

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2022
5 P.M. | RAMO RECITAL HALL
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

In conjunction with *Interstitial: A Book of (Musical) Stories*, which brought together noted composers, librettists, and the artists of Brightwork newmusic and HEX Ensemble to create original pieces inspired by and amplifying the in-between cultures of Los Angeles on October 11, 2022, students from the USC Thornton School of Music (Professor Veronika Krausas) and the USC Dornsife Department of English (Professor Molly Bendall) perform a concert of their own original collaborative works that tell musical stories of the city.

For the program, theme guide, and more information about *Interstitial: A Book of (Musical Stories)*, click HERE.

visionsandvoices.usc.edu
brightworknewmusic.com
hexensemble.org

USC Visions & Voices USC Thornton USC Dornsife Department of English

Brightwork newmusic HEX

INTERSTITIAL

Program

NEW MUSIC

In Transit

LIBRETTIST: Tricia Lim Castro
COMPOSERS: Namratha Kasalanati and Leaha Villarreal

PERFORMED BY Tricia Lim Castro (spoken word), Leaha Villarreal (projection), and Namratha Kasalanati (cello)

Interstitial (excerpt from *Monica*)

LIBRETTIST: Fatema Bhaiji
COMPOSER: Caleb Palka

PERFORMED BY Helen Feng (soprano) and Rufus Bordal (piano)

Taking Echo Park (from *Outside Still*)

LIBRETTIST: Rachel Cassar
COMPOSER: Charlie Richardson

PERFORMED BY Charlie Richardson (piano) and fixed electronics

I'm Outside Still (from *Outside Still*)

LIBRETTIST: Rachel Cassar
COMPOSER: Helen Feng

PERFORMED BY fixed electronics

Safe (from *Outside Still*)

LIBRETTIST: Rachel Cassar
COMPOSER: Grace Miedziak

PERFORMED BY fixed electronics

sodas, waters for $1! (from *The Metro*)

LIBRETTIST: Fatema Bhaiji
COMPOSER: Madeline Clara Cheng

PERFORMED BY Oliviana Marie (voice), Daniel Young (violin), and Madeline Clara Cheng (piano)

CHORAL WORKS

Poem in which Jack becomes an Angeleno

LIBRETTIST: Paul Liu
COMPOSER: Oliviana Marie

Exodus

LIBRETTIST: Paul Liu
COMPOSER: Theodore Strich

Glorious

LIBRETTIST: Fatema Bhaiji
COMPOSER: Daniel Montes de Oca Téllez

PERFORMED BY Reagan Arvidson, Gianna Calcagno, Madeleine Clara Cheng, Valerie Fang, Helen Feng, Cricket Gorey, Anika Gupta, Ajani Harris, Amelia Horney, Ella Kaale, Kai Kaufman, Daniel Montes de Oca Tellez, Sophie Wuthenau, and Daniel Young with special guest James Hayden from HEX Ensemble

CONDUCTED BY Stevie J. Hirner



IN TRANSIT

By Tricia Lim Castro

Despite the prick of carpet seats, sharing
perpetual damp air with perfect strangers,
and the patience prescribed for every stop,
I'm proud to be a Metro advocate.
Afterall in just time, and then a half,
the GPS projection, I'm pushed through
town – even more promptly than by freeway
if people made traffic. Plastered to screens
and seats, our eyes have dried up – superfluous
time spent alone – please, protest private cars.
Petroleum prices have pitched skywards.
Ask any person, like the woman placed
across the aisle, prepped to open shop,
or that man pressing homewards, post-night watch.

There are those who offer their seats, for the
elders laden with bundles and this night's
eats, who ask me my name as though they care
and even if there is no chair, let me
simply think. In each turn, a sway like waves,
every entry and exit like the tide,
a rush that chauffeurs sleep. For this brief time,
an hour travelled through, authority
is curbed. Cross turnstiles, there is no station skimmed,
corner cut. There is no nimble return
to what's missed. There's only this, the window
seat, tour of our own neighborhoods, gallery
of glass, graffiti, and me – a body
in transit and for this short moment, free.

This is the end of the line.

In transit and for this short moment free,
of me and bodies of glass graffiti,
our own neighborhoods seat tours, galleries
to what's missed. Only *they* are, window the
corner cuts. No, there is nimble return
to curb. Turn styles, skim stations, cross no
authority, though hours and travel
rush that chauffeur: sleep. This, a brief for time,
exit and enter like tidings every
turning wave and sway. Each simply thinking,
that even if there is no chair, let me
eat, ask me my name. Though who cares? As they,
this night, our elders laden with bundles,
for whom seats offer a home, they are *those*.

