



Tuesday, February 25, 2024, 8:00 PM
Taplin Auditorium, Fine Hall

Princeton Sound Kitchen presents

Modern Medieval

Vocal trio ModernMedieval Voices performs new works by Princeton University graduate student composers, **Sophie Cash**, **Francisco del Pino**, **Kennedy Taylor Dixon**, **Bobby Ge**, **Hope Littwin**, and **Onche Rajesh Ugbabe**.

DEPARTMENT OF
MUSIC
AT PRINCETON

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The Department of Music at Princeton University provides its undergraduates—whether they major or minor in Music—the opportunity to learn from a world-renowned faculty of scholars and composers. Performance opportunities include student-led and departmental ensembles like symphony orchestras, multi-genre choruses, jazz, contemporary music, African music, steel band, laptop orchestra, and much more, and students have access to private instrumental and voice lessons from eminent performing artists. The graduate program offers two distinct and prestigious PhD programs in composition or musicology; graduate students receive fully-funded, immersive experiences conducting research, advancing their craft, and collaborating with faculty within Princeton University's inspiring, interdisciplinary campus.

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PROGRAM

Onche Rajesh Ugbabe	<i>Missa Solaris</i>
Bobby Ge	<i>Recluse Song</i>
Kennedy Taylor Dixon	<i>incase you forget</i>
Sophie Cash	<i>P-38 Lightning</i>
Francisco del Pino	<i>Contar</i>
Hope Littwin	<i>Songs My Fathers Taught Me</i>

PERFORMERS

ModernMedieval Voices:
Jacqueline Horner-Kwiatek, voice
Martha Cluver, voice
Chloe Holgate, voice

The use of photographic, video, or audio equipment is strictly prohibited.
Please turn off or mute electronic devices for the duration of the performance.

PROGRAM NOTES

Onche Rajesh Ugbabe

Missa Solaris

- I. Dawn
- II. Beauty
- III. Duty
- IV. Dusk
- V. Manifold
- VI. Reprise

Missa Solaris is a composition in the sacred music tradition that sets to music a text from one of the oldest surviving hymns in the world: the ~3400 year-old “Great Hymn to the Orb” (‘Aten’, or sun disc) from the royal courts of the great North African civilization of ancient Egypt.

Ancient Egypt is famous for iconic architectural monuments, venerated pharaohs, extravagant tombs and burial rites, but behind the civilization’s endurance spanning three millennia were innovations in art, architecture, literature, science, mathematics, agriculture, and administration which likely influenced and paved the way, alongside advances from Mesopotamia, for later developments in Classical Greece and Rome. There is strong evidence for extensive cultural cross-pollination between ancient Egypt and Greece in antiquity, which only accelerated in the era of the Ptolemaic pharaohs after Alexander’s conquest and the ascendancy of Alexandria in Egypt, with its famed library, as the leading intellectual city of its day. Although details of his life are debated, there is substantial evidence that Pythagoras who made a mark in both music theory and math, traveled widely and may have spent up to two decades in ancient Egypt learning mathematics and other subjects in a secretive temple school (which served as a model for his hermetic mathematical society) and later spent several years in Babylon. It is very likely that innovations attributed to him today had origins outside of Greece including possibly in Egypt.

Ancient Egypt had a very vibrant musical scene—with a plethora of instruments and numerous occasions for music, as well as a professional class of musicians and musical directors in its royal courts—attested to by literature of the time, extant carvings depicting musicians, and musical instruments discovered in tombs (including variants of those found later in Greece such as the double reed pipe and lyres). Over a century ago, as European scholars began to study music in ancient Egypt, speculation began that “should we be far wrong then if we supposed that the scale based on the usual tetrachords, was originated on the banks of the Nile? ... Everything points to the present-day system of European music having originated in the land of the Pharaohs 5,000 to 6,000 years ago” (from a detailed lecture by Jeffrey Pulver to the UK’s Royal Musical Society in 1921, also reported in the *Musical Times* in 1922).

The text used for this piece comprises extracts from the profound and deeply personal “Great Hymn to the Orb” (Aten) quite likely by Pharaoh Akhenaten (reigned 1353 – 1336 BCE), translated by Toby Wilkinson (cross-referencing Simpson et al.) from hieroglyphs in the tomb of Ay, a high-ranking official under Akhenaten and later briefly Pharaoh. The selected lines have been reproduced almost verbatim with only minor edits mostly for musical meter. It contains core elements of the ‘Teaching’ of Akhenaten. It has been called “one of the most significant and splendid pieces of poetry to survive from the pre-Homeric world” (Wilkinson citing Foster 1999), and numerous scholars have noticed its marked similarity to the later Psalm 104 of the Hebrew Tanakh / Ketuvim (and later Christian Bible). If there was accompanying music (as is likely), it has been entirely lost.

