



presents

Del Sol String Quartet

Sam Weiser & Benjamin Kreith, *violins*
Charlton Lee, *viola* & Kathryn Bates, *cello*

Sunday, September 27, 2020 at 4 PM
Old First Church
1751 Sacramento St. at Van Ness Ave.
San Francisco, CA 94109
(415) 474-1608 www.oldfirstconcerts.org

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Ticket sales provide about 38 percent of our operating revenue each year. In addition, we rely on support from private foundations and Grants for the Arts from the city of San Francisco. Our generous individual donors complete the picture. We invite you to join us in our mission to connect audiences and local musicians and build up the classical music and world music scene in San Francisco. Donations are tax-deductible and donating on our website is easy and secure: www.oldfirstconcerts.org/give/, or checks can be mailed to:

Old First Concerts, 1751 Sacramento Street, San Francisco, CA 94109.
Thank you!

COVID-19 RESPONSE: RETURNING TO THE MUSIC

Old First Concerts is committed to the health and safety of our audiences, performers and staff. We hope to resume concerts soon and have implemented a number of policies and procedures to help us reach that goal, which you can read about on our website.

In the meantime, know that all tickets are fully guaranteed—so if we have to cancel or postpone an event that you’ve purchased a ticket to, you can choose to use the ticket for any concert between now and June 1, 2021, or you can be fully refunded.

SOCIAL MEDIA

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You can also find us on **Instagram** [@oldfirstconcerts](https://www.instagram.com/oldfirstconcerts) with information about upcoming events plus photos and videos from our concerts.

PROGRAM

Rajna Swaminathan
Borne (2020)*

Erika Oba
Halcyon (2018)*

Jonah Gallagher
Ghosts of Grass (2018)*

Julius Eastman (1940–1990)
Gay Guerrilla (1979)

*premiered by the Del Sol Quartet

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Rajna Swaminathan is an acclaimed *mrudangam* (a barrel-shaped South Indian drum) artist, composer, and scholar. Rajna has been described as “a vital new voice” (*Pop Matters*), creating “music of gravity and rigor... yet its overall effect is accessible and uplifting” (*Wall Street Journal*). In her music and research, she explores the undercurrents of rhythmic experience and emergent textures in collective improvisation.

One of only a few women who play the *mrudangam* professionally, Rajna received her creative foundation on the instrument from her father, P.K. Swaminathan, and *mrudangam* maestro Umayalpuram K. Sivaraman. While Rajna spent much of her youth performing in the Karnatik music and *bharatanatyam* (South Indian dance) scenes across the diaspora and in India, her music has also been

informed by her study of Western classical piano, an affinity for Indian film music and other popular musics, and extensive collaborations with improvisers in New York's creative music scene. Rajna's scholarly work also intersects with her musical study and informs her creative perspective: she holds degrees in Anthropology and French from the University of Maryland, College Park, and is currently at Harvard University, pursuing a PhD in Music—Creative Practice and Critical Inquiry—a doctoral program founded by her mentor, pianist-composer Vijay Iyer.

Rajna's recent commissions include Chamber Music America New Jazz Works (2019-2021), LAFil Green Umbrella Series (2020), and a composer fellowship with the Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music (2020).

A reflection on the process of discovering human movement, *Borne* meditates on various textures of being borne—that is, carried—by others or by oneself, physically or spiritually. In my nascent experiences with movement artists, and in beginning to explore my own relationship to movement, I encountered unexpected tenderness, joy, intensity, and play, which unfold here through sound. Playfully embedded within is the creative potential of being "born," or reborn. This music seeks to revel in the continuity of these life states, and invites the quartet to dwell on the intimacies and entanglements that shape their own movements as they play, and inevitably dance, carrying listeners with them.

