

# The Ph.D./D.M.A. Programs in Music

May 15, 2023 6:00 p.m.

*Baisley Powell Elebash Recital Hall*



## Graeme Steele Johnson, clarinet Min Young Kang, piano

City Vignettes for Clarinet and Piano, Op. 29c, No. 1 (2016) George N. Gianopoulos

*Dawn*

(b. 1984)

*Dusk*

*Rain at Night*

Nocturne (1911)

Lili Boulanger  
(1893–1918)

Sonata for Clarinet and Piano (1990)

Katia Tchemberdji  
(b. 1960)

*Quarter note = 80*

*Presto, quarter note = 126*

*Half note = 50*

### INTERMISSION

Apparition (2017)

Viet Cuong  
(b. 1990)

Grand Duo Concertant for Clarinet and Piano, Op. 48 (1816) Carl Maria von Weber

*Allegro con fuoco*

(1786–1826)

*Andante con moto*

*Rondo: Allegro*

This recital is given in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the D.M.A. degree.  
Please switch off your cell phones and refrain from taking flash pictures.

## Notes on the Program

### Gianopoulos: City Vignettes

I first met George N. Gianopoulos, or Nick, as he is known familiarly, at the Chamber Music America conference in New York in January 2023. Based in Los Angeles, Gianopoulos wears many hats between his work as composer, as Manager of Artistic Administration at the Colburn School, and as progenitor of a popular YouTube channel with over 31,000 subscribers. The latter was how I initially recognized Gianopoulos' name when we first met in person, and even in a conference room brimming with industry bigwigs, I was a bit starstruck to meet the YouTube star IRL (internet-speak for "in real life"). I'm being a little tongue-in-cheek because Gianopoulos' channel has little to do with Gianopoulos himself; rather, it is an impressively robust catalog of classical music recordings featuring scrolling score-videos set to excellent recordings and including many obscure works that are difficult to find elsewhere — a shockingly untrendy conceit for its outsized following, and a resource that has served me many times. Like the #wholesome content of his YouTube channel, my interactions with Nick felt genuine and interesting, more so set against the backdrop of some of the transactional handshaking common to industry conferences. And just as his YouTube channel has introduced me to wonderful music previously unknown to me, so has Gianopoulos' *City Vignettes* introduced me to the evocative poetry of the American lyric poet Sara Teasdale. Gianopoulos took his title and musical inspiration from Teasdale's set of three miniature poems, published in 1911 under the same title in her second collection, *Helen of Troy and Other Poems*. Teasdale was the first person to win the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1918 (at the time, the Columbia University Poetry Society Prize), but she suffered from health issues and bouts of depression throughout her life, which ended in suicide in 1933 at the age of 49. Her work is characterized by its simplicity and clarity, her use of classical forms, and her passionate and romantic subject matter, all of which are mirrored in Gianopoulos' colorful, pithy music.

#### I. Dawn

The greenish sky glows up in misty reds,  
The purple shadows turn to brick and stone.  
The dreams wear thin, men turn upon their beds,  
And hear the milk-cart jangle by alone.

#### II. Dusk

The city's street, a roaring blackened stream  
Walled in by granite, thro' whose thousand eyes  
A thousand yellow lights begin to gleam,  
And over all the pale untroubled skies.

#### III. Rain at Night

The street-lamps shine in a yellow line  
Down the splashy, gleaming street,  
And the rain is heard now loud and blurred  
By the tread of homing feet.

