goff-Maidoff)**

*Perhaps We’ll Thank What Breaks Us*  
by Ingrid Goff-Maidoff

One day, perhaps we’ll thank  
what reaches into our lives  
and breaks us into unknowing.

What reveals our chosen habits  
as habits and nothing more,  
what crumbles the walls we have built  
and then spent years trying to scale.  
by walls, I mean: not this, not this,  
and also ideas: first this, later this,  
almost this, therefore, this, if only this,  
what for this, and not until.  
Perhaps one day we’ll thank  
whatever unties the knots  
that have bound us, whatever  
releases us from our own netting,  
and lands us, naked, home.

This last year was full of more challenges than any other I’ve known, including our collective experience with the imposed isolation and of the Covid-19 pandemic. Life threw curve balls at me from every angle. Some, I hit out of the park, some I caught, and others clocked me in the jaw and left me reeling. All the while, in the back of my mind, was this invitation from Johnny to write a piece for him to include in this beautiful project, using his extraordinary voice as a violinist to convey, explore and connect the experiences and ideas of diverse composers in his many overlapping musical communities.

Like a dog trying to find a comfortable spot to lie down and tuck into a deeply nourishing nap, I turned around and around, trying out different starting points. When I opened this book of poetry given to me by the author a few months earlier, her poem transfixed me. It jumped off the page as both a challenge and an invitation. At its root is an inclination to turn what is most difficult into an opportunity for growth. It asks us to look at our habit of knowing, planning, deciding with skepticism—to dive into a process, a challenge, a story, a situation, and see it as if for the first time. This was a call to sit inside of my musical process and at the same time, approach it differently than I ever have before.

## Program Notes *continued*

As a violinist, writing for another violinist, this poem was the perfect cornerstone for an exploration of finding the new within the familiar. My violin and bow—my best friends of 32+ years—were stolen in December 2022. This was the deepest sorrow I have ever known. I have just, in the last few months, come to find myself another violin and bow to carry through the next 32+ years. So, while I have played violin for 46 years, the instruments in my hand were entirely new to me. In this piece, they were in the driver's seat and I was in the navigator's seat, merely suggesting directions and coordinates.

The piece begins with a theme written specifically for Johnny, keeping in mind the grace and elegance of his playing and his deep connection to the Bach Sonatas and Partitas. A series of loose variations follow, each answering a question, testing a theory or simply indulging an instinct—each responding in some way to the initial theme: One is a cubist rendition of the initial portrait; Another is a literal bean-counting catalog of the pitches involved; Another is a surreal shadow/dream that loses objective syntax in exchange for a look at a single element through a microscope.

Thank you Johnny, for your patience with me, as I blew through every deadline in the run up to this performance, and for inviting me into this tapestry of voices and perspectives that you are weaving with us all! And thank you for helping me start off my friendship with my new instruments on the right foot.

– Carla Kihlstedt

*Perhaps We'll Thank What Breaks Us* was generously commissioned by the Hopkins Center for the Arts at Dartmouth (Hanover, NH)

### **Kinan Azmeh, *Sahra be Wyckoff***

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. Sahra is the arabic word for party, and Wyckoff is a street in Brooklyn where 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 are present at a given moment. Violinists, clarinetists, cellists, singers, rappers, pianists, dancers, visual artists, film makers 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 بة

### ***A party at Wyckoff for all***

This piece is dedicated to Johnny Gandelsman, a wonderful violinist, producer, collaborator, human and a dear friend.

– Kinan Azmeh

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

# 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 *New York Magazine* and *New York 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's 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 Botstein'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.

Hailed as "intensely soulful" and a "virtuoso" by *The New York Times* and "spellbinding" by *The New Yorker*, Winner of OpusKlassik award in 2019 clarinetist and composer **Kinan Azmeh** has gained international recognition for what the CBC has called his "incredibly rich sound" and his distinctive compositional voice across diverse musical genres. Originally from Damascus, Syria, Kinan Azmeh brings his music to all corners of the world as a soloist, composer and

improviser. His compositions were commissioned by the New York Philharmonic, Seattle Symphony, The Silkroad Ensemble, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Elbphilharmonie, Apple Hill String Quartet, Brooklyn Rider, Quatuor Voce and Bob Wilson for his recent production of *Oedipus Rex*. [kinanazmeh.com](http://kinanazmeh.com)

**Olivia Davis** grew up in Eugene, Oregon where she began her studies in violin performance at the age of nine years old. She attended the University of Oregon, receiving her BM in Violin Performance and Composition in 2013. In the third year of her undergrad, she co-founded the Ova Novi Ensemble (ONE) whose mission is to perform works by women and women-identifying composers. Olivia continued her education in 2014 at the University of Texas at Austin where she received her MM in Composition. She was a founding (and current) member of the prismatx ensemble, a group whose mission is to combine visual arts with new music, collaborating with living artists. Olivia recently graduated from the University of Michigan, receiving a DMA in Composition in August 2020. She is an accomplished visual artist, and continues to be an active performer, performing and premiering colleagues' works as well as her own. [oliviadavismedia.com/about](http://oliviadavismedia.com/about)

