

presents...

PIVOT FESTIVAL

**GABRIEL KAHANE
CARLA KIHLESTEDT
SARAH CAHILL
DEL SOL QUARTET
THE WESTERLIES
HALEY HEYNDERICKX
SANDBOX PERCUSSION**

Wednesday, January 29, 2025 | 7:30pm

Thursday, January 30, 2025 | 7:30pm

Friday, January 31, 2025 | 7:30pm

Herbst Theatre

Launched in 2016, PIVOT is a San Francisco Performances series created for adventurous audiences interested in truly unique arts experiences, driven by a philosophy of innovation, creativity and artistic excellence that pushes the boundaries of the traditional concert experience.

For the tenth year of PIVOT, guest curator composer/singer-songwriter Gabriel Kahane introduces you to artists you'll want to lean in and listen to. He will perform opening night and host all three evenings of deliciously ingenious music brimming with thought, humor—both dark and light—and substance.

PIVOT: New Adventures in the Performing Arts was developed under a grant from:



The PIVOT Festival is sponsored by:



presents...

PIVOT FESTIVAL

CARLA KIHLESTEDT | Violin/Vocals

SARAH CAHILL | Piano

DEL SOL QUARTET

Hyeyung Sol Yoon | Violin

Charlton Lee | Viola

Benjamin Kreith | Violin

Kathryn Bates | Cello

SANDBOX PERCUSSION

Ian Rosenbaum

Jonny Allen

Terry Sweeney

Victor Caccese

GABRIEL KAHANE | Conductor · Host

Wednesday, January 29, 2025 | 7:30pm

Herbst Theatre

KIHLESTEDT

26 Little Deaths

*Inspired by The Gashlycrumb Tinies written and illustrated by Edward Gorey © 1963,
Renewed 1991 The Edward Gorey Charitable Trust*

**This program is made possible in part by the generous support of
Silvie Jensen and David Masterson.**

Carla Kihlstedt carlakihlstedt.com

Sarah Cahill is represented by Jensen Artists
249 West 34th Street, Suite 400, New York, NY 10001 jensenartists.com

Del Sol Quartet Del Sol Performing Arts Organization
751 47th Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94121 delsolquartet.com

Sandbox Percussion is represented by Blu Ocean Arts bluoceanarts.com

Gabriel Kahane is represented by MKI Artists
70 S Winooski Ave., #318, Burlington, VT 05401 mkiartists.com

Steinway Model D, Pro Piano, San Francisco



SAN FRANCISCO
PERFORMANCES



Illustration by Edward Gorey from his book "The Gashlycrumb Times" used by permission ©1963 Renewed 1991 The Edward Gorey Charitable Trust.

San Francisco Performances is delighted to welcome tonight's special ensemble of musicians for *26 Little Deaths*, which includes the performers listed below, who are current students or alumni from the **SF Conservatory of Music**.

Caleb Brosnac | Trumpet

Miriam Syder | Trombone

Jason Wilcox | Clarinet

Beneditto Caroc | Flute/Piccolo

Carlos Valdez | Bass



Illustration by Edward Gorey from his book *"The Gashlycrumb Tinies"* used by permission ©1963 Renewed 1991 The Edward Gorey Charitable Trust.

ARTIST PROFILES

Carla Kihlstedt, Del Sol Quartet, and Sandbox Percussion make their SF Performances debuts with tonight's concert. Sarah Cahill appears for the sixth time. Gabriel Kahane appears for the ninth time. He made his first appearance in January 2019 and has been curator of both the 2024 and 2025 PIVOT series.

Carla Kihlstedt—composer, collaborator, violinist, singer, improviser, educator and instigator. Her musical voice is grounded in the economy and immediacy of song form, which allows her to explore complex worlds—the ocean, dreams, imaginary creatures, the machine age, quarantine—through many different lenses.

Carla's music is a palimpsest, connecting and layering her divergent musical experiences. After graduating from the Oberlin Conservatory, she spent her 20s



and 30s creating and performing music with bands/composers collectives including Sleepytime Gorilla Museum, Tin Hat, 2 Foot Yard, Minamo, The Book of Knots, and Causing a Tiger. Aesthetically speaking, the

Venn Diagram of these would all have only one thing in the shared center space: Carla. But they were united by three other things: their musical clarity, their commitment to collaboration, and the deep friendships that grounded them all. She came away from these years with a rich musical language that continues to feed her current work.

