



FLUX QUARTET  
AH YOUNG HONG  
MIRANDA CUCKSON  
COLEMAN ITZKOFF  
CONRAD HARRIS  
BEN ROIDL-WARD  
STRING NOISE  
ADDA KRIDLER  
JAMES AUSTIN SMITH  
LEAH ASHER  
MICHAEL HERSCH

# SPECTRUM PRESENTS **THE MUSIC OF MICHAEL HERSCH**

2026

October 2

October 3

October 4



**THE MUSIC OF  
MICHAEL HERSCH**

A FESTIVAL

October 2 / October 3 / October 4  
2026

**Presented by Spectrum**

With performances by (in order of appearance)

FLUX Quartet  
Conrad Harris  
Ah Young Hong  
Ben Roidl-Ward  
String Noise  
Adda Kridler  
James Austin Smith  
Miranda Cuckson  
Leah Asher  
Coleman Itzkoff  
Michael Hersch

MISE-EN\_PLACE  
45 St. Nicholas Avenue  
New York, NY 10026

“Hersch is the explorer of an unconditional,  
radical expressivity that reveals the human  
abyss without any palliation.”

GEORG FRIEDRICH HAAS

## THE MUSIC of MICHAEL HERSCH

BY MIRANDA CUCKSON

Michael Hersch's music forms a unique world that is highly recognizable as his own and difficult to associate with stylistic movements. He uses spare materials to grippingly visceral effect. Using isolated clusters or chords, he often employs the power of a single attack, or of a crescendo on a single note, to express his aims. His markings outline both gentle motions and violent contrasts across a huge dynamic and pitch range. In solo pieces a single line can be devastating, with subtle changes in its timbre, or giving powerful impact with a sudden flourish. In all his works, there is the sense of space and of gesture as sculpted objects.

His music often deals with the most challenging aspects of human experience, invoking desolation, sorrow, illness, war, violence, isolation. The music also poses immense technical challenges. Loud and turbulent passages requiring great accuracy combined with wildly unleashed energy adjoin extensive sections or quiet moments of tremendous simplicity, in which shaping of every inflection becomes paramount. The music employs extremes of register, dynamics, and types of directional motion. There are violent gestures, wild chordal playing, slow pulses and cavernous gaps of silence. The sudden switches from furious virtuosity to very still, nuanced playing test the performer's skill and stamina. These issues are particular to Hersch's music and

they serve its basic expressive paradox, for the listener is simultaneously impacted by its huge dimensions and powerful gestures, and drawn in by its acute focus on subtle detail and nuance.

Also a remarkable pianist, it is apparent that his music has been informed by his own sense as a performer of the importance of the player's intentions and imagination. It is true and important in all music that the inert symbols on the page must be infused with meaning, but Hersch's music relies crucially on the symbiosis of composer and performer in order for its emotional power and sonic possibilities to come forth. In every gesture, in all fluctuations of volume, articulation and color, the music needs to be executed with the same sense of purpose and conviction as it was written.

Many of his works are companioned with text. In these pieces he selects fragments of texts by a particular writer and employs them as a counterpart to his composition, placing the fragments in conjunction with specific musical movements. The text can be read on the page but remains unsung and unspoken. His text-based works bear several layers of meaning, situated somewhere between the abstraction of pure music and the pictorial and poetic associations of programmatic composition.

His work often conjures images from nature: birds in motion, water, lightning, snow, fiery skies. The poetry and the music evoke a range of darkly tinged emotional states, from feelings of desolation and frustration, to horror, to a kind of fearful wonder. The persistent recurrence of material and passages of stillness counteract the volatile aspects of the music, often invoking a suffocating sense of despair and stasis.



Excerpts from the article

## PARALLELS and DIVERGENCES

BY CHRISTOPHER FOX

Originally published in TEMPO, VOLUME 77, ISSUE 304, APRIL 2023 (CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS)

Imagine opening a door. It looks like all the other doors, so it is reasonable to expect that it will open into a space of similar dimensions, revealing a more or less familiar range of things, arranged in a more or less familiar way. Getting to know the work of a musician is often like this: a particular piece provides the portal and from there one moves around, listening to first this, then that, making comparisons, getting to know what to expect. Now imagine instead that the door opens into a space whose dimensions seem, at least at first, to defy comprehension. Again there are familiar things, but some of them are of a size that seems to transcend the available space. For me, over the last three years, this has been the experience of trying to get to know the work of the American composer Michael Hersch.

... What is perhaps especially striking is the directness with which Hersch's music speaks to us, in an era when many composers of contemporary classical music see the very notion of music 'speaking' as at least conditional and, more probably, entirely problematic. I was present at the Maida Vale premiere of [his work *the script of storms*] and its impact on me triggered this article. I wanted to discover why the music had made such a

powerful impression and to what extent this went beyond Hersch's spectacular command of orchestral colour and [soprano] Ah Young Hong's compelling account of the solo soprano part.

... Hersch is a composer whose imagination thrives on personal interaction, with favourite performers, such as Hong, and, above all, with his own instrument, the piano. In October 2006 Hersch premiered *The Vanishing Pavilions*, playing the two-hour work entirely from memory, and he recorded it two months later for a two-CD album ... the listener's attention is constantly being engaged and re-engaged by a succession of clearly delineated musical images that confirm Hersch's extraordinary pianism and his vivid pianistic imagination.

... *extraordinary musical objects* ...

It seems to me that Hersch's music demonstrates that an uncompromisingly modernist musical vocabulary can still be used to powerfully expressive effect by a composer for whom subjective expressivity, rather than a preoccupation with formalist innovation, is a vital concern. Few of us will live our lives without discovering that at some point they can be turned upside down by some arbitrary shift in social order or by a mutation in the cells of our own body and it is these catastrophic existential changes that are the recurrent subject of Hersch's music. Above all his is music that demonstrates how art can be as all-enveloping, disruptive as life itself.



Maya

# PROGRAM 1

Friday, October 2, 2026  
7:30 PM

*Images from a Closed Ward* for string quartet

Michael Hersch

- I.
- II.
- III.
- IV.
- V.
- VI.
- VII.
- VIII.
- IX.
- X.
- XI.
- XII.
- XIII.

FLUX QUARTET

*The program will be played without an intermission*

Program Duration: c. 70'



## On Michael Hersch's *Images from a Closed Ward*

BY AARON GRAD

Music of urgency and fearlessness, Michael Hersch's work often navigates what can be difficult, at times painful, realms of loss and psychological instability. His string quartet, *Images from a Closed Ward*, is no exception. It has in its origins an encounter in Rome in 2000. The American artist Michael Mazur (1935-2009) had created a series of etchings to accompany Robert Pinsky's new translation of Dante's *Inferno*, and Mazur's works were on display at the American Academy in Rome while the then 29-year-old Hersch was there as a Rome Prize Fellow. During their time in the Eternal City, Hersch and Mazur seemed to recognize each other as kindred spirits. Hersch later noted, "Although we worked in very different mediums, I often sensed that Mazur connected with what I was attempting to articulate through sound, and above all that he felt strong parallels between music and image."

In 2003, Mazur provided artwork and commentary for Hersch's first CD release, a collection of his chamber music performed by the String Soloists of the Berlin Philharmonic. In describing the young composer's style, Mazur noted, "I am struck by what might constitute an analogy with painting and with my own work in particular. There is, of course, the overwhelming sense of 'sadness,' which is better than 'doom.' In fact, the 'abyss' in its finality is easy to portray: a rich black says it all ... Dante looked into the abyss but primarily found sadness

there. Sadness is a much more complicated and, therefore, interesting human condition."

Mazur began to make his name in the 1960s with two groups of etchings and lithographs, *Closed Ward* and *Locked Ward*. His subject matter involved a different form of confinement than Dante's rings of hell, but his vivid depictions of inmates in a Rhode Island mental asylum peered into an abyss all its own. Reviewing the etchings in 1964 for *The New York Times*, John Canaday wrote that Mazur's tormented subjects "have the terrible anonymity of individuals who cannot be reached, whose ugly physical presence is only the symptom of a tragic spiritual isolation." It was these images that resonated with Hersch, and that helped to shape what would be his first string quartet since one composed during his student days almost twenty years earlier.

Once he had the work outlined in the summer of 2009, Hersch decided that he would contact the artist with whom he had not spoken in some time. Hersch recalls, "I was extremely excited at the prospect of seeing him again, and sharing the terrain of this new quartet. I felt that he would be surprised and pleased that something he had done had a hand in the shaping of this new work. The day before I planned to write him, I read of his death in a Sunday newspaper."

