

Occidental College Music Department
Composition Recital



Friday, April 23, 2021
5:00 PM
Online

This concert is generously supported by the
Barbara U. Johnson '43 P'71 GP'04 GP'13 Fund for New Music

PROGRAM

Winter Jin-Shan Dai, violin	Forrest Love b. 2001
Of Robots and Reindeer Allen Savedoff, bassoon	Mason Cook b. 2000
Muimi (무의미) Rachel Mellis, flute	Brendan Kim b. 1999
Scrumptious Galina Barskaya, piano	Brandon Markson b. 1999
Welcoming Ceremony Jamey Tate, percussion	Zion Alcindor b. 1998
Cyclical Douglas Tornquist, tuba	Alex Prichett b. 2001
Ave 44 Terminus Station Wes Smith, saxophone	Sherry Gao b. 2000
A Sino-Bulgarian Rhapsody Aroussiak Baltaian, violin	Sherwin Zhang b. 2000
Mint Daniel Lippel, guitar	Olivia Oosterhout b. 1998
Among the Stars Michael Larco, viola	Alana Duvall b. 2001

PROGRAM NOTES

Forrest Love - *Winter*

This piece was inspired by the many Minnesota winters I have lived through. I wanted to showcase the different sides of winter, specifically focusing on the delicate and beautiful parts as well as the more harsh and bitter moments that one endures in the frigid cold. To achieve this, I used skills from another musical interest of mine, which is scoring for film/TV. In this case, I created an electronic backing track to accompany the violin, which was composed entirely using synthesizers. The piece is divided into three sections and begins by reflecting the more delicate side of winter. At this moment, I utilize soft non-vibrato tones played by the violin combined with very ambient sounds from the synthesizers. As the section eventually peaks with the violin climbing to a very high register and the synths texturally growing with more complexity, the gentle portion of winter slowly fades into the next section. Here, winter becomes more bitter as fast triplet arpeggios are played by the violin and synths. The overall electronics employed also feel slightly darker, while remaining subtly ambient. The triplet arpeggios continue to evolve and gradually become more complex, as the piece becomes harsher with synths that create an unsettled feeling. The music peaks again, and as the synths bring us into a new world, we arrive at the moment when fresh snow is glistening and the bitterness has dissolved. Together, the violin and synthesizers create a feeling of peace and calmness, suggesting winter is nearing its end.

Mason Cook - *Of Robots and Reindeer*

Of Robots and Reindeer follows a fairly absurd story of an army of world-conquering robots who happen upon some unsuspecting reindeer during their conquests. Chaos then ensues after the reindeer find themselves messing up the robots' schemes. You'll hear the militancy of the robot army contrasted with the calm of the reindeer flock and the conflicts that drive the two ideas together.

Brendan Kim - *Muimi* (무의미)

The title of my piece, *Muimi*, is a Korean word which roughly translates to “without meaning.” I chose this word as my title to reflect the initial sketches I had planned which were more heavily steeped within traditional Korean musical conventions. However, as I continued to write, this initial inspiration dissipated and the piece became more of an exercise in navigating a particularly rough bout of writer’s block; so while my piece does not ultimately have a grand message or meaning, it does have Korean roots. The Korean inspirations are most apparent in the introduction which is heavily inspired by Korean folk music, especially the iconic piece *Arirang*. These songs are often written in pentatonic scales, which is what the main theme of the piece attempts to emulate. After this section subsides, the piece transitions into a more contemporary classical sound with shifting meters and unstable tonalities. Despite the change in style, the main theme continues to appear sporadically throughout the piece in modified forms. Syncopation becomes a recurring effect in these latter sections, with the piece ultimately closing to a gradually fading syncopated figure. While the piece may not have larger narrative aspirations beyond the melodies that are presented, it has proved to be an invaluable experience for me as a budding composer.