—Sara Teasdale [1884-1933]

## **Boulanger: Nocturne**

Although at first glance Gianopoulos' *City Vignettes* and Lili Boulanger's Nocturne seem to have little to do with each other, they will be performed here without pause, as a set. Both works borrow from the violin repertoire (*City Vignettes*, admittedly, exists in many forms and was originally written for mezzo-soprano and guitar), and Boulanger composed the Nocturne in 1911, the same year Teasdale's *City Vignettes* was published. Like Teasdale, Boulanger was also afflicted by poor health throughout her life, which ended at the age of 24 after a case of bronchial pneumonia turned into Crohn's disease (pneumonia was also Teasdale's final illness). Owing perhaps to the zeitgeist of its source material and light-filled imagery of its verse, I sense a sort of neo-Impressionist musical language in Gianopoulos' *City Vignettes* that resonates with Boulanger's idiom, and by positioning the present work as a postscript to the former, I sought to use the Nocturne to extend the temporal imagery of the poem titles.

Parisian-born Lili Boulanger descended from a richly musical family; her grandfather was a cellist, her mother and grandmother were singers, her father a composer, and her sister, Nadia Boulanger, in addition to composing herself, became a legendary pedagogical figure as the teacher of many of the 20th century's leading composers, including Aaron Copland, Astor Piazzolla, Elliott Carter, Darius Milhaud, Philip Glass and many others. It's little surprise, then, that the younger Lili Boulanger became something of a child prodigy, displaying signs of perfect pitch by the age of two, and playing organ, piano, violin, cello and harp before she was five. The beautiful Nocturne adapts readily to the clarinet, though an early phrase reaches one semitone past the typical ceiling for the clarinet's range. Both Boulanger sisters were heavily influenced by Debussy, their older contemporary, and the Nocturne closes with what I'm convinced is a passing wink at the famous flute solo that opens his *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun* — and so night turns back into day.

## **Tchemberdji: Sonata for Clarinet and Piano**

My teacher Charles Neidich premiered Katia Tchemberdji's Clarinet Sonata with pianist Vasily Lobanov at the Kuhmo Chamber Music Festival in Finland in 1990—40 minutes after the composer handed them the score, according to Neidich. The opening phrase makes for a daunting first impression for a last-minute performance, ending in a piercing C7 (sounding pitch), two semitones above the clarinet's highest note in common practice—before repeating twice more in successive phrases. These shrieking phrases, counterpointed with *fff* cluster chords in the piano, express a familiar agony for those versed in Soviet music, a lineage of composers that seems to shed conventionality over time, moving from the artful phrases of Shostakovich and Prokofiev through the klezmer-tinged music of Weinberg, and finally to the bald intensity of Ustvolskaya and Gubaidulina. Born in 1960, Tchemberdji comes from one of the last generations of Soviet-raised composers, emigrating to West Berlin as late as 1990, the year of German reunification. To anachronistically impose modern vernacular, Tchemberdji's Clarinet Sonata concentrates on attachment styles between clarinet and piano—or, rather, *dis*attachment styles, as the three movements seem to explore varying relationships of asynchrony between the instruments. The clarinet and piano seem unable to connect for much of the first movement, with the cluster punctuations consistently arriving a beat late to the clarinet's accents, and the clarinet's screams failing to inspire a response from the piano. Occasional echoes and phrase handoffs between the parts become charged with significance in this context of missed connections. In the second movement, by contrast, the instruments almost always play together, just not *together*, their parts a mishmash of semitone gibberish out of sync from each other by an eighth note. In the haunting and hypnotic third movement, Tchemberdji dispenses with bar lines and meter altogether in favor of temporal independence: combining plucked strings with ordinarily struck keys,

the crystalline piano texture oscillates in dreamy delirium as the clarinet croons a chant-like phrase, repeating down a step each time.

### **Cuong: Apparition**

Vietnamese-American composer Viet Cuong wrote *Apparition* for clarinetist Gregory Oakes in 2017. The piece is written almost entirely in dyads and multiphonics, an extended technique of sounding two or three pitches simultaneously by eliciting multiple acoustic partials at once. While keyboard and string instruments self-harmonize naturally, for single-line wind instruments playing multiple notes at once is not only a challenge but also a way of opening up a new world of timbre and harmonic color possibilities that is profoundly different than how we typically experience the instrument and its sound. *Apparition* is indeed profound, despite a relatively reserved harmonic idiom. It uses the aural interest of the multiphonic effect and gradually developing harmony to create a sense of a large-scale arc and allowing the listener to zoom out from the details of the piece, similar to the effect of minimalist compositions.

