

# PROGRAMMA

Immigratie en Interactie in Cross-cultureel Amerika  
Samengesteld door Joel Sachs, New York

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Marnixzaal, Domplein 4, Utrecht  
Zondagavond 16 maart 2025, 19:30 uur

Joel Sachs, piano  
Elisabeth Perry, viool  
Richard Wolfe, altviool  
Matthias Naegele, cello  
Nancy Braithwaite, klarinet

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Splendor, Nieuwe Uilenburgerstraat 116,  
Amsterdam  
Dinsdagavond 18 maart 2025, 20:00 uur

Henry Cowell (VS, 1897-1965)

Homage to Iran, voor violin, zarb, en piano (1957)  
Andante rubato  
Interlude – Presto  
Andante rubato  
Con spirito

Chou Wen-chung (China/VS, 1923-2019)

The Willows are New (1957) voor piano solo

Chen Yi (China/VS, 1953)

Monolog (1993) voor klarinet solo

Chinary Ung (Cambodia/ VS, 1942)

Khse Buon (1980) voor cello solo  
In een deel

Roberto Sierra (Puerto Rico [VS], 1953)

Six Intervening Periods of Time, voor klarinet,  
altviool en piano (2019)  
Rápido  
Lento  
Veloz  
Preciso  
Moderado  
Furioso  
Eerste openbare uitvoeringen

PAUZE

Stefan Wolpe (Germany/Palestine/VS, 1902-1972)

Second Piece for Violin Alone (1966)  
[Geautoriseerde transcriptie voor altviool door Peter  
A. Perrin]  
In een deel

Oleg Felzer: (Azerbeidzjan/VS) (1939-1998)

Vestige, voor viool, klarinet en piano (1993)  
In een deel  
Nederlandse première

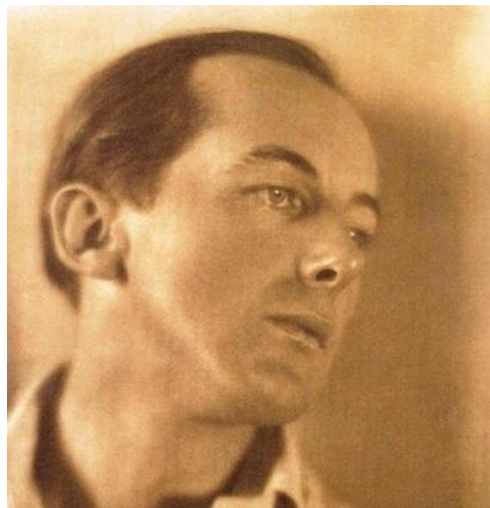
Charles Ives (VS, 1874-1954)

Trio voor viool, cello en piano (1904-11)  
Moderato  
TSIAJ  
Moderato con moto

# PROGRAM NOTES BY JOEL SACHS

When my long-time friend Elisabeth Perry, a Juilliard alumna, invited me to curate a program of American music for the Rietveld Ensemble, I proposed that it have a theme. I immediately thought it could combine outstanding compositions that demonstrate the multi-cultural basis of the arts in the United States. While most of the composers heard tonight emigrated to America, two of them, native born, pioneered the concept of looking beyond the European roots of “classical” music. It was an idea fostered by Antonin Dvorak during his stay in New York, but Henry Cowell and Charles Ives took it far beyond what Dvorak could have imagined.

**Henry Cowell (b. Menlo Park, California, 1897 -- d. New York City, 1965)**



No novelist could have invented Henry Cowell! Born to a mother who was a brilliant philosophical-anarchist writer, and an Irish born poet-father in Menlo Park, California, he was home-schooled; discovered and nurtured by Stanford professors who proclaimed him a genius, and, aided by other remarkable friends, financed his education. Although he had only a third-grade diploma from a rural midwestern primary school, he began studying with Charles Seeger at the University of California, Berkeley. Playing his own piano music, he quickly achieved international notoriety as an “ultra-modernist” inventor of unconventional techniques, including playing huge “tone clusters” with his forearms, palms, or fists; or plucking and strumming the piano strings, often to characterize Irish mythological tales. For years he toured the United States, and Europe; phenomenal press coverage, often hilariously negative, made him an international icon. In 1929 he was the first American composer-performer invited to play in the Soviet Union, alas just as freedom of thought was about to perish. When the Depression put a sudden end to his career, he eked out a living teaching. His early students included the young John Cage, Lou Harrison, and many famous

dancers. Determined to help other composers, he founded the New Music Society of California, which published *New Music Quarterly*, a journal of scores by modernists that was underwritten by Charles Ives. When electrical recording became available, they started a label for living composers. Cowell also helped establish the Pan-American Association of Composers to promote the exchange of music between the Americas.

For many years he divided his time between New York and California, tirelessly active in both new-music worlds. After 1940 he settled in New York, teaching at the New School and Columbia University. He composed constantly -- his catalog includes 952 entries. Although best remembered for his early piano music, he also wrote for a huge variety of ensembles and voices, eventually becoming one of the most-performed American symphonic composers. His music was always changing -- he did not believe a composer should aim for a single, recognizable style, since every composition poses new challenges.

Already in the 1920s Cowell became convinced that for composers and listeners, the way out of the “box” of European music lay in knowing the music of other cultures. Setting out to broaden horizons, he presented what were almost certainly the first public performances in New York of Asian music played by Asian performers whom he located in the city. Needing to support himself during the Depression, he won a prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship to study at the enormous collection of recorded non-western music in Berlin. It immediately began to alter his own compositions. Soon Cowell became the first to explore chance music, though his student Cage made it famous; he was one of the first to incorporate the aesthetics, musical structures, and instruments of Asian music. From extreme modernism to broadly-defined post-modernism -- it is all in his music.

