String Theory
A Festival Exploring Musical Frontiers

January 23–26, 2020 | Herbst Theatre
PIVOT: New Adventures in the Performing Arts
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Launched in 2016, PIVOT is a San Francisco Performances series created for adventurous audiences interested in truly unique arts experiences. Driven by a philosophy of innovation, creativity and artistic excellence that pushes the boundaries of the traditional concert experience, PIVOT offers exciting performances and creative exchanges between artists and audiences.

Since its inception in 2016, PIVOT been mixing things up around themes that resonate with today’s audiences (see article on page 4). This year, under the theme String Theory, our four-day festival will cross boundaries, explore frontiers and energetically traverse and unify four threads of music: ancient, traditional classical, new music and jazz.

We begin on Thursday with the unique pairing of harpsichordist Mahan Esfahani and violinist Stefan Jackiw. Together, they shatter musty stereotypes of the baroque keyboard in a program surveying 300+ years of music that puts the harpsichord in an entirely new light.

The following night, SF Performances’ favorites Jennifer Koh, violin and Vijay Iyer, composer/pianist team up with debut composer/percussionist Tyshawn Sorey. This vibrant trio examines limitless relationships between composer and performer including two new works and improvisations.

On Saturday, category-defying German composer/vocalist Theo Bleckmann joins dynamic jazz pianist Dan Tepfer and San Francisco’s own adventurous Telegraph Quartet in an evening of Berlin cabaret songs of Love and War, Peace and Exile.

We conclude this year’s festival early Sunday evening with the pairing of violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja and cellist Jay Campbell, both known for embracing a broad and diverse repertoire. Here they offer a program spanning a millennium and underscoring the timeless power of music to communicate, innovate and move us.

PIVOT: New Adventures in Performing Arts was developed under a grant from:

The Wallace Foundation"
Since 1979, **SAN FRANCISCO PERFORMANCES** has been a pioneer in the Bay Area by introducing hundreds of classical music, jazz, and contemporary dance artists to audiences. With a strong artistic vision and adventurous programming, San Francisco Performances presents the world’s finest in music and dance, connecting audiences with artists in intimate settings. For more info please visit our website at: [sfperformances.org](http://sfperformances.org)

**PHOTO CREDITS:**

**PAGE 4:** Kronos Quartet: Jay Blakesburg; Brooklyn Rider: Erin Baiano

**PAGE 5:** Philip Glass: Johansen Krause  **PAGE 8:** Jennifer Koh: Jürgen Frank

**PAGE 9:** Vijay Iyer: Lena Adasheva  **PAGE 10:** Tyshawn Sorey: John Rogers
San Francisco Performances: The First 40 Years
A History of Innovation

San Francisco Performances’ programming has long reflected a commitment to artists who are driving classical music forms in new and innovative directions. From the start, this philosophy complemented our mission of introducing exciting emerging artists in every season, and it has often—but not exclusively—been these early career artists who have nourished our audiences’ taste for adventure.

San Francisco’s own Kronos Quartet, known worldwide for their commitment to new music, has been a frequent presence for more than 30 years, going back to live dance performances with ODC (1986) and Japanese performance duo Eiko & Koma (1997), to their most recent collaboration for the 2017 world premiere of *Echoes* with The Living Earth Show, the spoken word group Youth Speaks and composer Danny Clay.

In recent seasons the trailblazing string quartet Brooklyn Rider has made a profound impact on our audiences—in collaboration with dancer Wendy Whelan and choreographer Brian Brooks (*Some of a Thousand Words*, 2017); and last season with a program entitled *Healing Modes* that explored new works written as a response to Beethoven’s *String Quartet Op. 15 No. 132* by Caroline Shaw, Gabriela Lena Frank, Reena Esmail and Matana Roberts.
Over the years we have taken special pride in bringing the iconic American composer/performer Philip Glass to San Francisco at regular intervals to highlight the full range of his experiments in sound, from screenings of the *Qatsi* film trilogy accompanied live by the Philip Glass Ensemble, to the minimalist cycle *Music in Twelve Parts*, to the epic, three-hour set of his 20 piano études.