### **Weber: Grand Duo Concertant**

The Grand Duo Concertant is the only one of Weber's six clarinet works not written for German clarinetist Heinrich Baermann. Instead, the piece was written for Johann Hermstedt, also the dedicatee Louis Spohr's four clarinet concertos. Best known for his operas, such as *Der Freischütz* and *Oberon*, Weber's instrumental works are also highly operatic, heavy-handed with dramatic flair and rife with aria-style melody and vocal turns of phrase. Unlike his other clarinet music, however, in the Grand Duo Weber divides the virtuosity evenly between the parts, whereas the solo clarinet fields the lion's share of pyrotechnic passagework in his other works for the instrument. Indeed, the Grand Duo has been described as "a double concerto without orchestra," in reference to the flashy technical demands on both instruments. The difficulty of the piano writing is presumably the result of Weber composing for himself; a skilled pianist himself, the composer was seated at the keyboard for the premiere performance in Prague in 1815.

## About the Artists

Praised for his "elegant and rounded sound" (*Albany Times Union*) and "effortless...unmatched" technique (*The Clarinet Online*), **Graeme Steele Johnson** is an artist of uncommon imagination and versatility.

His diverse artistic endeavors range from a TEDx talk comparing Mozart and Seinfeld, to his reconstruction of a forgotten, 125-year-old work by Charles Martin Loeffler, to performances of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto in its original form on an elongated clarinet that he commissioned. Johnson's recent and upcoming performances include appearances at Chamber Music Northwest, Bridgehampton Chamber Music Festival, Ravinia, Phoenix Chamber Music Festival, Emerald City Music, Maverick Concerts, Music Mountain and Yellow Barn, as well as solo recitals at The Kennedy Center and Chicago's Dame Myra Hess series. He is also a regular performer at the Annapolis Chamber Music Festival, Archipelago Collective Chamber Music Festival and Caroga Lake Music Festival. As a concerto soloist, he has performed twice with the Vienna International Orchestra, as well as with the Springfield Symphony Orchestra, Caroga Arts Ensemble, Vermont Mozart Festival Orchestra and the CME Chamber Orchestra. Since 2022 he has served as the clarinetist of the award-winning quintet WindSync, one of only two American wind quintets with a full-time, international touring schedule. WindSync is represented by MKI Artists.

Driven by his interest in shedding fresh perspective on familiar music, Johnson has authored numerous chamber arrangements of repertoire ranging from Mozart and Debussy to Gershwin and Messiaen, and performed them around the country with such artists as the Miró Quartet, Valerie Coleman and Han Lash. Other distinguished chamber music collaborators include David Shifrin, Lucy Shelton, Ani Kavafian, Anthony Marwood, Allan Vogel, William Purvis, Imani Winds, the Callisto and KASA Quartets, New York New Music Ensemble, Frisson Ensemble, Metropolis Ensemble and American Modern Ensemble. Upcoming performances include collaborations with David Shifrin, Ida and Ani Kavafian, Steven Tenenbom, Peter Wiley and Timothy Cobb.

Johnson is the winner of the Hellam Young Artists' Competition and the Yamaha Young Performing Artists Competition; other recent accolades include the Saint Botolph Club Foundation's Emerging Artist Award and the inaugural Lee Memorial Scholarship from the Center for Musical Excellence. He has recorded commercially for Hyperion Records, MSR Classics and Musica Solis Productions, as well as a recent recording project at London's Abbey Road Studios with WindSync.