### “Homage to Iran” (1957)

Restored to his throne, the Shah of Iran found that many Iranians, especially the non-Persian, Arabic-speakers in the northwest, preferred listening to music (and propaganda) broadcasts from Soviet Azerbaijan rather than the official radio station of his imperium. Concerned, he asked the US State Department to send a specialist to Teheran to upgrade the quality of music broadcasts, since music brought listeners. Cowell was the right person. He knew non-western music well and had worked in the Office of Strategic Services during World War II, using his extensive knowledge of world music to design broadcasting that would attract listeners in Europe and Asia so that the propaganda and spymasters could work effectively. He accepted at once.

That gave him and his wife, a professional folklorist, the idea of linking the Teheran engagement to further travels so they could finally visit the home of so much music that they loved. One of the pieces that emerged was his Symphony No. 13, the first Western orchestra piece with a non-Western soloist, a tablas player. But one piece on a smaller scale, “Homage to Iran,” was written while they were in Iran. (The Edition Peters publication includes a photo of the Shah listening to a concert where it was played.) As became customary for Cowell, he was not interested in incorporating traditional melodies, but in constructing a Western composer’s view of the materials of another culture. Meeting it in the middle, as his friend Chou Wen-chung would say. (See our note on Chou.) And so the four movements of “Homage to Iran” are derived from traditional Persian scales and rhythmic constructs. The form is “co-derived” from the Iranian and Western traditions of rhapsodic introductions (movements 1 and 3) to virtuosic display or dance-like pieces (movements 2 and 4).

But Cowell’s true vision was sabotaged by Edition Peters, which said the piece had to be playable by Western performers or they could not sell it. His original plan was altered significantly, something I only learned from Mrs. Cowell. In the publication the two fast movements are correctly scored for violin and piano, and for the slow movements the pianist mutes some strings with the left-hand fingertips while using the right hand to execute a written part simulating the drumming. But Cowell

had wanted the two slow movements to be scored for violin and zarb (or tombak, as it is also known), with no written part. The drummer would improvise in Persian style. Interestingly, in the photo of the Teheran performance, no drummer can be seen. The publisher would have to have cropped the photo to fit it in, but that may have conveniently cropped out the drummer!

In 1991 my professional group Continuum was engaged for a multi-cultural festival at Brighton, England. Needing another piece for at least three players, I located a superb Persian drummer living in New York and spent nearly a year learning to play the zarb. Of course, it is a pittance compared with the time a traditional player invests, but my teacher encouraged me because, he said, when traditional players began, they knew nothing about music. He felt I had a leg up as a trained musician. I certainly had no pretensions about being a proper zarbist, but my teach got me an instrument, built by an Iranian-born housebuilder in New Jersey who also built instruments. And so the performance took place. We later recorded it.



Many years ago, Elisabeth Perry had played “Homage to Iran” with me in the published version, before I studied zarb. Last summer, when she told me that she would be in New York, we decided to rehearse so she could get a sense of playing with the drum.

It did not take long to convince her that Cowell’s idea had been brilliant. But security issues resulting from the World Trade Center attack have precluded bringing my zarb on a plane. I therefore proposed that if she could locate a zarb in Holland, we do it. I am extremely grateful for her work in locating an instrument in Amsterdam. In my earlier performances, however, my Continuum partner Cheryl Seltzer played the piano parts and I improvised a zarb part for the fourth movement. I regret that that is not possible tonight, but you might imagine how wonderful that would sound.

[Joel Sachs’s biography of Henry Cowell was published by Oxford University Press in 2012 and updated in a paperback edition in 2015.]

**Chou Wen-chung (b. Yantai, China, 1923 -- d. New York City, 2019)**



Tonight we celebrate the first Chinese-born composer whose work has been influential worldwide, Chou Wen-chung – composer, mentor, academic diplomat, gentleman, and a good friend to countless performers, composers, and scholars.

Chou Wen-chung came to the United States in 1946, leaving behind the horrors of World War II. Although he had a fellowship to study architecture, he promptly discarded it and devoted himself to music, studying in Boston with Nicholas Slonimsky and then, in New York, becoming one of Edgard Varèse's few students. From 1952 to 1954 he pursued graduate studies at Columbia University under Otto Luening, serving as his assistant and helping him establish the historic Electronic Music Center. He then began a decades-long career teaching composition at Columbia; later, as the program's chairman, he developed its international renown. Beginning in 1975, as an administrator of Columbia's then-new School of the Arts, he supervised the revision of its masters' curricula in film, theater, visual arts, and writing. A decade later, Chou established the Fritz Reiner Center for Contemporary Music at Columbia to foster new-music performance and encourage young composers. He also revitalized the Electronic Music Center, converting it to the present Computer Music Center. Perhaps his most far-reaching project was the Center for United States-China Arts Exchange, which he founded in 1978, also at Columbia. It became an enormously important institution through its cultural projects in diverse fields throughout East and Southeast Asia.

Discovering many young Chinese talents, including Tan Dun, Chen Yi, Zhou Long, Bright Sheng, and Ye Xiaogang, Chou brought them to the United States for graduate studies. (To his disappointment, only two of them returned to China, where he had hoped they could propagate his ideas of cultural fusion.)

