



american composers orchestra

# news release

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## American Composers Orchestra Announces the 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Underwood New Music Readings



Featuring six composers selected from nearly 200 submissions:

Dai Wei, Anthony R. Green, Paul Novak, Christian Quiñones, Gity Razaz, and Keane Southard

George Manahan, music director and conductor

Thursday, March 12, 2020 at 9:30am (Open Rehearsal; free with advance reservation)  
Friday, March 13, 2020 from 10am – 3pm (Career Development Workshop; \$10 admission)  
Friday, March 13, 2020 at 7:30pm (Run-Through Performance; \$10 admission)

Aaron Davis Hall at The City College of New York  
Marian Anderson Theater  
129 Convent Avenue at West 135th Street | NYC

Tickets and more information: <http://bit.ly/UNMR2020>

New York, NY – **American Composers Orchestra** announces the 29<sup>th</sup> Annual **Underwood New Music Readings** for emerging composers on **March 12 and 13, 2020** at **Aaron Davis Hall at The City College of New York** (129 Convent Ave). In what has become an influential platform for aspiring orchestral composers, six artists from throughout the United States are selected to receive a reading of a new work, giving audiences a chance to look behind the scenes of bringing new, diverse orchestral music to life. Each composer participating in the Underwood New Music Readings receives rehearsals, a reading, and a digital recording of his or her work, and one commission will be awarded to write a new work for ACO.

A working rehearsal will be presented on **Thursday, March 12, 2020 at 9:30am**; on **Friday, March 13, 2020 at 7:30pm**, all selected pieces will be polished and performed in their entirety, led by ACO’s Music Director George Manahan. ACO’s Artistic Director Derek Bermel directs the Readings.

This year, six of the nation's most promising composers in the early stages of their professional careers were selected from nearly 200 submissions. **Dai Wei, Anthony R. Green, Paul Novak, Christian Quiñones, Gity Razaz, and Keane Southard** represent a broad spectrum of musical backgrounds and sound worlds. Feedback sessions with conductor George Manahan, ACO players, mentor composers, and ACO's directors provide crucial artistic, technical, and conceptual assistance. This year's mentor composers are **Jonathan Bailey Holland, Melinda Wagner** and ACO Artistic Director **Derek Bermel**.

In addition, the Readings offer a **Career Development Workshop** for composers, students, or anyone interested in exploring the business and realities of being a professional composer on **Friday, March 13, 2020** from **10am - 3pm**. These invaluable talks, led by leaders in the industry, present topics ranging from copyright and commission agreements to music preparation, from promotion to fundraising. This year's topics include:

### **All About Recordings**

### **Musicians, Conductors, Librarians, and Administrators – Collaborating with Orchestra Personnel**

### **Perspectives on Programming**

For over a generation, ACO's **Underwood New Music Readings** have been providing all-important career development and public exposure to the country's most promising emerging composers, with over 150 composers participating. Readings composers have gone on to win every major composition award, including the Pulitzer, Grammy, Grawemeyer, American Academy of Arts & Letters, and Rome Prizes. Orchestras around the globe have commissioned and performed hundreds of works by ACO Readings alumni. The New Music Readings have, for more than 25 years, served as a launch pad for composers' careers, a tradition that includes many of today's top composers, such as **Ellen Taaffe Zwilich** and **Joseph Schwantner**, both of whom received Pulitzer Prizes for ACO commissions; and ACO's own Artistic Director **Derek Bermel**, as well as composers **Lisa Bielawa, Anthony Cheung, Anna Clyne, Cindy Cox, Sebastian Currier, Jennifer Higdon, Pierre Jalbert, Aaron Jay Kernis, Hannah Lash, Ingram Marshall, Carter Pann, P.Q. Phan, Tobias Picker, Narong Prangcharoen, Paola Prestini, David Rakowski, Daniel Bernard Roumain, Christopher Rouse, Huang Ruo, Eric Samuelson, Carlos Sanchez-Guiterrez, Carlos Simon, Kate Soper, Gregory Spears, Joan Tower, Ken Ueno, Dan Visconti, Melinda Wagner, Wang Jie, Dalit Warshaw, Randall Woolf, Nina Young,** and **Roger Zare**.

