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***Songs Re-Imagined:***  
*An exploration of identity through music*

**BARDIN-NISKALA DUO**

**An-Lin Bardin, *cello***

**Naomi Niskala, *piano***

**Friday, February 24, 2023 at 8 PM**

Old First Church

1751 Sacramento St. at Van Ness Ave.

San Francisco, CA 94109

(415) 474-1608 [www.oldfirstconcerts.org](http://www.oldfirstconcerts.org)

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Old First Concerts' piano is a New York Steinway D model, circa 1980, with Hamburg action. It was donated by The Stanley Ibler Fund, and is maintained by David Love Piano Service and Restoration.

## 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.

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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/](http://www.oldfirstconcerts.org/give/), or checks can be mailed to:

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You can also find us on **Instagram @oldfirstconcerts** with information about upcoming events plus photos and videos from our concerts.

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**Sunday, February 26 at 4 pm**

**Daniela Mineva, piano—*Transfigured Voices***

This program features uncompromising piano scores are deeply spiritual and strikingly expressive by three of the most original and influential Eastern European women composers—Franghiz Ali-Zadeh, Galina Ustvolskaya, and Sofia Gubaidulina, performed by Daniela Mineva, who *The New York Times* called a “vibrant and expressive performer who could steal the show in every concert”.

**Saturday, March 11 at 8 pm**

**Gabriele Baldocci, piano**

Experience Gabriele Baldocci’s unique style, visionary programming and versatile artistic personality with a program that includes US Premieres of works by Baldocci, David Winkler, and Douglas Finch, plus Liszt’s transcription of Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 5*.

**Sunday, March 12 at 4 pm**

**Ives Collective—Kay Stern & Susan Freier, violins; Clio Tilton, viola; Stephen Harrison, cello; Kyle Bruckmann, oboe; Tody Brody, flute; Keisuke Nakagoshi, piano**

Presenting powerful live music experiences through fresh and informed interpretations of established masterworks and under-appreciated gems, the Ives Collective performs works by Helen Grime, Amy Beach, and Antonín Dvořák.

*For tickets & more information visit [www.oldfirstconcerts.org](http://www.oldfirstconcerts.org)*

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## PROGRAM

Yiheng Yvonne Wu (b. 1981)

**Three Adaptations\*** (2021)

*I. Dreaming*

*II. Playing*

*III. Remembering*

Jean Rudy Perrault (b. 1961)

**Brother Malcolm...** (2009)

Juantio Becenti (b. 1983)

**Fantasy\*** (2022)

### Intermission

Miguel del Águila (b. 1957)

**Tango Volante, Op. 133 for Cello and Piano\*** (2022)

Reena Esmail (b. 1983)

**Jhula-Jhule** (2013)

Michael-Thomas Foumai (b. 1987)

**Breath Water Spirit\*** (2022)

\* commissioned by the Bardin-Niskala Duo

Our thanks to our generous patrons: Patrick Wang, Grace and Michael Griffin, Lili and Wilson Ervin, the Leventritt Foundation, Mary P. McKillip Pautz, Tsing Bardin, Sean Hayes, Vince Martin, Maureen Engel, Kiran and Arjun Malhotra

## ABOUT THE MUSIC

### Yiheng Yvonne Wu *Three Adaptations* (2021)

Yiheng Yvonne Wu (*Taiwanese-American*) studied composition at the University of California, San Diego (Ph.D., M.A.) and Yale University (B.A.). She has received commissions from the La Jolla Symphony conducted by Steven Schick, Arraymusic, Palimpsest, Michael Mizrahi and the Wisconsin Music Teachers Association, Figmentum, Bonnie Withing, Jessica Aszodi, Carla Rees, Rachel Beetz, and Dustin Donahue. Wu's music has been performed by the MIVOS string quartet and Ensemble SurPlus and featured in the WasteLAND concert series, the University of Tennessee Contemporary Music Festival, New Music on the Bayou, SoundSCAPE Festival, Aspen Music Festival, and Schloss Solitude Summer Academy. *Dreams of a Young Piano*, for solo piano with chamber ensemble, was awarded the 2018 Judith Lang Zaimont Prize by the International Alliance for Women in Music. Wu's string quartet, *Utterance*, released on Carrier Records, won the 5<sup>th</sup> Mivox/Kanter String Quartet Composition Prize. Wu's primary composition teachers have included Katharina Rosenberger, Kathryn Alexander, John Halle, Sophia Serghi, and Steven Takasugi. She teaches composition and music theory and leads the InterArts Ensemble at Beloit College in Wisconsin.