Chou Wen-chung remains indelibly associated with Edgard Varèse. When he was Varèse's private student, the French master, nearing the end of his life, was composing what were to be his final works, including *Déserts* (1949-1954), the manuscript of which is in Chou's hand. His decades-long task of editing and correcting Varèse's scores began under Varèse's supervision but was mostly undertaken after his death in 1965. Chou also completed two of his unfinished scores. Varèse's house in Greenwich Village became the Chou family's residence.

Most of Chou's music dates from before he became an administrator at Columbia. During his seventeen years (1969-86) directing the department he did no composing. Then, at age 63, he entered a creative rebirth, completing his last composition in 2012, when he was 89. Although almost all his music is rooted in Chinese culture and Chinese traditional music, in varying proportions, his last compositions, a series called "Eternal Pine," was inspired by Korean traditional music. It began in 2008 with *Eternal Pine* (for Korean traditional instruments), continuing with *Ode to Eternal Pine* (2009), for western instruments, and *Sizhu Eternal Pine* (2012), for Chinese traditional instruments). As always, he utilized a variety of complex interrelationships between Asian and Western music, some of which are readily sensed, others of which are more structural.

Chou Wen-chung's life and music is a model for what can be accomplished at the intersection of cultures by bringing them together so that they can mutually inform one another.

### “The Willows Are New” (1957)

“The Willows Are New” is Chou’s only solo piano piece; was first performed in 1958, at radio station WNYC, a time when that city-owned station abounded in live music. In it an ancient piece for *ch’in* [a zither-like instrument] bearing the name of the poem by Wang Wei (689-759) has been refashioned into a composition in which “mutations of the original material are woven over the entire range of the piano and embroidered with sonorities that are the magnified reflexes of brushstroke-like movements” with which the poem was written.

The piece is very unusual for its time. In an era when complexity in both modernist music and neo-traditional piano music was commonplace, Chou found a unique approach to the piano by stripping away anything not related to the melody’s ancient model. Harmony is gone; a single-line melody, derived from the ancient solo *ch-in* piece, is supported by doublings of the tune in all ranges of the piano. To these, he added

dissonant tones that evoke the timbre of the *ch-in*, whose players used a gigantic range of techniques to subtly embellish the notes. Chou said that by following all the dynamics and small tempo changes, the nature of *ch-in* music will become apparent. Yet mechanically following those changes is not possible; the ongoing variations of inflection challenge the pianist to uncover the many ways in which the ancient spirit of the music can be brought to life. [Based on a program note by Chou Wen-chung with additions by Joel Sachs’]

The title comes from a line of the poem, which Chou translated as follows: In this town by the river, morning rain has cleared the light dust. Green, green around the tavern, the willows are new. \*Let us empty another cup of wine. For, once west of Yang Kuan\*\* there will be no more friends.

\*Sprigs of willow, used in farewell ceremonies, are a symbol of parting.

\*\*Yang Kuan is a mountain pass, known as the point of no return for a traveler.

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### Chen Yi: (b. Guangzhou, China, 1953)



Chen Yi writes:

*I was born into a family of doctors with a strong interest in music, in Guangzhou, China. I began violin and piano studies at the age of three (with standard repertoire of Western music). In 1966, when I was 13, the Great Cultural Revolution overtook China, making the study of Western music impossible. I tried hard to continue on my own, practicing violin at home (with the mute attached). When I was sent into the countryside for two years of forced labor I took my instrument along. A positive aspect of this experience was the knowledge I gained of the wider life and music of my motherland and its people. Returning to my home city, I served as concertmaster and composer with the Beijing Opera troupe and began my research of Chinese traditional music and Western music theory. When the revolution ended with Mao’s death in 1976 and, the following year, the*

*school system was restored, I enrolled in the Beijing Central Conservatory to study systematically composition, music theory, and Chinese traditional music. Besides getting to know folk songs, local operas, musical story-telling in various dialects from various provinces, and traditional instrumental music (solo instruments and ensembles), we had field trips every school year to collect folk music and learn about primitive peoples’ customs and temperaments.*

*When the ‘open’ policy was undertaken in China in the early 80s, I was among the first group of young composers who had grown up during the cultural revolution and emerged after the dark period to gain inspiration from what we consider original traditional elements and the Chinese way of thinking, to study new techniques and explore new languages in our compositions -- a break-through against the aesthetic principles and compositional style of the old generations, which basically had combined pentatonic tunes with their development based on the theoretical system borrowed from European classical music.*

In 1986 Ms. Chen was among a group of gifted young Chinese composers brought to the United States by Chou Wen-chung – see the note about him – and enrolled in the graduate program at Columbia University, where in 1993 she received



the Doctoral of Musical Arts degree with distinction as a pupil of Chou Wen-chung and Mario Davidovsky. After teaching composition at the Peabody Conservatory of Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore (1996–98) she joined the Conservatory of Music and Dance in the University of Missouri-Kansas City, where she rose to become Distinguished Professor. She has also been Distinguished Visiting Professor in China since 2006. She was elected to the American Academy of Arts & Sciences in 2005, and the American Academy of Arts & Letters in 2019. The list of her

commissions and awards is far too long to reproduce here. Suffice it to say that she has a vast number of awards and received honorary doctorates from six universities. Her music is published by Theodore Presser Company, performed worldwide, and has been recorded for more than 100 CDs. In recent years almost every season has seen the premier of a major new work. Dr. Chen husband is composer Zhou Long, a fellow student in China, an exact contemporary, and a life-long colleague at the University of Missouri.