Johnson's writing about music has been published by the international journal *The Clarinet*, as well as in program booklets by Carnegie Hall, Chamber Music Northwest, Yale and the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival, and as liner notes accompanying albums by David Shifrin, Ricardo Morales, Lloyd Van't Hoff and the Center for Musical Excellence. He holds graduate degrees from the Yale School of Music, where he was twice awarded the school's Alumni Association Prize. His major teachers include David Shifrin, Nathan Williams and Ricardo Morales, and he is now a doctoral candidate at The Graduate Center of the City University of New York under the mentorship of Charles Neidich and Kofi Agawu.

Praised as "an absolute gem" by Montecito Journal, Korean-born pianist **Min Young Kang** enjoys a versatile career as a chamber musician, collaborative pianist, and music director. For the past ten years, Min Young has performed in concerts and recitals throughout the United States, France and South Korea, at venues that include Weill Recital Hall, Merkin Concert Hall, Château de

Fontainebleau, and the Sejong Center M Theater. She has shared the stage with prominent artists including Ani Kavafian, Ettore Causa, Ole Akahoshi, David Geber, Linda Chesis, Nicholas Mann, Alan Kay, and Stephen Taylor.

Min Young recently released her first record “Remembering Russia” with PENTATONE with Spanish Violist Jesus Rodolfo in Oct 2021 and her playing was described as 'sensitive' and 'nuanced with a lyrical right hand' in the review by Tarraco Culture Club.

Min Young is a Founder/Artistic Director of Kallos Chamber Music Series ([www.kalloscms.org](http://www.kalloscms.org)) based in New Haven, CT. Hailed "resonant with the time, and offering understanding, catharsis, and consolation" by New Haven Independent, Kallos Chamber Music Series's mission is to cultivate a thriving community around a vibrant, intimate, and profound chamber music experience.

A prize winner at both the J.C. Arriaga Chamber Music Competition, Artur Balsam Duo Competition, and Lillian Fuchs Chamber Music Competition, Kang has also been recognized with numerous awards and scholarships, including the Talisman Energy Emerging Artist Award, Kraeuter Musical Foundation Award, Prix special du Directeur and Prix de Musique de chambre from Ecoles D'Art Americaines de Fontainebleau, the Renee and Richard Hawley Scholarship and the Manhattan School of Music's President's Award Scholarship.

Min Young has extensive collaborative experience, having worked with musicians of all “stripes” - strings, woodwinds, brass, vocal. She has worked as one of the recommended collaborative pianists for a prestigious international competition such as Naumburg International Competition and Longthibaud Violin Competition (New York Regional). She has also served as an official piano collaborator for the entrance auditions at Yale School of Music, Manhattan School of Music, and Mannes School of Music. As a vocal pianist, she has worked with the Center of Contemporary Opera and Manhattan Summer Voice Festival.

In summers past, Min Young served as a Collaborative Piano Fellow at the Music Academy of the West, and as a Vocal Piano Fellow at both SongFest and Aspen Music Festival and School, having studied closely with Graham Johnson, Alan Smith, Jonathan Feldman and Andrew Harley. She has also worked as a collaborative pianist at several other renowned summer music festivals, such as Ecoles D'Art Americaines de Fontainebleau, Banff International Music Festival.

Kang appeared at various masterclasses led by internationally recognized musicians such as Bruno Rigutto, Craig Rutenberg, Dominique Merlet, Graham Johnson, Gyorgy Sandor, Marilyn Horne, Jonathan Feldman, Margo Gerret, Lucy Shelton, Philipp Entremont, and Thomas Hampson.

Kang received a Master of Music (MM) as a full scholarship student from Eastman School of Music, where she studied collaborative piano and chamber music with Dr. Jean Barr. She completed a Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA) in collaborative piano with a full scholarship and Kraeuter Musical Foundation Award from Manhattan School of Music under the tutelage of Dr. Heasook Rhee.

Min Young completed a Collaborative Piano Fellowship at the Yale School of Music, where she worked with instrumental students in recitals, lessons, and master classes, while also providing rehearsal coaching. She is a Founder/Artistic Director of Kallos Chamber Music Series in New Haven, CT, and also a current staff pianist at Mannes School of Music in NYC.