



Williams College Department of Music

THOSE WHO FAVOR FIRE

for choir, chamber orchestra, and sampler

I. THE ORANGE SUN: 2020

II. MORAINES

CHOIR.

Chlöe Braum-Bharti

Juno Pelczar

Sienna Kelley

Nate Welsh

Olivia Wong

Nathan Liang

Cooper Johnson

Yona Kruger

CLARINET. Locke Meyer

BASSOON. Nathaniel Tunggal

PIANO. Zach Wadsworth

VIOLIN. Richard O'Donnell

VIOLIN. Keiyu Mamiya

VIOLA. Ah Ling Neu

VIOLA. Sam Johnson

CELLO. EB Diallo

BASS. Sohani Curtis

SAMPLER. Nathan Liang

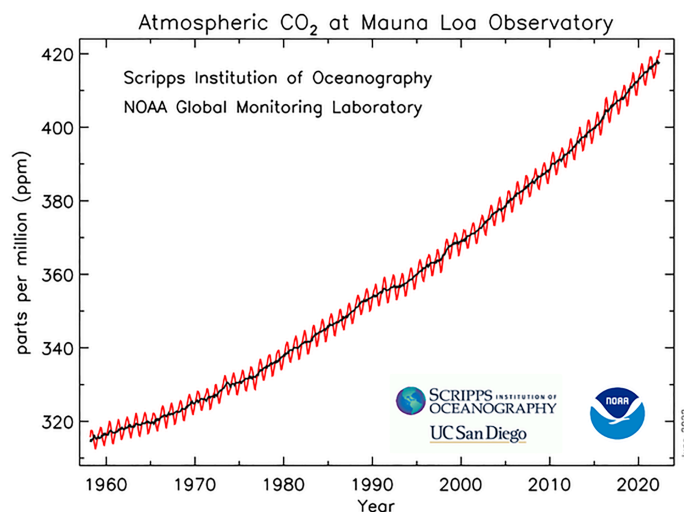
CONDUCTED BY Dr. Anna Lenti

Nathan Sherwood Liang is a composer from San Francisco whose work draws on the natural systems of ecology and geoscience. Through works like *Those Who Favor Fire* (2025), *Species for Harp and Piano* (2024), *Aeolia* (2022), and *The Restless Calm* (2022), Nathan investigates the relationship between humanity and nature and attempts to translate scientific concepts into visceral, emotional understanding.

PROGRAM NOTES

On September 9, 2020, ash and smoke streaming from hundreds of thousands of acres of burning wildfire in the Pacific Northwest converged over San Francisco, blotting out the sun and turning the sky a dark, rich orange. Waking up at midday to the night-dark sky and looking out over an orange-tinted ocean, it felt in every sense like the beginning of the apocalypse, the premonition of a future without blue skies. This is the scene onto which *Those Who Favor Fire* opens. Taking inspiration from literature of the end of the world—including Robert Frost’s *Fire and Ice*, Andri Snær Magnasson’s *On Time and Water*, and the ancient Icelandic poem *Völuspá*—and drawing upon my memory of this rising tide of fires, the first movement attempts to convey the mythological scale of our environmental collapse. At the end of the movement, the choir lists the name of every wildfire that burned in California in 2020, as well as places around the world whose fires defined my memory of this stretch of relentless burning: Australia (2019) and Hawaii (2023) among them. The voices rise into chaos, an incomprehensible tower of names that collapses with the impact of a massive wave.

In the second movement, we are transported to an utterly different environment. The electronics introduce sounds recorded on the glaciers of Iceland’s southern coast, immersing the audience in a soundscape of trickling water and calving icebergs. The orchestra reacts to the sounds without comment, becoming a part of the landscape itself and creating a sense of geologic time. Bit by bit, the human world encroaches on the incredible slowness of glacial timescales—Milankovitch cycles overtaken by the rate of human industry—and water begins to flow with increasing fervor. A low throbbing of seismic data from the Ross Ice Shelf in the electronics adds the language of science to the movement. Like the piece itself, this data sonification, created by geophysicists Richard Aster and Julien Chaput, attempts to translate the timescale of glaciers into a timescale perceptible by the human ear. But it is not fast enough to span the history of the glaciers’ collapse. Metric modulations in the viola and piano compress our sense of time further as swelling strings and winds—representing seasonal carbon flux—show the passage of each quickening year. Over this rushing sense of time, the strings begin a steady rising, and the pulse intensifies into an overwhelming, club-like beat. In the end, the rising, pulsing strings are overpowered by the sounds of water pouring down moulins and into massive subglacial rivers. The deafening torrent is cut short, leaving us to picture a world without ice: a world where moraines and eskers are our only reminder of a once unconquerable landscape.



Those Who Favor Fire is about the shifting of timescales through human greed. In Iceland, a few centuries of oil and coal-burning has just begun to erase a ten-thousand-year dynasty of glaciers. Fossil-fuel-induced climate change is at play in the wildfires of California as well, but the full truth of wildfires is more complicated—a convergence of climate factors, water extraction, and the abandonment of proper forest management practices. As the rate of our consumption surpasses the rate of natural systems, we disrupt non-human timescales and draw the Earth's resources away from nature—from million-year-old coal seams to power plants, from wetlands to beach resorts. With *Those Who Favor Fire*, I hope to create a space to feel the changing time of our environment and our society.

This project has been a process of learning: Julia Wolfe, who encouraged me to consider the power of the human voice, Miguel Crozzoli, who demonstrated how to bridge data and music with sonification, and Leilehua Lanzilotti, who talked with me about music's role in depicting socio-environmental issues like wildfires, are just a few of the people who shaped my understanding of this piece. Thank you to everyone.

Zachary Wadsworth
Anna Lenti
Rónadh Cox
Julia Wolfe
Kjartan Ólafsson
Kristján Steinn Kristjánsson
Sól Ey
Miguel Crozzoli
Veronique Vaka
Leilehua Lanzilotti
Gahlord Dewald
Richard Aster
Julien Chaput
Jacob Fanto
Rein Vaska

Saturday, March 15, 2025

7:30 p.m.

Chapin Hall

Williamstown, Massachusetts

Please turn off cell phones.

No photography or recording is permitted.