## **About the Selected Composers and Their Music**

### **Dai Wei (b. 1989) – *Samsaric Essay***

Dai Wei is originally from China. Her musical journey navigates in the spaces between east and west, classical and pop, electronic and acoustic, innovation and tradition. She often draws from eastern philosophy and aesthetics to create works with contemporary resonance and reflect an introspection on how multidimensional conflict and tension can create and inhabit worlds of their own. Her artistry is nourished by the Asian and Chinese Ethnic culture in many different ways. Being an experimental vocalist, she performs herself as a Khoomei throat singer in her recent compositions, which filter different experiences and backgrounds as a calling that transcends genre, race, and labels.

She recently served as Young Artist Composer-in-Residence at Music from Angel Fire and Composer Fellow at Intimacy of Creativity in Hong Kong. She has received commissions and collaborations with Utah Symphony Orchestra, Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia, Bang on a Can, Curtis 20/21 Ensemble, Merz Trio, and the Rock School of Ballet in Philadelphia. Her compositions were broadcast by WHYY, Performance Today, Radio Television Hong Kong, and Qinghai Television.

Wei is currently pursuing a doctorate in composition at Princeton University as a Naumburg Doctoral Fellow. She is working on a piece called *Partial Men* for string quartet, live electronics, and voice where she will perform with Aizuri String Quartet. The piece is dedicated to two deceased men who donated their kidneys to her mother, and to many other deceased organ donors who extended other people's lives. [www.daiweicomposer.com](http://www.daiweicomposer.com).

Of her piece *Samsaric Essay*, she writes, "The piece was inspired by a book I was reading called *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, which is written by Sogyal Rinpoche. He says, "The successive existences in a series of rebirths are not

like the pearls in a pearl necklace, held together by a string, the “soul,” which passes through all the pearls; rather they are like dice piled one on top of the other. Each die is separate, but it supports the one above it, with which it is functionally connected. Between the dice there is no identity, but conditionality.’

The title comes from the Sanskrit word Samsara, which is defined as the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. There are three different characters who represent three different lifetimes. They are being reincarnated and intersected by each other and more. It’s like a musical hotpot filled with diverse ingredients, and diversity is something we have since day one in our history. At the end of the piece, the orchestra evolves into only one pitch which represents the oneness of everything. As if we can finally rest. And yet, another journey is just about to start.”

### **Anthony R. Green (b. 1984) – *Peace Till We Meet Again***

The creative output of Anthony R. Green (composer, performer, social justice) includes musical and visual creations, interpretations of original, contemporary, and repertoire works, collaborations, educational outreach, and more. Behind all his artistic endeavors are the ideals of equality and freedom. His work has been presented in more than 20 countries by Amanda DeBoer Bartlett, Eunmi Ko, the McCormick Percussion Group, Boston Landmarks Orchestra, counter)induction, Tenth Intervention, NOISE-BRIDGE, Access Contemporary Music, the Playground Ensemble, Ossia New Music Ensemble, and Alarm Will Sound, to name a few. His work has been presented at the ACA festival, the Grachten Festival (Amsterdam), Gaudeamus Muziekweek (Utrecht), Fulcrum Point New Music Discoveries (Chicago), and Ft. Worth Opera Frontiers (Texas), amongst others. A McKnight Visiting Composer, he has received support from numerous foundations and residencies in the US and Europe, including Kimmel Harding Nelson, VCCA, VICC (Sweden), Space/Time (Scotland), atelier:performance (Germany), and the Bemis Center for Contemporary Art. As a performer, he has appeared at venues across the US, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, presenting piano and chamber music recitals, interdisciplinary and experimental performances, and lecture-recitals that fuse performance with research. Green’s most important social justice work has been with Castle of our Skins, celebrating Black artistry through music.

