

Hopkins Center for the Arts at Dartmouth

presents

This is America: Part II

Johnny Gandelsman, violin

Tuesday, February 6, 7:30 pm

The Church of Christ at Dartmouth College • 2024

Wednesday, February 7, 7 pm

Next Stage Arts Project • Putney, Vermont • 2024

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. This term is especially meaningful to us as a community as we welcome back Dartmouth alum Kojiro Umezaki '93 whose piece *Breathe*, a Hop commission, is part of the anthology. In addition to sharing his beautiful music, Ko sheds light on the piece and his perspective of the country during that difficult time. 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

Arts in the Curriculum & Community

As part of the Hop's tradition of immersing artists in the Dartmouth community to build knowledge and create connections, Johnny Gandelsman engages in a number of activities during his year-long residency with the Hop. This term, Johnny visits an American Music class, attends a dinner at School House and, alongside Dartmouth alum/composer Kojiro Umezaki '93, leads a student workshop and discussion at the Student Wellness Center. Johnny also discusses his project, *This is America*, in a live conversation on February 6 at 5:30 pm at the Hanover Inn with Vermont Public's Mikaela Lefrac and Umezaki, then takes part in a public conversation after the concert. Johnny also performs the second part of his anthology at Next Stage on February 7.

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 U.S.-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 is a true honor. 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 will all receive 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

Dew, Time, Linger

Adeliia Faizullina (1988–)

Dance Suite

Maya Miro Johnson (2001–)

World Premiere

- I. negating gravity on a molecular level (meditation)
- II. the virtue of lightness
- III. surrender to your tiredness (tragedy)
- IV. getting rid of our skin
- V. the sense of plenty of time (generosity)

A través del manto luminoso

Angélica Negrón (1981–)

Intermission

O

Clarice Assad (1978–)

Tardigrades

Nick Dunston (1996–)

Stitched

Matana Roberts Roberts (1975–)

Breathe

Kojiro Umezaki (1968–)

A Hopkins Center Commission

Music for Solitude

Justin Messina (1980–)

Approximate duration: 105 minutes

Program Notes

Dew, Time, Linger

Dew, Time, Linger is about how the pandemic sounded to me. The piece represents the few months I spent by myself in Los Angeles, when I saw people online but no one in person. The only people I could sense around me were people on the streets when I went on a walk or to the grocery store. This piece is about listening to the space where I was. All of a sudden I would hear tiny sounds from outside: the sirens, the clock, the tap dripping. Time slowed down to me, while I would ask myself when I would see my family and what is next, and where the world is going.

In my space, I visited places in my memory. My mind would travel to the places that I visited and people I love, and I would hang on these soothing memories. But then, the sounds in my environment would call me back to the present.

I see time as a fragile drop of dew, like nature's ticking clock. It is fragile, and the pandemic made that even clearer. This tiny drop of dew reflects the whole world. You hold it, and you try to keep this little water drop and save it, but it melts down and evaporates—it is already in the past.

Dew, Time, Linger was generously and jointly commissioned by Art of Elan (San Diego, California) & Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music (Booneville, California)

Adeliia Faizullina

Dance Suite

My work takes an interest in physical experiences of sound, or what I call *body|politics*. As a former violinist and tap dancer, I create work exploring relationships between the self, the body, tools/instruments/mediums and society. This is exemplified by my work with the movement language Gaga, a praxis created by Ohad Naharin centered around image-embodiment, sensory **אָנאַ** sensitivity and public-centered concepts of free movement. Gaga has a fundamentally healing quality to it, in that it exists in the fissured space between the mind and the body. I have been closely interested in finding a shared language between **אָנאַ** and traditions of acoustic instruments.

For example, my solo violin work for Johnny Gandelsman's 2022 *This Is America* album, *Dance Suite* (2021), emulates the form of both a baroque dance suite and a Gaga class, modulating three Jewish folk songs from the diaspora kinesthetically via guided audio instructions over five movements, with many of the resultant sound patterns entirely dependent on freely chosen physical decisions.

