



Old First Concerts

presents

Alchemy

Ensemble for These Times

Chelsea Hollow, soprano

Abigail Monroe, cello

Margaret Halbig, piano

Friday, October 14, 2021 at 8 PM

Old First Church

1751 Sacramento St. at Van Ness Ave.

San Francisco, CA 94109

(415) 474-1608 www.oldfirstconcerts.org

ABOUT OLD FIRST CONCERTS

- Great venue for music with beautiful acoustics and amazing Steinway concert grand piano.
- Primarily local emerging and mid-career professional musicians presenting innovative programs.
- Every concert offers new insights and virtuosic performances.
- Complimentary refreshments served at intermission or after the concert.
- An independent 501(c)3 non-profit organization devoted to presenting music at affordable prices, especially for low-income seniors and students.
- Solo, chamber music, and world music concerts year-round since 1970.

DONATING TO OLD FIRST CONCERTS

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 look forward to having all audiences back in our space when it is safe to do so. In the meantime, we are happy to be able to continue presenting artists of the highest caliber to our audience in the Bay Area—and beyond—via livestreamed events. We are following city guidelines and safety protocols to help ensure the safest possible environment for our performers and staff.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Following us on **Facebook** is a great way to keep informed about the latest concert information. While you are there, don't forget to **share** events with your friends and hit the "Like" button liberally. [facebook.com/oldfirstconcerts/](https://www.facebook.com/oldfirstconcerts/)

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

Mary Bianco (b. 1939)

Cello Solo for Abby (2021) World Premiere

Abigail Monroe, *cello*

Julia Perry (1924–1979)

How Beautiful Are the Feet (1953)

Chelsea Hollow, *soprano* & Margaret Halbig, *piano*

Marcus Norris (b. 1991)

Lake Turkana (2018)

George Walker (1922–2018)

Prelude and Caprice (1945, 1941)

Margaret Halbig, *piano*

Brennan Stokes (b. 1990)

The Unseen (2021) World Premiere

Open Windows

Lost Things

Pain

The Unseen

Gray Fog

There Will Come Soft Rains (Wartime)

If Death Is Kind

Chelsea Hollow, *soprano* & Margaret Halbig, *piano*

INTERMISSION

Darian Donovan Thomas (b. 1993)

Etudinal Caprice (2013) World Premiere

Gabriela Ortiz (b. 1964)

Su-Muy-Key (2004)

Margaret Halbig, *piano*

Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson (1932–2004)
Lamentations: Black Folk Song Suite (1973)
Abigail Monroe, *cello*

Pablo Ortiz (b. 1964)
Piglia (2002)

Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson
Toccata (1953)
Margaret Halbig, *piano*

Alchemy is supported in part through the Musical Grant Program, which is administered by InterMusic SF, and supported by the Clarence E. Heller Charitable Foundation, the Hewlett Foundation, and San Francisco Grants for the Arts. E4TT's 2021/22 season is made possible in part by a grant from the San Francisco Arts Commission, and sponsored, in part, by a grant from The Ross McKee Foundation.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Alchemy is associated today with science fiction/fantasy novels. But centuries ago, it was originally the precursor to modern chemistry in the Middle East, India, China, and Europe. Its practitioners worked to transform one metal into another, especially silver and gold, and to discover an elixir of life. For today's concert, the composers have performed their own musical alchemy, transforming earlier forms, styles, and texts from the past to make them their very own.

The program opens with California composer **Mary Bianco's** *Cello Solo for Abby*, inspired by J. S. Bach. Writes Bianco, "Bach was surely the master at composing for unaccompanied cello. Using his amazing repertoire as my starting point, I've mingled old and new with frequent

changes in key, meter, and themes in ways that belong to our era rather than his. Different? Yes! Hubris? Never: who would even dare to contemplate being able to improve on arguably music's greatest composer?" Closing the first half is our other commission on the program, *The Unseen*, a new song cycle about identity, loss, illness, and isolation by emerging composer **Brennan Stokes** to texts by Sara Teasdale (1884–1933). Recognized in her own time for her poetry that offered a woman's perspective on love, nature, beauty, and death, as well as for her anti-war poems during World War I, Teasdale won the precursor to the Pulitzer Prize in 1918. Profoundly affected by her divorce in 1929, she spent the last four years of her life as a semi-invalid; then, after surviving pneumonia, she committed suicide by overdosing on sleeping pills. The seven poems set in *The Unseen* chronicle her emotional journey through sickness, anger, isolation, hope, and despair. After months of the pandemic, we have all seen the effects of isolation and solitude on people and relationships, resulting in disappointment, frustration, futility, and fear. Teasdale shared these feelings. Set to music one hundred years after their publication in her second collection of poetry, *Flame and Shadow* (1920) the seven poems in *The Unseen* reflect these experiences, giving fresh life to powerful texts that utter universal truths—truths that speak not only to the present, but that will continue to speak to audiences a hundred years from now. *

