

Northwestern University

HENRY AND LEIGH
BIENEN SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Vital Currents: The Music of Viet Cuong

Symphonic Wind Ensemble

Robert Taylor, *conductor*

Viet Cuong, *guest composer*

Third Coast Percussion

Eighth Blackbird

~Nois Quartet

PICK-STAIGER CONCERT HALL
2025–26 SEASON

Symphonic Wind Ensemble

Robert Taylor, *conductor*

Viet Cuong, *guest composer*

FRIDAY NOVEMBER 14, 2025, AT 7:30 P.M.

Vital Currents: The Music of Viet Cuong

John and Jim (2024)

Viet Cuong

Re(new)al (2021)

Third Coast Percussion

Sean Connors, Robert Dillon, Peter Martin, and David Skidmore

INTERMISSION

Vital Sines (2022)

Eighth Blackbird

Lina Andonvoska, *flute*

Zachary Good, *clarinet*

Maiani da Silva, *violin*

Aaron Wolff, *cello*

Matthew Duvall, *percussion*

Lisa Kaplan, *piano*

INTERMISSION

Second Nature (2024)

~Nois Quartet

János Csontos, Jordan Lulloff, Julian Velasco, and Natalia Warthen

*This project was sponsored in part by the generous support of the
Alumnae of Northwestern University*

SYMPHONIC WIND ENSEMBLE

Robert Taylor, *conductor*

Maggie Whiteman, *doctoral assistant conductor*

Rachel Stiles, *graduate assistant conductor*

Flute/Piccolo

Sydney Feldman

Claire Kim*

Riona Kim

Alice Oh

Hanna Oyasu

Maggie Umanetz-Lertprasopsak

Oboe/English Horn

Tanner Carlson-Huber*

Orly Lindner

Nia Suresh

Bassoon

Dhruva Balan

Jack Pasacreta

Clarinet

Dylan Addonizio

Gavin Boudreau

Ian Dodd

Andrew Guo*

Yunhoo Jeong

Cameron Leonardi

Nathan Soto*

Oscar Tamez

Saxophone

David Bennette

Kolbe Chapman

Miguel Flores-Padilla

Haven Kahn*

Hudson O'Reilly

Trumpet

Jalen Dobson

Sam Ferguson*

Braxton Leek

Will Lewis*

Sam VanLoo

Oliver Zhang

Horn

Kyle Cho

Gui Cooper

Jack Moeser

Jordan Petan

Samantha Strickland*

Tristan Wittmer

Trombone

Neil Advant

Richard Horne

Andrew Ng

Austin Talbot*

Adam Uliassi

Euphonium

Brandon Baade

Will Claudius*

Tuba

Nolan Fallon

Luke Interrante

Sam Russ*

Percussion

Daniel Kinney*

Hila Kuperman

Adam Langs

Angela Lara Cabrera*

Ryan Lee

Jacob Scheidt

Charlize Yeh

String Bass

Brandon Garcia

Jerry Liu

Piano

Kyungmin Yang

* *section leader*

PROFILES

Described as “alluring” and “stirring” by *The New York Times*, the “arresting” (*Gramophone*), “irresistible” (*San Francisco Chronicle*), and “exhilarating” (*Chicago Tribune*) music of Vietnamese-American composer **Viet Cuong** (b. 1990) has been commissioned and performed on six continents by musicians and ensembles such as the New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Eighth Blackbird, Kronos Quartet, Sandbox Percussion, Alarm Will Sound, Sō Percussion, PRISM Quartet, and Dallas Winds, among many others. Cuong’s music has been heard at Carnegie Hall, Kennedy Center, and Lincoln Center, as well as on NPR Music’s Tiny Desk and PBS NewsHour. His works for wind ensemble have garnered over a thousand performances worldwide, including at Midwest, WASBE, and CBDNA conferences.

A composer known for his imagination and colorful voice, Cuong strives to blend the whimsical and profound by finding new expressive possibilities through unexpected instrumental pairings and textures. His works thus include concerti for tuba and dueling oboes, percussion quartets utilizing wine glasses and sandpaper, and pieces for double reed sextet, cello octet, and solo snare drum. This eclecticism extends to the variety of musical groups he writes for, and he has worked closely with ensembles ranging from middle school bands to Grammy Award-winning orchestras and chamber ensembles. His wind ensemble works are widely performed by leading groups such as the Dallas Winds, top United States military bands, and premier university ensembles including University of Texas Austin, University of Michigan, Northwestern University, North Texas University, Louisiana State University, University of Miami, and Michigan State University.