Carla has written for the International Contemporary Ensemble, Present Music, the San Francisco Girls Chorus, the Brooklyn Youth Chorus, Variant 6, the ROVA Saxophone Quartet, and the Dither Big Band. Her recent work, including *Black Inscription* (a Rabbit Rabbit Radio production), *Herring Run*, and her upcoming international treble chorus project, *Long for This World*, investigate the natural world and our place in it. (For more information, reach out to info@carlakahlstedt.com.)

Carla has had the pleasure of playing

and/or recording with many wonderful musicians/bands, including Tom Waits, Ben Goldberg, Trevor Dunn, Ches Smith, Anna Webber, Mary Halvorsen, Zeena Parkins, Tony Maimone, Tracy Chapman, Madeleine Peyroux, Mr. Bungle, and Brooklyn Rider. She has also created soundtracks for choreographers Jo Krieter/Flyaway Productions, Shinichi Koga/inkBoat, and Joe Goode Performance Group.

Carla lives on Cape Cod, MA with her two kids and her partner, Matthias Bossi. Along with Jeremy Flower and Jon Evans, they are the band Rabbit Rabbit Radio. RRR releases a work-in-progress song on the first day of every month to their subscribers at RabbitRabbitRadio.Bandcamp.com. At the end of the year they release the collection as an album. Currently they are working on Volume 6.

She is on the faculty of the Contemporary Improvisation Department of the New England Conservatory and the MFA in Composition program at the Vermont College of Fine Arts. She has co-facilitated the Creative Gesture Lab for composers and choreographers at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity and is a member of the Climate Reality Leadership Corps.



Sarah Cahill, hailed as “a sterling pianist and an intrepid illuminator of the classical avant-garde” by *The New York Times* and “a brilliant and charismatic advocate for modern and contemporary composers” by *Time Out New York*, has commissioned and premiered over 70 compositions for solo piano. Composers who have dedicated works to Cahill include John Adams, Terry Riley, Frederic Rzewski, Pauline Oliveros, Julia Wolfe, Roscoe Mitchell, Annea Lockwood, and Ingram Marshall. *Keyboard Magazine* writes, “Through her inspired interpretation of works across the 20th and 21st centuries, Cahill has been instrumen-



tal in bringing to life the music of many of our greatest living composers.” She was named a 2018 Champion of New Music, awarded by the American Composers Forum (ACF).

Cahill enjoys working closely with composers, musicologists, and scholars to prepare scores for each performance. She researched and recorded music by prominent early 20th-century American modernists Henry Cowell and Ruth Crawford and commissioned a number of new pieces in tribute to their enduring influence. She has also premiered and recorded music by Leo Ornstein, Marc Blitzstein, and other 20th century mavericks. In May 2023, she performed the world premiere of Viet Cuong’s *Stargazer*, a concerto for piano and orchestra, with the California Symphony.

San Francisco’s **Del Sol Quartet** believes that music can, and should, happen anywhere—screaming out Aeryn Santillan’s *Makeshift Memorials* from a Mission District sidewalk or a rural high school, bouncing Ben Johnston’s microtonal *Americana* off the canyon walls of the Yampa River or the hallowed walls of Library of Congress, bringing Huang Ruo’s *Angel Island Oratorio* home to the island detention barracks or across the Pacific to the Singapore International Arts Festival. Del Sol’s performances provide the possibility for unexpected discovery, sparking dialogue and bringing people together.

Since 1992, Del Sol has commissioned or premiered hundreds of works by composers including Terry Riley, Tania León, Frederic Rzewski, Vijay Iyer, Mason Bates, Pamela Z, Chinary Ung, Chen Yi, Andy Akiho, Erberk Eryilmaz, Theresa Wong, and Reza Vali. They especially value their ongoing relationship with the Gabriela

Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music in Boonville, California.

Huang Ruo—*A Dust in Time*, Del Sol’s eleventh album, was described in *The New York Times* as “excavations of beauty from the elemental.” New Del Sol recordings in 2023 include *The Resonance Between*, a collaboration with North Indian musicians Alam Khan & Arjun Verma, and *SPELLING* and *The Mystery School* with Oakland magical-futurist pop phenomenon SPELLING.

For **Sandbox Percussion** see p. 10.



Hailed as “one of the finest songwriters of the day” by *The New Yorker*, **Gabriel Kahane** is a musician and storyteller whose work spans the theater, club, and concert hall.