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### **“Monolog” (Impressions on the True Story of Ah Q) (1993)**

Chen wrote “Monolog” as she was completing her doctorate. In the score she said, “It has been strongly haunting me for a long time to think about ignorance and civilization, lowliness, and pride. This piece for solo clarinet was inspired by ‘The Biography of Ah Q,’ by Lu Xun, China’s best-known 20th-century author of essays and short stories, through which he called upon the Chinese people to rise and give battle to feudalism.” She expressed her gratitude to Inter-Artes, a London group, for commissioning the piece “and for offering me an

opportunity to listen to my heart through my own musical monologue.” It was premiered the piece at an Inter-Artes concert entitled “The World of Lu Xun,” in Birmingham, England.

*Chen Yi, An Accessible Guide to the Composer’s Background and Her Works*, by Leta E. Miller and J. Michele Edwards, was published by University of Illinois Press, 2020. Dr. Chen’s statements have been edited lightly by Joel Sachs.

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### **Chinary Ung (b. Krang Duon Kaev, Cambodia, 1942)**



Chinary Ung did not hear Western classical music until his late teens, when his French teacher loaned him some recordings. When Cambodia's first music conservatory opened in 1960, Ung was an early student, studying E-flat clarinet because it was the only instrument available. At 22, after graduating from the University of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh, he came to New York in 1964, receiving the BM and MM degrees at the Manhattan School as a clarinetist, and the DMA in composition at Columbia University, where his principal teacher was Chou Wen-chung. He taught at several American schools before being engaged as professor of music at the University of California, San Diego. Yet as positive as was his career, the late 1970s were horrifying for anyone

with an interest in Cambodia. In 1975 a revolutionary faction called the Khmer Rouge overthrew the Cambodian king and began the slaughter of the Cambodian middle class and intellectuals by the country’s new homicidal rulers. That era ended in 1979 when the Vietnamese army invaded and defeated them. From 1974, with one exception, Ung composed nothing, only resuming in 1985. What Ung did during this hiatus had a profound effect on all his subsequent work.

Retaining a strong interest in his culture, Ung has served as president of the nationwide Khmer (Cambodian) Studies Institute and written and lectured extensively on Khmer music and other Asian topics in the United States, Europe, and Asia. He performs on the RoneatEk (Cambodian xylophone) and compiled two volumes of Cambodian traditional music for Folkways Records. After the defeat of the Cambodian government he roared back to composing, producing orchestral, solo, and chamber works, many of which have been recorded, and which are published by Edition Peters. Of his long list of awards, perhaps the most impressive is the \$150,000 Grawemeyer Award; he was the youngest composer and the first American to receive that prize.

East-West connections have been powerful for Ung, who followed in Chou Wen-chung's footsteps. Over the years he has undergone noteworthy changes of attitude, progressing from using quotations of melodies of Cambodian origin alongside melodies freely invented and bearing the stamp of Cambodian dance, to material that is entirely new. Understandably, he prefers not to let this issue deflect listeners and commentators from

the music itself. While his attitude toward fusion of cultures will doubtless continue to evolve, his music will continue to express the fundamental truth that one draws, consciously or not, upon all of one's experience, which in his case, spans the globe. Like his teacher and role model Chou Wen-chung, he has found many musical paths to his goal.

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### **"Khse Buon" (1980)**

"Khse Buon" reveals the new outlook that the composer had developed over the decade after his studies. Expansiveness has replaced sparseness; an extraordinary expressiveness prevails. The title is taken from Khmer words meaning "strings four," referring to the strings of the cello. Direct and indirect references to Eastern music abound from the very opening, which evokes India's *sarangi* (a bowed instrument). To many listener the temporal spaciousness also evokes the music of the East. "Khse Buon" powerfully reflects Ung's exploration of the transfer of Asian techniques to Western instruments, utilizing the vast resources of the cello to conjure up characteristically Asian string sounds including as microtonal intervals and "bent" tones and *pizzicato* tones whose pitch is altered after plucking, which is common to many Asian instruments including the Japanese koto. Compared with a typical Western solo composition of this length, the pitch material is very concise, with pentatonic thematic germs recalling Eastern melodic styles. While he avoids intentionally

quoting Asian melodies, he allows that Asian ideas may have entered the piece subconsciously. The rhythmic vocabulary blends the Western concept of precise notation with the Eastern improvisatory tradition. Such a mixture was suggested, however, by the composer's work with an improvising group at Northern Illinois University while teaching there. The shape of "Khse Buon" is probably best described as a fantasia, whose subsections are recognizable because of the internal consistency of tone colors, energy levels, and thematic material. In later explaining his compositional voice he asks the listener to imagine Western cultural elements as blue watercolor and Eastern elements as yellow watercolor. As one drips the yellow into the blue, what emerges is green. Seeking different shades of green interests him.

*Khse Buon* was commissioned by Marc Johnson, of the Vermeer Quartet, and premiered by him in 1980. Susan Ung, the composer's wife, prepared a version for viola.

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### **Roberto Sierra (b. Vega Baja, Puerto Rico, 1953)**

I am particularly delighted to include a piece by Roberto Sierra, a composer whom I have known since 1983 and with whom I have collaborated constantly.



