

THE AMERICAN CONCERTO

JENNIFER KOH

VOLUME ONE

VIJAY IYER
COURTNEY BRYAN



OBERLIN CONTEMPORARY MUSIC ENSEMBLE
TIMOTHY WEISS, CONDUCTOR

CEDILLE
9

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VOLUME ONE

JENNIFER KOH, VIOLIN

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VIJAY IYER

*Trouble for Violin and
Chamber Orchestra (31:09)*

- 1 1. Prelude: Erasure (2:14)
- 2 2. Normale (5:50)
- 3 3. For Vincent Chin (3:48)
- 4 4. Cozening (4:25)
- 5 5. Interlude: Accretion (2:40)
- 6 6. Assembly (12:11)

COURTNEY BRYAN

*Szygyg** (18:05)

- 7 I. Alma Thomas:
The Eclipse (4:59)
- 8 II. Frida Kahlo:
Tree of Hope, Keep Firm (6:06)
- 9 III. Maya Ying Lin:
Eclipsed Time (7:00)

TT: (49:15)

*WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING

*This recording is made possible by the generous
support of Patricia A. Kenney and Gregory J. O'Leary*

PROGRAM NOTES

JENNIFER KOH THE AMERICAN CONCERTO PROJECT

The American Concerto grew out of a desire to capture America's multiplicity of histories through music. What form could best serve as a conduit for the complex narratives of the nation in which I was born? I was drawn to the violin concerto as a way of exploring the soloist's historic role as a heroic figure set against the orchestra's largest instrumental body: its two violin sections. The form itself embodies a tension between the individual and the collective.

What role does the individual choose in the present time? How can the dynamic form of the concerto reflect contemporary society? Does the soloist lead the collective, follow it, or become overtaken by it? How can music shape conversation and drive change? How can music inspire the role we choose to take every day?

These questions are at the heart of this project. Through newly commissioned concertos, composers explore how new sound worlds, rhythms, and forms can tell the story of the world we are writing in and creating together today.

VIJAY IYER

TROUBLE FOR VIOLIN AND CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

“I got in trouble. It was good trouble. It was necessary trouble.”

— Congressman John Lewis on the practice of civil disobedience

“Good trouble,” “necessary trouble” — these are favorite phrases of U.S. Representative John Lewis, referring to the strategies and tactics of the Civil Rights movement and ongoing struggles for equality and justice over the last six decades.

As I met with Jennifer Koh during the year of composition to discuss the details of this piece, I often found it difficult to focus. Typically, we found ourselves, instead, recoiling in horror at the events of any given day. This pattern only intensified after January 20, 2017, as we found our communities, our country, and our

planet in greater peril with each passing hour. In creating the piece, I found myself both channeling and pushing against the sensation of extreme precarity that continues to pervade our moment.

I didn’t want to rehash the typical concerto narrative, positioning a heroic individual over or against a multitude. Ms. Koh told me that the soloist could instead be viewed as someone willing to be vulnerable, to venture publicly where most people won’t, to accept a role that no one else will accept, to bear the unbearable. In other words, the soloist can embody the relationship of an artist to her community: not so much a “leader” or “hero,” but something more like a shaman, a conduit for the forces in motion around us.

The third movement is dedicated to Vincent Chin, whose murder in the early 1980s signaled an ongoing pattern of violent hate crimes against people of color. His death

became a watershed moment for antiracist activism, which is as urgently needed today as it has ever been.

Trouble was premiered by the International Contemporary Ensemble, Steven Schick, conductor, June 8, 2017, as part of the Ojai Music Festival at the Libbey Bowl in Ojai, CA.

Oberlin CME for Iyer

Violin I

Abby Simpson

Kai Werlinsky
Gabriela Salvador Riera
Seunne Khoo
Matilda Goldie
Erin Koo

Violin II

Samantha Kramer

Samuel Garcia
Gabriel Nichols
Ellen Joowon Seok

Viola

Chloe Kitzmiller

Milo Page
Zoe Slap
Kyle Sonon

Cello

Stine Adkins

Dylan Bachmann
Ma'ayan Kertcher
Kotomi Inaba

Bass

Malcolm Laurier

Oliver Andrews

Flute

Jonah Ordower

Oboe

Shiyi Song

Clarinet

Jared Sta. Ana

Bassoon

Mia Tran

Horn

Lilabeth Swalley

Trumpet

Jamie Hammarlund

Trombone

Abe Frato

Tuba

Chaz Chapman

Timpani

Stephanie Bloch

Percussion

Sophia Stehlik

Zeyi Guo

Piano

Arisa Onoda

COURTNEY BRYAN SYZYG

I wrote *Syzygy* for Jennifer Koh and the Chicago Sinfonietta as part of Jennifer's *The American Concerto* project. The piece grew out of my admiration for the work of three artists, whose creativity, vision, and engagement with the world have long inspired me: painter Alma Thomas (1891–1978); painter Frida Kahlo (1907–1954); and designer, architect, and artist Maya Lin (b. 1959).

The title *Syzygy* refers to the nearly straight-line configuration of three celestial bodies in a gravitational system, such as the sun, moon, and earth during a solar or lunar eclipse. Across the concerto's three movements, I explore different manifestations of eclipse, drawing on the imagery, symbolism, and visual perspectives found in the following works: Thomas's *The Eclipse* (1970), whose vivid colors and imagery suggest both illumination and obscurity;

Kahlo's *Tree of Hope, Keep Firm* (1946), with its symbolism of sun and moon; and Lin's *Eclipsed Time* (1994), an installation that transforms a familiar public space through shadow and light. Throughout the concerto, Jennifer's violin serves as a connective thread, guiding the listener through these three artistic worlds.