Highlights of the 2024–25 season include a return to the New York stage in a production at Playwrights Horizons of two solo works, *Magnificent Bird* and *Book of Travelers*, which Gabriel performs in repertory. In addition, he tours as a duo with fellow composer/performer Caroline Shaw in the United States and Europe, including performances at the Philharmonie de Par-

is, Wigmore Hall, and the Concertgebouw. This season also witnesses the premiere of a clarinet concerto for Anthony McGill, a solo debut with the Orchestre National de Lyon, as well as Kahane's San Francisco conducting debut in Carla Kihlstedt's 26 *Little Deaths*.

Gabriel's discography includes five LPs as a singer-songwriter; *The Fiction Issue*, an album of chamber music with string quartet Brooklyn Rider; as well as *emergency shelter intake form*, an oratorio exploring economic inequality through the lens of housing insecurity. That work, commissioned and recorded by the Oregon Symphony, has also been heard in San Francisco, Chicago, and London, with a New York premiere this season at Trinity Church Wall Street. Upcoming recordings include *Heirloom*, a piano concerto written for his father, the noted pianist and conductor Jeffrey Kahane; as well as the debut album from Council, an ongoing project with violinist, composer, and conductor Pekka Kuusisto.

As a theater artist, Kahane made his off-Broadway debut with the score for *February House*, which received its world premiere at the Public Theater in 2012. He made his Brooklyn Academy of Music debut in 2014 with *The Ambassador*, in a production directed by John Tiffany. In 2018, he wrote incidental music for the Broadway revival of Kenneth Lonergan's *The Waverly Gallery*, starring Elaine May.

Kahane maintains a diverse roster of collaborators from various corners of the musical universe, ranging from Phoebe Bridgers, Paul Simon, Sufjan Stevens, and Sylvan Esso, to the Danish String Quartet, Roomful of Teeth, and Attacca Quartet. As a writer, he has been published by *The New Yorker* online and *The New York Times*; a newsletter and collection of essays on music, literature, and politics can be found at gabrielkahane.substack.com.

A two-time MacDowell Fellow, Kahane received the 2021 Charles Ives Fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He lives with his family in Portland, Oregon, where he serves as Creative Chair for the Oregon Symphony.

PROGRAM NOTES

As I finished writing the last notes of this piece, the country was reeling from yet another massacre at yet another elementary school, this time in Uvalde, Texas. The irony has not been lost on me. But despite outward signs to the contrary, this piece is not

about death, nor is the iconic book on which it's based—Edward Gorey's *The Gashlycrumb Tinies*, or *After the Outing*. While Gorey's slim volume depicts twenty-six unfortunate ways to die, it is more a meditation than a mourning. As is true of Gorey's book, this music is made for dancing between the banality of life and the bottomless oddness of the human imagination.

Edward Gorey and the Dark

Edward Gorey (1925-2000) was an American writer, illustrator, and designer (costumes, puppets, sets, etc.) most famous for his pen-and-ink drawings of surreal Edwardian scenes that pit our circuitous inner workings against the inanity of daily life. We all know that imagination thrives in the dark. That is why, when we tell stories to our children, we head straight for the middle of the perilous night forest where the most fearsome creatures, witches, demons and goblins live. Most nursery rhymes are dark parables set to innocuously sing-songy melodies and underscored by blithely innocent harmonies. Go head—finish these sweet little nursery rhymes:

"It's raining, it's pouring,
the old man is snoring..."

"Hush-a-bye baby on the tree top.
When the wind blows, the cradle will
rock..."

"Ring-around-a-roses,
pocket full of posies..."

What sets the *Gashlycrumb Tinies* apart in the context of this tradition is that Gorey's drawings show us the penultimate moments of each character's short life, while his words forecast their impending ends. And that's it. There's no backstory, no setup, no character development, no context, no explanation. Our familiarity of the alphabet anchors us through Gorey's abecedarium. From the start, we know where we're headed: to Z, of course. We know exactly how many steps the journey will take: 26, of course. The gentle predictability of a couplet rhyme scheme draws us forward through this little book of imagined horrors, while it charms us with the utterly quotidian nature of their inception.