An etching from Mazur's *Closed Ward* series hangs directly over Hersch's writing desk in Pennsylvania. The etching depicts figures seated on a wide bench, back to back. In the foreground, a man is crumpled over with his hands nearly brushing his bare feet; his limbs are clearly outlined, but his head and torso are shaded to a deep, impenetrable black. The person next to him is a bundled sack of gray, the face distorted. Behind them are hooded figures and a ghostly partial image. There is a sooty,



Dickensian objectivity to the scene, and yet the image is surreal and fragile, like a partially remembered dream.

*Images from a Closed Ward* uses thirteen separate movements to convey a disquieting reality from multiple vantage points. Music, unlike art, requires time to unfold, and Hersch stretches out the unveiling with glacially slow tempos. The work never creeps higher than 66 beats per minute (like a resting heart rate) and it drops to as low as 24 beats per minute, obscuring any sense of pulse. Another distinctive trait of the quartet is how, apart from the climactic counterpoint of the 11th movement, the four players often work together in formations of massed sonorities. Although distinctly modern, these homophonic or quasi-homophonic textures hearken back to Renaissance and earlier church traditions, a connection reinforced by open harmonies that avoid stylized triads and tonal expectations. Hersch's ancient, pre-tonal tendencies are most apparent in the pale chorale texture of the first movement, which functions as a prelude to the work as a whole.

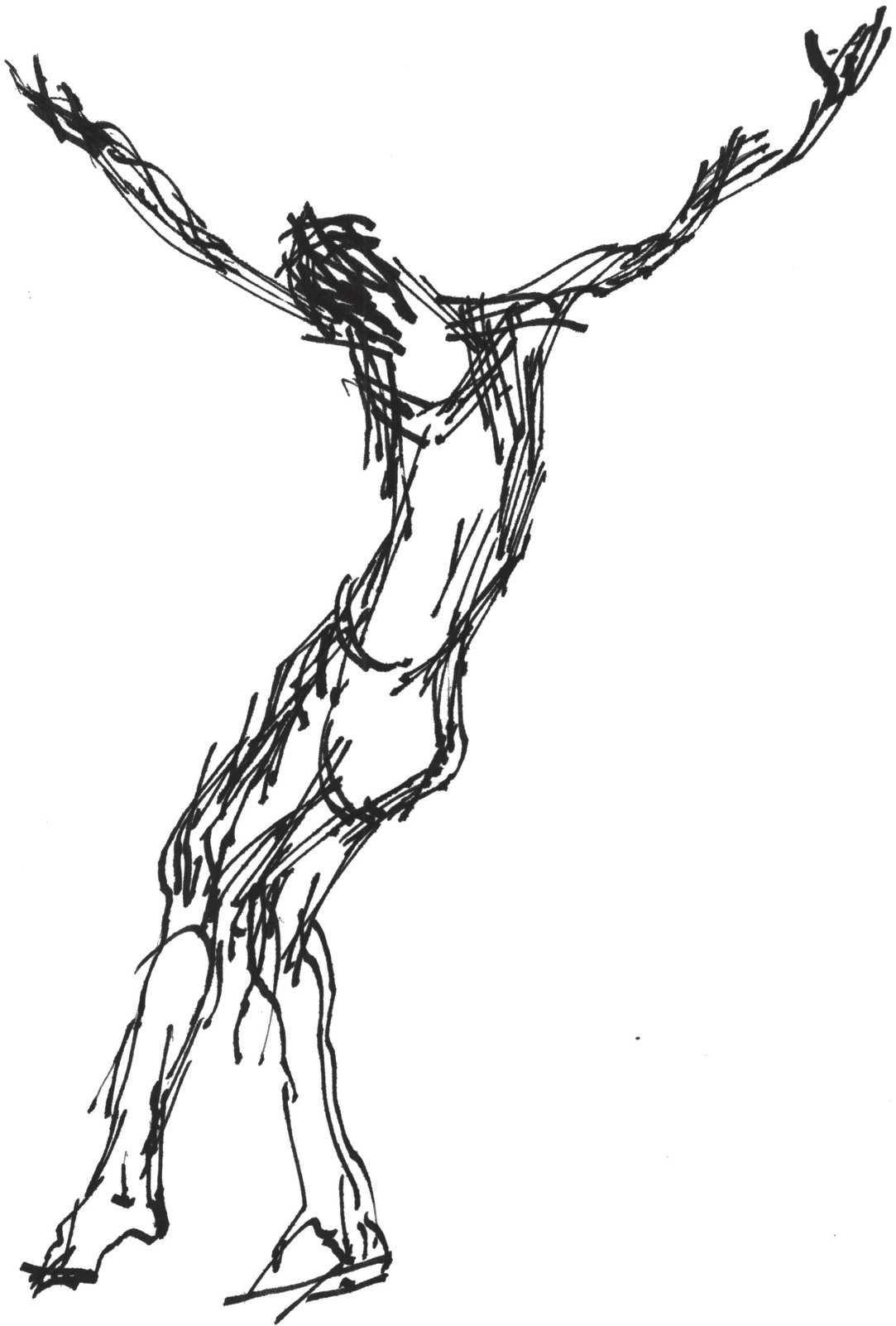
The players maintain rhythmic lockstep throughout the second and fourth movements, issuing loud and ferocious bursts of chattering chords. These two aggressive sections bookend the haunting third movement, marked with an expressive indication of "longing; quiet, restrained grief." The plucked cello provides a dirge-like foundation for the understated and strangely heroic melodies. The fifth movement brings the first taste of brittle counterpoint. The sixth movement also divides the ensemble, with two pairs sparring in opposing strata of slow and fast motion. The seventh movement looks back to the smooth chords of the first movement, but the sound takes on greater urgency and motion, propelled by a ceaseless cello line. The eighth

movement reduces the work's violent streak to dry attacks, the players assaulting their strings with the wooden bow-sticks. The ninth movement returns to the aching purity of long-tones, with a performance instruction of "haunted; stricken." The following movement, marked "frozen," drops the quartet into total stasis, a cold darkness reinforced by the use of mutes.

From this point of maximal tension, the eleventh movement erupts with ferocious, unrelenting rage. Gone are the targeted jabs of the second and fourth movements, in which the instruments moved together. For more than ten minutes, the four voices engage in a battle of ripping, gouging, and stabbing counterpoint, followed by an arresting silence. The twelfth movement combines the worlds of the first and second movements, while the ending, thirteenth, section, reprises the wistful music of the third movement; the melody provides solace, but not relief, as it once again leaves the final phrase unresolved.

Mazur's final thoughts about Hersch's early chamber music seem to apply well to *Images from a Closed Ward*: "These compositions are filled sometimes with frightening sounds. They are unrelenting, nearly without hope... But no artwork can be without hope since it is in the very nature of creative work to be optimistic, if only in as much as we continue to work through everything but our own death."

*Aaron Grad has been Program Annotator for the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra since 2005. He also contributes program notes to the New World Symphony, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Celebrity Series of Boston, Columbia Artists, and others. His concert reviews have appeared in The Washington Post, and PlaybillArts regularly publishes his feature articles and interviews online.*



# PROGRAM 2

Saturday, October 3, 2026

7:30 PM

*Fourteen Pieces after Primo Levi* for unaccompanied violin  
no. III

Michael Hersch

Conrad Harris, violin

*oaks cut for the pyre* – **NYC PREMIERE**  
*five songs after texts of Robert Lowell* for soprano and bassoon

Michael Hersch

Ah Young Hong, soprano

Ben Roidl-Ward, bassoon

*Fourteen Pieces*  
no. IV

Michael Hersch

Conrad Harris, violin

*a tearing loose from matter* for two violins

Michael Hersch

String Noise – Conrad Harris and Pauline Kim Harris, violins

*Fourteen Pieces*  
no. XIII

Michael Hersch

Adda Kridler, violin

*Trauerrefrain* – **NYC PREMIERE**  
*six songs after texts of Anja Utler* for soprano, oboe and violin

Michael Hersch

Ah Young Hong, soprano

James Austin Smith, oboe

Adda Kridler, violin

*Fourteen Pieces*  
no. XIV

Michael Hersch

Adda Kridler, violin

*The program will be played without an intermission*

Program Duration: c. 80'

Please hold applause until after the last work of the program.



