

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

April 1, 2024 12:00 p.m.

Baisley Powell Elebash Recital Hall



Austin Lewellen, double bass
with Eric Sedgwick, piano, Alexandra Smither, soprano,
Stephanie Liu, violin, Carrie Frey, viola,
and Aaron Wolff, cello

Four Romantic Pieces, Op. 75 (1887)

i. Allegro Moderato

Antonín Dvořák

(1841–1904)

Adoration (1951)

Florence Price

(1887–1953)

Concerto for double bass, Op. 3 (1904)

i. Allegro

ii. Andante

iii. Allegro

Serge Koussevitzky

(1874–1951)

with Eric Sedgwick, piano

INTERMISSION

Bedroom Tune She Might Have Heard (2022)

Daniel Leibovic

(b. 1995)

Bathing Sunphotons (2020)

Adeliia Faizullina

(b. 1988)

with Alexandra Smither, soprano

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.

Cal (2023)

Austin Lewellen
(b. 1994)

with Stephanie Liu, violin, Carrie Frey, viola, and Aaron Wolff, cello

Suite No. 5 for solo violoncello, BWV 1011
vi. Gigue

J. S. Bach
(1685–1750)

Notes on the Program

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)
Four Romantic Pieces, Op. 75 (1887)
i. Allegro Moderato

Dvořák originally composed his Four Romantic Pieces as a set of miniatures, for two violins and viola, to play with his violinist neighbor, only later reworking them for violin and piano. The first of these, presented here in E-flat major, is modeled after the Dutch double bassist James Oesi's performance on his 2024 album, *Adoration*. The movement states a rather simple melody, which it elaborates slowly but surely over a gently driving accompaniment.

Florence Price (1887-1953)
***Adoration* (1951)**

Florence Price, born in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1887, “won first prize in the Wanamaker Competition with her Symphony in E minor and as a result, became the first female composer of African descent to have a symphonic work performed by a major national symphony orchestra.”

Adoration comes from Price's first sonata for organ. It is the first of eight movements: *Adoration*, Cantilena, Allegretto, Festal March, Offertory, Little Pastorale, *The Hour Glass*, and Passacaglia and Fugue. This sonata was modeled after Félix-Alexandre Guilmant's Sonata in D Minor, op. 42, which Price performed while a student at the New England Conservatory. The primary function of *Adoration* is the presentation of the principal theme. This work was written in 1951, while Price was living in Chicago during what Samantha Ege calls the “burgeoning transformations of a sweeping Black Renaissance.”

Price is, notably, the first African American female composer to gain national recognition in the classical music industry. Her music is experiencing a renaissance, but not without trial. Scores of historically marginalized composers are often treated without the respect given to the rest of the canon. A 2024 article in Ludwig VAN magazine entitled “The Price is Wrong: How error-riddled scores get in the way of promoting music of marginalized composers,” outlined this phenomenon. *Adoration* was originally written for organ, and has been arranged for many instruments of late, but most recently for bass by Oesi, as above, on his 2024 album *Adoration*. For today's performance, I have transcribed that version myself.

Serge Koussevitzky (1874-1951)
Concerto for double bass, Op. 3 (1904)
i. Allegro – ii. Andante – iii. Allegro

Well-known as both a bassist and a conductor, Serge Koussevitzky served for 25 years as music director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Prior to that, he toured around Europe with his orchestra, “Concerts Koussevitzky,” who, on at least one occasion, traveled by river boat.

Koussevitzky’s Op. 3 is often, disparagingly, described as one long sonata form that spans three movements: this is not inaccurate. In fact, the first quarter of the third movement is identical to that of the first. This shared material includes the two, iconic, solo statements that lead into the *alla breve* minor dance theme, as well as that theme.