Roberto Sierra studied composition in Puerto Rico and Hamburg (with György Ligeti), and electronic music in London and Utrecht. After returning to San Juan, he was rector of the National Conservatory until a residency with the Milwaukee Symphony launched his larger career. Since then Sierra's music is regularly played by major orchestras; his "Fandangos" won a prestigious

place on the BBC Symphony's opening night of the 2002 BBC Proms and has had many recent performances by Gustavo Dudamel. Principally published by Subito and recorded frequently, Sierra has received two Grammy and two Latin Grammy nominations. Recent projects include a commission by the BravoVail festival for the Dallas Symphony and *Concierto Virtual*, for automated piano without pianist, which was composed for Joel Sachs and his New Juilliard Ensemble and premiered in 2017. Sierra's *Sinfonia No. 6* was premiered the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, which commissioned it jointly with the Boston Symphony Orchestra; a Violin Concerto commissioned by the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra was premiered in 2022. After many years as professor of composition at Cornell University, New York State,

Roberto Sierra recently retired and is spending his time, as expected, composing. Among his long-term projects is a series of piano sonatas, the nineteenth of which was written for Joel Sachs, who will premiere it in May in New York.

Sierra's studies in Europe convinced him that he needed to ensure the future of the Afro-Caribbean tradition in Puerto Rico. His music has evolved into a fascinating mixture of compositions draw upon

Puerto Rican popular and folkloric rhythms and modes, as well as non-folkloric materials and complex compositional methods. Sometimes folkloric ideas are hidden in the underbrush, as it were. And the impact of his studies of this music impact reached beyond his own style: György Ligeti frequently stated that what he learned about Afro-Caribbean drumming from Roberto revolutionized his own style.

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### "Six Intervening Periods of Time" (2019)

Sierra writes, "Is music marking time, going along with the clock, or is it transforming it, creating new regions of temporal space? The philosopher Philip Alperson has written, 'On the one hand, it has often been claimed, especially since Kant, that music is an art of time, if not the art of time. On the other hand, it has been claimed that music has what has often been called 'musical time', which is somehow to be distinguished from some other kind or kinds of time.' These questions, central to my compositional outlook during the last decade, sparked the idea for these miniatures. While musical materials unite each intervening moment,

their moods and gestures separate them. As a single nine-note scale and its manifold pitch combinations are recycled throughout the whole group, the outer elements of each miniature change their temporality and the perception of the work's singular and unifying pitch structure. As all these elements 'play out in time, they also 'play with time.'"

This work was first performed by The Israel Music Project. Continuum has recorded it on a new all-Sierra CD to be released in April by Naxos.

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### Oleg Felzer (b. Baku, Azerbaijan, 1939; d. New York, 1998),



The Republics of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia were originally regions south of the Caucasus Mountains dominated by distinctive ethnic groups, each with its own languages and traditions. Conquered by the Russian Empire, they later were incorporated into the Soviet Union. There, in the interests of national unification (and repression of opposition) traditional cultures were buried and replaced by Western-style arts, often complete with an orchestra, an opera house, and a conservatory. Simultaneously, ethnic music was "Russified" – harmonized and diluted into an exotic form of Western music. Because studying the authentic art forms was considered anything from unpatriotic to treasonous, traditional ethnic music sank into obscurity and public tastes were pushed toward Western models. Yet even before the

dissolution of the Soviet Union, the study of the ancient arts gradually resumed, camouflaged by the immensity of the country.

Azerbaijan has always been the most prosperous Caucasus republic thanks to its enormous reserves of oil and gas. Even during the Soviet period, it produced some accomplished Western-style musicians including Shostakovich's pupil Kara Karayev (1918-1982). His teaching mantle was inherited by his former student Oleg Felzer (*in the middle in the picture*), who graduated from the Baku State Conservatory and the Leningrad Conservatory, having originally earned an engineering degree. After teaching at the Moscow Conservatory, Felzer became professor of composition and music theory at the Baku Conservatory and founded and conducted a chamber orchestra that made him a major figure in Azerbaijan's musical world. In 1988, as the USSR was collapsing, he and his family emigrated to New York, where he lovingly directed the choir at an African-American church in Brooklyn until his untimely death from cancer.

Felzer's prospects as composer seemed to improve when *Vestige* – commissioned by Continuum, my contemporary ensemble -- won the Stoecker Prize of the Lincoln Center Chamber Music Society.



(Felzer, who certainly needed the money, turned it over to a friend and colleague in Baku who had to choose between repaying money to Russian mobsters or risking the murder of his children.) Despite performances in the US, Europe, the former USSR, and South America, by Continuum, the Gregg Smith Singers, the Nieuw Ensemble (Amsterdam), and others, Felzer's music remains little known in the West and difficult to obtain because he could not find a publisher to replace the defunct Soviet state publisher of his earlier works. He wrote solo pieces, chamber music, song,

choral music, and for chamber orchestra. His single theatrical composition, a musical, that was staged in Belarus. In Azerbaijan, he is lovingly remembered as a composer, teacher, and mentor by his students and colleagues, who include Franghiz Ali-Zadeh and Kara Karayev's son Faradz, both composers of international stature. Continuum's CD of his music was released by TNC. His music now is housed at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. It is a pity that he died at 59; he was just beginning to become known.

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### "Vestige" (1993)

One of Felzer's great contributions to music in Azerbaijan was to courageously study the unwritten traditional professional music of the Azeris, even when its study was banned by the Soviets. (He carefully distinguished between folk music and traditional professional music.) Ms. Ali-Zadeh is a perfect example of how he transmitted his new-found knowledge to some of his students. Called Mugham, it employs instruments and voice, celebrating all manner of passions, in an elaborate

improvised style in which the musicians gradually expand tiny musical cells into expansive structures. Finding the procedures remarkably compatible with concepts of development found in Western modernists such as Anton Webern helped Felzer to uncover his own voice. In *Vestige* Felzer used modal and rhythmic figures from Mugham, neatly fusing their freely unfolding development with recent trends in Western modernism.