Passionate about bringing all these different facets of the contemporary music community together, his notable works include *Vital Sines*, a concerto for Eighth Blackbird and the United States Navy Band; *Re(new)al*, a concerto for percussion quartet with a variety of ensemble accompaniments; and a saxophone quartet concerto entitled *Second Nature*.

Currently the Pacific Symphony’s Composer-in-Residence, Cuong was also the California Symphony’s Young American Composer-in-Residence from 2020-23. He has held artist residencies at Copland House, Yaddo, Ucross, the Atlantic Center for the Arts, and at Dumbarton Oaks, where he served as the 2020 Early-Career Musician-in-Residence. His music has been awarded the Barlow Prize, William D. Revelli Prize, Frederick Fennell Prize, Walter

Beeler Memorial Prize, Barlow Endowment Commission, ASCAP Morton Gould Composers Award, Theodore Presser Foundation Award, Suzanne and Lee Ettelson Composers Award, Cortona Prize, New York Youth Symphony First Music Commission, and Boston GuitarFest Composition Prize.

Cuong serves as Assistant Professor of Music Composition and Theory the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, where he teaches composition, orchestration, and music theory. He has also served on the faculties of the Eighth Blackbird Creative Lab, Juilliard Summer Composition, and Newfound Chamber Winds Tidewater Composition Workshop. He holds degrees in music composition from Princeton University (MFA/PhD), the Curtis Institute of Music (Artist Diploma), and the Peabody Conservatory (BM/MM). His mentors include Jennifer Higdon, David Serkin Ludwig, Donnacha Dennehy, Steve Mackey, Dan Trueman, Dmitri Tymoczko, Kevin Puts, and Oscar Bettison.

Third Coast Percussion is Chicago's Grammy Award-winning percussion quartet and Grammy-nominated composer collective that made history as the first percussion ensemble to win the revered music award in the classical genre. To date, Third Coast Percussion has garnered seven total Grammy nominations. After marking its 20th Anniversary in 2025, Third Coast Percussion continues its milestone celebrations with exciting and unexpected performances worldwide that “constantly redefine the classical music experience” (*Forbes*) and “push percussion in new directions, blurring musical boundaries and beguiling new listeners” (NPR), with a brilliantly varied sonic palette and “dazzling rhythmic workouts” (*Pitchfork*).

Representing “one of the most enterprising and creative ensembles working today” (WFMT), the artists of Third Coast Percussion are in-demand collaborators who have worked closely with a range of artists including choreographers Twyla Tharp, Lil Buck, and Jon Boogz; composer/performers Zakir Hussain, Jessie Montgomery, and Jlin; and composers Philip Glass, Missy Mazzoli, and Danny Elfman, among many others. The ensemble has been praised for the “rare power” (*Washington Post*) of its 30+ recordings, and its “inspirational sense of fun and curiosity” (*Minnesota Star-Tribune*).

Known for its devoted audience engagement, Third Coast Percussion has performed live in 42 states and 17 foreign countries. The quartet has commissioned and premiered new works from Zakir Hussain, Jessie

Montgomery, Philip Glass, Clarice Assad, Danny Elfman, and many more. Its recordings include 21 feature albums—including a Grammy-winning album of Steve Reich's works for percussion—and appearances on 14 additional collaborative releases. Its artists are also accomplished teachers who have developed a wealth of K-12 workshops and family programming, educational partnerships, and collaborations with Chicago institutions.

The 2025-2026 season takes Third Coast Percussion to performances in Chicago, New York, Boston, and Los Angeles, as well as international dates in Serbia, Montenegro, Latvia, and France. They conduct residencies at Denison University in Ohio and the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity in Alberta, Canada. Third Coast Percussion's new tour programs include 20th Anniversary commissions by Zakir Hussain, Jessie Montgomery, Tigran Hamasyan, and more. The four members of Third Coast Percussion (Sean Connors, Robert Dillon, Peter Martin, and David Skidmore) met while studying percussion at Northwestern University and formed the ensemble in 2005.