The date of the “Great Hymn to the Orb” (Aten) makes it roughly contemporaneous with the oldest-known notated musical work, the Hurrian Hymn (c. 1400 BCE from present-day Syria), with another ancient hymn, the Sanskrit Rigveda (from India, also from about the mid-second millennium BCE and oldest of the vedas), and with the approximate dates ascribed by the Rabbinical tradition to the life of Moses who is believed to have been raised in Egypt and to have substantially written the Torah.

The Pharaoh Akhenaten (born Amenhotep IV) was a revolutionary who pushed for a short-lived monotheistic religion in which a single God, as represented by the sun disc or orb (‘Aten’), was venerated and with himself (Pharaoh) as mediator, and for having created an ambitious new capital with grand structures and monuments replete with a new art style at Akhetaten (present day Amarna). He was also husband to the famed Nefertiti,— extolled as the “great wife ... whom he loves” in the hymn—and whose wish that she remain “living and youthful for ever and ever” has been realized in a fashion by the celebrated painted bust by sculptor Thutmose that has immortalized her beauty. He was also father to Tutankhamun who, despite his short reign and demise at the age of about nineteen, is one of the most famous pharaohs for the epic discovery of his largely intact tomb in the early 20th century.

It would be difficult for any music to do justice to so rich a text from the ancient world, and *Missa Solaris* represents the composer’s feeble attempt. While the lyrics stretch back a few millennia, the musical influences are more recent, as what we know of the sound of ancient Egyptian music is still largely speculative except for fragmentary clues in terms of tuning (eg, pitches from surviving flutes), the timbre of known instruments, speech and poetic meter / rhythms, and antecedents that may have worked their way into ancient Greek music (which itself has only few notated examples like the Seikilos Epitaph substantially intact). This piece therefore draws much of its musical inspiration loosely from styles of later sacred (church) music, to which the title is partly a nod; from plainchant and Eastern Orthodox liturgical chant (which themselves are descendants of music of antiquity) to Lutheran congregational singing and tonal hymnody.

This work is dedicated to three renowned ethnomusicologists from Ghana who have provided the composer with great inspiration, instruction and mentorship: Prof. George Dor, who is also one of Ghana’s foremost composers of art and sacred music; Prof. Daniel Avorgbedor, also an excellent composer and active in sacred music; and Prof. John Collins who is also a theorist

and performer and first brought to the composer's attention Pythagoras's sojourn in Egypt. It was also partly inspired by brief visits by the composer to Giza (site of the Sphinx and Great Pyramid) and the Nile River en route to and from West Africa via Cairo as the work was being composed.

Text:

Extracted lines from "The Great Hymn to the Orb" (c. 1350, possibly by Pharaoh Akhenaten) with minimal editing mostly for musical meter

You shine forth in beauty on the horizon of heaven,
O living Orb, the creator of life!
When you rise on the eastern horizon,
You fill every land with your beauty.
Beautiful, dazzling,
High over every land,
Your rays encompass the lands
To the limit of all that you have made.

When you send out your rays
The earth sets out to work.
The herds graze in their pastures
and trees grow green.
Birds fly from their nests,
their wings in praise of your spirit.
Flocks prance on their feet,
The fish they leap in your presence.

When you set on the western horizon,
The earth is in darkness in a state of death.
Nights are spent in bedrooms, heads covered;
One eye does not behold the other.
Every lion comes out of his den;
Creeping things they start to bite.
Darkness spreads, the earth is silent,
For the one who made it has set on his horizon.

How manifold your deeds,
You created to your desire,
All people, flocks, and cattle,
All upon the earth that walk on legs,
All on high that fly with wings,
The foreign lands of Levant and Kush,
The land of Egypt.
Unique, risen in your being,

Manifest, shining, distant, near.
You make millions of beings from yourself,
And you are in my heart.

[Reprise]

How manifold your deeds,
Sole God, apart from whom there is no other!
How manifold your deeds,
You created earth to your desire.