Watch that man at the post, sing words of home,
press and cross the open aisle to shop for
women to put in their place. But each ask
and pet meets no reply. Spit the word *bitch*
to protest time spent alone – private scars
perfuse each seat, so our eyes have dried up.
If people made traffic or screamed, he'd pass
free to town anyway, promptness is not
a push of LAPD protection,
but I'm just fine, after all, I must have
the prescribed patience for every stop with
perfect strangers – despite the perpetual
damp and the prick of carpet seats – and take
pride in being a Metro advocate.

INTERSTITIAL

These lines spoke to me because sirens can be found on land and sea, and in the interstitial space between. In mythology, sirens lure sailors towards dangerous rocks. In L.A., emergency vehicle sirens empty the road ahead. Air raid sirens, installed during the Cold War, have largely been abandoned, but in some parts of the country, are maintained as part of severe weather warning systems. Sirens draw attention—to warn or ensnare—and, in some cases, might be the last thing you hear.—Caleb Palka

The sea creeps to shore.

The sirens go off every night.

OUTSIDE STILL

"Outside Still" sets to music a haiku made from statements shared by individuals who experienced the mass eviction of unhoused residents in Echo Park on March 24, 2021, supposedly to move them to state-organized housing solutions. However, only 17 of the 183 people removed from the park are confirmed to be in longer-term housing situations a year later. The rest are either in temporary shelters, on the streets again, within mental or carceral institutions, unable to be found by tracking systems, or are no longer with us. The haiku form was chosen, with 17 syllables to represent each person who has found housing.

The first movement, which sets the full text for prerecorded electronics and live piano, explores what it means to occupy a space and reflects on the hypocrisy in the discourse surrounding homeless encampments. The second movement, written for electronics, attempts to connect with the experiences depicted in the poem by drawing upon personal emotional experiences associated with displacement and alienation. The third movement depicts longing for safety amidst chaos, change, and displacement. While the piece emits a nostalgic and longing sound, it also looks to the future with small sparks of hope for that feeling of safety once again.

Safe at Echo Park[1]

To me, a private park now[2]

And I'm outside still[3]

1. Queen, whom the Guardian identified by her nickname, is 33 and living in an apartment with her fiancé, who also lived at Echo Park. She was hired by a housing nonprofit group after her activism at the encampment.
2. Gustavo Otzoy, 55, received delayed temporary housing after being told there were no immediate openings once he left the park. He ultimately left this housing situation after learning he could not keep his tools, which impeded his work as a handyman.
3. Victor Monarque, 35, says he has been unable to get permanent housing or stable shelter since the encampment's closure.

THE METRO

I had the honor of setting Fatema Bhaiji's poem "The Metro," a glimpse into the world of the Los Angeles metro system and the people riding it. The narrative is told from the perspective of a woman traveling alongside a collective of strangers. As she sets foot inside the metro, she enters another world of people and wonders about their stories. The music invites the listener on that same journey, with a driving motion interrupted by sudden stops, all while suggesting the idea that everyone else is living a life just as complex as your own.—Madeline Clara Cheng

Wind past her hair, A step in and she's in a world. A world of harsh stops. A world of night-time commuters.

A world of "sodas, waters for $1!"

A world of a single parent, But also a tired businessman. On the metro, a city of people are

So unalike to her but in common:

THE METRO.



POEM IN WHICH JACK BECOMES AN ANGELENO

Los Angeles has long been a destination for people from all walks of life, and to define what it means to be an Angeleno seems to be an insurmountable task. The poem repurposes the old English fairy tale as a metaphor to the changes that accompany a migration to Los Angeles. The beanstalk and the giant both symbolize the idealizations of the Los Angeles experience, which only serves to disappoint and threaten the livelihood of the disillusioned. In the end, the piece suggests that what tethers the Angeleno experience is a tenacious drive to be identified.

EXODUS

At its most basic level, "Exodus" is a poem that explores the core elements of the Los Angeles geography and urban environment. The piece is framed as a person's journey on foot through the streets of Los Angeles, continuing even through the night. The latter half of the piece draws largely from the history of homelessness and Skid Row and attempts to discuss the pitfalls of a hyper capitalist environment. In the end, what the piece begs for is the simple recognition that the city is not mechanical, but human.

