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Conservatory

Concert Program

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Welcome to NEC!

I am thrilled to share New England Conservatory's 2024-25 concert season—a celebration of the power of music to connect and inspire one another.

Whether you are seated in one of our concert halls or watching online, we hope you are uplifted by the performances of our students, faculty, and guest artists.

Above all, we thank you for your support of our students as they cultivate their artistry and contribute to the world through music.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrea Kalyn". The signature is stylized and fluid, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Andrea Kalyn
President

NEC Festival

An Evening of Chamber Music

Curated by Sid Richardson

Friday, November 15, 2024
8:00 p.m.
NEC's Jordan Hall

NEC Festival 2024

This performance is part of the NEC Festival, which honors the legacy of John Heiss with a weeklong series of performances, discussions, and more. Taking place from November 10–17, the festival celebrates visionary American composers Charles Ives (1874–1954) and Ruth Crawford Seeger (1901–1953) — both recognized and often unheard.

Learn more about upcoming festival events at necmusic.edu/nec-festival-2024.

PROGRAM

Ruth Crawford Seeger
(1901–1953)

Chant, 1930 (1930)

Amy Li, soprano
NEC Chamber Singers
Erica J. Washburn, conductor

Kati Agócs
(b. 1975)

Sun and Shield (2024)
U.S. premiere

Melissa Reardon, viola

Charles Ives
(1874–1954)

Piano Trio (1911)

Moderato
TSIAJ (This scherzo is a joke): Presto
Moderato con moto

Trio Eris (NEC Piano Trio in Residence)
K. J. McDonald, violin
Annie Hyung, cello
Andrew Chen, piano

Intermission

Katherine Balch '13

(b. 1991)

different gravities (2023)

Agile, crisp
Fragile, sinking
Jittery, mechanical
Brisk, bells clanging

Trio Eris

Pozzi Escot

(b. 1933)

Jubilation (1991)

I.
II.
III.
IV.

Meraki String Quartet

Yixiang Wang, Lingyu Dong, violin

Joy Hsieh, viola

Kei Otake, cello

Charles Ives

Violin Sonata No. 3 (1914)

Adagio – Andante – Allegretto – Adagio

Allegro

Adagio cantabile

Donald Weilerstein, violin

Vivian Hornik Weilerstein, piano

Tonight's program focuses on the ongoing legacy of **Ruth Crawford Seeger** and **Charles Ives** at New England Conservatory. These visionaries have impacted us in myriad ways. For example, flute and composition faculty member John Heiss (1938-2023) taught an extremely popular course on Ives's music for decades that brought his unique insight into that idiosyncratic repertoire to generations of students. Ruth Crawford Seeger's ground-breaking approach to vocal and chamber music have resonated with contemporary composers of varying styles throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Her outsized impact on modernism in American concert music, as well as her voluminous work on American folk music, is perhaps only of late being fully grasped. The spirit of musical innovation embodied by these two luminaries is reflected in the music of the living NEC composers included on this program, Kati Agócs, Katherine Balch, and Pozzi Escot. Escot and Agócs are long-standing composition faculty members, and Balch is a graduate of the Tufts-NEC dual degree program who currently teaches at the Yale School of Music. Taken all together, these composers present a wide variety of intriguing chamber music styles that will be on full display in tonight's program. I would like to especially thank tonight's performers, whose artistry and dedication to this music is inspirational in its own right.

Ruth Crawford Seeger's *Chant, 1930* evidences the composer's interests in the clarity of melodic lines and linear musical organization, which developed out of her rigorous, collaborative study of ultra-modern music and composition with Charles Seeger in 1929 and early 1930. Through wordless vocalise, the composer focuses on the voice as instrument. The high voices of the ensemble project a flowing, duetting line that constantly varies the lengths of its phrases. Over this harmonic bed, the solo soprano floats above with an eerie melody activated by vowel experimentation. The lower voices of the ensemble move in counterpoint to the high voices, weaving undulating, hypnotic lines of their own. The soundworld is sonorous and haunting, which provides insight into its subtitle, "To an Angel." – Sid Richardson

Sun and Shield is a work for solo viola commissioned in 2023 as a companion work to my 2005 solo string piece *Versprechen* (Promise). Both pieces are structured as a single movement and deal with themes of faith, human vulnerability, and inner strength. The earlier work, *Versprechen*, is based on J.S. Bach's harmonization of the chorale tune "Ist gott mein Schild und Helfersmann" (God is my shield and helper). *Versprechen* subjects this borrowed material to serial processes akin to those Stravinsky used in his late period, generally referred to as "verticals" (for those familiar with 12-tone practices, the diagonal lines in of a matrix). The effect is as if one is hearing the material through an auditory prism. The tune goes through many transformations before it is finally stated explicitly at the end of the piece. *Sun and Shield* engages with similar themes and overall mood, but it contains no borrowed material. This work sustains a single, meditative atmosphere throughout, moving from a place of fragility through a processional that is lighter in character, a more intense climax, and then a diffusion and recall. The title is taken from Psalm 84:11:

“For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the lord will give grace and glory; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.” *Sun and Shield* was commissioned by Freundenkreises Hauskonzert Musik für heute e.V. in Hanover, Germany for violinist and violist Elisabeth Kufferath. This is the U.S. premiere.