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### Stefan Wolpe (b. Berlin 1902; d. New York City, 1972)



Berlin-born Stefan Wolpe responded to a seemingly infinite variety of artistic and cultural stimuli. The mature style that evolved after he settled in the United States (1938) rested on a wealth of experiences during his youth in Germany: studies with the uniquely imaginative Ferruccio Busoni; involvement with the artists of the Weimar years - Bauhaus, Dada, jazz, German cabaret theater -- and the socialist movement in Berlin (for which he wrote numerous simple workers' songs), consultations with Anton Webern

in Vienna, and contact with Middle Eastern styles as an emigrant to Palestine in the 1930s. In America from 1938, Wolpe was esteemed as a teacher of adventurous, serious young composers, as well as attracting an evergrowing circle of young performers -- especially jazz players -- who were willing to confront the novel but extremely rewarding challenges of his music. He spent his last years in New York, where, after an apparently losing battle with Parkinson's disease, a new treatment -- the pilot project of L-Dopa -- brought him sufficient relief to allow him to compose some of his finest music.

Wolpe's later style is related to the sparse, angular post-Webern idiom of post-World War II Europe and America. However, a basic musical simplicity always underlays his complex rhythms, textures, and compositional architecture. Furthermore, although he is seen as a descendant of Schoenberg and Webern, he had an unusual vision of musical space, which he served with a highly personal adaptation of the 12Tone method. Unlike the "classical" serial composer, who orders pitches or intervals in a predetermined sequence (the "series" or "row"), Wolpe liked to use small groups of pitches, constantly reshaping and recombining them throughout the gigantic range of the instrument in a kaleidoscopic fashion. Each musical

gesture embodied, to him, a poetic image in sound. The simple and the complex, the sustained and the energetic, the expansive and the compressed all interact, conflict, and transform one another, in a manner that although exactly organized, communicates the atmosphere of a monumental improvisation.

In this context the years he spent in Palestine may have been decisive. The obvious fruit of that period has seemed to have been vocal music, some in Hebrew, based on the style of Zionist workers' songs or spiritual songs. But Wolpe eagerly familiarized himself with the traditional music of the many ethnic groups who had settled along the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, which included Mugham, a style of traditional professional music shared by many Turkic groups in West Asia. As Oleg Felzer – see the next note --

found, the procedure of how the musicians expanded little cells of pitches proved to be a meeting point between East and West. This is amply illustrated by my first conversation with Wolpe, in 1968, when the remission of Parkinson's brought about by L-Dopa also restarted his power of speech. Lying on his hospital bed, he asked if I composed. I replied that I had done when I was young but never had good teaching and lost the urge. Although I was thinking of starting again, I added, I didn't know where to begin. He replied that I should try an exercise: "Pick three pitches. It doesn't matter which ones. Write as many variations as you can – change their registers, order, rhythm, etc. When you can't think of anything else, add a fourth pitch and see what happens." I was stunned! That, I thought, was genius! Later I understood why do many jazz composers wanted to study with him.

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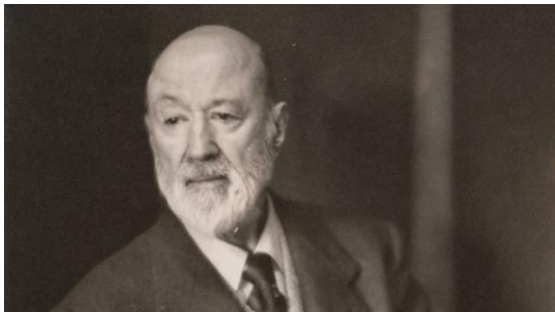
### **"Second Piece for Violin Alone" (1966)**

The ramifications for his own music can be heard in *Second Piece for Violin Alone*, written just before the worst days of his illness. One readily hears how he used small cells and contrasting energies, in a

language of simplification and clarity consistent with all his later music. It is played today in the authorized transposition for viola.

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### **Charles Ives (b. Danbury, Connecticut, 1874 - New York, 1954)**



Charles Ives, the greatest American composer of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, was born in Danbury, Connecticut, a manufacturing town dominated by the Ives clan. His unconventional father had rejected the business world and became a professional musician with a remarkably experimental mind and ferocious self-discipline, a great role model for his son. Alas, when Charles was twenty and away at Yale College, his father's sudden death deprived him of the only person sympathetic to his music. Horatio Parker, his very conventional teacher at Yale, found his music insufferable. Soon Ives recognized that earning a living in music required compromising his musical vision. Hoping to serve vast numbers of people, he was drawn to the insurance industry, where he achieved financial success and wide admiration,

which his employees attributed to an unflinching understanding of human nature. But grueling days in the office and long nights spent composing led to a massive heart attack in 1918. Weakened, he resumed his activities until 1926, when he said he could no longer compose and soon retired from his company. Apart from his wife Harmony, Ives was almost completely isolated musically; most people dismissed his music as amateurish. He spent his time revising his scores and sketching a "Universe" symphony but never completed another piece. The story might have ended then, but around 1926 he learned about Henry Cowell's *New Music Quarterly* and committed to subsidizing it. Cowell, in return, persuaded Ives to permit him to publish some of his music, thereby making *New Music Quarterly* his first outlet to the world. Gradually the word spread. In the late 1930s John Kirkpatrick began playing the complete second piano sonata, subtitled "Concord Mass. 1840-1860" Sonata, and in 1946, Lou Harrison conducted the premiere of his Third Symphony. Although Ives declined to attend for fear of being laughed at, the performance led to a Pulitzer Prize. The musical world was awakening to his significance just as Ives died in 1954.