The Process

While a scant few of the movements in 26 *Little Deaths* are simply sonic transla-

tions of the drawings (Amy falls down the stairs), with most, I stepped into the pictures to look around beyond their frame and find the story beyond the absurdist barbarism. Like Gorey with his *Gashlycrumb* drawings, in most of the pieces I leave the moment of mortality up to you to imagine, or not. In some cases, it's entirely beside the point—a footnote at most. Hector, for example, stands in the town square imagining all of the terrible things that could befall him. In his song, "H—Waiting," the hands of the lurking thug are just a part of his larger paranoid delusions. They may or may not even be real. In "V—Train of Thought," Victor stands on the train tracks on the outskirts of his small town wondering where the train came from, where it might be going, pondering the smallness of his own life and the vastness of all he doesn't know. The song is about his sense of wonder, more than it is about his doom. And in "M—Frisson," Maud, who is swept out to sea on a piece of driftwood, finds her spiritual awakening in the breathtaking expansiveness of the ocean.

Friends and Family

I can't imagine a world or a creative project without collaboration. While these are my own compositions and words, so much brilliance from my friends and colleagues has worked its way in, creating some of my favorite moments in the suite. Henry McNulty, Roger Zahab, Hankus Netsky and Jeremy Flower each arranged a movement. Mark Orton—one of my oldest friends and collaborators (Tin Hat/Tin Hat Trio)—took on five of them, including the finale. One story that relies on a variety of compositional voices is Neville who dies of ennui. He sits inside looking out his window at a square of world that seems never to change. For this one, I wrote a vocal theme sung by Neville about how boring the world is and sent it to five different colleagues/composers—Jeremy Flower, Andy Jaffe, Ben Goldberg, Aruán Ortiz and Ari Chais—to harmonize however they liked. And so Neville dies of boredom, oblivious to the ever-changing world as it careens around him. The words and melody of "S—Stupid Fort" in which Susan perishes of fits, is a direct transcription of an actual fit my son Viggo threw many years ago. It went on for such an extraordinarily long time that I knew no one would believe me without evidence. So I quietly grabbed my phone and recorded a few minutes of his

epic performance. (Yes, I got permission from the composer to repurpose his words and melody.)

Outsized Gratitude

Thank you to the dedicated and tenacious people at Present Music in Milwaukee, WI for commissioning *26 Little Deaths* as a part of their 40th anniversary celebration. Everything about this piece has been far more involved than any of us knew it would be. In a way, it was like having 26

children of our own: We love them all; They have caused us all both headaches and indescribable joy; It has taken a village to manifest them; We are so proud of this gaggle of Tinies.

Thank you also to Melanie Smith, Rami Paa and the folks at PIVOT Festival, who have schemed and plotted to bring *26 Little Deaths* to San Francisco. Last, but hardly least, I offer a most sincere thanks to Gabriel Kahane and to the wonderful musicians who brought their imaginations and artistry to making the Tinies come alive.

The End

It's the nature of humans of all ages to make both sense and nonsense of the world around and within us. No amount of sheltering or protection can spare a child from the discomfort, the inherent awkwardness, of simply being human. I hope you come to love these 26 unfortunates as much as we do. They will surely outlast us all.

Long live the Gashlycrumb Tinies!

—Program Notes by Carla Kihlstedt

presents...

PIVOT FESTIVAL

HALEY HEYNDERICKX | Guitar/Vocals

THE WESTERLIES

Riley Mulherkar | Trumpet

Andy Clausen | Trombone

Chloe Rowlands | Trumpet

Addison Maye-Saxon | Trombone

GABRIEL KAHANE | Host/Curator

Thursday, January 30, 2025 | 7:30pm

Herbst Theatre

This program is made possible in part by the generous support of Christian Jessen.

Haley Heynderickx is represented by Ground Control Touring
45 Main Street, Suite 300, Brooklyn, NY 11201 groundcontroltouring.com

The Westerlies are represented by Middleton Arts Management
98B Long Highway, Little Compton, RI 02837 middletonartsmanagement.com

Gabriel Kahane is represented by MKI Artists
70 S. Winooski Ave., #318, Burlington, VT 05401 mkiartists.com

Steinway Model D, Pro Piano, San Francisco



ARTIST PROFILES

Haley Heynderickx and The Westerlies make their SF Performances debut with tonight's concert. Gabriel Kahane appears for the tenth time. He made his first appearance in January 2019 and has been curator of both the 2024 and 2025 PIVOT series.