– Kati Agócs, November 2024

One of the essential things to say about Charles Ives is that he tends to elude generalizations made about him. He is often associated with episodes of musical pandemonium, and there are certainly those moments in his work, but he also wrote important pieces in a more traditional vein. A case in point is the *Piano Trio*, which Ives said was mostly written in 1904 and revised later—this being before the full maturity of his more adventurous vein. His own description paints it as a bit of nostalgia—

The Trio was. . . a reflection or impression of . . . college days on the Campus, now 50 years ago. The first movement recalled a rather short but serious talk, to those on the Yale fence, by an old professor of Philosophy; the second, the games and antics by the students . . . on a Holiday afterno . . . The last movement was partly a remembrance of a Sunday Service on the Campus.

The first movement is a singular formal experiment: a section of 27 bars played first by cello and right hand of the piano, next the same by violin and left hand of the piano, then once again with both instruments and both hands. The music is rather sternly contrapuntal and/or philosophical, as Ives wrote, the melodic material leaping and chromatic.

Next is the notorious movement Ives named TSIAJ, for “This Scherzo is a Joke,” a riotous potpourri of tunes current in Ives’s Yale days, including *A Band of Brothers in DKE* (Ives’s college fraternity), *The Campbells are Comin’*, *Dixie*, *How Dry I Am*, and *In the Sweet By and By*. There are many more, but you get the idea. The piece amounts to one of Ives’s early pandemonic efforts; his later ones are more focused and just as funny.

The last movement recalling a Yale Sunday service is a lyrical and beautiful outing in a voice unique in Ives’s output, but which like his later violin sonatas works toward and ends with a hymn, here *Rock of Ages*.
– Jan Swafford

different gravities is a musical take on ideas and images that have been rolling around in my head since reading Liu Cixin’s *Three Body Problem* trilogy. In this science-fiction saga, Cixin introduces readers to many concepts in theoretical physics and astrophysics, one of which is the trilogy’s namesake, the problem of solving the motion of three gravitationally interacting bodies. Cixin’s book led me down many delightful Wikipedia rabbit-holes, thinking about the way gravity looms omnipresent in my life on this planet and the fantastical number of other kinds of gravitational circumstances besides Earth’s little g . It also seemed an apt way to think about the relationships in chamber music: mutual attraction of greater or lesser strength

between musicians or musical materials, the downward fall of a musical line or phrase towards some resolution, the push and pull of intonation. *different gravities* imagines a kind of musical planet-hopping: each movement lets musical relationships play out according to their unique “gravitational” circumstances. This piece is written with affection for Longleash Trio: Pala Garcia, John Popham, and Julia Den Boer.

– Katherine Balch

Pozzi Escot’s *Jubilation*, her fifth string quartet, was commissioned by New England Conservatory in honor of its 125th anniversary. The work unfolds in four short movements, each with its own unique soundworld. In the first movement, the four voices continuously ascend as they build in intensity, each reaching its zenith at a different pace. The strident second movement is rhythmically free and features an angular, sul ponticello solo in the first violin over a blur of tremolo in the inner voices and stacked multi-stops in the cello. This is followed in the third movement by a homophonic texture composed of two widely-spaced chords, which are revoiced with each appearance. Three dramatic chords in octaves are intoned at peak intensity to bring the music to a close. The final movement presents an array of contrasting materials that include microtonal clusters, skittering lines, soft super-imposed fifths, and playing behind the bridge. Escot deftly crafts gripping and evocative textures throughout these four movements, which pack a sonic punch.

– Sid Richardson

In their style let’s call Ives’s violin sonatas in-between, neither elaborately experimental nor traditional, on the whole genial pieces with a strong lyrical bent. The *Third Violin Sonata* begins on a serious plane, the violin with a beautiful, introspective melody. That tone prevails through a wide-ranging movement. Ives wrote that it marks “an attempt to suggest the feeling and fervor...with which the hymns and revival tunes were sung at the camp meetings held extensively in New England in the '70s and '80s.” Ives’s abiding interest in another genre, ragtime, turns up in the jazzy second movement, in which “the feet and body, as well as the voice, add to the excitement.” In its harmony the finale has a cloudy, mystical tone. It ends with a proclamation of *I Need Thee Every Hour*, first fervent, then prayerful.

– Jan Swafford

New England Conservatory Choruses

Erica J. Washburn, Director of Choral Activities
Bailee Green, Ying Ting Lena Wong, Henri Youmans,
and Honghao Howard Zheng - graduate conductors

Sally Millar, administrator

Hyojeong Ham, Rafe Schaberg, and Ashly Zhang, rehearsal pianists

NEC Chamber Singers

Ryan Carpenter	Hyeona Kim	Rachel Solyn
Gia Cellucci	Amy Li	Matthew Tirona
Coco Chapman	Robert Moorman	Eduard Treshchev
Haijie Du	Olivia Nelson	Valentine Umeh
Kathryn Fernholz	Yuanwei Ni	Sunny Wang
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Tuesday Night New Music

New music by NEC student composers, performed by their peers

Tuesday, November 19, 2024 at 8:00 p.m., Brown Hall

Liederabend LXXIV, JJ Penna, curator

"The White Light Project" – songs by Sankaram, Schubert, Boulanger, Gordon,
Harbison, Schumann, Messiaen, and Puts

Wednesday, November 20, 2024 at 6:00 p.m., Williams Hall

NEC Baroque Orchestra, Susanna Ogata, guest artist

Music by Frescobaldi, Lully, Corelli, Biber, and Muffat

Wednesday, November 20, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

BSO Prelude: What I Hear

Kevin Puts, composer

Thursday, November 21, 2024 at 5:30 p.m., Brown Hall

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