## Fourteen Pieces after poetry of Primo Levi

NO. III

*As mad Ulysses sowed salt in the furrows I've found you everywhere ...*

NO. IV

*This is a time of lightning without thunder  
Before the leaves fall,  
Before the sky closes again,  
Before we are awakened again ...*

NO. XIII

NOCTURNE II

NO. XIV

*When all the snow has melted  
We'll go look for the old path,  
The one with brambles growing over it  
Behind the monastery wall.  
Everything will be the way it used to be.*

Translated into English by Ruth Feldman and Brian Swann.

# oaks cut for the pyre

## TEXTS

### I.

*Everything near you is smoke ...  
Everything you grab hold of  
street, portico, walls and mirrors -  
glues you to a paralyzed crowd of dead things ...*

*... it's a sign that this is the hour for letting go  
of the life you were always disposed to throttle ...  
... oaks cut for the pyre ...*

*... a paralyzed crowd of dead things ... Everything you grab hold of  
street, portico, walls and mirrors -*

*... Everything near you is smoke ...  
... it's a sign that this is the hour for letting go of the life you were always ...*

*... A wind carries its ashes to the stars.*

### II.

*Having flown too high to have any more use as a plaything  
who will care if it pays back its debt and explodes  
returning ... to an uncaring air it has never been able to breathe. ... to breathe ...*

*... and explodes ...*

### III.

*... I felt the winter freeze the sunshine into ice ...*

*... things here at hand and alive ...*

*... sunshine into ice ... and alive ...*

### IV.

*... wear away the days,  
those days that eat away eternity.*

### V.

*We feel the machine slipping from our hands, as if someone else were steering;  
if we see a light at the end of the tunnel, it's the light of an oncoming train.*

*... drowning his last crew in uncharted ocean, seeking the unpeopled world beyond the sun ...*

*... at the end of the tunnel,  
it's the light of an oncoming train ...*

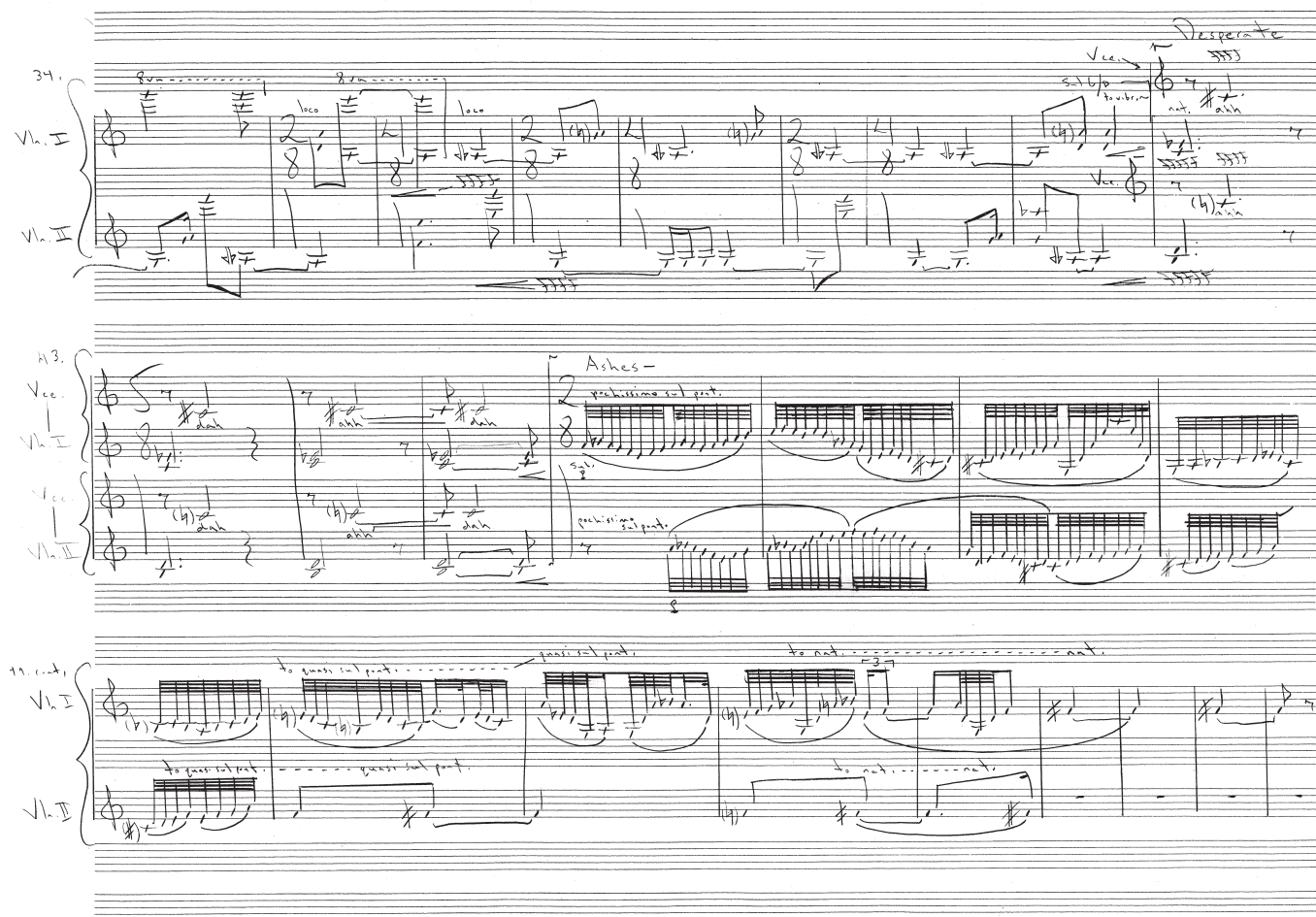
*... things here at hand and alive ... light of an oncoming train ...*

*It's amazing,  
the day is still here ... as if in the end ... we could ever escape being absolutely safe.*

*I myself am hell; nobody's here.*

*... each of us holds a locked razor.*

All texts by Robert Lowell (1917-1977). Used with permission.



Michael Hersch: *a tearing loose from matter*, excerpt, manuscript.

## *a tearing loose from matter* for two violins (2022)

*"a tearing loose from matter"* is a brief, single-movement work, written over two days in late 2022. I had been thinking about situations calling upon elusive ideas of compassion in difficult circumstances, issues that poet Shane McCrae often traverses in his writing. In creating the libretto for a new opera based upon McCrae's poetry, I found myself thinking about a particular few lines, lines which I never set in the opera but that lingered nonetheless:

*"... he saw the tops of the other angels' heads before he saw their bodies  
Before he saw their hands ...  
Shaking like the hands of humans when humans are pleading"*

This in turn reminded me of a line from the end of John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, a book I hadn't thought about in well over 40 years:

*"The hand shook violently, but his face set and his hand steadied ..."*

In this piece of music, the violinists are called upon to vocalize throughout. Usually, they are singing varying vowel and consonant sounds. The vocalized text is from poet Jan Zwicky's book, *Songs for Relinquishing the Earth*:

*"... where the heart lay ... nothing ... sun tumbles down"*

The title of the work is a fragment from the poem *The Memory of the Eye* by Ioan Flora - translated into English from the Romanian by Adam J. Sorkin and Elena Barta.

— Michael Hersch

# Trauerrefrain

TEXTS (WITH TRANSLATIONS)

I.

**Es beginnt der Tag:  
Ausstechform und Glanz; hält Fleisch  
in seinen Grenzen.  
Nichts fließt ab, nur weil es will.**

So the day begins:  
sharp-edged and shiny; keeps flesh  
within its limits.  
Nothing drains away at will.

II.

**Es beginnt der Tag  
und stimmt klingt fast wie schlimm. Mit  
Schluss aus Kreuz und Stoß.  
Das fällt zu ohne exit.**

So the day begins  
and *right* sounds so like *cry*. And  
ends with cut and thrust.  
It closes without exit.

III.

**Es beginnt der Tag.  
Knapper Blitz im Staub auf dem  
Regal ein Flügel  
Körper liegt ein Stückchen weg.**

So the day begins.  
Quick glint in the dust a wing  
atop the cupboard  
body lies not far away.

IV.

**Es beginnt der Tag  
in jedes Schattenlager  
das es gibt, gräbt sich  
in Decken Kopfhaut Sohlen**

—

**Es beginnt der Tag,  
organentleert als Schuh als  
Dreckschutz, Lehm-, tote  
Häute machen Boden gut**

So the day begins,  
digs into all the shadows'  
hideouts, digs into  
blankets, scalps, and soles of feet

—

So the day begins,  
disemboweled as a shoe  
as dirt-guard, clay-, dead  
skins help renew the soil

V.