Each movement contains the foundational concept of "describing curves and overlapping circles in interior and exterior space," which is one of the defaults in Gaga. The goal was to derive sound from movement, beginning with the action of motion itself and seeing the sound as a result rather than the directive, accomplished through the conduit of the instrument as an extension of the body.

The movements' foci are indicated in their titles:

- I. negating gravity on a molecular level (meditation)
- II. the virtue of lightness
- III. surrender to your tiredness (tragedy)
- IV. getting rid of our skin
- V. the sense of plenty of time (generosity)

Dance Suite was generously commissioned by Digital Daruma (NYC, New York)

Maya Miro Johnson

A través del manto luminoso

A través del manto luminoso (Through the luminous mantle) is a piece written for Johnny Gandelsman inspired by *A Book of Stars*, a collection of dark sky photographs taken in Puerto Rico and its islands by Javier Román-Nieves. *A Book of Stars* includes astrophotography showcasing night skies, sunrises and sunsets between 2011–2020. The resplendent, stunning and almost surreal image titled *Blanket of seawater on saturated sand in Luquillo*—which depicts a vast field of stars reflected on the ocean during sunrise in the northeast coast of the island—moved me deeply and sparked the idea behind this piece.

This specific image and the book brought back childhood memories of the tradition of stargazing with my family on the evening before Three Kings day looking to find the three bright stars that represented the Three Kings (also known as Orion's Belt) in the night sky. It also made me reflect on the night sky as an open field of possible connections to places that are distant from us while simultaneously revealing the immense distance that separates us. The synth sounds in this piece are inspired by audio recordings of a group of ancient stars that were put together by a team of researchers from the University of Birmingham in the UK. These recordings were made using data from NASA's Kepler/K2 missions of old stars in the Milky Way's Messier 4 (M4) cluster—one of the oldest and closest globular clusters to the sun and Earth. By measuring the vibrations of these distant stars, scientists captured a low-pitched sound which then they sped up 1-million times to being the oscillations within the range of human hearing. *A través del manto luminoso* is a piece about longing for connection and above all, holding on to the possibility of seeing light in darkness.

A través del manto luminoso was generously commissioned by the Chamber Music Society of Central Virginia (Richmond, Virginia)

Angélica Negrón

Program Notes *continued*

O

At the beginning of the 2020 COVID 19 pandemic, violinist Johnny Gandelsman approached several composers to collaborate on a commissioning project. There were no limits imposed to our creative process, though he made a critical remark: “I would like composers to reflect on the moment we are living now.” It was quite a suffocating moment. And so I fixated my attention on what seemed to be a recurring theme, the crucial character of several dramas that would ensue through the year that ironically left so many breathless: Oxygen.

O, the symbol representation of one of the most abundant elements in the universe without which we die, is the inspiration for this piece. As we withdrew from the social arena, we watched in horror a newly discovered virus take down thousands of people from acute respiratory failure every day. Some succumbed from complications of the disease, others for lack of respirators. Preventive measures required the whole of humanity to wear masks, to protect each other from an infection that could spread through the air. Soon after, another tragedy. This time, oxygen would take center stage and be violently obstructed, by force, from entering the lungs in George Floyd’s body, whose last words, “I can’t breathe,” echoed through the four corners of the world, causing pain, anger, outrage. The air was thick with doubt and fear.

Confined in an apartment without working windows in the middle of the winter, I could not help but feel a sense of entrapment in my own body. Bouts of anxiety attacks plagued me, and it was challenging to work or concentrate. But thinking about the miracle of life while not taking the gift of breathing for granted, singing was the way out of despair. For processed vocal overdubs and solo violin, O is a recollection of that fragmented time, undoubtedly filled with sentiments of distress. But it too, portrays a sense of hope.