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Oberlin CME for Bryan

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Malcolm Laurier

Oliver Andrews

Flute

Rachel Kraut

Jonah Ordower

Oboe

Miguel Arroyo

Shiyi Song

Clarinet

Keyvar Smith-Herold

Jared Sta. Ana

Bassoon

Elise Tekolste

Mia Tran

Percussion

Sophia Stehlik



PHOTO: JUERGEN FRANK

JENNIFER KOH

Grammy Award-winning violinist Jennifer Koh is recognized for performances that combine virtuosity, intellectual curiosity, and a commitment to expanding the violin repertoire. Throughout her career, she has forged close collaborations with composers, premiering more than 100 works written especially for her and establishing herself as a leading advocate for contemporary music while maintaining a deep engagement with the classical canon.

Koh's artistic projects — including *Alone Together*, *Bach and Beyond*, *Bridge to Beethoven*, *Limitless*, *Shared Madness*, and *The American Concerto* — explore connections between past and present through commissioning, performance, and curation. Her Grammy Award-winning album *Alone Together*, featuring world-premiere recordings

of 39 works created during the COVID-19 pandemic, exemplifies her commitment to fostering new music and supporting artistic communities.

Equally at home in concerto, recital, chamber music, and interdisciplinary performance, Koh has appeared with many of the world's leading orchestras, including the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, and Boston Symphony Orchestra. Her repertoire ranges from Bach, Mozart, and Brahms to landmark works of the 20th and 21st centuries.

An active lecturer, teacher, and interdisciplinary collaborator, Koh has worked with composers, visual artists, choreographers, and theater directors to create projects that expand the possibilities of classical performance. Her extensive Cedille Records discography spans solo,

chamber, and orchestral repertoire, documenting both landmark works and significant additions to the contemporary violin literature.

Named *Musical America's* 2016 Instrumentalist of the Year, Koh is the recipient of an Avery Fisher Career Grant and prizes from the International Tchaikovsky Competition and the Concert Artists Guild Competition. She is Founder and Artistic Director of ARCO Collaborative and Artistic Director of the Fortas Chamber Music Concerts in Washington, DC. Born in Chicago, Koh earned a BA in English literature from Oberlin College and studied at the Curtis Institute of Music with Jaime Laredo and Felix Galimir.



PHOTO: TANYA ROSEN-JONES

TIMOTHY WEISS

Conductor Timothy Weiss has earned acclaim for his performances and bold programming throughout the United States and abroad. His repertoire in contemporary music is vast and fearless, including contemporary masterworks and an impressive number of recordings, premieres, and commissions. He is the 2025 recipient of the Ditson Conductor's Award in recognition of his exceptional commitment to the performance of works by American composers. In 2024, his premiere recording of orchestral works by Missy Mazzoli with the Arctic Philharmonic earned a Grammy nomination.

For over three decades, Weiss has directed the Oberlin Contemporary Music Ensemble

(CME), bringing the group to a level of artistry and virtuosity in performance that rivals the finest new music groups. He earned the Adventurous Programming Award from the League of American Orchestras for his work with the Oberlin CME.

He also serves as faculty member and director of the Aspen Contemporary Ensemble at the Aspen Music Festival and School. Additionally, he is a co-director and founder of the Zohn-Collective, a flexible contemporary music collective that produces and performs artist-driven projects generated by its members. He remains active as a guest conductor in the U.S. and abroad and continues to be a regular guest of the Grossman Ensemble in Chicago, the Manson Ensemble at the Royal Academy of Music in London, and

the Arctic Philharmonic in Norway, an ensemble for which he served as Artistic Director for six years.



PHOTO: YEVHEN GULENKO

OBERLIN CONTEMPORARY MUSIC ENSEMBLE

An “experimental haven” and “hotbed of contemporary-classical players” (*The New York Times*), the Oberlin Conservatory of Music cultivates innovation in its students. Under the direction of Professor Timothy Weiss, the Oberlin Contemporary Music Ensemble’s (CME) high level of performance has garnered considerable acclaim. In its six annual full-concert cycles, CME performs music of all contemporary styles and genres:

from minimalism and serialism to electroacoustic, cross-genre, mixed media, and beyond.

CME has worked with and premiered pieces by many prominent composers from a variety of backgrounds, including Vijay Iyer, Stephen Hartke, George Crumb, Sir Harrison Birtwistle, Helmut Lachenmann, David Lang, Joan Tower, Carlos Simon, Cindy McTee, Courtney Bryan, Alex Paxton, among many

others. CME also regularly premieres works by prominent Oberlin faculty, student, and alumni composers.

Many noted contemporary music icons perform as soloists with CME, including Jennifer Koh ('97), Claire Chase ('01), Tony Arnold ('90), Marilyn Nonken, Stephen Drury, Steven Schick, and Ursula Oppens. The ensemble also features outstanding students as soloists each year.

CME routinely performs in Cleveland and tours the United States. In recent years, it has performed at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Roulette, Winter Garden, Miller Theater, Merkin Concert Hall, DiMenna Center, Harvard University, Benaroya Hall, Palace of Fine Arts, Carnegie's Weill Recital Hall, and the Cleveland Museum of Art.

The group is featured on a number of commercial recordings, including John Luther Adams' *In the White Silence* (New World

Records), Lewis Nielson's *Écritures: St. Francis Preaches to the Birds* (Centaur Records), and several releases on the Oberlin Music label.

Scores of powerhouse new music performers and ensembles began their careers as members of CME, including the multiple Grammy Award-winning sextet Eighth Blackbird and the International Contemporary Ensemble.

PRODUCER Judith Sherman

ENGINEER Bill Maylone

ASSISTANT ENGINEERS Andrew Tripp, Andrew Garver

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