**If you, or someone you know, are struggling with thoughts of self-harm or suicide, please contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255, or the San Francisco Crisis Line at 415-781-0500.*

Those familiar with Handel's *Messiah* will recognize the opening words in **Julia Perry's** lyrical setting (text based on the Bible [Isaiah, 5:7]). *Etudinal Caprice* (a third world premiere), *Piglia* and *Su-Muy-Key* all refer to etudes and

caprices, tangos, and salsa, respectively (the latter is also the name of the early 20th century Mexican-Chinese burlesque dancer and actress). The remaining pieces on the program take their inspiration from the forms named in their titles—from folk songs and lamentations to toccatas, etudes, and caprices—and were written by composers whose deep talents have been woefully under-recognized in their—and our—times.

TEXTS

How Beautiful Are the Feet

How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace.
That publisheth salvation, that sayeth unto Zion thy Lord reigneth.

The Unseen

I. Open Windows

Out of the window, a sea of green trees
Lift their soft boughs like the arms of a dancer,
They beckon and call me, "Come out in the sun!"
But I cannot answer.

I am alone with Weakness and Pain,
Sick abed and June is going,
I cannot keep her, she hurries by
With the silver-green of her garments blowing.

Men and women pass in the street
Glad of the shining sapphire weather,
But we know more of it than they,
Pain and I together.

They are the runners in the sun,
Breathless and blinded by the race,
But we are watchers in the shade
Who speak with Wonder face to face.

II. Lost Things

Oh, I could let the world go by,
Its loud new wonders and its wars,
But how will I give up the sky
When winter dusk is set with stars?

And I could let the cities go,
Their changing customs and their creeds,—
But oh, the summer rains that blow
In silver on the jewel-weeds!

III. Pain

Waves are the sea's white daughters,
And raindrops the children of rain,
But why for my shimmering body,
Have I a mother like Pain?

Night is the mother of stars,
And wind the mother of foam—
The world is brimming with beauty,
But I must stay at home.

IV. The Unseen

Death went up the hall
Unseen by every one,
Trailing twilight robes
Past the nurse and nun.

He paused at every door
And listened to the breath
Of those who did not know
How near they were to Death.

Death went up the hall
Unseen by nurse and nun;
He passed by many a door—
But he entered one.

V. Gray Fog

A Fog drifts in, the heavy laden
Cold white ghost of the sea—
One by one the hills go out,
The road and the pepper-tree.

I watch the fog float in at the window
With the whole world gone blind,
Everything, even my longing, drowns,
Even the thoughts in my mind.

I put my head on my hands before me,
There is nothing left to be done or said,
There is nothing to hope for, I am tired,

And heavy as the dead.

VI. There Will Come Soft Rains (Wartime)

There will come soft rains and the smell of the ground,
And swallows circling with their shimmering sound;

And frogs in the pools singing at night,
And wild plum-trees in tremulous white;

Robins will wear their feathery fire
Whistling their whims on a low fence-wire;

And not one will know of the war, not one
Will care at last when it is done.

No one would mind, neither bird nor tree
If mankind perished utterly;

And Spring herself, when she woke at dawn,
Would scarcely know that we were gone.

VII. If Death Is Kind

Perhaps if Death is kind, and there can be returning,
We will come back to earth some fragrant night,
And take these lanes to find the sea, and bending
Breathe the same honeysuckle, low and white.

We will come down at night to these resounding beaches
And the long gentle thunder of the sea,
Here for a single hour in the wide starlight
We shall be happy, for the dead are free.

ABOUT THE COMPOSERS

Mary Bianco (b. 1939) is a San Francisco-, Paso Robles-, Los Angeles- and New York-based composer of primarily classical chamber music. She received her M.A. degree in Music Composition from Mills College in 2015, her main teachers being David Bernstein, Fred Frith, Chris Brown and Roscoe Mitchell. Bianco received her B.A. with concentration in composing from Sarah Lawrence College.

Currently studying with David Garner, her previous teachers include Darius Milhaud, Ezra Laderman, Meyer Kupferman, and

Irwin Stahl. She composed for the Carpenter Trio from 2011 to 2016. Currently she composes for Symphony of the Vines in the Central Coast, the Crescent City Chamber Players, Project: Music Heals Us, The Solera Quartet, The Manhattan Chamber Players, and various California artists.

Marcus Norris' (b. 1991) first foray into making music came in the form of producing rap beats on pirated software, installed on a Windows 98 computer that he Macgyvered together from spare parts while lying on the floor of his childhood bedroom. He came to composing concert music later in life and transferred that same imagination to writing music fusing all kinds of influences. Called a "New Musical Talent in our Midst" by Chicago's *N'digo Magazine*, Norris was selected as an inaugural Composer-in-Residence for the Chicago Philharmonic from 2021–24 and for the 2020 LA Philharmonic's National Composers Intensive. In 2020 he founded South Side Symphony—the only orchestra that would perform *Back That Thang Up* on the same concert as Beethoven.