A notable moment of the Andante is its conclusion: a unique characteristic of the fourths tuning of the double bass (by way of contrast to the fifths tuning of the rest of the violin family) is that the way the four overtone series of the four strings overlaps permits one to play rather extensive scalar work *only* on harmonics. Naturally, a number of those harmonics stray from equal tempered expectations, in particular the fifth-partial B-naturals and F-sharps: as is tradition, they are left unaltered.

Daniel Leibovic (b. 1995)
***Bedroom Tune She Might Have Heard* (2022)**

Daniel Leibovic is a composer and pianist currently studying at Rice University. Leibovic’s music often explores lyricism mixed with pop and non-western musical materials, influenced by his Jewish and Indonesian heritage. He wrote this work for my wife and I as part of a series of lectures and workshops she gave on composing for the voice, and in doing so, set a text by Houston Poet Laureate Aris Kian.

The resultant work is incredibly intimate, delicate. Leibovic took the seminal work of bassist and composer Stefano Scodanibbio as a jumping off point: most of the sonic material is called “harp harmonics,” a technique in which the bassist uses the same hand to activate a harmonic node as they use to pluck that string. This, of course, limits the instrument to four overtone series: Leibovic builds a very interesting collection of pitches, and resultant chords and scales, by retuning the instrument to a half-diminished seventh, top to bottom: F-sharp, C-sharp, A, D-sharp.

Adeliia Faizullina (b. 1988)
***Bathing Sunphotons* (2020)**

In 2020, the Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music engaged my wife and I to premiere a new duo from one of their composers. We were paired with Adeliia Faizullina, an Uzbek composer who currently resides in Providence, Rhode Island. She describes that she “explores cutting-edge vocal colors and paints delicate and vibrant atmospheres inspired by the music and poetry of Tatar folklore.” Faizullina composed for Austin and I on a commission from the Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music. She wrote for us an absolutely beautiful piece titled “Bathing Sunphotons,” the sonic effect of which is often greater than the sum of its parts.

At only three minutes, the work thrives with a compact formal structure. It contains a really powerful demonstration of the overtone series: high, agile arpeggiation in the voice, accompanied by harmonic sweeps in the bass, combine to powerful effect. Immediately following, the bass changes course, from its highest frequencies to its lowest, by employing difference tones. Near-unison dyads produce a perceptible

beating which implies its own, quite low, pitch. Chris Otto writes in John Zorn's "Arcana VII: Musicians on Music" about the effects and implications of difference tones. He perceives instances of particularly slow beating as "timbral fluctuations and rotations in space around the listener." As the soprano tentatively branches out to explore chromatic neighbors to the "simple" overtones of D-natural, the bass grows to impossible size through the use of such difference tones, the qualities of which seem to physically surround the listener in a way both stabilizing and disconcerting.

Austin Lewellen (b. 1994)
***Cal* (2023)**

My first composition, *Cal* was commissioned and premiered by the Spoleto Festival USA in 2023, as part of their *Tell Your Story* series, which partners performer-composers with community members to build a body of musical work that is centered around practices of placemaking and locality.

Through this commission, I had the good fortune of getting to know Cal Boyce over the course of winter and spring 2023. Cal, in his own words, is a trans man born and raised in the Carolinas. From acting as visible representation for queer youth in his work at We Are Family, to lobbying for legal protections at the state level, Cal is a steadfast advocate for trans and queer folks in his home state.

The work that took shape is written for four strings and fixed media: the string writing mirrors an overarching thread I took from our interviews, which is that the appearance of shrinking, of a surface-level contraction, sometimes belies a deep and powerful expansion of the self. As a trans person, especially one raised by a conservative, religious family, Cal's life has been difficult. Yet our interviews reveal a deep joy that pervades his entire being. And this comes, in part, from the fact that he sees himself and who he strives to be with greater clarity than just about anyone I have ever met. I am grateful for his trust in me, both throughout our interviews and in putting his words to music.