*Three Adaptations* incorporates folk songs from China, Japan, and Taiwan with the melodies going into and out of focus, as if obfuscated by time and distance. Eschewing a generic, pan-Asian flavor, the setting of the songs is meant to acknowledge the complex relationships the performers and composer have with their respective Asian ancestries. *Dreaming*, the first movement, uses *Northeastern Lullaby* of Dalian, Liaoning Province of Northeastern China. *Playing* uses *Diu Diu Deng*, a Taiwanese folksong written in the early 20th century. The lyrics, written by Hsu Ping-tung, depict a train going through a tunnel, with the sound of the water dripping on the roof. Much of the lyrics can be heard as onomatopoeia, though they could have

she began studying piano at the age of three, raised in Rochester and then later in Tokyo. Niskala holds degrees from the Yale School of Music, Stony Brook University, and the New England Conservatory of Music, where she studied with Claude Frank, Gilbert Kalish, and Patricia Zander. She also worked with pianists Leon Fleisher, Menahem Pressler, Peter Serkin, and Maria Louisa Faini, and violinists Louis Krasner and Eugene Lehner. Niskala is currently Associate Professor of Music at Susquehanna University in Pennsylvania, where she teaches piano and theory and leads a summer chamber music exchange program to Japan.

*Support our work:*

The Duo is a 501c (3) not-for-profit organization. Donations to the Bardin-Niskala Duo are tax deductible, and help fund the commissioning of our composers. Please see [www.Bardin-Niskala-Duo.com](http://www.Bardin-Niskala-Duo.com) for details.

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assistant to the Takács Quartet at the University of Colorado at Boulder for two years as part of the graduate quartet residency program. A strong proponent of music education, Bardin was a founding member of Music Haven, an intensive mentorship program serving youth from low-income neighborhoods in New Haven. Raised in California by two nuclear physicists, Bardin began her cello studies at the age of eight with Irene Sharp. She holds a B.S. from Yale University in Geology and Geophysics, and an M.M. from the Yale School of Music, where she studied with Aldo Parisot and was a member of the Grammy-Award-winning Yale Cellos.

A soloist and chamber musician who has appeared in Europe, North America, Russia, Israel, Thailand, and Japan, pianist **Naomi Niskala's** performances have been broadcast on BBC Radio, Deutschlandradio, RTV Germany, and NPR's *Performance Today*. Niskala performs regularly with *Spectrum Concerts Berlin*, one of Germany's leading chamber organizations, and has also recorded two discs with them. Recent performance highlights include the San Francisco Symphony Chamber Series at Davies Symphony Hall, soloist with the St. Petersburg Chamber Philharmonic of Russia, and solo and chamber performances with *Spectrum Concerts Berlin* in the Philharmonie Kammermusiksaal of Berlin, Carnegie's Weill Hall, in Thailand, and in Kosovo. Her release of the only complete recordings of American composer Robert Helps's solo piano works on two discs with Albany Records in 2007 was met with high acclaim, and she has also recorded piano chamber works of Robert Helps and Ursula Mamlok with *Spectrum Concerts Berlin* for two discs on Naxos, as well as the world premiere of Mamlok's 2015 quintet *Breezes* for Bridge Records. Niskala is featured in the 2013 German rbb television documentary entitled *Sehnsucht Musik (Searching for Music)*, documenting the work of four members of *Spectrum Concerts Berlin* towards improving the harsh conditions for young musicians at a music school located in Prizren, Kosovo. Born to Japanese/Finnish-American parents,

been derived from one of Taiwan's aboriginal languages. Many of Taiwan's railroad tracks were laid down during the Japanese colonization of Taiwan. Several tunnels were built through high mountains, some over a mile long. *Remembering* features *Aka-Tombo (Red Dragonfly)*, composed in 1927 by Kosaku Yamada, with lyrics written in 1921 by Rofu Miki." — Yiheng Yvonne Wu