Past the numbered bystreets
where litters of cats linger and
lounge under the abandoned sedan

Past the bus stop bench and
the furrowed faces, the strange
stenches winding about the street
lights, whispering low the secrets
of the unnamed road.

In the street the cars come and go,
music on the radios.

The heaviness pressing down,
the pressing on, into the bodies of
night and city.

Through varicose roads, I continue on and
on, past the darkened storefronts and stars
on the ground, all around, the glamor left
out to die, like fruit dripping
from the vine.

Tonight the faceless people don garments
made from peacock feather and elephant teeth.
Such perfect figures in the stillness mocking
sleep and our eyes sunk with envy
looking for a face, only to find,
in the dim reflection, that familiar thing,
sewn on the mannequin.

The night stretches on like an endless road
caging me in. I stop and feel for my body,
my ankles, my knees, my waist, my elbow,
my neck, my wrists, these fingers. Tonight
I keep my joints like a man with something
to lose. The sun starts—

Past the night is the lazy, sultry Californian
hell. Past the night is our journey to the West,
human-shaped and sleepless, walking on,
each step pronouncing the quiet hope
that suffering will find its home.

At midday, sitting somewhere, here, there,
watching the cars and plastic bags racing
in the street. Waiting for the evening to
descend like a prophecy.

GLORIOUS

My roommate Jason once remarked to me about his vision of university as a space where people come together and make incredible things. Talking about this sentiment with poet Fatema Bhaiji, we've put together a piece to celebrate the vibrant energy at the heart of creative collaboration, a process that's all about the encounters of our in-betweens. And the differences? Engaging, experimenting, making do with them—now that's what Fatema and I would call "truly glorious."—Daniel Montes de Oca Téllez

Glorious.

What is?

The dreams.

What is?

The people.

What is?

The euphoria.

What is?

The differences.

What is?

The person next to me.

Truly glorious.

Bios



FATEMA ALI BHAIJI

Fatema Ali Bhaiji is a freshman at USC studying Narrative Studies. She is an avid writer and the author of two books, *the teenage cookbook* and *El Camino Brillante// The Sparkling Path*. Fatema focuses on several areas of writing, such as screenwriting, poetry, and novel writing. She is passionate about the role of diverse representation in various types of media and uses her writing to portray members of her community accurately. In her free time, she enjoys listening to music, learning new languages, and traveling to new places.

RACHEL CASSAR

Rachel Cassar is a writer, researcher, educator, and student raised in Moorpark, CA. She began writing poems, songs, and stories around the age of 8 (25-cents-apiece, you provide the topic) and has been fascinated ever since by the power of language to express and center the nuances of the human experience. She is especially passionate about the potential of creative work to humanize consciousness-raising processes surrounding social justice crises. The intersection of her studies in Creative Writing, Psychology, and Education at USC has inspired Cassar to look towards a career in teaching, in which she might empower others to communicate with authenticity, compassion, joy, and vision.

MADELINE CLARA CHENG

Madeline Clara Cheng is a composer, saxophonist, and pianist from the San Francisco Bay Area. She was a 2019–2020 Luna Composition Lab Fellow, the winner of the 2020 National Federation of Music Clubs Junior Composers Contest, and a recipient of the ICEBERG New Music Young Composer Scholarship. Madeline's compositions have also been performed by the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, the Bergen International Festival, and the International Contemporary Ensemble. She is an alumna of the Tanglewood Institute and the Yellow Barn Young Artists Program and is currently a freshman at USC studying music composition.

HELEN FENG

Helen Feng is a composer, pianist, singer, songwriter, and producer passionate about advocating for kindness, compassion, and social change. She is a TEDx speaker, a NextNotes Music Creator at the American Composers Forum, and a Morton Gould Young Composers Awards finalist, and was a composer intern at a Cannes-award-winning ad agency. Helen has written for the International Contemporary Ensemble, Cassatt String Quartet, theater productions, and films, and is working on her debut record and a commission for PRISM Quartet. She has performed with Lang Lang and the Vienna Boys Choir, premiered her music at Carnegie Hall, and sung and played piano in various works. As a musician and psychology student, Helen is drawn to emotional expression and navigating the deeper existential roots of human motivation as a path to healing, empowerment, and growth.