**Es beginnt der Tag  
bei andren Leuten**

So the day begins  
for other people

VI.

**Es beginnt der Tag  
weil Licht nicht umkehrt Feuer  
spritzt dass kein Auge  
nachwächst machts nicht ungesehn**

So the day begins  
since light can't turn back fire shoots  
eye not growing back  
does not undo the seeing

All texts by Anja Utler

From the book, *Es beginnt: Trauerrefrain* (Edition Korrespondenzen, 2023)

Translations by Kurt Beals and Aimee Chor. Used with permission.



# PROGRAM 3

Sunday, October 4, 2026  
7:30 PM

*Douleur me bat* for soprano and string quartet

Josquin des Prez – arr. Hersch

Ah Young Hong, soprano  
Miranda Cuckson, violin I  
Adda Kridler, violin II  
Leah Asher, viola  
Coleman Itzkoff, cello

*the weather and landscape are on our side* for unaccompanied violin

Michael Hersch

- I.
- II.
- III.
- IV.
- V.
- VI.
- VII.
- VIII.
- IX.
- X.
- XI.

Miranda Cuckson, violin

*The Vanishing Pavilions* for piano (excerpts)  
V., XII., VII., VIII., IX., XXVII.

Michael Hersch

Michael Hersch, piano

*Susanne un jour* for soprano and string quartet

Orlande de Lassus – arr. Hersch

Ah Young Hong, soprano  
Miranda Cuckson, violin I  
Adda Kridler, violin II  
Leah Asher, viola  
Coleman Itzkoff, cello

## — INTERMISSION —

*Sonata No. 2 for Unaccompanied Cello*

Michael Hersch

- I.
- II.
- III.
- IV.
- V.
- VI.
- VII.

Coleman Itzkoff, cello

Program Duration: c. 80'

Please hold applause until after the last work of the first half of the program.

# On *Douleur me bat* & *Susanne un jour*

BY MICHAEL HERSCH

From early on in my composing, I have had a love of certain musics from the 14th-17th centuries, with a particular affinity for the music of, among others, Guillaume de Machaut, Josquin des Prez and Orlande de Lassus. I found a certain haven in this early music which often exhibited qualities shared with art of any period which I admired, qualities of concision, clear-sightedness, directed power and, generally speaking, an aversion to sentimentality.

Over the years, in-between composing my own works, often as a way of taking a kind of refuge from myself, I have made varying arrangements and transcriptions of some of these aforementioned composers of the increasingly distant past. At times, I remain faithful to the original, at others, I take liberties, often extending the works durationally and structurally far beyond the original. In some cases I intensify or recede particular harmonies, employ a precise or modified use of ornament, apply recon-figurations of voicing, an expansion of coloration and gesture; above all, I embark on a reshaping of the dramatic arc, though always attempting to remain, with caveats, more or less within what I perceive to be the language of the period.

For those arrangements that feel as if they have stretched into something altogether different from the original, I often characterize the work as a Fantasia “on” the work in question. But again, there are those instances when I engage the originals in a more faithful manner, more or less adapting the work from one instrumental or vocal frame to another instrumentation. These arrangements of Josquin’s *Douleur me bat* and Orlande de Lassus’ *Susanne un jour* are works of this latter sort.

More than anything, I find these musics of the past both haunting and beautiful, and in the occasional works I endeavor to write which engage with these musics, I find these particular dialogues, these momentary “conversations,” deeply fulfilling.

Michael Hersch: excerpt from arrangement of *Susanne un jour*, manuscript.

# Susanne un jour

Orlando de Lassus  
arr. Michel Hersch

jeune et farouche et string-punk

meur so - li - e - té - e, Sus - san - ne un jour

meur so - li - e - té - e

This system contains the first two staves of the handwritten musical score. The top staff features a vocal line with lyrics in French. The bottom staff shows a complex instrumental accompaniment with various rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings.

sa veau - té, Fi - en son cœur tri - stes et de

sa veau - té, Fi - en son cœur tri - stes et de

This system continues the musical score with the second and third staves. The vocal line continues with more lyrics, and the instrumental part includes some dense, textured passages.

tri - stes et de - con - tri - stes - e, vo - gant l'é -

tri - stes et de - con - tri - stes - e, vo - gant l'é -

This system contains the final two staves of the handwritten musical score. It concludes with a vocal line and a final instrumental flourish.

à l'orchestre

## TEXT FRAGMENTS FROM THE LETTERS OF BRUNO SCHULZ

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Michael Hersch: *the weather and landscape are on our side*, manuscript page.



Michael Hersch: excerpt from *The Vanishing Pavilions*, manuscript pages.

## On Michael Hersch's *The Vanishing Pavilions*

BY ANDREW FARACH-COLTON

Like many composers before him, Michael Hersch finds inspiration in poetry. With few exceptions, though, his musical responses tend to be expressed not in song but in purely instrumental terms. Thus, after reading Christopher Middleton's poetry and feeling an immediate artistic and spiritual kinship with the British writer's work, the idea for a massive solo-piano cycle began to take shape. This was in the fall of 2001 at the American Academy in Berlin, where Hersch and Middleton were fellows; within a year he had settled upon the various lines of poetry that would serve as inspiration and signposts for *The Vanishing Pavilions*.

Hersch has called his Czesław Miłosz-inspired set of pieces for violin and piano, *the wreckage of flowers* (2003), "a shattered song cycle without words" and that vivid description also fits *The Vanishing Pavilions*. Yet with a score of some three hundred pages and a performance time of well over two hours, the latter work is on a far larger scale. *The Vanishing Pavilions* is divided into two books that encompass some fifty movements. Each book has its own discernible dramatic logic and shape, yet the two are indivisible. Approximately half of the movements were composed as companions to Middleton's poetic images; these are separated by a comparable number of *intermezzi* unrelated to any partic-



ular text. A dense web of motivic, harmonic and atmospheric relationships binds the whole together. And the density does not merely extend horizontally, from movement to movement, but is often expressed vertically, too, in elaborate layers of distinctly articulated musical ideas and characters. It is yet another technical challenge in a work that already requires extreme digital dexterity and strength.

*The Vanishing Pavilions* was premiered by the composer at Saint Mark's Church in Philadelphia. Hersch performed the vast, intricately detailed score entirely from memory. David Patrick Stearns of *The Philadelphia Inquirer* described the event as one that "felt downright historic." He added, "The long-term trajectory of *The Vanishing Pavilions* is from music of polarized extremes to something more integrated, but harshly mirroring how elements of daily life that were unacceptable before Sept. 11, 2001 are confronted daily. Overtly or covertly, *The Vanishing Pavilions* is about the destruction of shelter (both in fact and in concept) and life amid the absence of any certainty. And though the music is as deeply troubled as can be, its restless directness also commands listeners not to be paralyzed by existential futility." Stearns also praised Hersch's playing, writing that the composer "conjured volcanic gestures from the piano with astonishing virtuosity."

Hersch has said that when he reads text that resonates within him, he may feel a visceral reaction, or the very words themselves may appear "like fire on the page." If one were to generalize about the writers whose work Hersch is drawn to, including Mandelstam, Hölderlin and Miłosz, in addition to Middleton, it

might be fair to say that they share an unflinching, uncompromising vision; they are willing to acknowledge and grapple with the dark side of humanity.

*Gentle Reader* (from Middleton's 2001 collection *The Word Pavilion*) is not one of the texts selected by Hersch, but nevertheless illuminates how this poet and this composer are connected. In this poem, Middleton describes a serene piece of music that "brings to life a landscape: / Of poplars by a silver river, slender trees / Shimmering ..."

*Oboe, flute, and strings deliver from the air  
Just such a picture, like a Claude Lorraine.*

*Another fifty years – with different trees  
The picture will be mistier, Corot.*

The poet suggests that we, the gentle readers of the poem's title, are "greedy" for aural and visual images. And then, later in the poem, in an abrupt shift, there are the images and sounds we turn away from. Middleton wants us to see these, too, and to hear:

*... the shouts of thugs  
Clubbing to death with crowbars people  
Rather shocked to find that this was happening  
A few doors only from home, for no good reason ...*

Hersch's music can be similarly unsettling, raw, or even violent, yet the composer not only wants us to hear, he wants us to *listen*. This is what gives his music much of its power, and what makes

it so challenging to come to terms with. There is much that is beautiful in Hersch's music, certainly, though sometimes it can be a terrible beauty. There are no shimmering reflections, no Corot-like landscapes in *The Vanishing Pavilions*. Yet, in a sense, the music's emotional clout is a direct product of the composer's dogged truthfulness.