For more than two decades SF Performances has been a member of Music Accord, a national consortium of presenters that commissions and presents new works in the chamber music, instrumental recital and song genres. Recent Music Accord presentations in San Francisco include Caroline Shaw’s *Narrow Sea* performed by Dawn Upshaw, Gil Kalish and Sō Percussion (2017) and Shulamit Ran’s *Glitter, Doom, Shards, Memory* for the Pacifica Quartet (2014).

Over the past decade, novel curated projects have become a staple of our work. Jennifer Koh’s *Limitless* program, featured in the current PIVOT series, is representative. As reported in a 2018 profile in *The New York Times*, “In Mozart’s time, for example, there wasn’t a distinction between new and repertory works ‘because everything was new,’ Ms. Koh said. ‘Now we have pop, jazz, classical, and even new music within classical. I don’t believe in that; I just believe in good musicians and bad musicians.’ This project is also an attempt to add more diverse voices to the violin repertory beyond what Ms. Koh called ‘dead, white European males.'”

*PIVOT* is a celebration of artists who are moving their art into the present and future, making it accessible to younger audiences while converting many traditionalists to new possibilities. They represent the path forward.
JENNIFER KOH | Violin
VIJAY IYER | Piano
TYSHAWN SOREY | Percussion

Friday, January 24, 2020 | 7:30pm
Herbst Theatre

LIMITLESS

BACH

Partita No. 2 in D minor for Unaccompanied Violin, BWV 1004
ALLEMENDE
COURANTE
SARABANDE
GIGUE
CHACONNE

ANDREW NORMAN

Cecilia from The Companion Guide to Rome

TYSHAWN SOREY

In Memoriam Muhal Richard Abrams

INTERMISSION

MISSY MAZZOLI

Dissolve, O my Heart
Improvisations by Vijay Iyer and Tyshawn Sorey

VIJAY IYER The Diamond

This program is made possible in part by the generous support of Frank S. Bayley

Jennifer Koh is represented by Opus 3 Artists opus3artists.com

Vijay Iyer is represented by Music + Art Management, Inc. musicandart.net

Tyshawn Sorey is represented by First Chair Promotion firstchairpromo.com

Hamburg Steinway Model D, Pro Piano, San Francisco

Limitless celebrates the limitless creativity and imagination in collaborations between composers and performers. Limitless shares this creative process through duo performances with composers. I am grateful to all of the artists who engaged in this project of writing, performing, and recording their works with me. Each collaboration has been truly special and unique and collectively they reflect the multiplicity of voices that will guide our art form into the future. I hope that these performances communicate the love and respect that we artists have for each other and evoke the vitality of our musical world today.

—Jennifer Koh

Please join us after the performance for a brief Q&A with the artists and Cy Musiker
Jennifer Koh made her SF Performances debut in January 2003. Since then, she has returned eight times, most recently with her four-part Bridge to Beethoven series during the 2015–16 season.

Vijay Iyer was SF Performances’ Jazz Artist-in-Residence from 2011 to 2015 and has previously appeared four times.

Tyshawn Sorey appears with SF Performances for the first time tonight.

Violinist Jennifer Koh is recognized for intense, commanding performances, delivered with dazzling virtuosity and technical assurance. A forward-thinking artist, she is dedicated to exploring a broad and eclectic repertoire, while promoting diversity and inclusivity in classical music. She has expanded the contemporary violin repertoire through a wide range of commissioning projects and has premiered more than 70 works written especially for her. Her quest for the new and unusual, sense of endless curiosity, and ability to lead and inspire a host of multidisciplinary collaborators, truly set her apart.

Ms. Koh’s series include The New American Concerto, an ongoing, multi-season commissioning project that explores the form of the violin concerto and its potential for artistic engagement with contemporary societal concerns through commissions from a diverse collective of composers; Limitless (recently released on recording), which explores the relationship between composer and performer through duo works played by Ms. Koh and the composers themselves; Bridge to Beethoven, in which she joins pianist Shai Wosner in pairing Beethoven’s violin sonatas with new works inspired by them; Bach and Beyond, which traces the history of the solo violin repertoire from Bach’s sonatas and partitas to pieces by 20th- and 21st-century composers; and
*Shared Madness*, comprising short works that explore virtuosity in the 21st century, commissioned from over 30 composers.

