

I/O FEST 2025
FRIDAY, JANUARY 17, 7:30 PM

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

GABRIELLA SMITH: *Maré*

Through its long harmonic tracks, the slow and continuous transformation of a texture devoid of silence positions Gabriella Smith as the heir of her minimalist and repetitive predecessors. But in her work, the processes are intrinsically linked to immersion in nature. *Maré* ("tide" in Portuguese) recalls the ocean in Brazil during a residence at the Instituto Sacatar. On the island of Itaparica, facing Salvador de Bahia, Gabriella Smith observed that the progressive ebb and flow of the ocean covered a long distance; at high tide, the water rose almost to the level of her door. Inspired by this movement, aquatic sounds, wind and bird songs (noisy sounds, melodic oscillations), she invites us to better listen to the song of the world.

Gabriella Smith is a composer whose work invites listeners to find joy in climate action. Her music comes from a love of play, exploring new instrumental sounds, and creating musical arcs that transport audiences into sonic landscapes inspired by the natural world. An "outright sensation" (*LA Times*), her music "exudes inventiveness with a welcoming personality, rousing energy and torrents of joy" (*NY Times*).

Gabriella grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area playing and writing music, hiking, backpacking, and volunteering on a songbird research project.

LINDA CATLIN SMITH: *Knotted Silk*

Knotted Silk (1999) for mixed small ensemble, was composed for Arraymusic for their collaboration with Dancemakers called "Chemin de Ronde." The melody is shared by all of the instruments creating a line of continuously changing colour. The instruments also combine in irregularly spaced chords (or knots). *Knotted Silk* is recorded on the cd "Memory Forms."

Linda Catlin Smith grew up in New York and lives in Toronto. She studied music in NY with composer Allen Shawn, and at the University of Victoria with Rudolf Komorous and Jo Kondo. She taught composition at Wilfrid Laurier University in Ontario 1999 to 2020. Her music has been commissioned, performed and/or recorded by: Tafelmusik, BBC Scottish Orchestra, Goeyvaerts Trio, Trio Arbos, Victoria, Kitchener-Waterloo and Vancouver Symphony Orchestras, Arraymusic, Tapestry New Opera, Via Salzburg, Evergreen Club Gamelan, Exaudi, and the Penderecki and Bozzini string quartets, as well as by soloists including Eve Egoyan, Philip Thomas and Elinor Frey. She has had performances at the Tectonics Festival in Glasgow (2017), Huddersfield Festival (2017), Principal Sound Festival (London, 2018) and Louth Contemporary Music Festival in Ireland (2019). Her latest orchestral work *Nuages* was commissioned by the BBC Proms for the BBC Scottish Orchestra, premiered September 1, 2019.

About her music, she writes:

My compositions are acoustic instrumental works, often slow and quiet in nature, sometimes described as introspective; they share a certain compositional point of view, in their sense of time, their approach

to form, maybe even mood, or atmosphere. They show my ongoing interest in harmony, or what I prefer to think of as harmonic colour – harmony (non-functional harmony) intertwined with orchestration, the one not separate from the other.

My work is informed by my ongoing fascination with painters, and writers such as Giorgio Morandi, Agnes Martin, Mark Rothko; and Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner among many others. I am interested in a kind of abstract narrative, rather than a programmatic or dramatic approach. My pieces are intended to be subtle, focused more on the small change or transformation rather than the large, dramatic statement. They do however have their own sense of an unfolding narrative, and are not without drama, though it is a drama of an interior, quiet kind. I tend to work in what I think of as expansive, or expanded, time; I want to make time larger than it is, as though the listener is examining something up close, closer than a usual perspective... an intimate perspective.

MORTON FELDMAN: *Durations II*

The second of the five *Durations* pieces, but the first to be written, *Durations II* is also the shortest of the series, lasting only about five minutes. As with the other four pieces, in the score of *Durations II* Feldman employed normal notation but removed the note stems that would specify the duration of each note, leaving it to the performers to determine how long each note in their individual parts should be. They then move through their parts at their own speed. *Durations II* is to be played very slowly, and Feldman wanted the cello and piano to avoid what he called "the sound of linear counterpoint." There are, however, enough shared pitches between the two instruments to suggest some sort of interplay, or dialogue, between them. The piece is consistently quiet and gently dissonant. It acts as something of an interlude between the longer and more weighty *Durations I* and *Durations III* when the works are played as a set.

Morton Feldman was born in New York on January 12th 1926. At the age of twelve he studied piano with Maurina Press, who had been a pupil of Busoni, and it was her who instilled in Feldman a vibrant musicality. At the time he was composing short, Scriabin-esque pieces, until in 1941 he began to study composition with Wallingford Riegger. Three years later Stefan Wolpe became his teacher, though they spent much of their time together simply arguing about music. Then in 1949 the most significant meeting up to that time took place – Feldman met John Cage, commencing an artistic association of crucial importance to music in America in the 1950s. Cage was instrumental in encouraging Feldman to have confidence in his instincts, which resulted in totally intuitive compositions. He never worked with any systems that anyone has been able to identify, working from moment to moment, from one sound to the next.