Berkeley-based **Erika Oba** is a composer, pianist/flutist, and educator. As a composer she has written works for big band, small jazz ensembles, chamber groups, dance and theater. She is active as a performer on both piano and flute, and is a member of the Montclair Women's Big Band, Ends Meat'

Catastrophe Jazz Ensemble, electro-jazz duo Rice Kings, and The Sl(e)ight Ensemble. She has worked as a dance accompanist for Mills College and Berkeley Ballet Theater, and is currently a resident music director with Berkeley Playhouse's Youth Conservatory Program. In addition to her own private teaching studio, she is a private jazz piano instructor for UC Berkeley's Music Department.

Halcyon refers to the mythic seabird that is said to calm the ocean waves to create a period of relative serenity during which they could nest. In my neighborhood in South Berkeley, there is a small "parklet" called Halcyon Commons that was created by members of the local community in order to create a small space of tranquility. I wrote my initial sketches for this string quartet in the Halcyon Commons, while ruminating on the value of having pockets of calm in a turbulent world.

Jonah Gallagher is a composer of concert music born and raised in the suburbs of Chicago, Illinois. He received his Master's degree from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music where he studied with Mason Bates. He has additionally studied with Robert Denham, Alex Lu, and Mike Watts. Receiving both national and international recognition, his music has been performed domestically in Detroit, Los Angeles, Oakland, San Francisco, Miami, and Chicago, as well as internationally in Seoul, South Korea and Vienna, Austria. His most recent collaborations have been with the Del Sol Quartet.

Gallagher's music creates a musical narrative, communicating beauty and humanity in each piece. In addition to writing music, Jonah has a passion for woodworking, especially the

crafting of hand carved tobacco pipes. He currently lives in Daly City, California with his wife Hannah.

Ghosts of Grass explores what might happen if a professional string quartet was to become possessed by the spirits of Old-Time bluegrass fiddlers. The piece is a short meditation on this idea. In the spirit of visiting the spirit of fiddlers, I sought to create an original melody that one might think they've heard before, but is in fact, a melody of my own creation. I wanted to dive into this unique medium—the string quartet—and get back to one of the most common ways these instruments have been played. It is important to me that music be not just for the concert stage, but the living room and the front porch too. Music is for people, and for people to share it.

Julius Eastman (1940–1990) was a prodigy pianist, virtuoso singer, and groundbreaking composer. He studied piano with Mieczyslaw Horszowski at the Curtis Institute, recorded Peter Maxwell Davies vocal tour de force, *Eight Songs for a Mad King*, and formed part of the adventurous musical community in Buffalo, NY alongside Morton Feldman and Lukas Foss. Eastman's later compositions often bear provocative titles that may have reflected—or contributed to—his increasing marginalization from the classical music establishment as a gay, Black man. In the 1980s Eastman experienced eviction, homelessness and drug dependence. He died alone in Buffalo at the age of 49. Recently, Eastman's music has received increasing attention thanks to the advocacy of Mary Jane Leach, Luciano Chessa and others.

Gay Guerrilla is aptly described by Chessa as “a minimalist choralphantasie.” The loosely pulsing, repetitive texture builds through a cannily constructed harmonic and motivic arc,

centered around the hymn *A Mighty Fortress is our God*. Although *Gay Guerrilla* was first recorded with four pianos, the score gives no directions regarding instrumentation. In the fashion of John Cage, events are organized in time by stopwatch, as well as the performers' musical preference. For today's performance, we have chosen an ensemble of three string quartets—two prerecorded and one performing live.

Del Sol would like to thank Luciano Chessa for sharing his insights on Eastman's music.

ABOUT THE PERFORMERS

Del Sol began as a thought on the night shift at Fermilab. Charlton Lee loved the cutting edge of physics research – always looking for the next discovery, pushing boundaries. But he missed the way music connected people, building community by communicating in ways physics never would. What if he could bring that scientific passion for exploration to a string quartet?

Twenty-six years later, Del Sol is still sharing music that brings out the endorphins. Music that asks why not?