Ms. Koh has appeared with orchestras worldwide, among them the New York, Los Angeles, and Helsinki Philharmonics; Cleveland, Mariinsky, Minnesota, Philadelphia, and Philharmonia (London) Orchestras; and Atlanta, Baltimore, BBC, Chicago, Cincinnati, National, New World, NHK, RAI (Torino), and Singapore Symphonies. Named *Musical America’s* 2016 Instrumentalist of the Year, she has won the International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, Concert Artists Guild Competition, and an Avery Fisher Career Grant.

Ms. Koh has a BA in English literature from Oberlin College and studied at the Curtis Institute, where she worked extensively with Jaime Laredo and Felix Galimir. She is an active lecturer, teacher, and recording artist for Cedille Records; and is the Artistic Director of *arco collaborative*, an artist-driven nonprofit that fosters a better understanding of our world through a musical dialogue inspired by ideas and the communities around us. Visit Jenniferkoh.com for more.

Composer-pianist **Vijay Iyer** was named *Downbeat Magazine’s* Jazz Artist of the Year for 2012, 2015, 2016, and 2018 and Artist of the Year in *Jazz Times*’ Critics’ Poll and Readers’ Poll for 2017. He received a 2013 MacArthur Fellowship, a 2012 Doris Duke Performing Artist Award, and a 2011 Grammy nomination. He has released more than 20 albums, including 2019’s *The Transitory Poems* in duo with pianist Craig Taborn, and 2017’s *Far from Over* with the Vijay Iyer Sextet, both on the ECM label. The sextet record ranked #1 in U.S. National Public Radio’s annual Jazz Critics’ Poll, surveying 157 critics. *Far from Over* was named among the best jazz albums of the year in the *Los Angeles Times, Chicago Tribune, Boston Globe, Slate*, and *The New York Times*, and the was the only “jazz” release in *Rolling Stone*’s list of the 50 best records of 2017, which cited it as “2017’s jazz album to beat”.

Previous key releases of Iyer’s include *A Cosmic Rhythm with Each Stroke* (ECM, 2016) in duo with legendary composer-trumpeter Wadada Leo Smith, named “Best New Music” by *Pitchfork; Break Stuff* (ECM, 2015) with the Vijay
Iyer Trio, winner of the German Record Critics’ Award for Album of the Year; the live score to the film *Radhe Radhe: Rites of Holi* (ECM, 2014) by filmmaker Prashant Bhargava; and *Holding it Down: The Veterans’ Dreams Project* (Pi Recordings, 2013), his third politically searing collaboration with poet-performer Mike Ladd, named Album of the Year in the *Los Angeles Times*.

Iyer’s compositions have been commissioned and premiered by Bang on a Can All-Stars, The Silk Road Ensemble, Ethel, Brentano Quartet, Brooklyn Rider, Imani Winds, American Composers Orchestra, International Contemporary Ensemble, Chamber Orchestra Leopoldinum, Matt Haimovitz, and Jennifer Koh.

Iyer is the Franklin D. and Florence Rosenblatt Professor of the Arts at Harvard University, with joint affiliations in the Department of Music and the Department of African and African American Studies, and the Artistic Director of the Banff International Workshop in Jazz and Creative Music.

Newark-born multi-instrumentalist and composer Tyshawn Sorey (b. 1980) is celebrated for his incomparable virtuosity, effortless mastery and memorization of highly complex scores, and an extraordinary ability to blend composition and improvisation in his work.

Sorey has written for the Los Angeles Philharmonic’s Green Umbrella series, International Contemporary Ensemble, Alarm Will Sound, the Louisville Orchestra, and Carnegie Hall in partnership with Opera Philadelphia, as well as for countless collaborative performers. His music was the subject of a Miller Theater Composer Portrait in 2019, and he is Composer-in-Residence at the Seattle Symphony in the 2019–20 season. In 2017, Sorey was named a MacArthur Fellow.

Sorey “plays not only with gale-force physicality, but also a sense of scale and equipoise” (*New York Times*) and is a “composer of radical and seemingly boundless ideas” (*Wall Street Journal*). *The New Yorker* hails Sorey as “among the most formidable denizens of the in-between zone . . . An extraordinary talent who can see across the entire musical landscape.” He has performed
nationally and internationally with his own ensembles, as well as artists such as John Zorn, Vijay Iyer, Roscoe Mitchell, Muhal Richard Abrams, Wadada Leo Smith, Marilyn Crispell, George Lewis, Claire Chase, Steve Coleman, Steve Lehman, Robyn Schulkowsky, Evan Parker, Anthony Braxton, and Myra Melford, among many others.