Eighth Blackbird moves music forward through innovative performance, advocacy for music by living creatives, and its growing legacy of guiding an emerging generation of artists.

Lina Andonvoska, *flute*
Zachary Good, *clarinet*
Maiani da Silva, *violin*
Aaron Wolff, *cello*
Matthew Duvall, *percussion*
Lisa Kaplan, *piano*

Accolades include: Four Grammy Awards for Best Small Ensemble/Chamber Music Performance, The MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions, The Concert Artists Guild Competition Grand Prize, The Musical America Ensemble of the Year, The Chamber Music America Visionary Award, and The APRA AMCOS Art Music Awards Performance of the Year.

Creative Output Includes: commissions and world premieres of hundreds of works by established and emerging composers, fully produced theatrical chamber music productions, chamber ensemble concertos with both orchestras and bands, and an extensive recording catalog.

In addition to chamber music performance, the members of 8BB value their roles as curators, educators, and mentors. Beginning exclusively as a chamber music ensemble, 8BB has expanded in recent years to represent multiple mission-driven initiatives: Eighth Blackbird, Blackbird IV, The Blackbird Creative Lab, The Chicago Artists Workshop, and Blackbird Productions. In 2025, Eighth Blackbird began a partnership as Artists-in-Residence with the Athenaeum Center for Thought and Culture.

The name “Eighth Blackbird” derives from the eighth stanza of Wallace Stevens’s evocative, imagistic poem, “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird”:

I know noble accents
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;
But I know, too,
That the blackbird is involved
In what I know.

Matthew Duvall proudly endorses Pearl Drums and Adams Musical Instruments, Vic Firth Sticks and Mallets, Zildjian Cymbals, and Black Swamp Percussion Accessories. Lisa Kaplan is a Steinway Artist.

Matthew Duvall and Lisa Kaplan, Artistic co-Directors
eighthblackbird.org

Take your preconceptions of ‘noise’ and toss them out the window. Equal parts “fiendishly good and fiendishly goofy” (*Chicago Tribune*), ~**Nois Quartet** is a “prolific, charismatic young ensemble that is swiftly becoming the American saxophone quartet du jour” (*Musical America*). Founded in 2016, the Chicago-based ensemble is dedicated to championing new music for saxophone and building community through innovative, inclusive, and exceptional musical experiences.

~Nois has presented over 200 performances and has “continued to legitimize the saxophone quartet as a premier ensemble formation for classical music” (*Brutal New Music*). Their performances have spanned 28 states, including invitations to perform at some of the top festivals, concert series, and academic institutions in the nation. The ensemble has also been awarded top prizes at numerous prestigious chamber music competitions including the M-Prize International Arts Competition, the Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition, and was once deemed, “Too loud for the Farmers’ Market” (*Evanston Local, Illinois 1st Ward Constituent*).

At the core of ~Nois' ethos is a fierce dedication to the commissioning of living composers, leading to over 120 world-premieres to date. The members of ~Nois have had the privilege of working closely with some of the world's leading voices in composition to create new works for saxophone quartet, including Jessie Montgomery, Nico Muhly, Shawn Okpebholo, and Augusta Read Thomas. ~Nois has had the honor of sharing the stage with some of today's most prolific ensembles including Third Coast Percussion, Sō Percussion, the Bang on a Can All-Stars, the United States Navy Band, and the Northwestern University Symphonic Wind Ensemble.

~Nois is Julian Velasco (he/him), Natalia Warthen (she/her), Jordan Lulloff (he/him), and János Csontos (he/him). For more information, please visit www.noisquartet.org.

Robert Taylor is Professor of Conducting and Director of Bands at Northwestern University, where he holds the John W. Beattie Chair of Music. As the fourth person in the university's history to hold the Director of Bands position, Taylor conducts the Symphonic Wind Ensemble, teaches graduate and undergraduate conducting, and leads all aspects of the band program. With a career in music education spanning over thirty years, previous appointments include the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, BC, University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, WA, and Eureka High School in Northern California, where ensembles under his direction earned recognition by *Downbeat Magazine*, the Selmer Corporation, and Grammy Signature Schools.