Fascinated by the feedback loop between social change, technology, and artistic innovation, the San Francisco-based ensemble is a leading force in 21st century chamber music—whether introducing Ben Johnston's microtonal *Americana* at the Library of Congress, taking Aeryn Santillan's gun-violence memorial to the streets of the Mission District, exploring Andean soundscapes with Gabriela Lena Frank and traditional musicians, or collaborating with Huang Ruo and the anonymous poets who carved their words into the walls of the

Angel Island Immigration Station during the years of the Chinese Exclusion Act. The current Del Sol lineup, marked by the arrival of violinist Sam Weiser alongside mainstays Kathryn Bates and Ben Kreith, bring a fresh energy, freedom, and precision to the group.

Recognized as a “vigorous champion of living composers”, Del Sol has premiered hundreds of works by composers including Terry Riley, Gabriela Lena Frank, Frederic Rzewski, Ben Johnston, Chinary Ung, Mason Bates, Tania León, Erberk Eryilmaz, Theresa Wong, Reza Vali, Mohammed Fairouz and Peter Sculthorpe. Many of these works are included on Del Sol’s nine critically-acclaimed albums. *PopMatters* praised Del Sol’s “unfettered mastery” on Terry Riley’s *Dark Queen Mantra* (2017, Sono Luminus). *Scrapyard Exotica* (2015) elicited this rave in *The New York Times*: “I could be wrong, but I’m guessing it’s been a while since you’ve rocked out to a string quartet recording. See if your foot can stay still once you put on this funky disc of rhythmically infectious (if often warped) music played by the adventurous Del Sol String Quartet.”

With its deep commitment to education, Del Sol has reached thousands of K-12 students through inventive school performances, workshops, coaching, and residencies. The Quartet members also have worked closely with student composers, musicians and faculty artists at universities across the country.

Learn more about Del Sol members **Sam Weiser**, **Benjamin Kreith**, **Charlton Lee**, and **Kathryn Bates** on the quartet’s website, delsolquartet.com.

COMING UP AT OLD FIRST CONCERTS

Friday, October 9 at 8 pm

**Circadian String Quartet—Monika Gruber & David Ryther, violins
Omid Assadi, viola & David Wishnia, cello**

Debussy's *Préludes* for piano are so coloristic that they suggest many sounds and images that transcend the instrument—join Circadian as we transform them into string quartet music and explore their endless suggestive possibilities. Program includes *Ondine*, *Des pas sur la neige* and *La danse de Puck*, as well as the *String Quartet in G minor*.

Sunday, October 11 at 4 pm

Stenberg | Cahill Duo—Kate Stenberg, violin & Sarah Cahill, piano
Premieres by Mary Watkins and Ronald Bruce, plus works for duo and solo by Claude Debussy, Somei Satoh, Grazyna Bacewicz, Lili Boulanger, Ruth Crawford, Germaine Tailleferre, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, and Johannes Brahms.

Friday, October 16 at 8 pm

Stephen Porter, piano

Stephen Porter returns to our stage with a program of Beethoven's final piano work, the *Six Bagatelles Op. 126*, premieres by four living composers—Toni Lester, Norberto Oldrini, Andrew List and Martin Skafté—and both books of Debussy's luminous *Images*.

Sunday, October 18 at 8 pm

Lynn Schugren, piano - *The Sierra Prelude Project*

A series of ten newly commissioned preludes evoking the Sierra Nevada Mountains, from the beauty of sunrise and the sounds of the forests to the destruction caused by man or wildfire. Works by Alexis Alrich, Eleanor Armer, Molly Axtmann, Jake Collins, Jerry Grant, Robert Greenberg, Durwynne Hsieh, Dennis Lauderdale, Bruce Nalezny, and Mark Vance.

Friday, October 23 at 8 pm

Aaron Rosengaus, viola & Jennifer Lee, piano

English music for viola and piano written during the difficult and confusing era of the two World Wars, a time with parallels to our current Covid-19 pandemic. Works by Frank Bridge, Rebecca Clarke, Arnold Bax, and Julius Harrison.

Tickets and more information at oldfirstconcerts.org

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