O was generously commissioned by San Francisco Performances (San Francisco, California)

Clarice Assad

Tardigrades

Tardigrades is named after the animal of the same name—these are microscopic creatures, who are

extremely resilient, so much so that they have been known to be able to survive in conditions as extreme as outer space. The piece is inspired by this idea of microscopic beings having extremely intense lives, but only being able to perceive this by being incredibly intimate. In other words, paying attention. This piece pays attention to unconventional parts of the violin, with a performer as empathetic and masterful as Johnny exploring, exposing, witnessing. This manifests in process, as well. All processes. Mine, when composing the piece. And again, when putting it into a strange language (notation) for Johnny Gandelsman to interpret, which he did and does so beautifully. Paying attention. This is a sentiment, a skill, a fundamentally radical act of love, that as I write this on the first day of 2024, I hope to embody every day moving forward.

Tardigrades was generously commissioned by the Baryshnikov Arts Center (NYC, NY)

Nick Dunston

Stitched

I make music for the purpose of illuminating and supporting the inner lives of many different types of listeners and sound practitioners. It is service work that I feel so privileged to have in my creative life. This piece structure is a complex representation of the hope, joy and sadness we have collectively traveled through and are still traveling through, as global citizens in the midst of the COVID 19 pandemic.

Through the worst of times and the best of times, sound continuously resonates. A sob, a cry, a laugh, a whimper, a guffaw, a sigh and all the many types of joyful outbursts that are intrinsic to the human experience, regardless of the various boundaries that are used to separate and distract us. It is my hope, that in a listening or performance rendering of this piece, we are reminded that opposites exist for a reason, that any ending, no matter how painful, is a new beginning, and that the unwavering vastness of human spirit is what holds us together as a collective humanity, regardless of dire circumstance. Hope is not dependable, but the thought of it is there for the taking, whenever one might dare to ask... I wish you strength, faith and a limitless sense of hope.

Stitched was generously and jointly commissioned by Celebrity Series & Boston Symphony Orchestra (Boston, Massachusetts)

Matana Roberts

Breathe

It's hard to imagine one living through the year 2020 without stopping for moments to contemplate the act of breathing, and the struggle to do so freely, without obstruction. During this period, countless others surely produced works similarly or even identically titled "Breathe." Movements in American social justice and protests against systemic racism rallied around and indelibly memorialized those who were deliberately and forcibly denied breath and therefore life. Raised were deep questions on how best to elevate the human condition; amplified was the rhetoric fueling the dynamics of similarity and difference. All of this against the backdrop of the world being indiscriminately and repeatedly brought to its knees by an inconspicuous peril replicating exponentially (and paradoxically) through the life-giving/sustaining act of breathing.

The 20 modules in *Breathe* (each on average loosely around one minute in duration) are designed to be resequenced and reordered. Any number of them can be played/omitted, depending on the occasion. For this album, a sequence of select modules were assembled. All the modules on this recording focus on the open strings and the natural harmonics of the violin. As if the instrument were an organism, perhaps. The electronic part—an optional yet critical element of the work—echoes in its output, not repeating/fading identical copies of the input, but previously played and captured passages that lie on a continuum between most similar and most different.

I am truly grateful to The Hopkins Center for the Arts at Dartmouth College for commissioning and supporting this work. And, equally so to Johnny Gandelsman—a dear friend—to and for whom this work is dedicated and written.

Breathe was generously commissioned by the Hopkins Center at Dartmouth College (Hanover, New Hampshire)

Kojiro Umezaki

Music for Solitude

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

This work was born out of the extended lockdowns and tumult of 2020 & 2021. These periods of isolation and upheaval led me to rediscover my deeply personal relationship with playing music detached from public performance. Music in solitude became a form of therapy, bolstering me against the outside world.

This 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 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 began to realize it was strongly rooted in an earlier large-scale series I had been unable to complete to my satisfaction. In 2014, I embarked on a field recording project at the Channel Islands in Southern California. The centerpiece of that series was *Painted Cave*, one of the largest sea caves in the world. The unique acoustics and sounds of the cave contribute to a sacred atmosphere and, at the time, proved too daunting for my own music. Instead I recorded a violist playing excerpts of Bach's cello suites in the cave over a period of several days.