**Layale Chaker**'s musical world lies at the intersection of classical contemporary music, Jazz, Arabic Music and improvisation. As a violinist and composer, she has received commissions and presented performances and projects around Europe, the Middle-East, North and South America and Asia, and has collaborated with Daniel Barenboim and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, Johnny Gandelman, Holland Baroque, International Contemporary Ensemble, Oxford Orchestra, the New World Symphony, Babylon Orchestra. Her debut album with her ensemble Sarafand, *Inner Rhyme*, recipient of the AFAC 2018 fund, is dedicated to the sounds, rhythms, rhymes, shapes and forms of Arabic poetry. The album was released on In a Circle Records, and listed as "Top

## About the Artists *continued*

of The World” by Songlines with a five-star review, rated #2 on NPR 10 Best Releases, #1 for several weeks on the World Charts of iTunes and Amazon Music, and has received praises by the *BBC Music Magazine*, *The New York Times*, *The Strad*, *Strings Magazine*, *Jazz World* among others. [layalechaker.com](http://layalechaker.com)

**Ebunoluwa Oguntola** is an avid 14-year-old composer, violinist, pianist and singer from Upstate, New York. Ebum was a 2019-2020 Luna Composition Lab Fellow, student of Reena Esmail. As part of Luna Lab, Ebum was the recipient of the Patrina Foundation Fellowship in the end of 2019. In summer of 2020, Ebum attended the internationally acclaimed Eastman Classical Studies program for composition, and was accepted with a merit-based scholarship. She was also featured on **I CARE IF YOU LISTEN**, an award-winning publication about contemporary classical music and the preferred source of New Music news. Ebum Oguntola was interviewed for the Local WSYR-TV News as part of the segment, Extraordinary Talent, for music. [ebunoguntola.com](http://ebunoguntola.com)

Newark-born composer and multi-instrumentalist **Tyshawn Sorey** (b. 1980) is celebrated for his incomparable virtuosity, effortless mastery and memorization of highly complex scores, and an extraordinary ability to blend composition and improvisation in his work. He has performed nationally and internationally with his own ensembles, as well as artists such as John Zorn, Vijay Iyer, Roscoe Mitchell, Muhal Richard Abrams, Wadada Leo Smith, Marilyn Crispell, George Lewis, Claire Chase, Steve Lehman, Jason Moran, Evan Parker, Anthony Braxton and Myra Melford, among many others. Sorey has composed works for the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the

International Contemporary Ensemble, soprano Julia Bullock, PRISM Quartet, JACK Quartet, TAK Ensemble, the McGill-McHale Trio, bass-baritone Davóne Tines, Alarm Will Sound, the Louisville Orchestra and tenor Lawrence Brownlee with Opera Philadelphia in partnership with Carnegie Hall, as well as for countless collaborative performers. [tyshawnsorey.com](http://tyshawnsorey.com)

**Carla Kihlstedt** is a composer, collaborator, violinist, singer, improviser, educator and instigator. Her musical voice is grounded in the economy and immediacy of song form, which allows her to explore complex worlds—the ocean, dreams, imaginary creatures, the machine age, quarantine—through many different lenses. Carla’s music is a palimpsest, connecting and layering her divergent musical experiences. After graduating from the Oberlin Conservatory, she spent her 20s and 30s creating and performing music with bands/composer collectives united by their musical clarity, their commitment to collaboration and the deep friendships that grounded them all. Carla has written for the International Contemporary Ensemble, Present Music, the San Francisco Girls Chorus, the Brooklyn Youth Chorus, Variant 6, the ROVA Saxophone Quartet and the Dither Big Band. Her recent work investigates the natural world and our place in it. She is currently developing an international environmental project for treble chorus called Long for This World. Carla lives on Cape Cod, Massachusetts with her two kids and her partner, Matthias Bossi. Along with Jeremy Flower and Jon Evans, they are the band Rabbit Rabbit Radio. She is on the faculty of the Contemporary Improvisation Department of the New England Conservatory and the MFA in Composition program at the Vermont College of Fine Arts. [carlakihlstedt.com](http://carlakihlstedt.com)



# Connecting Artists to the Community

Johnny Gandelsman is a 2023/24 resident artist. In the fall, he will visit classes in the music department, joined by composer Carla Kihlstedt who is in residence for the premiere of her new work. Johnny takes part in a pre-show reception on September 26 and both artists discuss *This is America* in a public talk immediately following the performance. Johnny also performs Part I of the anthology followed by a discussion with the artists at Avaloch Farm Music Institute on September 27.



**Upcoming Events  
at the Hop in the**

# ***This is America***

**Series**

**Part II: Feb 6**  
featuring a Hop-commissioned  
work by Dartmouth alum  
Kojiro Umezaki

**Part III: Apr 2**  
featuring a Hop-commissioned  
premiere by Gabriel Kahane

**Part IV: July 20**  
featuring a Hop-commissioned  
premiere by Gonzalo Grau

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