Brandon Markson - *Scrumptious*

As a final piece at Oxy, I wanted to finish off my musical journey with a strong farewell. The purpose of this piece is to celebrate the small things in life that we enjoy. This is accomplished by creating specific and enjoyable moments in the composition by using repeating motives, chromaticism, complex jazz chords, and moments of harmonic openness and space to let the music breathe. Although conceived as a through-composed work, the piece somewhat reprises after a solo section, bringing back familiarity and closure in order to create a satisfying ending. The name, *Scrumptious*, encapsulates the message of the piece. Normally, I name pieces after finishing them and have a deeper understanding of the overall narrative and shape of the music. In this case, however, the name and character of the music was predetermined. I'd like to thank and give a shoutout to my neighbor, Vaughn, for his suggestion of naming the piece *Scrumptious* while I was brainstorming back in December.

Zion Alcindor - *Welcoming Ceremony*

Welcoming Ceremony represents a historically fictitious scene where three kings, from Benin, Togo, and Nigeria, visit Haiti for an annual celebration. As they walk through, the corresponding rhythms and dances are played to honor them. The Yanvalou rhythm or A section represents the king of Benin, the Nago rhythm or B section represents the king of Togo, and the Ibo or C section represents the king of Nigeria. The ceremony closes by returning to the A section before ending in a loud crescendo.

The piece is written for a traditional Rada ensemble: The Ogan (bell), Boula (highest pitched drum), Segon (middle pitched drum) and Manman (lead and lowest pitched drum), but it can be played by any drums that maintain the characteristics of the traditional elements. For this specific performance, a cowbell, bongos, congas and quintos, and tumba and super tumba will be used in place of the traditional instruments.

Being my first fully notated composition for an instrumentalist, I used the opportunity to explore traditional Afro-Haitian rhythms, specifically those of Haitian Vodou music. The creative process for making this piece has helped me feel more connected to my Haitian roots, further appreciate my culture, and realize the seemingly infinite ways that diverse rhythms (and diaspora) can interact with each other. Although this composition barely touches on the many musical layers of the Afro-Haitian world, the purpose of this piece is to highlight the complex beauty of Haitian and African culture and art.

Alex Prichett - *Cyclical*

Cyclical is a short piece for solo tuba. As my first stand-alone notated composition, it felt natural to be inspired by my day-to-day life, which at the time was essentially under full quarantine. The piece is divided into roughly two sections (AB): The A section features the tuba mostly within the upper register, and the B section in the lower register. I wanted to reflect the monotonous nature of being quarantined, the lack of any real escape, and the stresses this situation brings. The main motive of the piece, which is demonstrated in the A section, is intentionally

repetitive and reflects the struggle of escaping the day-to-day sameness. The B section utilizes the lower, “scarier” end of the tuba in order to evoke the doom-and-gloom of living through the COVID-19 pandemic. However, nothing in life comes without its fair share of silliness and brevity, so there are moments of a lighthearted tone scattered throughout the piece, toying around with what most would consider an unconventional solo instrument.

Sherry Gao - Ave 44 Terminus Station

Ave 44 Terminus Station is my first saxophone piece. It intends to depict the experience of meeting and parting with people in the process of growing up. It seems that as time goes by, we would inevitably lose connection with someone we used to love or care about for different reasons. As a result, I came up with this title thinking of how I used to meet my friends at the subway station next to our school, using it as a metaphor for how people come and go in our life.

The piece begins with melodic phrases, rendering pleasant and lighthearted moods, which inevitably set up a background for the upcoming events. A motive is then introduced to mark the start of a conversation. The music tries to mimic dialogues people have when first meeting and getting to know each other. Some gestures are being repeated and varied, representing how we are interacting and exchanging ideas. The delighted encounter is brought to an interruption by the slap tongues. In this section, I’m using rests and exploring diverging registers to express the fading connection between people who are drifting apart. The ending goes back to the original motives from the beginning of the piece, expressing some hope for another chance in life to reunite with those who we lost.

Sherwin Zhang - A Sino-Bulgarian Rhapsody

In 2019, we celebrated my sister and her husband's marriage in Bulgaria. This rhapsody, using folk tunes and textures from both of our family's cultures, is my late wedding gift to celebrate this beautiful occasion. As a part of the wedding celebrations, I took lessons in how to dance a **horo**, which is a collective noun for many types of traditional Bulgarian round dances, and a **rachenitsa**, which is commonly danced in celebrations. Somewhere on the internet, there is a video of me dancing

rachenitsa with a whole rotisserie chicken (it's a wedding tradition for the bride's brother to do this... don't ask me why). In this piece, the horo dance section follows a 2+2+2+3 beat pattern, and the rachenitsa follows a 4+3 beat pattern. These themes represent my brother-in-law's culture. The Chinese melody, inspired by the *Butterfly Lovers' Concerto* by He Zhanhao and Chen Gang, uses traditional pentatonic harmonies, and represents our family's culture. Using the violin, a Western instrument, I represent the complete synthesis of the union, as they met in the West (California).