SKY MACKLAY: *Harmonifriends*

Harmonifriends takes the form of a concerto featuring two of my hand-crafted inflatable "harmonitree" sculptures, one containing harmonicas in A and the other in B-flat. However, the B-flat harmonitree sits about a quarter-tone higher than the accordion, opening up a crunchy free-reed microtonal pitch space between them. The harmonitrees interact with the ensemble in sonic and kinetic counterpoint as they rise, sing, tremble, and fall.

Sky Macklay (b. 1988) is a composer, oboist, and installation artist based in Baltimore, where she is Assistant Professor of Composition at the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University. Her music is

conceptual yet expressive, exploring extreme contrasts, surreal tonality, audible processes, humor, and the physicality of sound. She has been commissioned by Chamber Music America (with Splinter Reeds and Left Coast Chamber Ensemble), the Fromm Foundation at Harvard University (with Ensemble Dal Niente), the Barlow Endowment (with andPlay), and Kronos Quartet's 50 for the Future project. Sky's work has also been recognized with awards and fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, The American Academy of Arts and Letters, ASCAP, MacDowell, and Civitella Ranieri. Recent projects include an opera set in a uterus, a set of mnemonic songs for mushroom hunters (for Loadbang), and three interactive installations of harmonica-playing inflatable sculptures. Sky is a founding member and the oboist of Ghost Ensemble, a group focused on collaborations with living composers and expanding perceptual horizons through shared immersive experiences. In their review of Ghost Ensemble's 2019 album *We Who Walk Again*, Sequenza21 said, "her command of multiphonics and microtones on the oboe is prodigious." Sky completed her D.M.A. in composition at Columbia University and her music is published by Edition Peters.

BEN RICHTER: *Portent of Laramidia*

The Laramide orogeny, spanning the late Cretaceous and early Paleogene periods (and therefore including the Cretaceous-Paleogene mass extinction occasioned most likely by the Chicxulub impact), was a time of mountain-building that saw Laramidia, a former continent that now forms much of western North America, separated from Appalachia to the east. In this alien place and time on our world, pre-human but bursting with life, what did the shimmering night sky look like? What big and small creatures witnessed its glaciers and oceans? What awe did they feel?

Portent of Laramidia employs a selection of retuned reeds that allow approximation of normally inaccessible just-intonation intervals — octave displacements of the 7th, 11th, 13th, 25th, 33rd, and 37th harmonic partials. As the title suggests, this prelude only begins to explore the manifold possibilities of the tuning system.

Ben Richter is a composer, accordionist, and founding Artistic and Executive Director of Ghost Ensemble. Inspired by nonhuman consciousness, Ben's music orients toward interacting gradual processes that cross acoustic thresholds to auralize the vast and infinitesimal timescales we do not experience in everyday life. Chamber works such as *Dissolution Seedlings* (2024), *Rewild* (2022), and *Wind People* (2016) have been described as "uncanny and marvelous" (Steve Smith), "a multifaceted texture that evokes the primeval" (Meg Wilhoite), "cloudy, mysterious, and dark ... Beckettian in its slow spread" (Brian Olewnick), and "gorgeous ... arresting ... lingering, unspooling and evading time ... suggesting an eternal process" (Peter Margasak). As an accordionist, Ben explores modifications and techniques that extend the instrument's microtonal and timbral capacities, with albums *Aurogeny* (2023) and *Panthalassa: Dream Music of the Once and Future Ocean* (2017) called "an epic symphony of accordion mastery ... some of the most powerful experimental music of the last 12 months or more" (Noel Gardner), "consistently fascinating ... pulsating, scintillating music realised brilliantly ... with momentous results" (Julian Cowley), and "likely to offer a profound impact on the very nature of listening" (Stephen Smoliar). In addition to Ghost Ensemble, Ben's recent collaborators include Loadbang, House On Fire Trio, Middle Ear Project, Jeonghyeon Joo, Phill Niblock, Jack Dettling, and UMass-Amherst's Futuring Lab and Y3K exhibitions. An active Deep Listening facilitator in the tradition of early mentor Pauline Oliveros, Ben holds a Performer-Composer DMA from CalArts and has taught at CalArts and CUNY-New York City College of Technology.

REIN VASKA '25: *Crush*

Crush is an experimental alternative song cycle which sets the poems of Richard Siken's 2005 collection by the same name. Through vivid imagery and hallucinatory, dreamlike passages, the lyrics tell stories of queer love, intimacy, and loss. Composed for voice, a four-piece band, strings, saxophones, and flugelhorn, the piece incorporates elements of folktronica, dreampop, shoegaze, and romantic music to explore themes of warmth, nostalgia, obsession, and death. The musicians perform alongside a distorted pre-tracked electronic soundscape created with analog synthesizers, guitar pedals, digital effects, vocoders, and vintage hardware emulators. This performance is a preliminary production of Rein Vaska's senior composition thesis project. The full song cycle will be performed in the coming Spring.

Rein Vaska is a composer, multi-instrumentalist, and producer from Northern California. His style blends alternative rock with contemporary classical music, incorporating influences of R&B, jazz, folk, electronic, and ambient music. In 2024, Rein wrote, recorded, and released a self-titled psychedelic indie album with his duo project, *Montara*. At Williams, Rein has played drums in jazz ensembles, Cap and Bells productions, and independent student bands, as well as been the music director for the Purple Rain a capella group.