

JENNIFER KOH

LIMITLESS

Duos performed with the composers

QASIM NAQVI

LISA BIELAWA

DU YUN

TYSHAWN SOREY

NINA YOUNG

WANG LU

VIJAY IYER

MISSY MAZZOLI



JENNIFER KOH

LIMITLESS

DISC 1

QASIM NAQVI, *modular synthesizer*

- 1 The Banquet (12:19)

LISA BIELAWA, *soprano*

Sanctuary Songs (13:00)

- 2 I. Broken (5:09)

- 3 II. Speak Softly (3:47)

- 4 III. My Marvelous Wall* (4:00)

*Choirs: Composition Studio at the University of
North Carolina at Greensboro

Composing a Creative Life Seminar at the College of
Performing Arts, The New School

DU YUN, *voice*

- 5 Give Me Back My Fingerprints (9:25)

TYSHAWN SOREY, *glockenspiel*

- 6 In Memoriam Muhal Richard Abrams (6:56)

NINA YOUNG, *electronics*

- 7 Sun Propeller (12:26)

TT: 54:09

DISC 2

WANG LU, *electronics*

Her Latitude (15:12)

- 1 Movement I (7:18)

- 2 Movement II (2:54)

- 3 Movement III (4:53)

VIJAY IYER, *piano*

The Diamond (20:17)

- 4 I. A Dream (5:34)

- 5 II. A Phantom (3:15)

- 6 III. A Drop of Dew (5:23)

- 7 IV. A Flash of Lightning (6:00)

MISSY MAZZOLI, *piano & electronics*

- 8 A Thousand Tongues (7:09)

- 9 Vespers for Violin (5:08)

TT: 47:56

All world premiere recordings except Mazzoli

PERSONAL NOTE

Limitless celebrates the limitless creativity and imagination in collaborations between composers and performers. *Limitless* shares this creative process through duo performances with composers. I am grateful to all of the artists who engaged in this project of writing, performing, and recording their works with me. Each collaboration has been truly special and unique, and collectively, they reflect the multiplicity of voices that will guide our art form into the future. I hope that these performances communicate the love and respect that we artists have for each other, and evoke the vitality of our musical world today.

— Jennifer Koh

PROGRAM NOTES

THE BANQUET

When Jennifer asked me to write *The Banquet*, I was learning how to use a modular synthesizer — a type of voltage controlled musical system that predates the modern keyboard synthesizers we use today. It has certain unstable properties and I'm drawn to the beautiful and complex textures it creates because of that instability. In this context, I wanted to highlight the synthesizer's treatment of odd and even harmonics against the natural resonance of the violin. At a critical juncture in the music, the violin moves from a lyrical space towards the abstract energy of this machine. On a programmatic level, *The Banquet* is about the challenges of expressing beauty during times of great emotional turmoil. I was grappling with a profound challenge in my life during the making of this piece and my desire was to feed these opposing forces into the music.



Photo by Falkwyn de Goyeneche

— Qasim Naqvi

SANCTUARY SONGS

The *Sanctuary Songs* are settings of texts using the word "sanctuary" by American women poets writing between the wars, in the 1920's: Broken (text from "Broken" by Virginia Stait), Speak Softly (text from "Sanctuary" by Elise M. Baker), and My Marvelous Wall (text from "Sanctuary" by Elinor Wylie). "Sanctuary" is a word that carries significant political weight today in the discussion around immigration; I wanted to find instances of its use within a broad range of American writings, in order to reach a greater understanding of its layered meanings within American consciousness. Definitions of "sanctuary" center around sacredness (a spot where something holy happened, a building or container within which something sacred is held, often on one of these holy spots) and also around safety (a place where one can be safe from danger, take refuge). The word has new prominence and resonance as various cities and schools take a stand on whether or not they will protect members of their communities from deportation.

The music community itself emerges, then, as a kind of sanctuary itself. In the case of Jennifer Koh, whose parents are Korean refugees, or others in our major symphony orchestras who are themselves immigrants and, in some cases, refugees, a life in music has been providing a kind of sanctuary (sacredness, a refuge) all along. We are newly aware, however, in the current political climate, of the specificity of our individual paths to get here, and also of the powerful potential for sacredness and refuge that we can create through our work.

— Lisa Bielawa



GIVE ME BACK MY FINGERPRINTS

The piece is a personal narrative for both Jenny and me. A woman's scream for independence, revealing and manifesting the strength of both women's emotional connection to each other. Intimacy, rooted in a primal need, has also, in turn, morphed into a catharsis.

— Du Yun



TYSHAWN SOREY

*IN MEMORIAM
MUHAL RICHARD ABRAMS*



SUN PROPELLER

Sun Propeller refers to fanned sunbeams that pierce through cloud openings. It is the literal translation of Huun-Huur-Tu, a Tuvan word for these “crepuscular rays,” these columns of light that radiate majestically from a single point in the sky. A Tuvan folk group has also taken the name. Their throat-singing style is drawn from a single low drone-tone that is filtered by nuanced vocal techniques to create rays of overtones with beautiful timbres — the vertical composite relationships forming hybrid melodies that become a human mimicry of nature’s sounds. This is the human muscular structure filtering and synthesizing — electronic music for the human body.