J. S. Bach (1685-1750)
Suite No. 5 for solo violoncello, BWV 1011
vi. Gigue

Much ink has been spilled over BWV 1007-1012, primarily because no autograph seems to exist. The closest equivalents that we possess for this suite in particular are [1] Anna Magdalena's copy which, while a marvelous resource, is widely acknowledged to be error-prone and has unhelpfully messy notation of slurs, and; [2] the composer's reworking of the suite for lute which, while elucidating, isn't quite the same thing.

This is the suite that asks the cellist to retune, specifically, by lowering their A string to a G. This remakes the upper two strings into the interval of a fourth: familiar territory for a double bassist. In terms of resonance and response, since every pitch is, in fact, a spectrum of pitches, tuning in fourths is less "ideal" than tuning in fifths. Common overtones occur at markedly smaller divisions of the string, which in turn makes sympathetic vibrations speak much less readily.

Stephen Isserlis presented a wonderful, if perhaps reaching, narrative for the suites, namely that they trace the life of Christ. As concerns this program, the cellist assigns the fifth suite to the events surrounding the crucifixion. For the suite as a whole, this opens the door to an interesting explanation for the unfavorable tuning. The greater degree of effort that is required of the performer to make the body of the instrument resonate has a certain poetics to it: "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

About the Artists

Austin Lewellen, double bass

My interests lie primarily in the creation of living music, through active collaboration with composers. I am most at home in small ensembles, recording studios, and opera pits, though my technique has a firm grounding in the orchestral tradition of the Common Practice Era. I take these skills both as a basis of communal understanding and as a point of departure.

In the past couple of years, I've had the good fortune to take part in the [world premiere of a new opera](#) from [Rhiannon Giddens](#) and [Michael Abels](#), to perform the music of [Dev Hynes](#) at [BAM](#) and [NYFW](#), and to record the music of [Tyondai Braxton](#), [Julius Eastman](#), [Patrick Harlin](#), [Éliane Radigue](#), and [Nicky Sohn](#) for releases on labels that include [Nonesuch](#), [Bright Shiny Things](#), and [Furious Artisans](#). I serve as Managing Director of [Kinetic Ensemble](#), who released their debut album in November 2023, and who were named Best Chamber Orchestra of 2023 by the [Houston Press](#). At present, I split my time between New York and Houston.

Eric Sedgwick, piano

Eric Sedgwick has performed with many of music's top talents including Leona Mitchell, Sanford Sylvan and Marni Nixon, Broadway leading ladies Sarah Rice, Carole Demas and Debra Monk, and English hornist Thomas Stacy of the New York Philharmonic. A frequent performer and collaborator in the New York City area, Eric is a vocal coach at the [Manhattan School of Music](#) and the faculty collaborative pianist for the [Tanglewood Music Center](#). He has served as rehearsal pianist for the [Boston Symphony Orchestra](#), under the batons of [Michael Tilson Thomas](#), [Bramwell Tovey](#), [John Williams](#) and [Andris Nelsons](#). He is a regular pianist for events with the [Metropolitan Opera Guild](#), and has worked for [Carnegie Hall](#)'s Music Education Workshops with Joyce DiDonato, as well as for the [International Vocal Arts Institutes](#) in New York and Montreal, and for [Beth Morrison Projects](#). For ten years he was the music director for the Junior Opera Theater scenes program at Manhattan School of Music, directed by [Catherine Malfitano](#).

Alexandra Smither, soprano

An adventurous performer and one of the [CBC](#)'s 2017 "30 Young Hot Classical Musicians Under 30", Canadian soprano Alexandra Smither is a fresh fixture on the worldwide stage. Her "sunny, cloudless top" and "silky, light, soprano" are an organic fit in staple repertoire of Mozart and Monteverdi; Ms. Smither's signature rapport with new music shows her as "an extraordinarily adept soprano, one who can shriek, gurgle, cackle, mutter, gesture, and declaim as well as sing beautifully." (The Threepenny Blog). Recently, Ms. Smither sang Iphigenia #1 in Wayne Shorter and esperanza spalding's new opera [Iphigenia](#) at [MASSMoCA](#), [ArtsEmerson](#), [The Kennedy Center](#), [Cal Performances](#) at UC Berkeley, and [The Broad Stage](#) in Los Angeles as well as gave her debut with [California Symphony](#) as the soloist in [Katherine Balch](#)'s *Illuminate*, and returned to [Ars Lyrica](#) to sing Belinda in *Dido and Aeneas*.