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.

Music for Solitude was generously commissioned by Linda Burrows.

Justin Messina

About the Artists

Grammy award-winning violinist and producer **Johnny Gandelsman**'s musical voice reflects the artistic collaborations he has been a part of since moving to the United States in 1995. Richard Brody of *The New Yorker* has called Johnny Gandelsman "revelatory" in concert, placing him in the company of "radically transformative" performers like Maurizio Pollini, Peter Serkin and Christian Zacharias.

Johnny integrates a wide range of creative sensibilities into a unique style amongst today's violinists, one that according to the *Boston Globe*, possesses "a balletic lightness of touch and a sense of whimsy and imagination".

Johnny is a founding member of Brooklyn Rider and a former member of the Silkroad Ensemble, 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*; Brooklyn Rider's *Healing Modes* and *The Wanderer*; Johnny's own recording of JS Bach's complete Cello Suites & complete Sonatas and Partitas for violin; and two albums with Silkroad Ensemble and Yo-Yo Ma: *The Vietnam War*, an album of music recorded for the documentary film by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick; and *Sing Me Home*, a Grammy-award winner for Best World Music album. 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.

A powerful communicator renowned for her musical scope and versatility, Brazilian American **Clarice Assad** is a significant artistic voice in the classical, world music, pop and jazz genres. A Grammy-nominated composer, celebrated pianist, inventive vocalist and educator, she is renowned for her evocative colors, rich textures and diverse stylistic range. As an innovator, her award-winning education program, Voxploration, has been presented throughout the United States, Brazil, Europe and Qatar. With her talent sought-after by artists and organizations worldwide, the multi-talented musician

continues to attract new audiences both onstage and off. Clariceassad.com

Nick Dunston is a Berlin-based acoustic and electroacoustic composer, improviser and bassist. An "indispensable player on the New York avant-garde" (*New York Times*), his performances have also spanned a variety of venues and festivals across North America and Europe. He's performed, toured and recorded professionally with bands led by artists such as Marc Ribot, Ches Smith, Imani Uzuri, Ingrid Laubrock, Tyshawn Sorey, Anna Webber, Amirtha Kidambi and Vijay Iyer. In addition to three studio albums released under his name, he has also been commissioned by artists such as Bang on a Can, Ex-Aequo, T R O M P O, Joanna Mattrey and Clifton Joey Guidry III. nickdunston.org

Uzbekistan-born Tatar composer **Adeliia Faizullina** (b.1988) is a vocalist, multi-instrumentalist and Tatar quray player. As a composer, she explores cutting-edge vocal colors and paints delicate and vibrant atmospheres inspired by the music and poetry of Tatar folklore. Adeliia received her BM in Voice in Kazan, Russia, and BM in Music Composition in Gnessins Russian Academy of Music. She has an MM in Music Composition from the University of Texas at Austin, studying with Yevgeniy Sharlat, and in 2019 started her DMA at the University of Southern California, studying with Nina C. Young. Adeliia is a composer fellow at the Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music. In 2019, she won the Seattle Symphony Celebrate Asia Competition and performed with the Seattle Symphony in 2020. Her music has been performed at the Next Festival of Emerging Artists, Chamber Music Society of the Carolinas, and National Sawdust.

Maya Miro Johnson is a conductor, composer and interdisciplinary artist who considers her work philosophy not constrained to logic and reason. In no particular order, it focuses on exorcizing hereditary ghosts, corroding the capitalist continuum, satirizing supremacy paradigms, affirming the intellectual and aesthetic value of the proletariat by recontextualizing the quotidian, manipulating the duality of the familiar and the strange, and invoking the universe. Equally at home on the stage, at the gallery and in the concert hall,

Maya blends a unique background in theater, film, dance performance, concept art, literature, philosophy and classical music into her praxis. mayamirojohnson.com