### **Jean "Rudy" Perrault *Brother Malcolm* (2016)**

Born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, performer, conductor and composer, Jean (Rudy) Perrault is a sought-after educator/clinician, composer, performer, and conductor, nationally and internationally. His compositions have been commissioned for, and performed by, world famous musicians and ensembles. His most recent compositions include a work for string orchestra (*Sometimes, I Feel...*) depicting the events surrounding the George Floyd murder, a duo for flute and double bass entitled *Caged*, and a piano trio (*We Three Kings*) marking the 100th anniversary of the 1920 Duluth lynching. Current projects include a duo for violin and cello (*Dialogues for Violin and Cello*), a duo for cello and hand drum (*Peze Kafe*), a work for 13 instruments, and an arrangement of Ludovic Lamothe's *Danza #4* for violin, cello, and hand drum. Future projects include a duo for cello and piano, setting to music three poems of world-renown author Edwidge Danticat, and a ballet (*Seremoni*). For more than a decade, Rudy has been collecting, digitizing, and editing the piano works of Haitian classical composers. Rudy is Professor of Music, and Director of Orchestras, at the University of Minnesota Duluth, and a frequent judge/panelist at festivals and competitions in all corners of the world. He is a founding member of the Kako Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to bringing music to at-risk youth in the US and Haiti.

### **Juantio Becenti *Fantasy* (2022)**

Juantio Becenti (*Diné/Navajo*) lives in the four corners area of New Mexico close to his birthplace on the Navajo Nation. He began composing music at a young age and received his first

commission from the Moab Music Festival in 1998. He has since received commissions from Dawn Avery (North American Indian Cello Project), Raven Chacon (Native American Composers Apprenticeship Program), Michael Barrett (New York Festival of Song), George Steel (Abrams Curator of Music, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum), and others. His compositions have been performed by the Phoenix Chamber Orchestra, Dawn Avery, ETHEL, America's premier postclassical string quartet, and the Claremont Trio. He has studied at the Walden School for Young Musicians which he attended on full scholarship. He was the recipient of a grant from the First Nations Composers Initiative which he received in order to create original music for the film *Two Spirits*, a documentary about the life and murder of Fred Martinez, a transgendered Navajo teenager.

"Music is a healing force and a mode of expression that people universally fall back onto for healing and other fundamental human needs... I've selected a Navajo song called *Shi Naasha* that was composed after the Navajo left Ft. Sumner where they had been imprisoned for numerous years after conflicts with the US, Mexico, and various other Native American tribes aligned with the US. After a period of conflict the Navajo were rounded up in 1864 and forced on a walk from our traditional homelands to an internment camp 300+ miles away. Many Navajo died during that journey, and those who survived were imprisoned until 1868 when a treaty was signed. The Navajo homeland is bordered by four mountains with the southernmost being called Tsoodzil (turquoise mountain), or Mt. Taylor, in New Mexico. When the returning Navajo saw the mountain they were overcome with joy and composed *Shi Naasha*. It talks about going in beauty and freedom." —Juanito Becenti

**Miguel del Águila** *Tango Volante, Op. 133 for Cello and Piano*  
Three-time Grammy nominated composer Miguel del Águila (*Uruguayan-American*) has established himself among the most

continue to live and breathe today, defying the near extinction of the culture. Identity to the Native Hawaiians is central to their fight for recognition and visibility in the domain of the United States of America today.

As a composer who has found purpose in Pacific work, finding identity is a journey of embracing the culture and becoming aware and less ignorant of the history of my home. In June of 2022, I traveled to Hawaii Island (the Big Island). I attended a talk with John DeFries (President of the Hawaii Tourism Authority) at the Mauna Lani resort. DeFries touched upon many aspects of sustainable tourism, but what surprised me was his use of the words "Breath, Water, and Spirit." From the geothermal energy in volcanic power, sustainable agriculture, land preservation, and the telescopes on the Mauna (mountain); windows into stars, Hawai'i is the classroom for exploration, and a renewable and sustainable world. DeFries posited ancient Polynesians would have recognized the island's life-giving properties, giving breath (Ha) through life-sustaining water (Wai) and the spirits ('i), and named this place Hawai'i."