Known for innovative and immersive concert programming, Taylor maintains an active schedule as a guest conductor. Past engagements include performances with the Vancouver Brass Orchestra, U.S. Army Field Band, Pacific Symphonic Wind Ensemble, and Chicago-based contemporary music group, the Maverick Ensemble. Collaborations span a wide range of international artists—from virtuosi performers Barbara Butler (trumpet), Jose Franch-Ballester (clarinet), Larry Knopp (trumpet), Julia Nolan (saxophone), Daniel Perantoni (tuba), Jeff Nelsen (horn), Gail Williams (horn), and Allen Vizzutti (trumpet); to composers Mason Bates, Jodie Blackshaw, Steven Bryant, Raven Chacon, Michael Colgrass, John Corigliano, David Maslanka, Cait Nishimura, Joel Puckett, Alex Shapiro, Frank Ticheli, and Dana Wilson; to jazz, pop, and crossover performers Ingrid Jensen, Shruti Ramani, Manhattan Transfer, Kenny Werner, and Big Bad Voodoo Daddy. As a passionate advocate of music in the schools, Dr. Taylor is in high demand as a festival adjudicator, rehearsal clinician, and guest conductor throughout North America and internationally. His

frequent appearances with young musicians include serving as principal conductor of the Puget Sound Youth Wind Ensemble and guest conductor of numerous honor groups, such as the Honors Performance Series at Carnegie Hall, National Youth Band of Canada, AMIS Asia Honor Band, California Orchestra Directors Association Honor Symphony, and many provincial and all-state bands across Australia, Canada, and the United States.

Taylor received the Master of Music and Doctor of Music degrees in conducting from Northwestern University, where he studied with Mallory Thompson, and the Bachelor of Arts degree in Trumpet and Music Education from Humboldt State University. His research on wind literature, rehearsal techniques, integration of cutting-edge technology, and application of Ashtanga Yoga to improve body awareness and injury prevention in the training of nascent conductors and performing musicians, has been featured in presentations at regional, national, and international music conferences, including appearances at the Midwest Clinic, College Band Directors National Association, and on several popular podcasts. He has contributed to numerous leading publications and is a co-author of *The Horizon Leans Forward*.

Dr. Taylor is a Killam Laureate, Jacob K. Javits Fellow, and Thomas A. Davis Teaching Prize Winner, and has served as on the executive boards of the British Columbia Music Educators Association and College Band Directors National Association (Northwest Region). He is a member of the Phi Kappa Phi and Pi Kappa Lambda National Honor Societies, World Association for Symphonic Bands and Ensembles, and National Association for Music Education.

PROGRAM NOTES

Program notes have been provided by the composer.

John and Jim

Cuong

I first heard the name Obergefell in 2015 when the case that bears it, *Obergefell v. Hodges*, was decided by the Supreme Court. Among the most important in history for queer Americans, this landmark ruling granted marriage rights to all same-sex couples. At that moment, Obergefell was etched in history. For those writing about the law, the name would thereafter be written in italics, and today it's as much a shorthand for the case law of marriage equality as it is the name of a man. But at its core, the case begins with two people.

John Arthur and Jim Obergefell were married in July of 2013. They had been together in a loving relationship for 22 years, and Jim was caring for John as he faced the end stages of ALS. In the last year of John's life, they traveled on a medical plane to Maryland—one of just a handful of states where same-sex marriage was legal at the time—to be married. The marriage ceremony was conducted on board the plane before they returned home to Ohio for their last months together. John passed away that October, and, because Ohio did not recognize their marriage as legal, Jim had to challenge the state in court to be listed as John's surviving spouse on his death certificate. The state appealed, and the court battle worked its way through the legal system until 2015, when Jim and his team were victorious before the Supreme Court. Their efforts ensured that the relationships of same-sex couples, including my marriage to my husband, would be seen as equal under the law. For that I am deeply and personally grateful.

