

Northwestern

BIENEN SCHOOL OF MUSIC

2024-25 SEASON



NUNC!6

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY
NEW-MUSIC CONFERENCE

APRIL 25-27

Northwestern University

HENRY AND LEIGH
BIENEN SCHOOL OF MUSIC

NUNC! 6

Northwestern University New-Music Conference

presented by
The Institute for New Music

Alex Mincek, *director*

Ben Bolter, *associate director*

*NUNC! is made possible in part by the
Sorensen Jacobson Fund for New Music*

APRIL 25-27, 2025

Symphonic Wind Ensemble

Robert Taylor, *conductor*

Sheldon Frazier, *doctoral assistant conductor*

Andrew Nogal, *oboe*

George Lewis, *guest composer*

FRIDAY, APRIL 25, 2025, AT 7:30 P.M.

PICK-STAIGER CONCERT HALL

Big Shoulders, Sharp Elbows

Overture from *Dancer in the Dark* (2004)

Björk

***Soundings* (1995)**

Cindy McTee

Fanfare

Waves

Gizmo

Sheldon Frazier, *doctoral assistant conductor*

***Big Shoulders, Sharp Elbows* (2020)**

George Lewis

INTERMISSION

***Velocity Meadows* (2015)**

Christopher Stark

Andrew Nogal, *oboe*

***Mothership* (2012)**

Mason Bates

PROGRAM NOTES

Overture from *Dancer in the Dark*

Björk

Björk, the Icelandic singer who is known as much for her flair with costumes as for her catchy eccentric music, was born in 1965 and fronted the band The Sugarcubes in the 1980s before branching out on her own in the early 1990s. She writes most of her own music, which includes the instrumental Overture from *Dancer in the Dark*. Grammy-winning arranger and jazz artist Vince Mendoza orchestrated the Overture for brass, and it was included on Björk's album *Selmasongs*, which is essentially a soundtrack to the film.

Set in Washington state, *Dancer in the Dark* tells the story of Czech immigrant Selma Jezkova (played by Björk), who moved to the United States in 1964. She has a congenital disease that is making her go blind. So, she works as hard as she can at the local factory with the limited sight she has left to provide for her 12-year-old son, who will eventually develop the same condition unless she can raise the money for an expensive medical procedure for him. Her only diversion is her love for musicals; she lapses into daydreams involving musical numbers at several points throughout the film, often to her detriment. Nothing goes as Selma plans, yet she does her utmost to protect her son as her vision fades. The Overture from *Dancer in the Dark* begins in stasis with an E-flat pedal. As the melody emerges (Selma's motif), it is restated and elaborated, each time becoming simultaneously more urgent and inexorably entwined in the darkening complexity of the work's underlying harmonic foundation. This music is haunting, shimmering, and melancholic in its effect, and as quickly as the work rises, it dissolves back to a more optimistic form of the stasis from which it grew. As a bookend to the story, the final song of the film is based on the Overture's "Selma motif" and is titled "New World."

Soundings

McTee

Cindy McTee is an American composer whose award-winning works have been performed by orchestras and bands around the world. She spent the majority of her career at the University of North Texas, where she was on the faculty from 1984 until her retirement as Regents Professor Emerita in 2011. McTee offers the following comments on *Soundings*:

I chose the title quite literally for its "sound," but also for its relatively abstract definition—"the making or giving forth of sounds." *Fanfare* employs familiar musical materials such as quartal harmony (harmony based on the interval of a fourth) and imitative counterpoint but

departs from traditional fanfares in its use of woodwind as well as brass instruments. *Waves* was born out of my experience in the computer music studio and my preference for sounds whose shapes slowly expand and contract. Four musical layers are presented: 1.) a steady tremolo in the percussion serves to anchor as well as animate the music; 2.) waves of sound through the lower brass and woodwinds are supported by timpani and tamtam; 3.) scattered, freely-moving solos in the upper winds are complemented by: 4.) a repeated melody played by trumpets, oboe, flute, and piccolo. *Gizmo* reflects a fascination with gadgets, motoric rhythms, and the sounds of major sevenths.