A true visionary, Ives shared the Transcendentalists' reverence for the beauty and power of the individual, and their faith in the oneness of humanity and nature. Detesting the stale traditions that dominated the musical world, he dismissed "rules" unless they facilitated creativity. In this spirit he constantly found new compositional methods that anticipated the thinking of generations to come. He drew inspiration from ordinary mortals at worship, singing roughly and out of tune but from the soul.

That love of spontaneous, untrained creativity led him to unprecedented feats of compositional virtuosity. Why should composed music be tyrannized by the conventions of having one key, one tempo, or one conductor at a time? He quoted popular and church music not to make the listener feel comfortable, but because they were in his bloodstream thanks to his father's wind band and his own history as a church organist. In all this he was a pioneer in crossing the barriers between "high culture" and "low culture."

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### **Trio for Violin, Cello, and Piano (ca. 1909-10, rev. ca. 1914-15)**

In the *Trio for Violin, Cello, and Piano* (1904-1911), one of his grandest compositions, Ives employs to the maximum the advanced structural concepts for which he is now famous: dissonant polyphony, polytonality, invocations of well-known American tunes, and the use of different tempos simultaneously to create the effect of music coming from many distances and many directions. The daunting challenges of the *Trio* partly explain why it was not publicly performed until 1948. At that time, Ives offered the following description:

*The Trio was, in a general way, a reflection or impression of college days on the [Yale] Campus, now 50 years ago. The 1st movement recalled a rather short but serious talk, to those on the Yale fence, by an old professor of philosophy; the 2nd, the games and antics by the students on a holiday afternoon and some of the tunes and songs of those days were suggested in this movement, sometimes in a rough way. The last movement was partly a remembrance of a Sunday service on the Campus which ended near the 'Rock of Ages.' It was composed mostly in 1904 but fully completed in 1911; it was [played] in a private concert in N.Y. some 30 years ago. The TSIAJ over the 2nd movement is hardly anything but a poor joke.*

John Kirkpatrick, editor of Ives' autobiographical *Memos*, adds, "The professor of philosophy must be George Trumbull Ladd (1842-1921); sitting on

the Yale fence was a privilege of sophomores, juniors, and seniors. 'TSIAJ' is a cryptogram for 'this scherzo is a joke'. The third movement is largely adapted from "The All Enduring," a unison song Ives wrote for the Yale Glee Club 'but they wouldn't sing it'. The collage style of the second movement, like so many of Ives' ideas, came from life itself: it was how an alert person would hear the tumult of life on a holiday. Ives had begun developing the style early:

*While in college, some things were written and played by the Hyperion Theater Orchestra, New Haven, some short overtures and marches, some brass band pieces, and some short orchestra pieces. Some had old tunes, college songs, hymns, etc., sometimes putting these themes or songs together in two or three differently keyed counterpoints (not exactly planned so but just played so) and sometimes two or three different kinds of time and key and offtunes, played sometimes impromptu. For instance, a kind of shuffledancemarch (last century rag) was played on the piano the violin, cornet, and clarinet taking turns in playing sometimes old songs, sometimes the popular tunes of the day. "After the Ball," football songs, Tararaboomdeay ... The pianist (who was I, sometimes) played his part regardless of the offkeys and the offcounterpoints, but giving the cue for the impromptu counterpoint parts etc.*

# BIOGRAFIEËN



**Joel Sachs** voert een breed scala aan traditionele en hedendaagse muziek uit als dirigent en pianist. Als co-directeur van Continuum en als uitgenodigde gastdirigent heeft hij opgetreden in honderden concerten in de Amerika's en op het Euraziatische continent, van Engeland tot Japan, Korea, China en Indonesië. Hoewel hij vooral bekend is om zijn werk in de muziek van de 20e en 21e eeuw, hebben zowel Brahms' Pianoconcert nr. 2 als Rachmaninoffs Pianoconcert nr. 3 de laatste jaren hun weg naar zijn repertoire gevonden, evenals de eerste pianosonate van Charles Ives, die hij regelmatig internationaal speelt.

Als een van de meest actieve promotors van hedendaagse componisten in New York richtte Sachs in 1993 het New Juilliard Ensemble op, dat hij dirigeerde en leidde tot zijn pensionering in

2022. Het ensemble groeide uit tot een van de meest actieve in zijn soort in de Verenigde Staten en voerde honderden première's uit. Daarnaast produceerde en leidde hij Juilliards jaarlijkse Focus! Festival voor post-traditionele muziek van 1985 tot 2022 en was hij artistiek directeur van Juilliards zomerconcerten in het Museum of Modern Art van 1993 tot aan de pandemie. Door deze activiteiten kwam hij in nauw contact met componisten van over de hele wereld.

Als lid van de Juilliard-faculteit gedurende 52 jaar schreef hij biografieën over J.N. Hummel – Beethovens voornaamste rivaal – en over de Amerikaanse componist Henry Cowell (Oxford UP, 2012), evenals artikelen over uiteenlopende onderwerpen, van het muzikauteursrecht in de vroege 19e eeuw tot muziek in de USSR en nazi-Duitsland. Als veelgevraagd pleitbezorger van recente muziek was hij studiogast en uitvoerend muzikant in de Composer of the Week-serie van BBC Radio 3, waarin vijf afleveringen van een uur gewijd werden aan Cowell. Hij ontving de Alice M. Ditson Award van Columbia University voor zijn verdiensten als dirigent voor de Amerikaanse muziek, werd als erelid opgenomen in Phi Beta Kappa aan Harvard voor zijn inzet voor nieuwe muziek, en werd onderscheiden met de Gloria Artis-medaille van de Poolse regering voor zijn bijdrage aan de Poolse muziek.