John and Jim is my effort to pay tribute to the men whose love and devotion gave rise to great change, and I do so by interpolating source material from an iconic piece of traditional wedding music: Pachelbel's *Canon in D*. In my youth I adored Pachelbel's Canon, and I learned a piano arrangement of it when I was 11 years old. For months I would play the piece every morning before school, endlessly repeating its bass line while improvising melodies when the treble clef's music ran out. Through these explorations, I discovered some basic principles of music composition, and it was through the Pachelbel that I began composing in earnest. It was also around that time that I first learned of its use in weddings, as it was the frequent soundtrack to reality TV shows chronicling the weddings of straight couples. At the time it saddened me that music I found so beautiful was emblematic of something that, according to the law, I could never have. It feels fitting then, that in the year of my own wedding to my partner of 11 years, reframing (and perhaps reclaiming) the Pachelbel should provide the inspiration for a celebration of marriage equality.

My piece is a conversation between two alternating phrases, one of which uses melodic fragments and harmonic progressions from the *Canon in D* as source material. In the Canon, Pachelbel establishes a single bass line and layers it with several melodies, two of which are quite iconic but never performed simultaneously in the original. I disassembled and rewrote these to work harmoniously with one another upon the arrival of the piece's climax, which appears after several minutes of what I think of as the music finding and piecing itself together. Ultimately, I believe John and Jim sounds like both a departure and nod to the piece that first inspired me to compose.

All of this takes place in a reverberant atmosphere, where notes linger and continually echo around one another, symbolic of both the persistence and impact of people like John and Jim.

John and Jim was commissioned by The Columbus Pride Bands and the Queen City Freedom Band of Cincinnati for the 2024 Pride Bands Alliance Annual Conference, where it was premiered on July 20, 2024, by Dr. Jon Noworyta and the combined concert bands. Heartfelt thanks to the Pride Bands Alliance for this opportunity to tell my story and celebrate John Arthur, Jim Obergefell, and the progress that has been made in the name of love.

Re(new)al

I have tremendous respect for renewable energy initiatives and the commitment to creating a new, better reality for us all. *Re(new)al* is a percussion quartet concerto that is similarly devoted to finding unexpected ways to breathe new life into traditional ideas, and the solo quartet therefore performs on several “found” instruments, including crystal glasses and compressed air cans. And while the piece also features more traditional instruments, such as snare drum and vibraphone, I looked for ways to either alter their sounds or find new ways to play them. For instance, a single snare drum is played by all four members of the quartet, and certain notes of the vibraphone are prepared with aluminum foil to recreate sounds found in electronic music. The entire piece was conceived in this way, and even the accompaniment was written these ideas in mind.

Cooperation and synergy are also core themes of the piece, as I believe we all have to work together to move forward. All of the music played by the solo quartet is comprised of single musical ideas that are evenly distributed between the four soloists (for those interested, the fancy musical term for this is a hocket). The music would therefore be dysfunctional without the presence and dedication of all four members. For example, the quartet divvies up lightning-fast drum set beats in the second movement and then shares one glockenspiel in the last movement. But perhaps my favorite example of synergy in the piece is in the very opening, where the four soloists toast crystal glasses. We always toast glasses in the presence of others, and oftentimes to celebrate new beginnings. This is my simple way of celebrating everyone who is working together to create a cleaner, more efficient world.

Re(new)al is constructed of three continuous movements, each inspired by the power of hydro, wind, and solar energies. The hydro movement transforms tuned crystal glasses into ringing hand bells as the wind ensemble slowly submerges the soloists in their sound. The second movement turns each member of the quartet into a blade of a dizzying wind turbine, playing seemingly impossible 90's-inspired drum and bass patterns over a bass line that quotes and expands upon a few bars from one of my favorite drum and bass tracks by DJ Hype. The closing movement simulates a sunrise and evokes the brilliance of sunlight with metallic percussion instruments. This piece was originally written with a sinfonietta accompaniment, and in its original form was commissioned for the 2017 American Music Festival by David Alan Miller and the Albany Symphony's Dogs of Desire in partnership with GE Renewable Energy. A full orchestra version was commissioned in 2018 by the Albany Symphony, and this final version for wind ensemble was commissioned by a consortium of universities and community ensembles. Heartfelt thanks to everyone who has been involved in any of the three versions of this piece.