NAMRATHA KASALANATI

Namratha Kasalanati (she/her) is a composer, instrumentalist, and community activist, currently pursuing a Bachelor of Music degree in Composition at USC. Hailing from the Bay Area, her work aims to bring attention to the diverse musical traditions around the world, focusing on the intersections between Western and Indian classical music.

TRICIA LIM CASTRO

Tricia Lim Castro (she/they) is a storyteller, dancer, and leader in arts education. Currently, Tricia is an undergraduate student at USC pursuing a Narrative Studies BA, Dance minor, and Natural Sciences minor. She is currently a company member of Malaya Filipino American Dance Arts, a co-director of Troy Philippines' Pilipinx American Culture events, and the Club Annex Captain of Break On 2 Latin Dance Fusion Team. Their work has also been featured in *Nobody Knows: Voices Unmuted* at the Grammy Museum and the Borgen Project.

PAUL LIU

Paul Liu is a third-year undergraduate student at USC studying Creative Writing. He enjoys reading and writing poetry, particularly about the Asian American experience. Some of his work has appeared in USC publications like *Haute Magazine* and he currently works on the staff writer team for *Descent*.

OLIVIANA MARIE

Oliviana Marie is a singer, dancer, actress, composer, lyricist, librettist, trumpeter, pianist, and conductor, currently studying composition at the USC Thornton School of Music. She's a 2021 YoungArts and Grammy Camp winner in the singer-songwriter category, a U.S. Presidential Scholar in the Arts nominee, and a proud member of ASCAP. Oliviana has written the book, music, and lyrics to four award-winning musicals! Her most recent musical, *Corona's Cabaret: An Act of Destruction*, won the Audience Choice Award for *Playbill*'s first ever Virtual Theatre Festival Live.

GRACE MIEDZIAK

Grace Miedziak is a composer/producer raised in Central Oregon. At 16, her chamber piece *For Little Grace* (2018) won first place in the state in the Music Teachers' National Association National Competition. This opportunity led to the Metropolitan Youth Symphony of Portland commissioning her to compose *Seereise* (2019) for orchestra, which earned national recognition by the New York Emerging Composers Competition. Since then, Miedziak has sung for multiple movie and television soundtracks, composed for NPR, scored short films through the USC School of Cinematic Arts, and produced electronic music. Miedziak is pursuing a Bachelor of Music in Composition and plans to earn her Master's in Composition at USC.

DANIEL MONTES DE OCA TÉLLEZ

Daniel Montes de Oca Téllez (2001) is a composer, singer, and sonic artist. He strives to bring kindness to the world by means of song, music, and weird sounds. Native from Mexico City, he studies music composition with Ted Hearne at the USC Thornton School of Music.

CALEB PALKA

Caleb Palka (b. 2001) is known as "an eloquent thinker and creator" (*PSU Vanguard*) whose work is "inquisitive and creative in an unapologetic way" (*Oregon ArtsWatch*). He has been performed/commissioned by Fear No Music, Luna Composition Lab, International Contemporary Ensemble, Opera Omaha, Cincinnati Men's Chorus, Calliope's Call, Eugene Symphony, Metropolitan Youth Symphony, Mivos Quartet, Portland Piano International, and others. He received a BMI Honorable Mention and Tribeca Emerging Composer honor. He studied with Ryan Francis, Kenji Bunch, and Ellen Reid, and attends the USC Thornton School of Music, studying with Andrew Norman, Veronika Krausas, Ted Hearne, and Camae Dennis.

CHARLIE RICHARDSON

Charlie Richardson (b. 2003) is a composer from New York City currently studying Composition at USC. With a background in classical piano, experimental rock, and electronic production, much of his work seeks to synthesize seemingly disparate worlds. He has studied with Christopher Trapani and Ted Hearne.

THEODORE STRICH

Theodore Strich grew up in Tempe, AZ, where he discovered music by playing in a variety of classical and jazz groups as a flautist and saxophonist. He writes and plays music in a range of styles, including electronic and ambient, but has a continuing focus on modern classical and jazz. He is currently studying Composition at the USC Thornton School of Music under Frank Ticheli.

LEAHA MARIA VILLARREAL

Leaha Maria Villarreal (she/her) is a composer, scholar, and a cultural worker. Her work has been presented at the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Wende Museum, and the Detroit Institute of Art with features in *Apricity Magazine*, *VoyageLA*, and *I CARE IF YOU LISTEN*. She is currently pursuing a Doctor of Musical Arts at USC.