[www.anthonrygreen.com](http://www.anthonrygreen.com); [www.castleskins.org](http://www.castleskins.org)

Of his piece, Green writes, “*Peace Till We Meet Again* is at once a dedication to Black people who were killed by cops. However, during the composition process of this work, the story of Black people in the United States throughout history was in my head, heart, and soul. This incredible journey from surviving the transatlantic journey in chains all the way to the present uncomfortable mix of success and failures is a history with which I sit every day of my life. When taking that into consideration, *Peace Till We Meet Again* can then extend its dedication to every Black person who has died because of racism, bigotry, discrimination, oppression, and other reasons beyond their control. This piece originally is the third movement of a large chamber work entitled *Oh, Freedom!* for flute, viola, and cello, which was commissioned by the Boston-based concert and education series Castle of our Skins. With this work, I wish to express the following: to all Black victims of legal brutalization and otherism, past, present, and future, I extend peace ... till we meet again.”

### **Paul Novak (b. 1998) – *as the light begins to drift* for chamber orchestra**

Paul Novak writes music that is lyrical but fragmented, exploring the subtleties of instrumental color and drawing influence from literature, art, and poetry. He has received numerous national awards, most recently from the ASCAP/SCI Commission, Tribeca New Music, Webster University, and YoungArts Foundation, and has participated in festivals across the country, including the first-ever National Youth Orchestra of the United States Composer Apprenticeship. Novak has collaborated with ensembles including the Austin Symphony, Orlando Symphony, Reno Philharmonic, NYO-USA, the Amaranth and Rosco Quartets, Sō Percussion, Texas New Music Ensemble, NODUS Ensemble, MotoContrario Ensemble, Ensemble Ibis, Blackbox Collective, Face the Music, and Worcester Chamber Music Society; he has worked on interdisciplinary projects with Rice Dance Theatre, poets Ming Li Wu and Erica Cheung, and the Bowdoin Museum.

Originally from Reno, NV, Novak is an undergraduate student at Rice University’s Shepherd School of Music, where he has studied with Kurt Stallman, Pierre Jalbert, Anthony Brandt, and Karim Al-Zand. Upcoming projects in Spring 2020 include a commission from the Texas New Music Ensemble, a soprano/contrabass duo for LIGAMENT, and work for viola and ensemble for violist Sebastian Stefanovic. [www.paulnovakmusic.com](http://www.paulnovakmusic.com).

Of his piece *as the light begins to drift*, Novak writes, “As a student at Rice, I’ve become familiar with the unusual and beautiful cloud formations that appear in East Texas skies. *as the light begins to drift* was inspired by their subtle interplay of light and shadow and their flowing, hazy geometries. The work opens with a burst of swirling texture, with spiraling

runs and swells entangling in a chaotic sound world. The brass interjects with jagged, syncopated hits as different instruments emerge from and then vanish into the ensemble. After a spiraling downward run, a plaintive English horn melody is accompanied by a canopy of string harmonics and trills. In the second section, crystalline percussion instruments merge with subtle orchestral textures. A clarinet solo leads into a pulsing triplet ostinato, which is passed throughout the ensemble, growing in intensity until it reaches a furious climax. The work closes gently with the return of the English horn, fading to nothing in a halo of shimmering sounds.”

### **Christian Quiñones (b. 1996) – *Trigueño o Moreno***

Christian Quiñones (b.1996) is a Puerto Rican composer whose music explores concepts such as cultural identity and minorities within society, literature, and poetry. He was the first prize winner of the 2019 Boston New Music Initiative Young Composer Competition and the Pro Arte 2015 Composition Competition. His music has been performed by the Trio Sanromá, Victory Players, Cuban virtuoso René Izquierdo, Boston New Music Initiative, Orquesta del Conservatorio de Música de Puerto Rico, Young Artist Concert Orchestra (YACO), emerging talents such as Daniela Santos Colón. Quiñones has also been commissioned by The Association of Professional Dancers (APRODANZA), Young Artist Concert Series, and The Zodiac Festival in France where he was awarded the Distinguished Composer award.