Vital Sines

When Eighth Blackbird was graciously contacted by CAPT Kenneth C. Collins and the US Navy Band with the invitation to create a new work, I picked up my phone and texted Viet:

Me: Hey. Got a question. Concerto for 8BB and the US Navy Band. Wanna do it? 🙄 *drinking ☕ and waiting*

Viet: I just spit out my drink YES 🙌 that is like a dream project omg 🎉

Me: We have the best contracts 🙄

Viet: lol yes we do thanks a million WOW

Me: Wonderful, more soon 😊 (pour a new drink)

Viet: I shall, cheers! 🥂

The whole exchange, from getting the Navy Band invitation to 🥂 took 4 minutes. For those who may be unfamiliar with the commissioning process, this is not usual. Except that with Eighth Blackbird and Viet Cuong, it is. Eighth Blackbird operates an innovative professional development initiative for artists called The Blackbird Creative Lab. Viet was a visiting artist at our first intensive in 2017 and we've been fast friends ever since. We've humbly mentored Viet, and he's amazed us more times than we can count. He means more to us than we can describe. Commissioning him to write this concerto was no different from giving him a hug. Performing a composition, like acting a role in a play, is an interpretative practice. We

didn't compose the work, but we are tasked with making it authentic to us so that the experience is also authentic. But it's different, in wonderful ways, when someone composes a work specifically for you. Every aspect is amplified. Viet composed *Vital Sines* for us, knowing who we are and how we perform. We get to go beyond performing the concerto instrumental parts. We get to perform OUR parts, made for us. The US Navy Band gets to perform THEIR parts, made for them.

One indication of authenticity in the arts is personal relevance. We so often limit ourselves to asking "What did the artist mean?" and forget to ignore all that and ask ourselves the only question that actually matters: "What does this mean to me?" In some way (and this way can have nothing to do with anyone else's intentions), where do you find yourself in the work? That answer is yours and something over which I hope you feel empowered to assume complete ownership. In this case, the answer for us is quite literal. We, all of us, find ourselves in this work, making this performance about as personal as it can get. And now it's personal for you. You're here, with us, and because Viet created *Vital Sines*, and we're going to experience this together. Afterward, send Viet a text. Use emoji. He likes emoji 😊

—Matthew Duvall, *Eighth Blackbird*

About *Vital Sines*, the composer Viet Cuong shares the following:

It would be difficult to overstate just how important the wind ensemble has been in my life. Band was where I found community and identity during a time in my youth when I feared that there was nothing out there for me. In fact, it was one of the only places during those teenage years where I felt confident in who I was. And it was ultimately this confidence that gave me the nerve to believe that I could one day make it as a composer. But my life in the wind ensemble world almost never was. I very nearly gave up my musical pursuits in a fit of childhood frustration at the age of 11. My father, though he had no musical ability himself, saw in it something important. Always one to look after my creativity, he steadied me and encouraged me to give it more time. It was not long before he was proven right, and music had become something vital to me.

I find myself thinking of that crucial moment more and more since my father's passing last year, and how music was and remains my vital connection to him. In the last weeks of his life—spent in the disorienting whirl of the ICU—I often struggled to speak. But when I could not, I would play him the pieces of mine that I knew were his favorites, hoping that the

sounds, the sine waves, could find their way to his consciousness. Since his death, I have come to understand that my love for music is inseparable from the love I have for him. I still catch myself wanting to call him and play him my latest efforts.

This one, *Vital Sines*, is dedicated to my father's memory as the guardian of my musical life, as well as the many moments during my life when I found sanctuary in music. The creation of this particular piece, though challenging, was a way of finding solace when I needed it most. Throughout the piece, I employ several musical sequences and chaconne forms, all of which use repetition as a means of development. The overarching structure of the piece thus bears a resemblance to the visual depiction of the sine wave, rising and falling like the tracing of breaths and heartbeats. There is of course comfort in the familiarity of continued repetition. But I also followed memories back to my teenage years in Band, when that community had the extraordinary ability to not just bring me comfort but heal my heart. What I then realized was that all the other musical communities I have become a part of since then, Band or not, hold this same healing power.

With this concerto for Eighth Blackbird and the US Navy Band, I am tremendously honored to bring together the Wind Band and New Music communities, both vital to me and so many others. Thank you to Eighth Blackbird and the US Navy Band for giving me an opportunity that I dreamed of for many years, as well as for your patience as I navigated this time in my life. Finally, thank you to my father for helping me find my way all those years ago. This one's for you.