Indie folk singer/songwriter **Haley Heynderickx** draws from a wide array of influences, citing her religious Filipino-American upbringing, the folk music of the 1960s and '70s, jazz radio, and the idiosyncratic acoustic guitar styles of Leo Kottke and John Fahey. All of those ingredients find their way into her music, which pairs deft fingerpicking with lyrics that flirt with levity but hew toward introspection. Her first album *I Need to Start a Garden* saw release in 2018. Following years of heavy touring, Heynderickx's second album, *Seed of a Seed*, was released in late 2024.

Where Heynderickx's debut album was about self-actualization and the excavation of the soul, her new album is now about protecting it. Heynderickx's answer is by going inwards, requiring a brave solitude, while also acknowledging that it's not done alone. On *Seed of a Seed*, Heynderickx's signature intricate finger-picking is hemmed into a lush, living tapestry created with producer Andrew Stonestreet and what she calls her "core jazz boy band": Daniel Rossi on drums, Denzel Mendoza on trombone, and Matthew Holmes on electric and upright bass. It's a group she first worked in hopes of exploring her songs with a wider freedom of expression. Later, they added electric guitarist William Seiji Marsh and cellist Caleigh Drane to lift the

melodies even higher. The result is a complex forest of sound, and if you imagine all the instruments as the layered leaves, Heynderickx's voice is the light filtering through them—gentle, tender, and clear.

Heynderickx's journey is not a linear one. A theme that persists across both of her albums is that Heynderickx is still building herself. She is still growing and changing, and her songs invite us to notice that in ourselves, as well. She admits, "The irony is I'll still be asking these questions; I'm not on the other side of it."

The Westerlies, "an arty quartet...mixing ideas from jazz, new classical, and Appalachian folk" (*New York Times*) are a New York-based brass quartet comprised of Riley Mulherkar and Chloe Rowlands on trumpet, and Andy Clausen and Addison Maye-Saxon on trombone. From Carnegie Hall to Coachella, The Westerlies navigate a wide array of venues and projects with the precision of a string quartet, the audacity of a rock band, and the charm of a family sing-along.

Formed in 2011, the self-described "accidental brass quartet" takes its name from the prevailing winds that travel from the West to the East. "Skilled interpreters who are also adept improvisers" (NPR's *Fresh Air*), The Westerlies explore jazz, roots, and chamber music influences to create the rarest of hybrids: music that is both "folk-like and composerly, lovely and intellectually rigorous" (NPR Music).

The Westerlies' 2023-24 engagements included performances at Bravo! Vail, the Skaneateles Festival, Rockport Music, the Lied Center of Kansas, FreshGrass Festival, Tippet Rise, and a cross-country tour with singer-songwriter Haley Heynderickx. In

2024-25, among others, The Westerlies will perform for San Francisco Performances, Celebrity Series of Boston, and will offer a week-long residency at Montclair (NJ) State University culminating in a performance at Merkin Hall in New York.

Since their inception, the ensemble has produced ten critically acclaimed albums of genre-defying music. 2023 saw the release of their fifth studio album, entitled *Move*, featuring music of new music icons Caroline Shaw and Nico Muhly, on the ensemble's in-house record label. Sought-after collaborators, The Westerlies are featured on recordings by Fleet Foxes, Big Red Machine, Common, Theo Bleckmann, Aoife O'Donovan, and Conrad Tao. Their work with Tao recently led to the commission of *Concerto for Westerlies*, an expansive and ebullient concerto for brass quartet that premiered in 2023 with the Orlando Philharmonic under the direction of Eric Jacobsen.

Education and community engagement are core elements of The Westerlies' mission. The ensemble has taught masterclasses at The Juilliard School, Manhattan School of Music, Yale School of Music, The Colburn School, and in 2021 The Westerlies were named the inaugural small ensemble-in-residence at the School of Jazz and Contemporary Music at The New School. The Westerlies also produce an annual music festival in Seattle called Westerlies Fest, which combines evening performances with workshops in local public schools.

The Westerlies have engaged students of all ages and abilities around the country with their innovative assemblies and masterclasses, promoting the values of cooperation and inclusion through music.

For **Gabriel Kahane** see p. 4.

presents...

PIVOT FESTIVAL

SANDBOX PERCUSSION

Ian Rosenbaum

Jonny Allen

Terry Sweeney

Victor Caccese

GABRIEL KAHANE | Host/Curator

Friday, January 31, 2025 | 7:30pm

Herbst Theatre

AKIHO

Seven Pillars

Stage Direction and Lighting Design by Michael Joseph McQuilken

This program is made possible in part by the generous support of Jeanne Newman.