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There are pieces of comparable size in the keyboard literature—Messiaen's *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* (1944) and Morton Feldman's *Triadic Memories* (1981) are notable examples. Though, really, in terms of dramatic range and emotional force, *The Vanishing Pavilions* is sui generis. Hersch's aforementioned description, "a shattered song cycle without words," is likely the most accurate and useful. Indeed, Hersch's cycle feels closer in spirit to, say, Schubert's *Die Winterreise* than to either *Vingt Regards* (an act of intense, ecstatic spiritual contemplation) or *Triadic Memories* (an aural organism whose movements are mesmerizing, sublime). It's "shattered" in the sense that the unfolding narrative concerns the exploration and development of a state of mind rather than story-telling in any traditional sense. Along this epic journey, the composer serves not as a detached guide but as an active participant. And perhaps this is the ultimate source of the music's power. Exhilaration, terror, awe, despair, rapture—Hersch doesn't just confront us with these sensations, he experiences them with us.



# Michael Hersch's Sonata No. 2 for Unaccompanied Cello

BY ANDREW FARACH-COLTON

"Vox clamantis in deserto"

*Isaiah 40:3*

Listening to a work for unaccompanied violin or cello can feel a little bit like eavesdropping. This may be partly because the relationship between a player and instrument is such an intimate one, although surely the music itself is also a factor. Much of the repertoire for solo cello, for instance – from Sainte-Colombe and Bach to Kodaly and Britten – seems to have been intended for solitary contemplation, or even self-induced catharsis, rather than for public display.

Certainly, Michael Hersch's two sonatas for solo cello suggest a highly confidential form of communion between player and instrument, although both turn out to be potently communicative in a much broader sense, too. A quick glance at a few of the expressive markings peppered throughout the scores gives an indication of just how high Hersch has set the emotional stakes: "haunting, grieving"; "*violente* (violent)"; "with great weight and power"; "with a sense of terror". Like so much of Hersch's work, in fact, these sonatas come across as musical manifestations of life-or-death struggles – and a significant portion of their power is derived from the highly personal nature of the medium. The sight and sound of 100 or more musicians playing at full strength might knock you sideways, but it's at essence a communal form of expression, and (as the saying goes) there's safety in numbers. By contrast, a solitary cellist playing his or her heart out evokes a more ancient, archetypal image of loneliness – one that harks back at least as far as the New Testament and Isaiah's "voice of one crying in the wilderness."

The intensity and immensity of Hersch's musical vision demands extraordinary emotional largesse buttressed by a virtuosic technique and huge reserves of stamina. There is however nothing remotely flashy or flamboyant about these sonatas; the virtuosity required is purely transcendental. In the case of the cello, an instrument normally relegated to a single melodic line in an ensemble must now alone command a listener's full and unwavering attention. What's presented must come across as wholly complete – a world unto itself.

Hersch has said that he does not approach the writing of an unaccompanied work as a solo at all, but rather as an ensemble, while still considering the instrument on its own terms. Many of the methods Hersch employs – for example: extensive double stopping (bowing two lines simultaneously); rapid, shifting arpeggiation (successively playing through the individual notes of a series of chords by either moving from the top note to the bottom or vice versa); and alternating between two streams of notes that are separated far enough (high voice and low voice) to create a conversational effect – are not his invention. It's how

he adapts these devices that makes them so gripping, as well as so daunting for the performer. There are indeed passages where it's obvious that the cellist's prowess is being severely tested: most notably in the ruthless final movement of his First Sonata, and nearly the entirety of the Second Sonata's extensive fifth movement. There are other pages that are terse, or where the texture seems uncomplicated, and gaping silences play a crucial role in both sonatas. Even in these, however, issues of bow control and intonation are potential minefields. In addition, there remains the overarching challenge of establishing, sustaining, and developing the music's heightened emotional states. So, really, none of it – including the silences, it seems – is easy to play.

Nor do these sonatas make for easy listening. Hersch's music is rarely sweet and never light-hearted or merely pretty. Its beauty emanates from its absolute sincerity and the acute, unblinking focus on the truths and visions that Hersch reveals to us.

The Sonata No. 1 for unaccompanied cello is among Michael Hersch's earliest published works. He was 23 and still a student when he completed the score in 1994. This may seem astounding given that the music already speaks recognizably in his mature voice, and that the sizable score is held together so expertly. Indeed, the first movement alone is vast, taking nearly a quarter-hour in performance.

When Hersch completed his Sonata No. 2 in 2000, the First Sonata, apart from a conservatory performance, had yet to be performed publicly. The official premiere finally took place in 2001, seven years after its completion, when cellist Daniel Gaisford played it at the 92nd Street Y in New York City. In 2003, Gaisford gave the first performance of the Sonata No. 2 (which is dedicated to him) in Rome at the Romaeuropa Festival, and he recorded it the following year for Vanguard Classics.

An ingenious seven-movement structure provides the Sonata No. 2 with balance and cohesion through asymmetry – a technical achievement that was surely an important stepping stone towards the staggering organizational complexity of *The Vanishing Pavilions*, Hersch's massive, 50-movement solo piano cycle, completed in 2005. Movements I, IV and VII of the Sonata are complementary; there are crucial thematic connections among them, though each has a distinct dramatic shape that befits its structural placement. Movements III and VI are identical, succinct, and motivically single-minded to the point of obsessiveness; one might describe them as a pair of unnerving *intermezzi*. Movement II is *étude*-like in the character and consistency of its figuration. Movement V is the sonata's dramatic crux.

What Hersch means when he says he writes for the cello as an "ensemble" rather than as a solo instrument (as mentioned above) is clearly evident in Movement I of the Sonata No. 2, which is composed as a duet from start to finish. Except for a few bars in the movement's center, the two voices move together, like monks intoning a threnody, and the intervals they chant are often achingly dissonant or empty sounding, like hollowed-out chords. These intervals are the building blocks for the entire work; almost all of what follows is derived from the sonorities heard in the first seven measures.

Movement II flows in an almost unbroken stream of arpeggiated 16th-notes, creating an ornate pattern of lapping waves. These waves outline an harmonic progression that may sound appealingly opulent after the preceding movement's relative austerity. But the dissonances persevere as a kind of underlying throbbing pain, and of the 103 "waves" that make up the movement, all but ten are rigidly anchored to the cello's low C. When the bass note does break away (which happens only twice) it's merely up a short step to D before being quickly yanked back.

Movement IV commences with the grim, marching chant that formed the third part of Movement I, and ends with a variation on the sonata's introductory chorale.

the overarching lyricism of its extensive, grave first part is mitigated by sudden outbursts and cavernous silences. A new figure appears, its conspicuous two-octave leap fueling a surge of simmering passion. The fire ignites with a doggedly ascending phrase that's remarkably similar to the one that sparked the furious second half of the First Sonata's opening movement. Rapidly, the flames spread and the mood becomes increasingly desperate. Shattered motives from previous movements begin to appear. A return of the arpeggiated figuration from Movement II provides a momentary reprieve, but soon the flames rise again, consuming everything in their path. The fire only dies out when there's nothing left for it to consume.

*Andrew Farach-Colton is a regular contributor to Gramophone, BBC Music Magazine, Opera News, and The Strad. His essays and analytical notes have appeared in the program books of the New York Philharmonic, BBC Proms, and the San Francisco Opera, as well as in CD booklets of Decca and Harmonia Mundi recordings.*

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# MUSICIAN BIOGRAPHIES

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## FLUX Quartet

The FLUX Quartet, “one of the most fearless and important new-music ensembles around” (*San Francisco Chronicle*), has performed to rave reviews in venues worldwide, including the Tate Modern with BBC Radio3, Park Avenue Armory, Kennedy Center, Mount Tremper Arts, EMPAC, Walker Art Center, Carnegie’s Zankel Hall, as well as international festivals in Australia, Europe and Asia. It has also premiered new works on numerous experimental incubators, including Roulette, The Music Gallery, and Mount Tremper Arts. FLUX’s radio appearances include NPR’s *All Things Considered*, WNYC’s *New Sounds* and *Soundcheck*, and WFMU’s *Stochastic Hit Parade*. The group’s discography includes recordings on the Cantaloupe, Innova, New World, Passin Thru, and Tzadik labels, in addition to two acclaimed releases on Mode encompassing the full catalogue of Morton Feldman’s output for string quartet.