One of the foremost Mexican composers today, Latin Grammy-nominated **Gabriela Ortiz** (b. 1964) is one of the most vibrant musical voices emerging on the international scene. Her musical language achieves an expressive synthesis of tradition and avant-garde by combining high art, folk music and jazz in novel, frequently refined, and always personal ways. Her compositions are considered both entertaining and immediate as well as profound and sophisticated; she achieves a balance between highly organized structure and improvisatory spontaneity. Ortiz has written music for dance, theater and cinema, and has actively collaborated with poets, playwrights, and historians. Her creative process focuses on the connections between gender issues, social justice, environmental concerns and the burden of racism, as well as the phenomenon of multiculturalism caused by globalization, technological development, and mass migrations.

Born in Buenos Aires, composer **Pablo Ortiz** (b. 1964) is a professor of composition at the University of California, Davis. Prizes and commissions include the Fromm Music Foundation in 1992, a

Guggenheim Fellowship in 1993, the Charles Ives Fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1996, and an Academy Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 2008. In 1997 and 1998, Ortiz was commissioned to write two chamber operas, *Parodia* and *Una voz en el viento*, by the Centro Experimental Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires. In 1999 he was commissioned by the Koussevitzky Foundation to write *Raya en el mar*, for the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players. In 2000 from *Fideicomiso para la cultura Mexico-US* to write children's songs.

Named for African-British composer Samuel Coleridge Taylor, **Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson** (1932–2004) was an American composer whose career spanned the musical worlds of classical, jazz, dance, film and television, as well as pop, including working with Harry Belafonte and Marvin Gaye. Perkinson was born and raised in New York and studied dance and education before his full immersion into music. In 1965, he cofounded, and later became the music director of, the Symphony of the New World, the first racially integrated orchestra in the United States. Perkinson's music has influences of blues, spirituals, and Black folk music, and is also known for its rhythmic complexity.

Julia Perry (1924–1979) was a Black American composer known for her neoclassical style. A two-time Guggenheim Fellow, she used these opportunities to study with composers Luigi Dallapiccola in Italy, and then with Nadia Boulanger in France. When she returned to the United States, she joined the music faculty at Florida A&M University, and would later take a teaching position at Atlanta University. While her music was not recorded much in her lifetime, her *Short Piece for Orchestra* was recorded by the New York Philharmonic in 1965. Perry suffered two strokes later in life, and subsequently taught herself to compose with her left hand. During her life, Perry composed 12 symphonies, two concertos, three operas, and many smaller pieces.

Brennan Stokes (b. 1990) is a San Francisco based composer, pianist, teacher, and tenor. He received his Master's Degree in Music Composition from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music

and his Bachelor's in Piano Performance from Pacific Union College. Previous composition mentors include David Garner and Asher Raboy. Stokes enjoys finding ways of expressing his European, Peruvian, and queer identities in his works, alongside other musical stylings. His compositions focus heavily on storytelling and have been described as “transportive”. Within the last few years, he has written music for chorus, strings, voice and piano, and opera utilizing texts from both poets/writers of the past and present, as well as writing original texts.

Darian Donovan Thomas (b. 1993) is a Brooklyn-based composer, multi-instrumentalist, and interdisciplinary artist interested in combining genres into a singular vocabulary that can express ideas about intersectionality (of medium and identity). Necessarily, he is interested in redacting all barriers to entry that have existed at the gates of any genre – this vocabulary of multiplicity will be intersectional, and therefore all-inclusive. He has received a Bachelors in Music Composition from The University of the Incarnate Word, and was a 2018 New Amsterdam Composer Lab Fellow, 2018 SoSI Composer Fellow, and 2019 Banglewood Composition Fellow.

George Walker (1922–2018) was an American composer, pianist, and organist. The first Black student to graduate from the Curtis Institute of Music in 1945, he went on to receive his first doctorate from USC in 1956 (and would eventually receive six honorary doctoral degrees), becoming the first Black composer to win the Pulitzer Prize in 1996 for his piece *Lilacs*, for soprano and orchestra. Walker's music was influenced by many genres that included jazz, folk songs, and hymns. Over his career, Walker published 90+ works spanning sonatas for piano, violin, viola, and cello, a cantata, art songs, organ pieces, works for chorus, as well as works for woodwinds and brass.