Big Shoulders, Sharp Elbows

Lewis

George Lewis is an American composer, musicologist, and trombonist. He is the Edwin H. Case Professor of American Music and Area Chair in Composition at Columbia University. In 2020-21 he was a Fellow of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (Institute for Advanced Study), and he currently serves as Artistic Director of the International Contemporary Ensemble. He is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy, a member of the Akademie der Künste Berlin, and an Honorary Member of the American Musicological Society. Lewis's other honors include the Doris Duke Artist Award (2019), a MacArthur Fellowship (2002), and a Guggenheim Fellowship (2015). A member of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians since 1971, Lewis has had his work presented by ensembles worldwide, published by Edition Peters. A Yamaha Artist, Lewis is widely regarded as a pioneer in the creation of computer programs that improvise in concert with human musicians. Lewis holds honorary doctorates from the University of Edinburgh, Harvard University, the University of Pennsylvania, Oberlin College, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, New England Conservatory, New College of Florida, and Birmingham City University, among others.

Big Shoulders, Sharp Elbows was written for the DePaul University Wind Ensemble. The "big shoulders" reference is to the city of Chicago, as envisioned by the American poet Carl Sandburg in 1914:

Hog Butcher for the World,
Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,
Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler;
Stormy, husky, brawling,
City of the Big Shoulders;

They tell me you are wicked and I believe them, for I have seen your
 painted women under the gas lamps luring the farm boys.
 And they tell me you are crooked and I answer: Yes, it is true I have
 seen the gunman kill and go free to kill again.
 And they tell me you are brutal and my reply is: On the faces of
 women
 and children I have seen the marks of wanton hunger.
 And having answered so I turn once more to those who sneer at this
 my
 city, and I give them back the sneer and say to them:
 Come and show me another city with lifted head singing so proud to
 be
 alive and coarse and strong and cunning.
 Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil of piling job on job, here is a
 tall
 bold slugger set vivid against the little soft cities;
 Fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action, cunning as a savage
 pitted
 against the wilderness,
 Bareheaded,
 Shoveling,
 Wrecking,
 Planning,
 Building, breaking, rebuilding,
 Under the smoke, dust all over his mouth, laughing with white teeth,
 Under the terrible burden of destiny laughing as a young man
 laughs,
 Laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs who has never lost a
 battle,
 Bragging and laughing that under his wrist is the pulse, and under
 his
 ribs the heart of the people,
 Laughing!
 Laughing the stormy, husky, brawling laughter of Youth, half-naked,
 sweating, proud to be Hog Butcher, Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,
 Player with Railroads and Freight Handler to the Nation.

—Carl Sandburg, “Chicago” from *Chicago Poems* (March 1914)

The reference to “sharp elbows” might reference any large American urban area, in which people risk brawling in the desperation to win space in what appears to be an utterly stochastic cultural movement. Musically, the piece deploys a sonic strategy of depiction, a common characteristic

of American music from Amy Beach's "Gaelic" Symphony to Charles Ives, Duke Ellington, and John Zorn. The fanfare-like opening of the work may be heard as a depiction of a particular line from the poem, so celebratory of the composer's hometown: Come and show me another city with lifted head singing so proud to be alive and coarse and strong and cunning.

Velocity Meadows

Stark

Christopher Stark is a composer of contemporary classical music deeply rooted in the American West. Having spent his formative years in rural western Montana, he is always seeking to capture with his music the expansive energy of this quintessential American landscape. Stark, whose music *The New York Times* has called "fetching and colorful," has been awarded prizes from the American Academy in Rome, the Guggenheim Foundation, the Fromm Foundation at Harvard, Chamber Music America, ASCAP, and the Barlow Endowment. His debut CD, *Seasonal Music*, was released in 2019 on Bridge Records. Stark provides the following note:

Velocity Meadows is an eleven-minute concertino for solo oboe, chamber winds, electronics, and video. I was asked to compose this piece by oboist Jennifer Gookin-Cavanaugh and conductor James Smart, who both teach at the University of Montana where I studied as an undergraduate. I themed the piece around western landscapes because of the geographical connection to the commissioners, and the title is taken from a poem by the recently deceased American poet Mark Strand. For me, the title perfectly encapsulates the sound image I have in my head of western Montana: landscapes that bustle with natural life and kinetic energy, set in stark relief to intimidatingly large expanses of glacially carved geologic formations. In Strand's poem, he impressionistically describes an eerie dream-like pastorella, which immediately repositioned me into one of my recurring dreams: it is dusk, and I am standing behind my childhood home in Montana as an ominous red light glows on the other side of the snow-capped Mission Mountains from the east. The concept of dreaming inspired the form and content of the work, and it is constructed out of a series of five short surrealist episodes. I combined different influences and inspirations within each episode with complete disregard for whether they belonged together or not—a technique I first encountered during my studies with Montana-based composer, David Maslanka. The experimental video adds yet another dimension to the ambience of the work—made by designer and artist Andrew Lucia, and it is my hope that through the combination of these different elements the work will, perhaps unknowingly, express the time and place in which we live and dream.