Sandbox Percussion is represented by Blu Ocean Arts bluoceanarts.com

Gabriel Kahane is represented by MKI Artists
70 S. Winooski Ave., #318, Burlington, VT 05401 mkiartists.com

Steinway Model D, Pro Piano, San Francisco

For Tickets and More: sfperformances.org | 415.392.2545



ARTIST PROFILE

Sandbox Percussion make their *SF Performances* debut with tonight's concert. Gabriel Kahane appears for the eleventh time. He made his first appearance in January 2019 and has been curator of both the 2024 and 2025 PIVOT series.

Described as “exhilarating” by *The New York Times* and “utterly mesmerizing” by *The Guardian*, the Grammy®-nominated ensemble *Sandbox Percussion* champions living composers through its unwavering dedication to contemporary chamber music. In 2011, Jonathan Allen, Victor Caccese, Ian Rosenbaum, and Terry Sweeney were brought together by their love of chamber music and the simple joy of playing together; they have since captivated audiences with performances that are both visually and aurally stunning. In 2024, *Sandbox Percussion* became the first percussion ensemble to be awarded the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant.

This season's highlights include a performance of their 2021, Grammy®-nominated album *Seven Pillars*, featuring Andy Akiho's title piece at the Beijing Music Festival; a collaboration with the London-based Gandini Juggling at Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art and a special Max Roach tribute with the Tyshawn Sorey Trio with performances that include the 92nd Street Y and the Library of Congress. Together, the two groups explore the extraordinary legacy of jazz pioneer Max Roach, who was born 100 years ago.

Sandbox Percussion recently recorded percussion music for its first feature film: *The Wild Robot* (DreamWorks, 2024), an animated science fiction survival film with music by Kris Bowers. In August, *Sandbox Percussion* released their latest album via Ecstatic Records with composer Michael

Torke, who created the hourlong piece *BLOOM* for the group. The first recording of *Lifeline*, a vibrant percussion quartet composed by Ellis Ludwig-Leone for *Sandbox Percussion*, will be released on the album *Past Life/Lifeline* in December, on Better Company Records. A new album celebrating the group's long-standing collaboration with Christopher Cerrone will be released in February on Pentatone Records, including the piece *Ode To Joy*, co-commissioned by the group in 2023.

Sandbox Percussion holds the positions of ensemble-in-residence and percussion faculty at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and The New School's College of Performing Arts.

Starting in 2024–25, *Sandbox Percussion* will also be on faculty at the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University.

Sandbox Percussion endorses Pearl/Adams musical instruments, Zildjian cymbals, Vic Firth sticks and mallets, Remo drumheads, and Black Swamp accessories.



Called “trailblazing” by the *Los Angeles Times*, **Andy Akiho** is a Pulitzer Prize finalist and five-time Grammy®-nominated composer whose bold works unravel intricate and unexpected patterns while challenging the boundaries of classical music.

“Increasingly in-demand” (*The New York Times*), Akiho has earned international acclaim for his large-scale compositions that highlight the theatricality of live performance. He is the only composer to receive Grammy® nominations for Best Contemporary Classical Composition in 2022, 2023, and 2024.

Recent highlights include the world premieres of several major works, most notably *Nisei*—a sweeping new concerto for cellist Jeffrey Zeigler—which headlined this year's Sun Valley Music Festival. Another standout: *Sculptures*, a groundbreaking, triple Grammy®-nominated work for Omaha Symphony honoring renowned visual artist Jun Kaneko. Finally, *BeLonging*, a powerful new collaboration with Imani Winds with strong political undertones, also made highly acclaimed live and recorded debuts.

Akiho's works have been commissioned by leading orchestras and ensembles around the world, including the New York Philharmonic, National Symphony Orchestra, and Shanghai Symphony. Equally at home writing chamber music and symphonies, he is the Oregon Symphony's 2023–24 composer-in-residence.

Also a virtuosic steel pannist, Akiho has a deeply physical relationship with playing, which undoubtedly informs his compositions. His style is also shaped by his unique path as a composer: having spent most of his 20s playing steel pan by ear in Trinidad and New York City, Akiho only began writing music at age 28.