Strongly influenced by the “anything-goes” philosophy of the fluxus art movement, violinist Tom Chiu founded FLUX in the late ‘90s. The quartet has since cultivated an uncompromising repertoire that combines late twentieth-century iconoclasts such as Cage, Nancarrow, Scelsi, and Ligeti with today’s visionaries, including Oliver Lake, Michael Hersch, David First, Alvin Lucier, Michael Schumacher, Sean Shepard, Wadada Leo Smith, Julia Wolfe, Matthew Welch, and others. Having premiered over 100 new works, FLUX has been awarded grants from the American Composers Forum, Aaron Copland Fund, Meet-The-Composer, New Music USA, and Chamber Music America. FLUX also discovers emerging composers from its many college residencies, including Wesleyan, Dartmouth, Williams, Princeton, Bard, and the College of William and Mary.

The spirit to expand stylistic boundaries is a trademark of the FLUX Quartet, and to that end the quartet avidly pursues interdisciplinary projects, resulting in acclaimed new works with choreographers Pam Tanowitz and Christopher Wheeldon, avant balloonist Judy Dunaway, digital collective The OpenEnded Group, and visual artist Matthew Barney. In the upcoming season, FLUX will perform and record the full string quartet output of Toshiki Ichihyanagi, widely acknowledged as an influential pioneer of the Japanese avant-garde.

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## Ah Young Hong

A soprano of “fearlessness and consummate artistry” (*Opera News*), soprano Ah Young Hong has interpreted a vast array of repertoire, ranging from the music of Monteverdi, Bach, Mozart, and Poulenc, to works of Shostakovich, Babbitt, Haas, and Kurtág. Widely recognized for her work in Michael Hersch’s monodrama, *On the Threshold of Winter*, the *New York Times* praised Ms. Hong’s performance in the world premiere as “the opera’s blazing, lone star.” In the work’s most recent production, directed by the soprano, *The Chicago Tribune* called her “absolutely riveting,” and the *Chicago Classical Review* noted the soprano’s “fearless presence, wielding her unamplified, bell-like voice like a weaponized instrument. Hong delivered a tour de force vocal performance in this almost unfathomably difficult music-attacking the dizzying high notes with surprising power, racing through the rapid-fire desperation of agitated sections, and bringing a numbed, toneless sprechstimme and contralto-like darkness to the low tessitura.” Recent performances include solo appearances with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Camerata Bern, and at both the Aldeburgh and Ojai Music Festivals. In 2021, Ms. Hong performed the title role in Hersch’s *POPPAEA* at the Wien Modern and ZeitRäume Basel Festivals, and in 2022 she performed excerpts from Fang Mang’s opera *Golden Lily* with Alarm Will Sound. She returned to Hersch’s work, premiering *one step to the next, worlds ending* with Ensemble Phoenix Basel and *sapped from me broken* with Ben Roidl-Ward and William Overcash. During the 2024/25 season, she premiered Hersch’s newest opera, *and we, each* in Baltimore, Washington, D.C. and New York City. In 2026/27 she presents world premieres by composers Kate Soper, Oscar Bettison, Augusta Read Thomas, and Michael Hersch.

In high demand as a concert and chamber soloist, Ms. Hong has performed with Mahler Chamber Orchestra, FLUX Quartet, the acclaimed Netherland-based contemporary music group Ensemble Klang, Konzerthaus Berlin’s ensemble-in-residence, Ensemble unitedberlin, Ensemble Dal Niente in Chicago, The Daedalus Quartet, Wiener KammerOrchester, the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Charleston Symphony Orchestra, Phoenix Symphony Orchestra, Mendelssohn Club of Philadelphia, Concert Artists of Baltimore, and Tempesta di Mare, amongst others. In summer of 2018, she gave her Ojai Festival debut with violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja in György Kurtág’s complete *Kafka Fragments*. Ms. Hong also appeared as soloist during the 2018 Aldeburgh Music Festival and on the CalPerformances series in Berkeley in Michael Hersch’s *I hope we get a chance to visit soon*. Alex Ross from *The New Yorker* praised her performances as “transfixing.” Other operatic appearances by Ms. Hong include the title role in Monteverdi’s *L’incoronazione di Poppea*, Morgana in Handel’s *Alcina*, Gilda in Verdi’s *Rigoletto*, Fortuna and Minerva in Monteverdi’s *Il ritorno d’Ulisse in patria*, and Asteria in Handel’s *Tamerlano*. She has also appeared with Opera Lafayette in Rebel and Francoeur’s *Zélindor, roi des Sylphes* at the Rose Theater in Lincoln Center and as La Musique in Charpentier’s *Les Arts Florissants* at the Kennedy Center.

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## Ben Roidl-Ward

Named one of 23 artists “changing the sound of classical music” by *The Washington Post*, Ben Roidl-Ward has been praised for his “dazzling technique” (*The Sydney Morning Herald*), “breathless virtuosity” (*Bandcamp Daily*), and “astounding flexibility and range” (*The Double Reed*). He is the Assistant Professor of Bassoon at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and the Principal Bassoonist of the Chicago Sinfonietta and the Illinois Symphony. A devoted performer of contemporary music, Roidl-Ward is the bassoonist of Ensemble Dal Niente and served as a Contemporary Leader for the Lucerne Festival in Switzerland, where he continues to teach as a coach for the Lucerne Festival Academy. His dedication to advocating for composers of his generation has led him to participate in the premieres of over 175 compositions to date.

Roidl-Ward has performed with the Chicago Symphony, the New York Philharmonic, the Arctic Philharmonic, the ELISION Ensemble, the International Contemporary Ensemble, and the Grossman Ensemble. He has played as a soloist with ensembles such as the Seattle Symphony, the Illinois Wind Symphony, the Oberlin Contemporary Ensemble, and the Northwestern Contemporary Ensemble. Roidl-Ward was the 3rd Prizewinner of the International Double Reed Society Young Artist Competition, a finalist for the Gillet-Fox Competition, and the recipient of a Luminarts Fellowship in Classical Music. He has served as solo Artist-in-Residence at Northwestern University and Harvard University and appeared in festivals such as Mostly Mozart, Tanglewood, Lucerne, Donaueschingen, TIME:SPANS, Spoleto, Grant Park, Ravinia, National Repertory Orchestra, and Banff.

Roidl-Ward’s debut solo album, featured on *Bandcamp Daily*’s “Best Contemporary Classical on Bandcamp,” can also be heard on numerous prestigious labels. Prior to his appointment at the University of Illinois, he taught at the University of Northern Iowa and the University of North Carolina School of the Arts. He has presented masterclasses at the International Double Reed Society Conference, the Royal Conservatory of Music (Toronto), the Eastman School of Music, Northwestern University, and the Oberlin and Peabody Conservatories.

Roidl-Ward is an alum of the Civic Orchestra of Chicago. He received his DMA from Northwestern University, where he studied with David McGill and researched methods of notating the bassoon’s multiphonics. His previous teachers were Ben Kamins (Rice University), George Sakakeeny (Oberlin Conservatory), and Francine Peterson in the Seattle area.

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## String Noise

String Noise is composed of violinists Conrad Harris and Pauline Kim Harris. Recognized for their distinct blend of disparate genres, from arrangements of songs by punk legends to conceptual minimalist treatises by Alvin Lucier, they have expanded their repertoire with over 50 new works since their

debut at Ostrava New Music Days in 2011. Nearly a decade later, they continue to break down the boundaries of traditional expectations and inspire innovative compositions, displaying formidable virtuosity, integrating multimedia art, electronics, improvisation, video projections, opera and dance.

Premieres by String Noise include works by George Lewis, Christian Wolff, Michael Byron, David Behrman, Alvin Lucier, John King, Phill Niblock, Caleb Burhans, Catherine Lamb, David Lang, Petr Kotik, Du Yun, Annie Gosfield, Bernhard Lang, John Zorn, Greg Saunier, Alex Minck, Tyondai Braxton, James Iglennfritz, Richard Carrick and others.

String Noise has recorded for Northern Spy Records, Dymaxion Groove, Black Truffle Records, Cold Blue Records, New Focus Recordings, Infrequent Seams and Nouveau Electric Records and has been featured on WNYC, WKCR, WFMU and BBC Radio.

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## Pauline Kim Harris

Pauline Kim Harris is a GRAMMY™-nominated violinist and composer. The youngest student to have ever been accepted into the studio of legendary violinist Jascha Heifetz, she has appeared throughout the US, Canada, Europe, Asia and Australia as soloist, collaborator and music director. Known for her work with classical avant-punk violin duo, *String Noise*, she has toured extensively with *Orpheus Chamber Orchestra* and continues to collaborate with leading new music ensembles in New York City. Pauline Kim was the first Music Director for the *Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company* and has been the featured artist for choreographers David Parker and Pam Tanowitz. Pauline’s debut album, *Heroine* — a reimagining of the Bach *Chaconne* and Ockeghem’s *Deo Gratias* was released on *Sono Luminus* with worldwide distribution in September of 2019.