— Michael-Thomas Foumai

#### ABOUT THE MUSICIANS

Described as "stunning," by *The New York Times*, cellist **An-Lin Bardin** currently teaches cello and chamber music at Sarah Lawrence College, freelances in the greater NYC area, and moonlights as a math tutor. As the cellist of the Vinca Quartet, she performed extensively throughout Europe and the United States, and her performances have been broadcast on Deutschlandradio and WNYC. She is a laureate of several international quartet competitions, including the Paolo Borciani Quartet Competitions in Reggio Emilia, Italy, and the Fischhoff, the Plowman, the Yellow Springs, and Chesapeake Competitions in the United States. She served as Artist-in-Residence for the Perlman Music Program in Florida, and the ProQuartet Odyssee Program in France. She was a graduate

### **Michael-Thomas Foumai *Breath Water Spirit* (2022)**

Michael-Thomas Foumai (*Chinese-Samoan*) is a composer of contemporary concert music and educator with work focusing on storytelling and the history, people and culture of his Hawai'i home. His music has been performed by Yannick Nézet-Séguin and the Philadelphia Orchestra, George Manahan and the American Composers Orchestra at Carnegie Hall, Osmo Vänskä and the Minnesota Orchestra, and in the summer of 2021, the Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra presented a festival of his music with over 30 performances conducted by Rei Hotoda, Lidiya Yankovskaya, Sarah Hicks and JoAnn Falletta. Honors for his music have included a Fromm Foundation Grant from Harvard University, the MTNA Distinguished Composer of the Year Award, the Jacob Druckman Prize from the Aspen Music Festival, and three BMI composer awards. Foumai holds multiple degrees in music composition from the University of Hawai'i at Manoa (BM) and the University of Michigan (MM, DMA).

“Concepts of identity, place, and purpose are at the center of *Breath Water Spirit*. Born in Honolulu, Hawaii, I have always associated my birthplace with a place of belonging and identity. Yet, I have no Native Hawaiian ancestry. On January 17, 1893, the United States of America aided in the overthrowing of the Hawaiian Kingdom. Some 94 years before my existence, these events marked a dismantling of Hawaiian identity. ‘Ōlelo Hawai'i, the Hawaiian language, was systemically banned from being taught in schools and spoken in public. In addition, foreign and commercial interests had already disenfranchised native land ownership and voting rights. Hawaiians were faced with renouncing their Hawaiian identity, the Queen and Kingdom of Hawaii, for an allegiance to a new foreign constitution. A Hawaiian renaissance awakened in the 1960s, a revival and reclaiming of the Hawaiian language and cultural practice by the descendants of lost generations. This movement and the propagation of indigenous knowledge and practice

distinctive and highly regarded composers of his generation with over 130 works that combine drama, driving rhythms and nostalgic nods to his South American roots. His music, which enjoys over 200 performances annually, has been hailed as “brilliant and witty” (*The New York Times*) and “sonically dazzling” (*Los Angeles Times*). He is currently composer-in-residence with Denmark’s Ensemble Storstrøm, following a 2020 residency with Orchestra of the Americas. New and upcoming releases of his works include CDs by Norwegian Radio Orchestra; the Louisiana Philharmonic, Augusta Symphony, Cuarteto Latinoamericano, and the Eroica Trio, on Naxos, Albany, Bridge and Centaur. 2020–2021 collaborations include performances by Chicago Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra, Charlotte Symphony, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, Brazil’s Teatro São Pedro orchestra, São Paulo Dance Company, and Stavanger Symphoniorchester, Norway. Besides three Grammy nominations, he has received a Kennedy Center Friedheim Award, Magnum Opus Award, grants from New Music USA/Music Alive, the Copland Foundation and Lancaster Symphony Composer of the Year award. His music, recorded on 52 CDs, has been performed by over 100 orchestras and by thousands of ensembles and soloists worldwide. He graduated from San Francisco Conservatory and Vienna’s Universität für Musik und Darstellende Kunst. His music is published by Peermusic Classical, Theodore presser and self-published.