Southern California native, **Justin Messina** (b. 1980) works with both acoustic and electronic means to create music that explores the expressive nature of sound. Recent work includes a film score for director Anne Aghion's upcoming film *Turbulence* and an installation for the Chrisman California Island Center. His works have been performed at major concert halls in the US and Europe, including Carnegie Hall, Cité de la Musique, Concertgebouw and Wiener Musikverein. He has been artist in residence at The MacDowell Colony, The Camargo Foundation, Ucross and the Sitka Center for Art and Ecology. Through installations like *Island*, recorded at Channel Islands National Park, he explores the relationship between music and sound by recording acoustic instruments in unusual acoustic spaces like sea caves and forests. His album *Shortwave Artifacts* investigates the mysterious nature of radio. Made entirely of radio sounds and music for string ensemble, the album emerged naturally following a decade of interest in electronic music and techno during which time he worked with Francesco Tristano, Carl Craig and Moritz von Oswald.

Puerto Rican-born composer and multi-instrumentalist **Angélica Negrón** writes music for accordions, robotic instruments, toys and electronics as well as for chamber ensembles, orchestras, choir and film. Her music has been described as “wistfully idiosyncratic and contemplative” (WQXR/Q2) while *The New York Times* noted her “capacity to surprise.” Negrón has been commissioned by the Bang on a Can All-Stars, Kronos Quartet, loadbang, MATA Festival, Brooklyn Youth Chorus, Sō Percussion, the American Composers Orchestra and the New York Botanical Garden, among others. She has composed numerous film scores, including *Landfall* (2020) and *Memories of a Penitent Heart* (2016), in collaboration with filmmaker Cecilia Aldarondo. Upcoming premieres include works for the Dallas Symphony Orchestra and National Symphony Orchestra, Opera Philadelphia, LA Philharmonic and NY Philharmonic Project 19 initiative. angelicanegron.com

Matana Roberts has been called “a major talent” (*The Wire*) and “the spokeswoman for a new, politically conscious and refractory Jazz scene” (*Jazzthetik*). Since the release of her last record, she has been traveling extensively, and her voyages have allowed her to build on a personal archive of experience which has inspired much of her work to date, with a thematic focus on migration, memory, sound and the place of history in uncertain times. Roberts is also a 2019 DAAD fellow in music composition. Of her work, Matana says the following: “At my artistic core, I am firmly dedicated to creating a unique and very personal body of sound work that speaks to, and reminds people of all walks of life to reach, stand up, give voice, regardless of difference, created from mere labels of intellectual classification. In my ideal world the idea of ‘difference,’ is an illusion designed only for modern economic division and elitist intellectual hierarchy. Through my life’s work, I stand creatively in defiance.” matanaroberts.com

Kojiro Umezaki (梅崎 康二郎) is a performer of the shakuhachi and composer, often developing and employing media-technology systems for live performance. Noted by *The New York Times* as a “virtuosic, deeply expressive shakuhachi player and composer” and the LA Times as one of the “better kept secrets of Southern California music,” he has performed regularly with the Silkroad Ensemble since 2001 with whom he appears on multiple recordings including the Grammy Award-winning *Sing Me Home*, *A Playlist Without Borders*, *Off the Map*, and the Grammy-nominated 2015 documentary film, *The Music of Strangers*, directed by Morgan Neville. Other notable recordings as performer, composer and/or producer include Brooklyn Rider’s *Dominant Curve*, Yo-Yo Ma’s *Appassionato*, Nicole Mitchell’s *Mandorla Awakening II*, Kei Akagi’s *Aqua Puzzle*, *The Silk Road: A Musical Caravan* (Smithsonian Folkways), and Huun Huur Tu’s *Ancestors Call*. A developer of real-time music/media systems, his interest in hybrid forms of creative activity draws from tradition and technology, with a particular focus on intercultural musical practices across the historic Silk Road regions. He holds a degree in Electro-acoustic Music from Dartmouth College. kojiroumezaki.com

Upcoming Events in the ***This is America*** Series



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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