Mothership

Bates

Mason Bates is an American composer known for his unique blending of electronic sounds with the traditional symphony orchestra medium. Composer of the Grammy-winning opera *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs*, Bates is imaginatively transforming the way classical music is created and experienced as a composer, DJ, and curator. With electro-acoustic works and multimedia projects, Bates has become a visible advocate for the modern orchestra and imaginatively integrates it into contemporary culture. Bates was the first composer-in-residence appointed by the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and is championed by conductors Riccardo Muti, Michael Tilson Thomas, Marin Alsop, and Leonard Slatkin. Bates currently serves as Artist-in-Residence at San Francisco's iconic Grace Cathedral. Bates offers the following note on *Mothership*:

The mothership floats high above, an orchestra pulsing rapidly with a heart of techno. At several moments in the piece, various soloists dock with the mothership, dropping in with solos both virtuosic and lyrical. The work was commissioned by Michael Tilson Thomas and the YouTube Symphony, which premiered the work in March 2011 at the Sydney Opera House in Australia.

The piece follows the form of a scherzo with double trio. But while symphonic scherzos historically play with dance rhythms such as the waltz, *Mothership* looks to 21st Century dance music (such as techno) to enliven its journey. The brief solos can be played as written or improvised.

Many thanks to Michael, whose mentoring greatly helped the work on many levels, and to the musicians from around the world who came together in Sydney and helped *Mothership* lift off.

SYMPHONIC WIND ENSEMBLE

Robert Taylor, *conductor*

Sheldon Frazier, *doctoral assistant conductor*

Andrew Nogal, *oboe*

George Lewis, *guest composer*

Daphne Agosin, *lighting designer*

Flute

Claire Kim

Mara Goree*

Hanna Oyasu

Maya Ravi

Mary Miklos

Oboe/English Horn

Tanner Carlson-Huber

Kate Tolchinsky

Timothy Zhang*

Bassoon

Micah Cortezzo

Justice Gardner

Alexander Lake*

Clarinet

Elynn Chang

Alvin Chen

Jason Chen

Chris Cui

Andrew Guo*

Aydin Iqbal

Cameron Leonardi*

Hannah Webb

Saxophone

Kolbe Chapman

Haven Kahn

Hudson O'Reilly*

Christopher Unumb

Natalia Warthen

Trumpet

Troy Archer

Brendan Breen

Sam Ferguson

Braxton Leek

Will Lewis*

Stefan Filip

Jack Shimon

Horn

Emi Brady

Kyle Cho

Dena Levy*

Jonathan Mandrell

Jack Moeser

Trombone

Ellie Abbott

Wesley Connor

Noah Eder*

Andrew Ng

Joe Maiocco

Adam Uliassi

Euphonium

Chris Carrigg*

Oliver Stark

Tuba

Evan DeRicco

Sam Russ*

Percussion

Isaac Chiang

Ryan Payne

Christian Santos*

Jacob Scheidt

Charlize Yeh

String Bass

Leo Buckman

Piano

Hannah Zhang

Harp

Jocelyn Chiu

*Section Leader

PROFILES

To view additional profiles for NUNC! 6, please visit the website at the QR code below:



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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.

Band Concerts SPRING 2025

Symphonic Wind Ensemble

Friday, April 25, 7:30 p.m.
Pick-Staiger Concert Hall, \$8/5

*Robert Taylor, conductor • Andrew Nogal, oboe
George Lewis, guest composer*

Kicking off NUNC! 6 (the Northwestern University New-Music Conference) with guest composer George Lewis's *Big Shoulders, Sharp Elbows* and more.

Symphonic Band

Friday, May 9, 7:30 p.m.
Pick-Staiger Concert Hall, \$6/4

Shawn D. Vondran, conductor

Featuring Vincent Persichetti's celebrated Symphony No. 6 and David Biedenbender's kaleidoscopic *Enigma*.

Concert Band Stage and Screen

Sunday, May 18, 3 p.m.
Pick-Staiger Concert Hall, \$6/4

Daniel J. Farris, conductor

Featuring music from Broadway and the cinema by Michael Giacchino, Leonard Bernstein, John Williams, and more.

Symphonic Wind Ensemble & Symphonic Band: THE MUSIC OF JOHN WILLIAMS

Friday, May 23, 7:30 p.m.
Pick-Staiger Concert Hall, \$8/5

*Robert Taylor and Shawn D. Vondran, conductors
Sarah Heimberg, trumpet • Julian Velasco, alto saxophone*

Iconic music from *Harry Potter, Star Wars, Indiana Jones, Superman,* and more.

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