In *Sun Propeller*, the violin and its real-time electronic duo partner ebb and flow, filter and amplify, become the body and the environment. Together, they create a union that is a composite whole — refractions all traceable to a single drone rooted in the violin’s drop-D scordatura tuning.

— Nina Young



HER LATITUDE

I have known and admired Jenny's recordings and performances since long before I met her in person and got to know her as a dear friend. Her invitation to compose this work made me truly think about her, her background as an incredible musician, a child of immigrants from Korea, a socially and politically passionate citizen inside and outside of music, and as someone with immense curiosity in exploring new sounds. I find many of her strengths and characteristics resonate with me, and think about her unique cultural and artistic origins as part of her overall persona as a great violinist.

Her Latitude is written for violin and electronics, with a special semi-improvised part for me to play, reacting in real time to Jenny's treatment of time and gesture. The electronics part includes processed sounds from various sources of spiritual calm and catastrophic unrest: Buddhist chants, rusty bell sounds, faint old Korean pop songs, nuclear alarms, and the clanging of earthenware symbolizing early civilization. I thought a lot about the artistic and emotional journeys a woman artist of a non-mainstream heritage in the western world goes through before proudly performing on stage, often the most challenging compositions. For me, and certainly for Jenny as well, music is never just about the delivery of notes. The richness of her playing and character is the primary inspiration for this piece.

— Wang Lu



THE DIAMOND

In *The Diamond Sutra*, an early Buddhist text also known as *The Diamond that Cuts Through Illusion*, the Buddha leads his interlocutor, the Elder Subhuti, through a series of questions and provocations. The Buddha then concludes the session by offering this teaching to those assembled:

All composed things are like a dream,
a phantom, a drop of dew, a flash of lightning.
That is how to meditate on them;
that is how to observe them.

This duo piece is in four sections, corresponding roughly to these four disparate visions of impermanence: four distinct moments of interplay between form and emptiness, four corners of a diamond. This series of images is itself a “composed thing,” gathering dissimilar elements into a unified system. It suggests that the things we make are similar to things that exist beyond intention. The Buddha’s utterance helps us hear so-called “composition” and “improvisation” — or the encompassing category, “music” — as part of an even larger aggregate: *that which forms and recedes*.

— Vijay Iyer



A THOUSAND TONGUES

A Thousand Tongues was originally commissioned by cellist Jody Redhage. This piece is a short but intense response to the following text by Stephen Crane:

Yes, I have a thousand tongues,
And nine and ninety-nine lie.
Though I strive to use the one,
It will make no melody at my will,
But is dead in my mouth.



Photo by Marylene Mey

VESPERS FOR VIOLIN

Vespers for Violin, for amplified violin and electronics, began as a reimagining of my recent composition *Vespers for a New Dark Age*. I sampled keyboards, vintage organs, voices, and strings from that composition, drenched them in delay and distortion, and re-worked them into a piece that can be performed by a soloist. The result is something completely separate from the original work, with only distant, nostalgic connections to the source material. *Vespers for Violin* was composed for Monica Germino and Frank van der Weij and premiered at the Sounds of Music Festival in Groningen in October, 2014.

— Missy Mazzoli

JENNIFER KOH

Jennifer Koh is recognized for intense, commanding performances, delivered with dazzling virtuosity and technical assurance. A forward-thinking artist, she is dedicated to exploring a broad and eclectic repertoire while promoting diversity and inclusivity in classical music. She has expanded the contemporary violin repertoire through a wide range of commissioning projects and has premiered more than 70 works written especially for her. Her quest for the new and unusual, sense of endless curiosity, and ability to lead and inspire a host of multidisciplinary collaborators truly set her apart.

Ms. Koh's critically acclaimed series include *Bach & Beyond* and *Two X Four*, both of which have been recorded for Cedille Records, as well as *Shared Madness*, *Bridge to Beethoven*, and *The New American*

Concerto. These projects feature commissions from today's foremost composers, including Kaija Saariaho, whom she has long championed and closely collaborated, as well as Chris Cerrone, Anthony Cheung, John Harbison, Philip Glass, Vijay Iyer, Missy Mazzoli, Qasim Naqvi, Andrew Norman, and Tyshawn Sorey, among others.

Ms. Koh was named *Musical America's* 2016 Instrumentalist of the Year, was a winner in the International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow and Concert Artists Guild Competition, and received an Avery Fisher Career Grant. Born in Chicago, She has a BA in English literature from Oberlin College and studied at the Curtis Institute, where she worked extensively with Jaime Laredo and Felix Galimir.

She is an active lecturer, teacher, and recording artist for Cedille Records, and is the Artistic Director of *arco collaborative*, an artist-driven nonprofit that fosters a better understanding of our world through a musical dialogue inspired by ideas and the communities around us.



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Photos of Jennifer Koh Jürgen Frank

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www.arccollaborative.org

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