“Since I can remember I had a recurring dream in which I'm often chased or in trouble. As I try to run faster I jump and suddenly start flying. At first I'm surprised, but soon flying becomes a normal ability and situation. As I climb I reach a peaceful state in which I'm effortlessly floating in the air looking down at a beautiful landscape. This work conveys this dream's feelings and reflects about the unknown possibilities and powers hidden within each of us and our ability to turn challenges into a positive motivation and outcome. A three-note

theme (which illustrates the three stages of flight: *run - jump - take off*), recurs throughout the piece in different forms. At first in dark, tritone notes retracing their steps downwards. Soon the theme acquires a threatening, tango inspired beat. A struggle follows and finally the music breaks away from the threat and starts flying ending in floating peacefulness.”

—Miguel del Águila

### **Reena Esmail *Jhula-Jhule* (2013)**

Composer Reena Esmail (*Indian-American*) works between the worlds of Indian and Western classical music, and brings communities together through the creation of equitable musical spaces. Esmail’s work has been commissioned by ensembles including the Los Angeles Master Chorale, Kronos Quartet, and Imani Winds. Upcoming seasons include new work for Seattle Symphony, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Santa Fe Desert Chorale, Amherst College Choir and Orchestra, Santa Fe Pro Musica, and Conspirare. Esmail is the Los Angeles Master Chorale’s 2020–2023 Swan Family Artist in Residence, and Seattle Symphony’s 2020–21 Composer-in-Residence. Previously, she was named a 2019 United States Artist Fellow in Music, and the 2019 Grand Prize Winner of the S & R Foundation’s Washington Award. Esmail was also a 2017–18 Kennedy Center Citizen Artist Fellow. She was the 2012 Walter Hinrichsen Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters (and subsequent publication of a work by C.F. Peters). Esmail holds degrees in composition from The Juilliard School (BM’ 05 and the Yale School of Music (MM’ ,11 MMA’ ,14 DMA’ .(18 Her primary teachers have included Susan Botti, Aaron Jay Kernis, Christopher Theofanidis and Martin Bresnick, Christopher Rouse and Samuel Adler. She received a Fulbright-Nehru grant to study Hindustani music in India. Her Hindustani music teachers include Srimati Lakshmi Shankar and Gaurav Mazundar, and she currently studies and collaborates with Saili Oak. Her doctoral thesis, entitled *Finding Common Ground: Uniting Practices in Hindustani and Western Art*

*Musicians* explores the methods and challenges of the collaborative process between Hindustani musicians and Western composers. Esmail was Composer-in-Residence for Street Symphony (2016–18) and is currently an Artistic Director of Shastra, a non-profit organization that promotes cross-cultural music connecting music traditions of India and the West. She currently resides in Los Angeles.

“*Jhula-Jhule* uses two folk melodies. The first is a song called *Ankhon vina andharon re*, which I found on a recording my mother’s father made long before I was born. Of his five grandchildren, I am the only one who never met him. But as I’ve grown up, I realize how much we have in common, including our deep love of music. My mother often tells me stories of listening to records of Beethoven symphonies on hot nights in Kenya, where my grandfather spent most of his life. All the lights were turned off, and they would listen as a family, in the silent darkness, following his lead as he taught them to savor each note. We still have recordings of my grandfather singing songs in many languages – English, Marathi, Konkani, Portuguese and others – which I listen to from time to time, imagining what it might have been like to know him.

The other song comes to me from my grandmother, my father’s mother. My father’s parents (who even our American friends affectionately called Mamma and Pappa) moved to the US the year before I was born, and lived with us for most of my childhood. I grew up speaking to Mamma only in Gujarati, a language that I spoke to no one else until she died in 2007. As a baby, Mamma would often sing me this lullaby: *Jhula Jhule, Jhula Jhule / Reena Rani Jhula Jhule* which translates: *Back and forth, back and forth / Reena the Queen swings back and forth*. It has been years since I have thought about this melody, but while working on this project, it suddenly popped back into my mind. I’m so glad it did – it is one of the few musical memories I have of her.”

— Reena Esmail