As a leader, Sorey has released seven critically acclaimed recordings that feature his work as a composer, multi-instrumentalist and conceptualist including his latest Pillars (Firehouse 12 Records, 2018), among many others. Pillars has been praised as “an immersive soundworld... sprawling, mysterious... thrilling” (Rolling Stone), and has been named as one of BBC Radio 3’s Late Junction albums of the year.

Sorey has taught and lectured on composition and improvisation at Columbia University, the New School, the Banff Centre, NEC, the University of Michigan, International Realtime Music Symposium, Hochschule für Musik Köln, Berklee College of Music, Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, the Danish Rhythmic Conservatory, and the Other Minds Festival, and was selected to be the Danish International Visiting Artist at Jazz Danmark.

As of Fall 2017 he has held the role of Assistant Professor of Composition and Creative Music at Wesleyan University, where he received his master’s degree in Composition in 2011.

PROGRAM NOTES

Partita No. 2 in D minor for Unaccompanied Violin, BWV 1004

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

(1685–1750)

Bach’s six sonatas and partitas for unaccompanied violin date from about 1720, when Bach was Kapellmeister at the court of Anhalt-Cöthen. The three sonatas are in sonata di chiesa form, employing a slow-fast-slow-fast sequence of movements, but the structure of the three partitas is more complex. The term partita—which suggests a collection of parts—refers to a suite of dances, and Bach wrote his three partitas for unaccompanied violin as sets of dance movements. While each of the sonatas has four movements, of which the second is always a fugue, the partitas have more movements (five to seven) and are somewhat freer in form, as Bach adapted a number of old dance forms to the capabilities of the solo violin.

The Partita No. 2 in D minor has become the most famous of Bach’s six works for unaccompanied violin, for it concludes with the Chaconne, one of the pinnacles of the violin literature. Before this overpowering conclusion, Bach offers the four basic movements of partita form, all in binary form. The opening Allemande is marked by a steady flow of sixteenth-notes occasionally broken by dotted rhythms, triplets, and the sudden inclusion of thirty-second
notes. The Courante alternates a steady flow of triplets within dotted duple meters. The Sarabande proceeds along double and triple stops and a florid embellishment of the melodic line, while the Gigue races along cascades of sixteenth-notes in 12/8 time; the theme of the second part is a variation of the opening section.

While the first four movements present the expected partita sequence, Bach then springs a surprise by closing with a chaconne longer that the first four movements combined. The Chaconne offers some of the most intense music Bach ever wrote, and it has worked its spell on musicians everywhere for the last two and a half centuries: beyond the countless recordings for violin, it is currently available in performances by guitar, cello, lute, and viola, as well as in piano transcriptions by Brahms, Busoni, and Raff.

A chaconne is one of the most disciplined forms in music: it is built on a ground bass in triple meter over which a melodic line is repeated and varied. A chaconne demands great skill from a performer under any circumstances, but it becomes unbelievably complex on the unaccompanied violin, which must simultaneously suggest the ground bass and project the melodic variations above it. Even with the flatter bridge and more flexible bow of Bach’s day, some of this music borders on the unplayable, and it is more difficult still on the modern violin, with its more rounded bridge and concave bow.

This makes Bach’s Chaconne sound like supremely cerebral music—and it is—but the wonder is that this music manages to be so expressive at the same time. The four-bar ground bass repeats 64 times during the quarter-hour span of the Chaconne, and over it Bach spins out gloriously varied music, all the while keeping these variations firmly anchored on the ground bass. At the center section, Bach moves into D Major, and here the music relaxes a little, content to sing happily for awhile; after the calm nobility of this interlude, the quiet return to D minor sounds almost disconsolate. Bach drives the Chaconne to a great climax and a restatement of the ground melody at the close.

—Note by Eric Bromberger

Cecilia from *The Companion Guide to Rome*

ANDREW NORMAN
(b. 1979)

Like many of the buildings in Rome, this piece is the product of a long gestation marked by numerous renovations, accretions, and ground-up reconstructions. What has emerged is a collection of portraits—nine in all—of my favorite Roman churches. The music is, at different times and in different ways, informed by the proportions of the churches, the qualities of their surfaces, the patterns in their floors, the artwork on their walls, and the lives and legends of the saints whose names they bear. The more I worked on these miniatures, the less they had to do with actual buildings and the more they became character studies of imaginary people, my companions for a year of living in the Eternal City.
The work was named a finalist for the 2012 Pulitzer Prize in music.