Hij is nu emeritus hoogleraar muziek aan The Juilliard School.



**Violiste Elisabeth Perry** was een van de eerste leerlingen op de Yehudi Menuhin School en speelde samen met hem toen zij veertien was in de Royal Albert Hall. Na verdere studies in New York aan de Juilliard School of Music bouwde zij een reputatie op voor haar veelzijdigheid ook in de rol van solist en concertmeester. Zij speelt ook veel kamermuziek o.a. met pianist Melvyn Tan, en recitals met Toru Oyama. Met het Rietveld Ensemble heeft zij een serie in Utrecht. Zij was concertmeester van het Radio Filharmonisch Orkest.



**Altviolinist Richard Wolfe** werd geboren in New York City. Hij studeerde viool bij Mara Sebriansky en Dorothy DeLay. Later studeerde hij bij Walter Levin aan het College-Conservatory of Music in Cincinnati, Ohio en verhuisde hij naar Israel. Hier speelde hij eerste viool in het Israel Kamermuziek Orkest en in de bijbehorende kamermuziek ensembles binnen dit orkest. In 1982 verhuisde Richard naar Nederland en kreeg twee jaar later een vaste aanstelling als solo altviolinist bij het Nederlands Philharmonisch Orkest/ Nederlands Kamerorkest, waar hij 35 jaar heeft gespeeld. Richard was als docent verbonden aan de conservatoria van Amsterdam en Utrecht, en speelt daarnaast met verschillende ensembles, één daarvan samen met Elisabeth Perry, Matthias Naegele en Nancy Braithwaite in het Rietveld Ensemble.



**Cellist Matthias Naegele** heeft zowel als solist en kamermusicus diverse keren opgetreden in Europa, Amerika, Mexico, Brazilië en Azië. Hij was te zien en horen op muziekfestivals als Marlboro, Apple Hill, Dubrovnick, Jerusalem, Curacao, California State Summer Arts, Aspen, International Musicians Seminar in Prussia Cove, en de Edinburgh Festivals. Veel van zijn concerten zijn uitgezonden op radio en tv zenders over de hele wereld. Op dit moment speelt Matthias met het Rietveld ensemble. Matthias speelt op een Mateo Gofriller cello, gemaakt in Venetië in 1735. Deze cello werd eerder bespeeld door Hermann Busch uit the Busch Quartet.



**Klarinettiste Nancy Braithwaite** studeerde af aan de Eastman School of Music (VS) met de hoogst mogelijke onderscheiding: het Performers Certificate. Op haar 23ste werd ze benoemd tot solo-klarinetiste van het Savannah Symphony Orchestra. Als soliste trad ze op met professionele Amerikaanse orkesten in concerten van Mozart, Weber, Rossini en Nielsen. Zij speelt in kamermuziek-ensembles, geeft recitals in binnen- en buitenland, heeft masterclasses en concerten gegeven in China, Zuid Korea en Spanje en is lid van de jury geweest van internationale klarinetconcoursen in Beijing en London. In 2018 kwam haar CD uit met werken van de Amerikaanse componiste Edith Hemenway. Nancy Braithwaite was 33 jaar verbonden aan het Rotterdams Conservatorium (Codarts) als hoofdvakdocent klarinet en docent kamermuziek. Zij bespeelt Uebel klarinetten en is daarnaast Silverstein Inspiring Pro Artist. In juni 2025 komt haar 2e CD uit met werken van Carlos Micháns, Edith Hemenway, Thomas Oboe Lee, Oane Wierdsma en Willem Wander van Nieuwkerk.



Dit project heeft financiering ontvangen via een subsidie van de Netherland-America Foundation.

Kamermuziek onder de Dom met het  
**Rietveld Ensemble**  
Zondag 16 maart 2025, 19:30

**“Immigratie en Interactie in Crosscultureel Amerika”**  
Samengesteld door Joel Sachs (New York)

Henry Cowell  
Chou Wen-chung  
Chinary Ung  
Chen Yi  
Roberto Sierra  
Stefan Wolpe  
Oleg Felzer  
Charles Ives



Marnixzaal  
Domplein 4  
Utrecht

Joel Sachs - piano  
Elisabeth Perry - viool  
Richard Wolfe - altviool  
Matthias Neegels - cello  
Nancy Brathwaite - klarinet

**naaf** The  
Netherland-  
America  
Foundation  
**BRIDGING WORLDS**

Dit project wordt mede mogelijk gemaakt door de Netherland-America Foundation.



Kosten: nu €25,- of van de voor €20,- met een kaartje  
€2,50 studenten & jongeren t.o.v.

Julija Hartig presenteert in Splendor het  
**Rietveld Ensemble**  
Splendor, Nieuwe Uilenburgerstraat 116, Amsterdam

Dinsdagavond  
18 maart 2025  
20 uur

Joel Sachs - piano  
Elisabeth Perry - viool  
Richard Wolfe - altviool  
Matthias Neegels - cello  
Nancy Brathwaite - klarinet

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Het volgende concert van het Rietveld Ensemble in Utrecht is op zondagavond 27 april om 19.30. Het Rietveld Ensemble speelt dan werken van Alexander Arutiunian, Natalie Hunt en Ernest Chausson met pianist Nicholas Harris.