From 2018 to 2019 he was the composer-in-residence for the Mt. Holyoke MIFA Festival where he was commissioned by the Victory Players and worked on outreach programs bringing new music talks and performances to public schools in Massachusetts. Apart from his work as a composer, Christian has done research on the commissions of *Ballets de San Juan* to Puerto Rican composers, and an analysis of the sustainability of independent music in Puerto Rico during an economic crisis published by Musiké.

He obtained his BM in Music Composition at the Conservatorio de Música de Puerto Rico, studying composition and orchestration with Alfonso Fuentes and in 2019 Christian was a recipient of the Graduate College Master’s Fellowship at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he is studying with composer Carlos Carrillo. [www.christianquinonesmusic.com](http://www.christianquinonesmusic.com).

Of his piece *Trigueño o Moreno*, Quiñones writes, “The title of the piece is not an idea that can be translated easily from Spanish to other languages. It comes from a study from 1992 where they would ask second-generation Puerto Ricans who were living in the United States if they identify as either black, white, or other. Most of them did not respond in a binary form of black and white but identify themselves as either trigueño or moreno. In Spanish, depending on the cultural context, when you describe a person as trigueño or moreno it means that this person as color skin is not "black enough" to be considered black (the person does not have strong African factions), but also not "white enough" to be considered white. For the majority of these second generation of Puerto Ricans, there is an identity crisis because of the rich mix of heritage in Puerto Rico.

In a way, this piece is a comment on that confusion of who we are, and how as a Puerto Rican I can't describe myself in a binary form. And also, how the same identity crisis happens in music. In a certain way this piece it's representing the amazing, but at the same time conflicting, heritage that Puerto Ricans hold.”

### **Gity Razaz (b. 1986) – *And the brightest rivers glide...***

Hailed by *The New York Times* as “ravishing and engulfing,” Gity Razaz’s music ranges from concert solo pieces to opera and large symphonic works. With intense melodies and inventive harmonic languages, her compositions are often dramatically charged. Razaz’s music has been commissioned and performed by Washington National Opera, National Sawdust, National Ballet School of Canada, Chautauqua Opera Company, Ballet Moscow, Seattle Symphony, Albany Symphony Orchestra, Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, La Jolla Symphony & Chorus, American Composers Orchestra, New York Choreographic Institute, and Amsterdam Cello Biennale, among many others.

Her compositions have earned numerous national and international awards, such as the 2019 American Academy of Arts and Letters Andrew Imbrie Award, the Jerome Foundation award, the Libby Larsen Prize in 28th International Search for New Music Competition, three ASCAP awards, ASCAP Plus Award, to name a few.

Razaz is a composition teacher and mentor for the Kaufman Music Center's Luna Composition Lab since 2017. She attended The Juilliard School on full scholarship, and received her Bachelor and Master of Music in Composition under the tutelage of John Corigliano, Samuel Adler, and Robert Beaser.

Of her piece, Razaz writes, "*And the brightest rivers glide...* is my third composition for large orchestra; its title refers to a fragment from a poem by the Persian poet Rumi. I have always been fascinated by the Sufism of Persian poets, and how their evocative depictions of earthly pleasures are actually metaphors for the intensity and purity of their spiritual devotion. In this way, this piece is an attempt to conjure a dramatic, voluptuous surface that surrounds the deeper spiritual essence, as depicted by a pure and simple lyrical line.

The structure of the piece is a hybrid idea inspired by palindromes and the Golden Ratio, or the divine proportion. Musical ideas and textures re-appear in exact reverse order of the opening episodes, their length upon return considerably shortened in order to maintain an organic and proportional dramatic arc."