—Note by Andrew Norman

In Memoriam Muhal Richard Abrams

TYSHAWN SOREY
(b. 1980)

Tyshawn Sorey’s In Memoriam Muhal Richard Abrams is a piece dedicated to an important mentor, the late composer/pianist and the founding president of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM). Abrams’ legacy is at once musical, spiritual, and communal. “It is a hard connection to put into words,” says Sorey, “but there was a kinship with Muhal that I hadn’t yet experienced with anyone else. The time that I spent with him on and offstage has proven invaluable beyond measure.”

Sorey’s inspiration was Abrams’ 30-minute solo piano exploration Young at Heart from the recording Young at Heart, Wise in Time (Delmark). As Sorey describes it, Abrams created “an all-encompassing structure that allows him to take a multitude of approaches in turn. In listening to the kaleidoscopic nature of the work, it soon became very clear to me that the idea of whether or not this piece was completely improvised or composed is an irrelevant and moot point, a fundamental attitude that had led to the establishment of my own musical model.”

—Note by Lara Pellegrinelli, commissioned by Miller Theatre at Columbia University, 2019

Dissolve, O my Heart

MISSY MAZZOLI
(b. 1980)

Dissolve, O my Heart has its roots in a late-night conversation over Chinese food and cupcakes with violinist Jennifer Koh. She told me about her Bach & Beyond project, a program that combines Bach’s Sonatas and Partitas with newly commissioned works and asked if I would write a piece that referenced Bach’s Partita in D minor. This request was, to put it mildly, utterly terrifying; the last movement of the Partita, the Chaconne, is undoubtably the most famous piece of solo violin literature in the world. It overwhelmed Brahms, has been subject to hundreds of transcriptions and arrangements over the past two centuries, and is dizzying in its contrapuntal complexity. But something about Jennifer’s enthusiasm was infectious, and I agreed to the project before I realized what I was getting myself into. Jennifer seemed to approach Bach through the lens of contemporary music, and I realized that this was what this new piece should do as well.

Dissolve, O my Heart begins with the first chord of Bach’s Chaconne, a now-iconic D minor chord, and spins out from there into an off-kilter series of chords that
doubles back on itself, collapses and ultimately dissolves in a torrent of fast passages. The only direct quote from the Partita is that first chord, which anchors the entire piece even as it threatens to spiral out of control. The title comes from an aria in the St. John’s Passion but has many potential interpretations.

_Dissolve, O my Heart_ was commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic and was premiered in 2011 as part of their Green Umbrella Series in Disney Hall.

—Note by Missy Mazzoli

**The Diamond**

**VIJAY IYER**
(b. 1971)

In _The Diamond Sutra_, an early Buddhist text also known as _The Diamond that Cuts Through Illusion_, the Buddha leads his interlocutor, the Elder Subhuti, through a series of questions and provocations. The Buddha then concludes the session by offering this teaching to those assembled:

>*All composed things are like a dream,*
*a phantom, a drop of dew, a flash of lightning.*

_That is how to meditate on them;*_

_That is how to observe them._

This duo piece is in four sections, corresponding roughly to these four disparate visions of impermanence: four distinct moments of interplay between form and emptiness, four corners of a diamond. This series of images is itself a “composed thing,” gathering dissimilar elements into a unified system. It suggests that the things we make are similar to things that exist beyond intention. The Buddha’s utterance helps us hear so-called “composition” and “improvisation”—or the encompassing category, “music”—as part of an even larger aggregate: _that which forms and recedes._

—Note by Vijay Iyer

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**SALON SERIES**

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**Wed Feb 5 | 6:30pm**
Edward Simon, piano; Hrabba Atladottir, violin and Eric Gaenslen, cello

**Wed Feb 26 | 6:30pm**
Edward Simon, piano

**Wed Apr 15 | 6:30pm**
Edward Simon, piano and Marcos Granados, flute

All Salons at the Education Studio at the War Memorial Veterans Building