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## Conrad Harris

Violinist Conrad Harris has performed new works for violin at Ostrava Days, Darmstadt Ferienkurse für Neue Musik, Gulbenkian Encounters of New Music, Radio France, Warsaw Autumn, and New York’s Sonic Boom Festival. In addition to being a member of the FLUX Quartet and violin duo String Noise, he is concertmaster/soloist with the S.E.M. Orchestra, Ostravská Banda, STX Ensemble, Wordless Music Orchestra and Ensemble LPR. He has performed and recorded with such artists as Elliott Sharp, Robert Ashley, Alvin Lucier, David Behrman, “Blue” Gene Tyranny, Jean-Claude Risset, Rohan de Saram and Tiny Tim. His recording of the Lejaren Hiller Violin Sonatas with pianist Joseph Kubera was released in 2018 on New World Records. He has also recorded for Asphodel, Vandenburg, CRI, and Vinyl Retentive Records.

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## Adda Kridler

Described as “lyrical and precise” by the *New York Times* and lauded in the *Miami Herald* for her “incisive energy and lovely tone,” violinist and violist Adda Kridler has cultivated a diverse career in New York City.

As a vital member of the contemporary and avant-garde music scene, Adda has premiered more than 60 works and worked with over 100 living composers, including Georg Friedrich Haas, Michael Hersch, and Tania León. She appears frequently with the Talea Ensemble, is on faculty at the Composers Conference, and is a former member of the Momena and Overlook Quartets. With the avant-metal string quartet SevenSuns, she has performed at the Walla Walla Chamber Music Festival as well as on the Dillinger Escape Plan’s 20th anniversary shows in New York.

As a chamber and orchestral player, she has played and toured with the Argus Quartet, performed in Cuba with the Third Sound Ensemble, and appeared with ensembles including the Mark Morris Dance Group, NOVUS NY, The Knights and A Far Cry.

Adda frequently records and performs for film, television and recording artists; she has toured nationally with Adele, played on The Tonight Show and Saturday Night Live, recorded film scores for Ryuichi Sakamoto, and appeared on-screen in *Succession* and *Maestro*. She tours regularly with the Vitamin String Quartet, and has played in many Broadway productions and cast albums, including *Hamilton*, *Moulin Rouge*, *Beetlejuice*, and *The Great Gatsby*. Adda is the Artistic Director of the Rochester Chamber Music Society in Rochester, Vermont.

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## James Austin Smith

Performer, curator and on-stage host, James Austin Smith “proves that an oboist can have an adventurous solo career.” (*New Yorker*). Praised for his “virtuosic,” “dazzling,” and “brilliant” performances (*New York Times*), Smith appears regularly at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center in New York City and at leading national and international chamber music festivals, at Carnegie Hall and on tour as Co-Principal Oboe of the conductor-less Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, and as an artist of the International Contemporary Ensemble.

As Artistic and Executive Director of Tertulia Chamber Music Smith creates intimate evenings of food, drink, and music designed to engage audiences hungry for singular cultural experiences in New York, San Francisco and Serenbe, Georgia, as well as an annual weekend festival of food and music in a variety of global destinations. He serves as Artistic Advisor to Coast Live Music, a new home for chamber music in the San Francisco Bay Area. He mentors graduate-level musicians as a professor of oboe and chamber music at Stony Brook University and as a regular guest at London’s Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

In the fall of 2023 Smith presented *Hearing Memory*, an evening of performance, story-telling and archival film footage doc-

umenting a clutch of politically engaged musicians in the former East Germany. Describing the event in the *New Yorker*, Alex Ross wrote, “no less virtuosic was Smith’s running commentary on the East German context. His deployment of videos, including some of musical discussions that he had found in television archives, gave the evening the feeling of a live documentary. For any young performer seeking an alternative to the usual walk-out-and-play routines, this impeccable event could serve as a model.”

James Austin Smith holds a master’s degree from the Yale School of Music and bachelor’s degrees in political science and music from Northwestern University. He spent a year as a Fulbright Scholar at the Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy Conservatory in Leipzig, Germany, and is an alum of Carnegie Hall’s Ensemble Connect. Born in New York and raised in Connecticut, Smith’s principal teachers are Stephen Taylor, Christian Wetzel, Humbert Lucarelli, and Ray Still.

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## Miranda Cuckson

Violinist/violist Miranda Cuckson is acclaimed as a soloist and collaborator and delights audiences with her performances of music ranging from older eras to the newest creations. Engaging with musical avenues including those of Western classical traditions and various tributaries of American music, she has pursued a personal path motivated by sincere interest, innovation, and exploration, the expression of any human feelings and experiences, and the realization of virtuosity, craft, and invention.

Miranda premiered Georg Friedrich Haas’ Violin Concerto No. 2 in four countries. She made her solo debut at the Vienna Musikverein with this piece in 2023, with the Vienna Radio Symphony and conductor Markus Poschner, and the live recording was recently released on the Urlicht AV label. Her live performance of the Ligeti Violin Concerto with the UC Davis Orchestra has also been released, on Centaur Records, to great acclaim.

She is a featured artist at festivals internationally including Wien Modern, Grafenegg, Lincoln Center, Ojai, Le GuessWho, West Cork, Bard, Frequency, Time Spans, and Sinus Ton, and by such presenters as St. Paul’s Liquid Music, 92NY, Miller Theatre, Suntory Hall, Mexico City’s Palacio de Bellas Artes, Teatro Colón, Library of Congress, Cleveland Museum, San Francisco Performances, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, and Detroit Institute of Arts.

Her upcoming projects include new violin concertos by Jeffrey Mumford and Dongryul Lee; *Limin’*, a concert-length duo by/with pianist Stewart Goodyear, to be released on Avie Records; a collaboration with harpist Parker Ramsay including a new duo by Haas; *Lux Aeterna* for solo violin and choirs by Rene Hirschfeld; and solo performances in Germany and Japan.

Her widely-lauded recordings include *Világ* featuring the Bartók Solo Sonata and folk-flavored compositions; the Korngold, Ponce, and Piston concertos; Bartók, Schnittke, and Lutosławski on ECM; the Grammy-nominated *Songs and*

*Structures* by Harold Meltzer; Michael Hersch's *the wreckage of flowers*; several albums of 20th-century American music; and *Melting the darkness*, a forward-looking compilation of micro-tonal/electronic music. Her album of Luigi Nono's *La lontananza nostalgica utopica futura* was named a Recording of the Year by the New York Times.

Miranda is passionate about all the arts and is a core member of the American Modern Opera Company (AMOC\*), an interdisciplinary collective that has been featured at the Ojai and Lincoln Center Festivals. She founded the non-profit Nunc and has been noted throughout her career for her venturesome and thoughtfully threaded programming and curation.

Miranda teaches violin and chamber music at the Mannes School of Music/New School University. She frequently writes and speaks to audiences about music and she holds a doctorate from The Juilliard School.

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## Leah Asher

Violinist/violist, composer, and visual artist Leah Asher is an avid performer of contemporary music and creator of new artistic works. Asher is the executive director and violinist of The Rhythm Method string quartet and co-creator of MEANINGLESS WORK with Nicolee Kuester. Asher regularly performs with New York-based ensembles such as International Contemporary Ensemble, Talea Ensemble, and S.E.M. Ensemble. She formerly served as solo violist of NOSO Sinfonietta and co-principal viola of the Arctic Philharmonic. As a composer, Asher has been commissioned by ensembles including andPlay, Chartreuse, Periapsis, NorthArc Percussion Group, The Great Learning Orchestra, Du.0, and solo artists such as Meaghan Burke, Tristan McKay, and Jennifer Torrence. Recent releases include Asher's solo album *Retreat into Afters* on SCRIPTS records and The Rhythm Method's album *Pastorale* on New Focus recordings. Leah joined the faculty of Manhattan School of Music as of 2022.

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## Coleman Itzkoff

Coleman Itzkoff is a cellist and performer with an omnivorous artistic appetite. His work moves between concert halls, theaters, dance stages, and film, driven by curiosity and a readiness to enter unfamiliar territory. He is as drawn to the intimacy of chamber music and the invention of a continuo band as to the demands of a concerto or a role in a theater or dance company. A founding member of the American Modern Opera Company (AMOC) and a core member of Ruckus and Twelfth Night, he has helped create a body of work spanning new commissions and collaborations, reimagined Baroque repertoire, and theatrical productions in which he performs as an instrumentalist, actor, and dancer.