Second Nature

The term "second nature" typically describes a skill that, while baffling at first, becomes effortless once mastered. Naturally, *Second Nature* calls for a quartet of saxophonists to tackle the virtuosic demands of the piece and make their efforts look easy. But the virtuosity in their music runs deeper than speedy flurries of notes or sky-high belts. The solo quartet must also play with exacting ensemble coordination as they emulate complex electronic delay effects, which, when combined with thumping four-on-the-floor drumbeats, capture the infectious exuberance of House music. If you see the soloists sweat, I hope that it's at least in some measure because the music inspires them to move. I personally have never danced so much while writing a piece (and fortunately you'll just have to take my word for it). Written in three unbroken movements, this concerto often exudes pure, unbridled joy.

Indeed, when I think about my own nature as a composer, and the affective inclination of my earlier work, it was at first joy. Improvisation at the keyboard, my first childhood foray into composition, was a happy escape from the labors of piano practice. For many years composition felt like play, and my music was infused with much more whimsy than gravitas. That changed to a great degree in 2020. My compositions, both by intention and the unconscious intrusions of the wider world, became darker and introspective. I had even come to terms with the possibility that my music would remain in this darker place for a very long time. However, with the brightness of its opening and closing C-major chords, *Second Nature* is me finding my way back. In that way, “second nature” is less of a description of something that has become effortless, but rather something which is relearned, an inclination rediscovered nature, for the second time around.

It is with tremendous gratitude that I thank Dr. Sarah McKoin and Texas Tech University for leading the consortium of fifteen university wind ensembles and saxophone quartets who commissioned *Second Nature*. This concerto is dedicated to the sensational Aruna Quartet, who premiered the piece in early 2024 alongside Dr. McKoin and the Texas Tech University Symphonic Wind Ensemble.

—Viet Cuong

BAND PROGRAM

Director of Bands	Robert Taylor John W. Beattie Chair of Music
Associate Director of Bands	Shawn Vondran
Director of Athletic Bands	Daniel Farris
Department Assistant	Emily Roberg
Doctoral Assistants	Imran Amarshi, Maggie Whiteman
Graduate Assistants	Oliver Stark, Rachel Stiles, Michael Witt
Stage Managers	Stewart Bridgeforth, Kolbe Chapman, Andy Hankes, Henry Lazzaro, Cameron Leonardi, Toby Tse
Ensemble Librarians	Sarah Perry, Toby Tse, Maggie Umanetz-Lertprasopsak
AV/Equipment Manager	Micah Northam
Lighting Designer	Daphne Agosin

CONCERT MANAGEMENT OFFICE STAFF

Director of Concert Management	Jerry Tietz
Concert Operations Manager	Kait Samuels
Ticketing Manager	Maxwell A. Johnson
Marketing Manager	Laura Nielsen
Marketing Coordinator	Elizabeth Avery
Technical Services Manager	Bill Milgram
Technical Services Manager	Zachary Lovitch
Concert Business Manager	Meg Lindsey
Supporting Staff	150 Northwestern Students
Dean, Bienen School of Music	Jonathan Bailey Holland

KEYBOARD MAINTENANCE

Supervisor of Keyboard Maintenance	Wesley Owen
Piano Technician	Chris Scroggins

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

- Latecomers will be seated at the discretion of the house manager. In consideration of the artists and other members of the audience, patrons who must leave before the end of the concert are asked to do so between pieces.
- Photography and audio/video recording of performances is strictly prohibited without prior written consent of the Concert Management Office.
- A limited number of assisted listening devices are available for the hearing impaired. Inquire at the box office.
- Smoking is prohibited by law in all Bienen School of Music performance venues.
- Every patron who will be occupying a seat must have a ticket in order to be admitted into the concert.
- The presenter reserves the right to ask any patron who is disrupting the event in any way to leave the concert hall.
- In the event of a medical emergency, please notify the nearest usher.
- When joining us for upcoming concerts, please leave the Concert Management Office phone number (847-491-5441) with anyone who might need to reach you in case of emergency.