Bobby Ge

Recluse Song

Recluse Song is a distant and somewhat self-aware meditation on the process of responding to another person's art. The piece sets a brief poem by Robin Helwig-Larsen that describes, but never purports to really understand, the swirling inner dialogues of its subject—an introspective recluse poet (heavily implied to be Emily Dickinson). I was simultaneously attracted to yet repelled by Helwig-Larsen's writing; his poem carried a mild air of pity, but it also managed to walk the line between a number of challenging dualities: the internal versus the external, the intimate and the detached, the vivid and the subdued.

I set out to do to his poem what he had done to Dickinson's work: rather than inviting listeners fully into any kind of inner world, the music keeps them at arm's length, adopting a deliberately observational quality. Emotionally placid and measured, the music evokes a sense of stillness, as though seeing a distant figure through frosted glass.

The text is treated nonlinearly, emphasizing the texture of language: the sensation of words on the tongue, the interplay of their sounds, and their resonances against one another. Meaning unfolds gradually, not through narrative progression but through the layering and juxtaposition of fragments.

Ultimately, *Recluse Song* is a study in detachment, paradoxically inviting listeners to linger in its delicate, suspended world.

Text

Her thoughts were all inside her –
Free from reality –
Poor little cramped-up spider
Who never saw the sea.

– Robin Helwig-Larsen

Kennedy Taylor Dixon*incase you forget*

incase you forget is a play on the relationship between performing and rehearsing and understanding what we believe are the differences between each. what gets lost in translation between them? what about ourselves are we forgetting along the way? and what the hell are we doing, really?

Text

has anyone ever told you how wonderful you are?

Sophie Cash*P-38 Lightning*

This work was inspired by a 1940s promotional film featuring a fighter plane by Lockheed Martin, the P-38 Lightning. To make the film for this work, I compiled footage from this film as well as footage from a 1947 Boy Scout recruitment film (indirectly a military recruitment film). The idea of wordless female voices was inspired by a line about the plane from the film's narrator: "She flies steep and swift like a homesick angel."

Francisco del Pino*Contar*

I think a lot about translation, its challenges and its joys. Sometimes, I will write music as an attempt at figuring out little translation problems.

For this piece, I tasked myself to write music on words so simple they could potentially be translated into any language, without losing meaning and without having to tweak the music too much. I thought counting numbers could be an answer, its action being so universal, its rhythms so universally similar.

Paradoxically, the word *contar* doesn't translate very well. In Spanish, depending on context, it means both "to count" and "to tell" (and it sounds very similar to *cantar*—"to sing"—which is only fitting). I find that ambiguity fascinating: what stories could counting tell? I'm writing this piece to find out.

Hope Littwin*Songs My Fathers Taught Me*

ABOUT

Sophie Cash is a violinist and composer from West Virginia. Her current interests include electronics, sound design and soundtracks, industrial music, improvisation in various genres, and folk music, particularly Appalachian. She has written and produced electroacoustic songs featuring her own vocals and lyrics, and she has made multimedia work with archival footage. Sophie attended Colburn Conservatory of Music for violin performance and University of Michigan and Yale School of Music for composition studies. Past artist residencies have included MacDowell, Yaddo, and Ucross.

Francisco del Pino is a Buenos Aires-born composer and guitarist with an affinity for music that is meticulous, expressive, and patient. Drawing influence from both classical and vernacular traditions, his work revolves around process and pattern and is usually characterized by an extensive use of counterpoint. Francisco is a PhD candidate in the Music Department and a fellow in the Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program in the Humanities.

Bobby Ge is a Chinese-American composer and avid collaborator whose work, often collaborative in nature, focuses on themes of home, communication, and hybridity. Winner of the 2022 Barlow Prize, Ge has received commissions and performances by groups including the Minnesota Orchestra, the New York Youth Symphony, the Albany Symphony, the US Navy Band, the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, the Harbin Symphony Orchestra, the Sioux City Symphony, Music from Copland House, Bergamot Quartet, Tesla Quartet, JACK Quartet, and Mind on Fire. He has created multimedia projects with the Space Telescope Science Institute, painters collective Art10Baltimore, the Scattered Players Theater Company, and the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center. He is currently pursuing his PhD at Princeton University, and holds degrees from University of California, Berkeley and the Peabody Conservatory.

Kennedy Taylor Dixon is a composer, violist, and scholar currently residing in Princeton, New Jersey. Described as a “vibrant musical voice,” Dixon often writes for herself and is also passionate about collaborating with members in her musical community. Recent highlights of her career include recipient of Westminster College’s inaugural Hear and Now Emerging BIPOC Composer Commission (April 2023), Tetractys New Music: Here Be Monsters Commission (May 2023), New Music Gathering performer participant (June 2023), and Bang on a Can Composer Fellow (July 2023). Dixon has worked with numerous artists throughout her career, such as JACK Quartet, Sō Percussion, ~Nois, F-Plus, Boston Children’s Chorus, Parker Ramsey, Michael J. Love, and more. Dixon holds a MA in Music Composition in addition to her dual undergraduate degrees in Viola Performance and Music Composition from Western Michigan University. Dixon is currently pursuing her PhD in Music Composition at Princeton University as a President’s Fellow.