Born in 1979 in Columbia, SC, Akiho is based in Portland, OR, and New York City.



Michael Joseph McQuilken originally hails from Portland, Oregon, where he was raised in a working-class home by a health worker mother who was terrified that his artistic tendencies would leave him perpetually broke. These fears were not allayed when 20-something Michael became a pro-

fessional street performer for three years, making music with garbage. Fortunately, he finagled a scholarship-fueled higher education, and now he is a (working) director, writer, filmmaker, and composer in New York. He holds degrees in directing and sound engineering, and has an amazing wife, Adina, and a beautiful three-year-old daughter, Zelda, who both tolerate his restless creative tendencies that have taken over the majority of the space in their home. Recent collaborators include Drake, Migos, Cardi B, Nelly, The Flaming Lips, Du Yun, Daniil Trifonov, Lupita Nyong'o, and many others. Michael also serves as the current Artistic Director for Titus Kaphar's film production company, Revolution Ready.

For **Gabriel Kahane** see p. 17.

PROGRAM NOTES

Seven Pillars by Andy Akiho explores the free spaces created within an organized structure. This evening-length work, comprising seven quartets and four solos, began with its central movement, *Pillar IV*. Originally commissioned as a stand-alone work, this piece contained a rigorous struc-

ture and motivic content that Akiho felt compelled to expand beyond its 10-minute capsule. *Pillar IV* became the nucleus for *Seven Pillars*, containing the DNA from which the other six quartets are built.

The macro-structure of *Seven Pillars* is made up of two simultaneous processes. The first is an additive process where each movement introduces a new instrument that is then incorporated into the subsequent pillars. To balance this expansion, there is a symmetrical structure on either side of the central movement, *Pillar IV*.

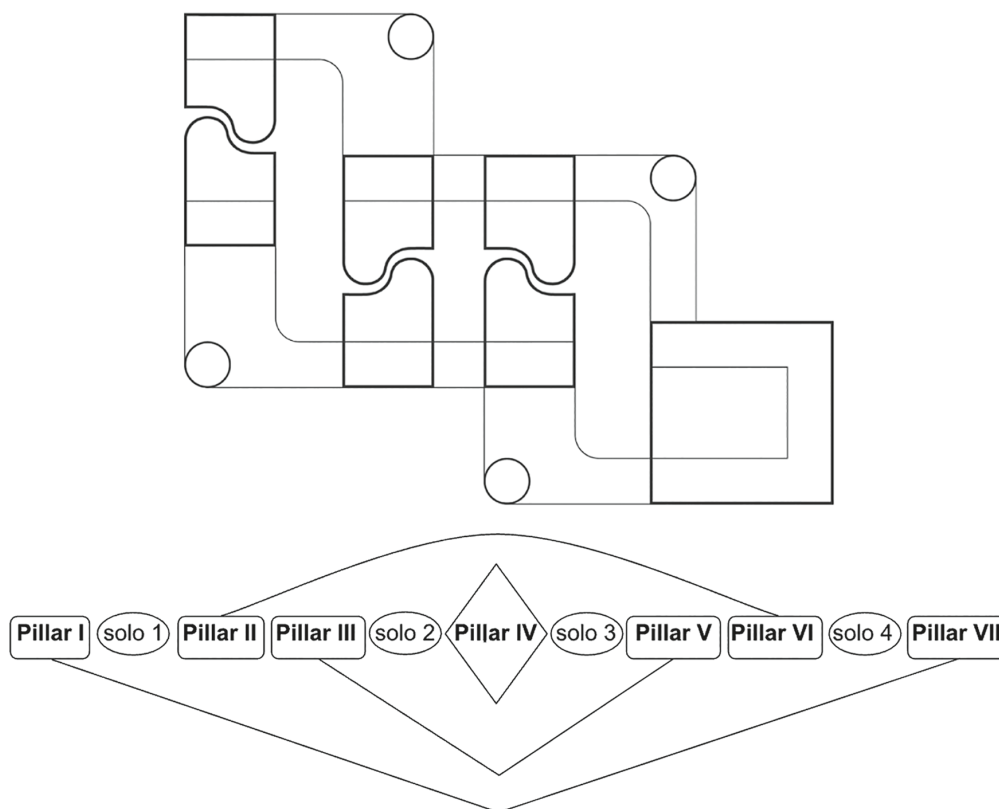
The reflecting movements—*Pillars I & VII*, *Pillars II & VI*, *Pillars III & V*—share formal elements, motives, pitch sets, and other musical elements, but Akiho is the first to say that this is not the point of *Seven Pillars*. Rather, this structure creates space that can be populated with emotion and imagination. Even the reflecting movements are occupied by wildly different aesthetics despite sharing an underlying logic. While still observing the macro-structure, these free spaces are first seen in the solo movements. The solos have a more improvisatory form, elaborating on the pillars, going off on tangents, or transporting us to somewhere else entirely. They are the

skin to the pillars' bones, but, as we zoom in further, this soft tissue permeates every moment of this meticulously crafted work.