ABOUT ENSEMBLE FOR THESE TIMES

Winners of The American Prize in 2021 for Chamber Music Performance, E4TT consists of award-winning soprano and Artistic Executive Director Nanette McGuinness, cellist Abigail Monroe, pianist Margaret Halbig, and Senior Artistic Advisor and San Francisco Conservatory of Music faculty member, composer David Garner. The group focuses on 20th and 21st century music that is relevant, engaging, original and compelling—music that resonates with today and speaks to tomorrow, that harnesses the power of artistic beauty, intelligence, wit, lyricism, and irony to create a deep understanding of our times and the human condition. E4TT made its international debut in Berlin in 2012; was sponsored by the U.S. Embassy in Budapest for a four-city tour of Hungary in 2014; and performed at the Krakow Culture Festival in 2016 and at the *Conservatorio Teresa Berganza* in Madrid in 2017. E4TT has performed locally at the German Consulate General, the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, Old First Concerts, JCC Peninsula, Trinity Chamber Concerts, and Noontime Concerts, among other venues. E4TT's critically acclaimed recordings include *Once/Memory/Night: Paul Celan*, which was released in 2020 in honor of the centennial of this seminal 20th century poet, and won a Silver Medal in the Global Music Awards. The group's debut CD, *Surviving: Women's Words*, released on the Centaur label in 2016, was also honored with a Silver Medal in the Global Music Awards. E4TT's second CD, *The Hungarians: From Rózsa to Justus* (Centaur Records, 2018), features a cello duo by Hollywood movie maven and Hungarian émigré Miklós Rózsa, along with works by three of his compatriots who perished in the Holocaust; *The Hungarians* won a Gold Medal in the Global Music Awards the year of its release.

E4TT pianist **Margaret Halbig** is in high demand as a collaborative artist in both the instrumental and vocal fields. On staff at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music since 2011, she regularly performs recitals, masterclasses, and lessons and has collaborated with many of esteemed Bay Area musicians including mezzo-soprano Frederica Von Stade, San Francisco Symphony Principal Trombonist Timothy Higgins, and San Francisco Symphony's

principal tubist Jeffrey Anderson. An advocate of new and contemporary music, Halbig is the pianist for Ninth Planet, a San Francisco-based new music collective and a member of the wind-and-piano sextet Frequency 49. Halbig was a Collaborative Teaching fellow at Interlochen Arts in 2017 and 2018 and has been the pianist for Young Women's Chorus of San Francisco since 2014.

Guest coloratura soprano **Chelsea Hollow** is an operatic activist, creating art that makes audiences think and heal collectively. Hollow uses classical music to take audiences on a journey using the texts, perspectives and dreams of activists. Her 2019 feminist recital *Voice for the Voiceless* chronicles a variety of voices of the feminist movement. Hollow's 2020 recital *Cycles of Resistance* (rescheduled for Jan 2022) showcases seven activist movements from around the globe in the 20th and 21st centuries. Known for her "soaring high range" and "stage panache," Hollow performs regularly in the United States and Mexico in operatic productions and solo recitals while building Concert Rebels, an organization with a mission to amplify marginalized voices and disrupt the classical music industry.

E4TT cellist **Abigail Monroe** hails from New Mexico and holds a Bachelor's degree from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music in cello performance under the instruction of Jennifer Culp. She has appeared as a soloist, chamber musician, and large ensemble musician in venues across the United States. As a San Francisco resident, Abigail performs frequently throughout the Bay Area as both a classical cellist. She has served as both Principal cellist of the SFCM Orchestra, as well as the Miami Summer Music Festival Symphony Orchestra. As the winner of the Jackie McGehee Young Artists Competition in 2019, Abigail was also featured as cello soloist performing Elgar's *Cello Concerto* with the New Mexico Philharmonic.

COMING UP AT OLD FIRST CONCERTS

Friday, October 22 at 8 pm—Dorisiya Yosifova, *violin*

A World Premiere based entirely on Bulgarian folklore tradition by Jillian Honorof, plus works by Dora Pejacevid & Amy Beach.

Sunday, October 24 at 4 pm—Ives Collective

Roy Malan, *violin*; Susan Freier, *violin & viola*; Stephen Harrison, *cello*; Gwendolyn Mok, *piano*

The Ives Collective presents powerful live music experiences through fresh and informed interpretations of established masterworks and underappreciated gems, in this program featuring works by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Erwin Schulhoff, and Johannes Brahms.

Friday, November 5 at 8 pm—The San Francisco Leonard Cohen Festival presents: Madeline Tasquin & Friends + Smitty & Julija

An evening of Leonard Cohen songs presented by dynamic musicians who have been part of many Leonard Cohen tributes around the Bay Area over the years.

Saturday, November 6 at 8 pm—The San Francisco Leonard Cohen Festival presents: Conspiracy of Beards

San Francisco's Conspiracy of Beards is a choir of men that performs dynamic, original, a cappella arrangements of the poetic songs of Leonard Cohen.

For tickets & more information visit www.oldfirstconcerts.org

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