### **Keane Southard (b. 1987) – Symphony No. 2 for Large Orchestra**

Described as "a hugely prolific musician with a wide variety of skill sets" (*newmusicbuff.com*), Keane Southard is a composer and pianist who believes deeply in the power of music to change how people think, feel, and act, and that it can be a catalyst for positive change in the world. His music has been described as "a terrific discovery" (*Bandworld Magazine*) and "highly-professional and well-orchestrated" (*Portland Press Herald*) and his works reflect his many diverse musical tastes, from medieval chant to 70's rock, Bach to the Blues, and 19<sup>th</sup> century romanticism to Latin dance forms. He has been a recipient of many awards, most recently winning the Yale Glee Club's Emerging Composers Competition and Capital Hearings Young Composers Competition, and he has been a fellow at the Intimacy of Creativity (Hong Kong) and the Bennington Chamber Music Conference. Keane earned his M.M. at the University of Colorado-Boulder in composition and is currently a Ph.D. student in composition at the Eastman School of Music. His composition teachers include Kenneth Girard, Loris Chobanian, Daniel Kellogg, Jeffrey Nytech, Carter Pann, Richard Toensing, Allen Shawn, Ricardo Zohn-Muldoon, and David Liptak. Keane spent 2013 in Brazil as a Fulbright scholar studying music education.

Of his piece, Southard writes, "Symphony No. 2 for Large Orchestra first began life as my Piano Sonata No. 2. The sonata was begun in 2006 and completed in 2008. This was my first large-scale work (over 15 minutes) that I had ever written, and I premiered the sonata myself in 2008. After playing the first movement in a masterclass with a well-known American composer, she suggested that I orchestrate it, that the instruments and colors were right there begging to be realized in orchestral form. This thought stayed in the back of my mind for several years until I decided to give it a shot. After completing the first movement, I decided that the other movements would work well in an orchestral form as well and decided to turn the sonata into a symphony. (I am still working on orchestrating the other three movements).

While I have written a lot of joyful and happy music in recent years, this work of mine represents a different side of my music, one that is loud, dissonant, "in your face," and intense. I haven't written in this mode very often, but I still connect deeply with it and feel it is an important part of my creative identity and what I want to express in my music."

## **About American Composers Orchestra**

American Composers Orchestra (ACO) is dedicated to the creation, celebration, performance, and promotion of orchestral music by American composers. With commitment to diversity, disruption and discovery, ACO produces concerts, K-12 education programs, and emerging composer development programs to foster a community of creators, audience, performers, collaborators, and funders.

ACO identifies and develops talent, performs established composers, champions those who are lesser-known, and increases regional, national, and international awareness of the infinite variety of American orchestral music, reflecting gender, ethnic, geographic, stylistic, and age diversity. To date, ACO has performed music by 800 American composers, including over 350 world premieres and newly commissioned works. ACO recordings are available on ARGO, CRI, ECM, Point, Phoenix USA, MusicMasters, Nonesuch, Tzadik, New World Records, InstantEncore.com, Amazon.com and iTunes.

In addition to the Underwood New Music Readings in NYC, EarShot enables orchestras across the country to identify talented young composers. With guidance from ACO, partner orchestras – such as the Detroit Symphony, the Sarasota (FL) Orchestra, the Charlotte Symphony, and the Philadelphia Orchestra – undertake readings, residencies, performances and composer-development programs that speak directly to their communities and leverage local resources.

For nearly two decades, ACO has brought composers and musical teaching artists into New York City public schools through Music Factory. Students in Brooklyn, Bronx, Manhattan and Queens, work directly with professional composers to create and perform original music. ACO also offers the intensive Compose Yourself seminars, during which high school composers will participate in hands-on composition classes, culminating in a performance of student compositions played by ACO's professional musicians.

More information about American Composers Orchestra is available online at [www.americancomposers.org](http://www.americancomposers.org).

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*This press release is available online at [www.americancomposers.org/press-media](http://www.americancomposers.org/press-media)*

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#### american composers orchestra

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