Pillar I unapologetically throws us into the world of *Seven Pillars*. The building blocks of the piece are flying around like shrapnel, colliding and combining with each other to eventually congeal into a cohesive whole. This extraverted overture is followed by the first solo, *Amethyst*. Scored for vibraphone, it transports us away from the cacophony of *Pillar I* into the colorful, dreamlike world of pitch and brightness.

Pillar II is an otherworldly experience generated from Akiho's reimagining of what the vibraphone and crotales can be. It begins with glowing, amorphous sounds. The resolution on these sounds is made finer and finer as the piece progresses, until they become sharply defined. This sets the stage for *Pillar III* which brings us back to earth with its firm rhythmic underpinning. Interlocking figures dance around each other and then snap into unison. We are treated to Akiho's version of a backbeat—in 13 beats rather than in four. Layers of variations culminate into a fire-alarm of sound that collapses into a sedated coda. The second solo, *Spiel*, snaps us out of this

SEVEN PILLARS



trance and introduces the glockenspiel. Kicking down the door with dazzling speed and agility, eventually it disappears into thin air as if nothing had happened.

The stage is now set for the nucleus of the whole piece, *Pillar IV*. Every theme presented thus far is here, tightly woven into an impenetrable lattice structure. Even in its moments of ambiguity, *Pillar IV* has a straight-faced determination that is unflappable. After this onslaught, the air is cleared with the third solo of *Seven Pillars*, *mARImBA*, which introduces the marimba to our palette. Its warm, dark tones are a welcome sound, exploring a more introspective realm than we've yet heard.

Pillar V is a sadistic game. We hear the same hexatonic scale that we heard in *Pillar III*, but now it is used as the foundation for a bass line ostinato. With each repetition, this piece swells like a festering

wound. A singular build which lasts the latter two-thirds of the movement presses forward relentlessly, ending with a manic, obsessive, accelerating repetition of its six pitches. The following movement, *Pillar VI*, is like a delirious fever-dream. A motif like the twitchy ticking of a clock in the high marimba is battled by unsettled unison gestures. The coda of *Pillar VI* is profound in its simplicity. Unison repeated pulses anchor a high yearning marimba descant. These pulses fade away and so too does the desperate melody. This stillness is jolted forward by the fourth and final solo, *carTogRAPH*. Scored for a multi-percussion setup (a 'trap' set), this solo is a virtuosic display of rhythmic complexity and agility. Titled accordingly, *carTogRAPH* requires the performer to navigate a highly detailed map of musical twists and turns in this exhilarating demonstration of dexterity.

The final movement, *Pillar VII*, is structurally a near carbon copy of *Pillar I*, but rather than stark unpitched sounds, *Pillar VII* is populated with all the vivid colors that have been discovered throughout the piece. By now, we've come to expect the gradual build that has propelled so many of the previous movements, but rather than breaking itself under the duress and intensity, *Pillar VII* transcends itself. Notes that were dizzyingly fast now seem comforting, and with each successive layer we gain confidence, not concern. This movement, and the entire *Seven Pillars*, finishes with the performers executing over five thousand notes in the final three minutes alone. It's like taking off in a rocket, and we all are passengers.

—Program Note by Jonny Allen



DREAMERS' CIRCUS

Nikolaj Busk | Piano
Rune Tornsgaard Sørensen | Fiddle
Ale Carr | Guitar

FEB 27 | 7:30pm | Presidio Theatre

Program to be announced from the stage



AMJAD ALI KHAN | Violin

SHARON ISBIN | Guitar

AMAAN & AYAAN

ALI BANGASH | Sarod

AMIT KAVTHEKAR | Tabla

FEB 22 | 7:30pm | Herbst Theatre

Strings for Peace

415.392.2545

sfperformances.org