Stephanie Liu, violin

Stephanie Liu is a violinist, educator, and arts administrator based in Brooklyn, NY. Stephanie has been featured as a soloist with the Stony Brook Baroque Chamber Players, Menomonee Falls Symphony, Princeton University Orchestra, and Princeton Chamber Orchestra, among others. She has performed in recent seasons with the Norwalk Symphony, Albany Symphony, Frisson Ensemble, New York Classical Players, and other ensembles. She has participated as an ensemble and collaborative musician in festivals and residencies internationally, including Spoleto Festival USA, Banff Centre for Arts & Creativity, and Bang on a Can Festival at MassMoCA.

With a special interest for collaboration beyond the traditional classical canon, Stephanie brings tireless energy to working with composers and has performed over 20 world premieres. In summer 2023, Stephanie created an original sonic memoir piece - *And Then We Come Home* - combining interviews with Charleston resident Kim Clark, soundscape recordings, and improvisation, which premiered at the Spoleto Festival USA. She is a member of the Deep Roots Ensemble, a folk music ensemble with whom she has appeared at bluegrass festivals and workshops and recorded two albums.

Carrie Frey, viola

Carrie Frey is a New York City-based violist, improviser, and composer who “conjures an inviting warmth that leaves her virtuosity on the margins, placing the focus on her humanity (Bandcamp Daily).” Frey is the violist of the Rhythm Method (“a group of individuals with distinct compositional voices and a collective vision for the future of the string quartet” - *I Care If You Listen*) and a founding member of string trio Chartreuse and string quartet Desdemona. She has performed with many of New York City’s notable contemporary ensembles, including Wet Ink Large Ensemble, AMOC*, Talea Ensemble, Wavefield, Cantata Profana, and the International Contemporary Ensemble. Her own compositions, described as “a moldering compost heap” (*I Care if You Listen*), have been performed by the Rhythm Method, RE:duo, Arco Belo, Adrienne Munden-Dixon, and Kal Sugatski. Her debut sonata album, *The Grey Light of Day*, with pianist Robert Fleitz, was released in 2016, and her first solo album, *Seagrass*, was released on Gold Bolus in December 2023.

Aaron Wolff, cello

Described by the Chicago Tribune as “a musician of quicksilver brilliance,” Aaron Wolff is a New York City-based cellist and performer active in solo, collaborative, and cross-disciplinary capacities. Aaron gave his Carnegie Hall debut in Weill Recital Hall as the winner of the 2023 Leo B. Ruiz Memorial recital. Other recent performances include Beethoven’s Cello Sonata in A Major at Ravinia’s Steans Music Institute, Schumann’s *Fünf Stücke im Volkston* at IMS Prussia Cove Concerts, Debussy’s Cello Sonata on CNN’s *Quest Means Business*, and Marc Migo’s *La Dona d’Aigua* with the Juilliard Orchestra.

Aaron received a B.A. in comparative literature and B.M. in cello performance from Oberlin College & Conservatory. He then completed Master’s degree at Juilliard, where he was a Kovner Fellow under Joel Krosnick, and an Artist Diploma under Tim Eddy and Fred Sherry. He is now pursuing a Doctorate of Musical Arts at CUNY: The Graduate Center, studying with violinist Mark Steinberg of the Brentano Quartet. Aaron plays an 1813 Thomas Kennedy cello made in London.