I am extremely thankful for having the help of Mitko, my brother-in-law, and Aroussiak, my violinist, for sharing recommendations of their culture's music with me, and helping us bring them together.

Olivia Oosterhout - *Mint*

Mint is a solo acoustic guitar piece influenced heavily by Celtic and American folk music. Like many folk guitar pieces, *Mint* is written in Rondo form, containing a recurring section or refrain alternating with contrasting sections. A technical staple in folk (as well as flamenco, blues, and bossa nova), fingerstyle guitar is a technique I use throughout *Mint*, where a guitarist plucks the individual strings with fingertips/nails instead of using a plectrum (or pick) or simply strumming all of the strings. My piece also mimics folk compositional techniques. Despite being harmonically and structurally simple, the music highlights happy, driving melodies with diverse melodic contour. Although the piece takes inspiration from many Celtic and American music traditions, it still has my distinctive compositional voice with chaotic melodic movement, intricate rhythms, and complex harmonies.

For me, writing this piece brought on feelings of nostalgia for my four years at Occidental. It is titled *Mint* after my college admissions essay. In the essay, "mint" (well, mint gum) is a metaphor, symbolic of growing up, learning new things, and discovering the world around me. Here, "mint" represents all the growing, learning, and discovering I had during college, and all the growing, learning, and discovering I have yet to do.

Alana Duvall - *Among the Stars*

Among the Stars takes the idea of stargazing as a metaphor for dreaming, in which the stars represent an ambitious aspiration. The viola essentially plays the role of the main character reaching for the stars, which are represented by the accompaniment. For a moment, it seems possible, but the tranquility of the scene is disrupted by a world of chaos. The main character struggles against this nightmare, only to plunge further into darkness. Once reaching a point of calm, they recenter themselves and try to ascend to the stars again.

The piece is divided into three sections: the gentle legato stargazing section, the rhythmically driven chaos section, and the reflection— the gradual modified return of the opening themes. The reflection resembles the opening section to display the nature of moving forward. In spite of the chaos and in spite of the darkness, we find new ways to keep reaching for the stars.

Barbara Urner Johnson* *July 2, 1923-August 21, 2020

My mother, Barbara Urner Johnson, was born and raised in Bakersfield, California in a family that introduced her to classical music at an early age. She would often tell us stories about times in childhood when she and her sister would listen to radio broadcasts of symphonies and chamber music, keeping a card file of their favorites. My mom studied piano but then began to play the organ, an instrument she truly loved. She attended Occidental College, living in Haynes Hall and studying psychology with one of Oxy's iconic professors, Gilbert Brighthouse. She sang in the Glee Club and thrived in Oxy's small, liberal arts atmosphere. Her idyllic college days were abruptly altered by the outbreak of World War II on December 7, 1941. Classmates and friends, primarily the male students, left in droves to serve our country. I imagine her education was disrupted in much the same way it has been for current students affected so profoundly by the pandemic.

In her seventies, Barbara's passion for genealogy led her to write a scholarly book about her paternal aunt, Catherine Urner, who had

earned the Prix de Paris and the accompanying scholarship to study music composition in Paris after distinguishing herself as an undergraduate music student at UC Berkeley. Barbara's research led her to the UC Berkeley Library of Music where the collection includes several boxes of her aunt Catherine's unpublished scores in manuscript form. This gave her a new appreciation of the struggles young composers face in getting their music published and how this hampers performances of new work. While she and my father, Gordon K Johnson, were long-standing supporters of music in their community over many years, Barbara's gift to Occidental is uniquely her own and represented her desire to both support her alma mater and the performance of new music by young composers. She would be so pleased to know her gift was realizing these goals in today's concert.

-Cynthia Johnson-George '71