Highlights of his 2026–27 season include his Saint Paul

Chamber Orchestra debut with Anthony Marwood in Christopher Cerrone's double concerto *Selah*, following their world premiere of the work with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra in May 2026. At The Frick Collection, he premieres a new work written for him by Matthew Aucoin, performing with the composer at the piano. He appears as a cello soloist in Alys Pires's new ballet for New York City Ballet, performing music from Jocelyn Morlock's *Aeromancy*, and joins Bobbi Jene Smith and Or Schraiber for a new creation with GöteborgsOperans Danskompani. Other engagements include concerto performances with Sinfonia Gulf Coast and the Palo Alto Chamber Orchestra, and Handel's *Deidamia* with Ruckus at Hudson Hall.

Since AMOC's founding in 2017, Coleman has participated in the development and performance of much of its repertoire, including the company's music directorship of the 2022 Ojai Music Festival and its 2025 Run AMOC\* Festival at Lincoln Center. His projects with the company include Matthew Aucoin's theatrical oratorios *The No One's Rose* and *Music for New Bodies*; *The Comet / Poppea*, conceived and directed by Yuval Sharon, which juxtaposes a new opera by George Lewis with Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea*; Doug Balliett's *Rome Is Falling*, an irreverent rock opera about the absurdities of power and imperial collapse; and Carolyn Chen's *How to Fall Apart*, an exploration of entropy through music, text, and movement for two musicians and three dancers. He has also performed in *El Niño: Nativity Reconsidered*, Julia Bullock's conception of John Adams's oratorio, and in Gerard & Kelly's *Gay Guerrilla*, an exploration of Julius Eastman's music at the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

His work with choreographers and partners Bobbi Jene Smith and Or Schraiber has developed over years of close collaboration and friendship. In addition to *Lost Mountain*, *Broken Theater*, and *The Cello Player*, he appeared in their *Seven Scenes* at Little Island, with music by Ringdown, the duo of Caroline Shaw and Danni Lee Parpan. For *Procession*, their full-length creation for the National Ballet of Canada, he served as music coordinator, arranger, and orchestrator, and performed onstage as a solo cellist (and occasional dancer) alongside mezzo-soprano Rachael Wilson. The production premiered in Toronto in November 2025. Their latest collaboration brings him to GöteborgsOperans Danskompani for a new work in the 2026–27 season.

With Ruckus, "the world's only period-instrument rock band," Coleman has helped shape and tour programs including *Fly the Coop*, an exploration of Bach's sonatas and preludes with flutist Emi Ferguson; *By George!*, which brings together new arrangements of Ligeti's *Musica ricercata* and Telemann's flute fantasias; and *Strawberry Fields*, pairing Handel's trio sonatas with Ignatius Sancho's country dances. He also performs in the ensemble's Handel opera productions at Hudson Hall, including R. B. Schlather's *Giulio Cesare*. His work with Twelfth Night includes its Carnegie Hall debut program, *Elemental*, and performances of Handel's *Aminta e Fillide* and *Apollo e Dafne*.

Alongside his exploration of historical performance, creating new music is central to Coleman's artistic life. His work with

living composers has ranged from Jörg Widmann, Brett Dean, Tan Dun, Vivian Fung, and Steven Mackey to the sustained collaborations with Matthew Aucoin, Doug Balliett, and Michael Hersch that have helped shape his career. His projects include the premiere of Christopher Cerrone's *Selah* with Anthony Marwood and music written for him by Nico Muhly for Bobbi Jene Smith's *Ways of Listening*. His association with Hersch encompasses the unaccompanied cello sonatas, the premiere performances of the opera *and we, each*, and *Carrion-Miles to Purgatory*, performed with Miranda Cuckson at TIME:SPANS in 2026.

Now based in New York, Coleman began playing cello at four. He owes much of his musical formation to the generosity and guidance of his teachers Eric Kim, Desmond Hoebig, Ralph Kirshbaum, and Timothy Eddy. Coleman holds degrees from Rice University and the University of Southern California, and an Artist Diploma from The Juilliard School.

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## Michael Hersch

A composer of “uncompromising brilliance” (*The Washington Post*) whose work has been described by *The New York Times* as “viscerally gripping and emotionally transformative music ... claustrophobic and exhilarating at once, with moments of sublime beauty nestled inside thickets of dark virtuosity,” Michael Hersch is widely considered among the most gifted composers of his generation. *The New Yorker* has called Hersch a composer of “masterly modernist music of implacable seriousness,” *The Baltimore Sun* a composer of “great originality, daring, and disturbing power,” and *Opera News* noting that the composer’s “singular vision, coupled with astonishing compositional skill, makes it difficult to turn away.”

Recent performances include his Violin Concerto with Patricia Kopatchinskaja in Paris with Ensemble intercontemporain and at the Lucerne Forward Festival, *the script of storms* with the BBC Symphony Orchestra; his cantata *AGATHA* with the Camerata Bern in Bern and Geneva, and his elegy *I hope we get a chance to visit soon* at the Ojai and Aldeburgh Festivals, where Hersch was a featured composer. In 2019, Hersch’s 10-hour cycle, *sew me into a shroud of leaves*, a work the composer spent fifteen years composing, premiered at the Wien Modern Festival. In 2021, his opera *Poppaea* premiered at the ZeitRäume Basel Festival to acclaim. Recent works include the premiere in 2023 of his opera, *MEDEA*, for Sarah Maria Sun, Schola Heidelberg, and Ensemble Musikfabrik. Hersch’s newest opera, *and we, each* premiered in 2024 in Baltimore and at New York’s National Sawdust. Other recent projects include works for the Talea Ensemble, Ensemble Phoenix Basel, and the loadbang ensemble. Additional performances include the Violin Concerto at the Avanti Festival in Helsinki, productions of his two-act monodrama, *On the Threshold of Winter*, in New York, Chicago, Salt Lake City, and Washington D.C., his *A Forest of Attics* on the Berlin Philharmonic’s chamber series, and presentations of his

*Images from a Closed Ward* with the Blair, FLUX, and Kreutzer Quartets.

Notable past performances include *Night Pieces*, commissioned and premiered by the Cleveland Orchestra, a song cycle for baritone and piano, *Domicilium*, commissioned and premiered by Thomas Hampson and Wolfgang Rieger, and Hersch’s second piano concerto, *along the ravines*, commissioned by Shai Wosner and given performances with the Deutsche Radio Philharmonie and the Seattle Symphony Orchestra, as well as part of the George Enescu International Festival in Bucharest; Hersch’s *end stages*, commissioned and premiered by the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, his *Zwischen Leben und Tod* given its U.K. premiere at St. John’s Smith Square, and *A Forest of Attics*, commissioned for the Network for New Music’s 25th anniversary season. *The Philadelphia Inquirer* selected the premiere as one of the year’s most important classical music events writing, “*A Forest of Attics* threw a Molotov cocktail into the concert: Everything before it paled in comparison ... Hersch has written some towering works in recent years; this is yet another.”

Also a pianist, noted for his “astounding facility at the keyboard” (*International Piano*), Mr. Hersch has appeared around the world including appearances at the Ojai Festival, Aldeburgh Festival, the Festival Dag in de Branding in the Netherlands, the Warhol Museum, the Romaeuropa Festival, the Phillips Collection in Washington D.C., Cleveland’s Reinberger Chamber Hall, the Festival of Contemporary Music Nuova Consonanza, the Network for New Music Concert Series, Festa Europea della Musica, St. Louis’ Sheldon Concert Hall, and in New York City at Merkin Concert Hall, the 92nd St. Y - Tisch Center for the Performing Arts, and Carnegie Hall’s Weill Recital Hall, among others.

Michael Hersch came to international attention at age twenty-five, when he was awarded First Prize in the Concordia American Composers Awards. The award resulted in a performance of his *Elegy*, conducted by Marin Alsop in New York’s Alice Tully Hall. Later that year he became one of the youngest recipients ever of a Guggenheim Fellowship in Composition. Mr. Hersch has also been the recipient of the Rome Prize, the Berlin Prize, the Goddard Lieberman Fellowship and Charles Ives Scholarship from the American Academy of Arts & Letters. In 2017, Hersch received the President’s Frontier Award from the Johns Hopkins University. He currently is a Professor of Music Composition at the Peabody Institute.

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