American composer and music producer **Hope Littwin** grew up in dance and theater before she took to music, first as a singer-songwriter then as a classical singer and now as a composer and music producer. She loves to collaborate with artists of all kinds on embodied, expressive works. Hope's compositions fuse chamber music, vocal music, electronics and choreography. She has been commissioned by choirs, chamber ensembles, theater and dance companies to lead the creation of original works that pull from the idiosyncratic desires and abilities of the ensembles that she is engaged with. She is currently pursuing her PhD in Music Composition at Princeton University. *The Daily Princetonian* says Hope Littwin's music explores the "euphoric realm, where the physicality of musical expression is fully embraced—where music is not only something we do, but something we are." Hope's original works are available for streaming on band camp and YouTube, her albums can be found on Spotify and iTunes. Find Hope on Instagram @hopelittwin

ModernMedieval was created by Dr Jacqueline Horner-Kwiatek, a member of the world-renowned vocal quartet Anonymous 4, to explore the worlds of early and new music through lectures, workshops, masterclasses, and performances. **ModernMedieval Voices** is a project-based all-female ensemble directed by Jacqueline. She is joined by early and new music specialists for concerts and special projects that combine medieval chant and polyphony with music from later eras and new commissions influenced by the poetry and sonorities of music from the Middle Ages. ModernMedieval Voices takes the vocal techniques developed by Anonymous 4 for singing this repertoire and combines them with a fresh approach to programming that introduces this wonderful music to new audiences. The ensemble gave a triumphant debut performance at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in NYC performing the Hildegard chant *O Jerusalem* as part of the *Al-Quds: Jerusalem* concert with MetLive Arts, described by Heidi Waleson of *The Wall Street Journal* as "exquisitely sung."

ModernMedieval Voices has given performances and residencies at East Carolina University NewMusic Initiative, University of Notre Dame, University of Tampa, FL, Binghamton University, Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, Pittsburgh Dance Project, Liquid Music in Saint Paul, MN, Princeton Sound Kitchen, Electric Earth Concerts in NH, The Cloisters in NYC, The National Museum for Women in the Arts, Dumbarton Oaks, and The National Gallery in DC, The Virginia Arts Festival, VA and the Ecstatic Music Festival in NYC, which was broadcast live on WNYC NewSounds Live, hosted by John Schaefer. They are also featured on the award-winning CD *To Shiver the Sky* with music by composer Christopher Tin, which received its world premiere performance on May 2022 in Washington DC. Their recording of *The Living Word* is available on Amazon Music, iTunes and other digital platforms.

Onche Rajesh Ugbabe is a composer of Nigerian / Indian heritage, born and raised in Nigeria. His compositions are broadly intercultural and include works for orchestra, chamber ensembles, solo instruments, jazz big band / combos, and electronics. His works have been performed by acclaimed musicians including the Lark Quartet, Ying Quartet, marimbist Robert Van Sice, jazz saxophonist Odean Pope, and the Ghana National Symphony Orchestra. He has also been commissioned by Ensemble Modern (Germany), the Akojopo African Art Music Commissioning Project (USA / Nigeria) where he won second prize for an African art music piece in 2023, and County Hall Arts (UK) where he was joint first-prize winner in its 2024 symphonic concours. He studied music composition at Dartmouth College with Jon

Appleton, Larry Polansky, Charles Dodge and Paul Moravec and attended lectures by Christian Wolff, and was the recipient of numerous awards and grants. He further studied music at the University of Ghana receiving an MPhil in Music Theory and Composition where his research focused on the application of African traditional music elements in orchestral composition, under the guidance of the department's esteemed Theory / Composition and Ethnomusicology faculty. He has also served as a music producer and audio engineer with a range of artists including Molly Parden, BJ Lomas (female lead of the iconic BT Express), Leslie Ming (drummer for Roberta Flack, Mariah Carey, Madonna, etc.), and Nigerian jazz bass virtuoso Bright Gain Sagbamah. He has performed ethnomusicological research in Nigeria and Ghana, produced a documentary on Nigerian popular music and has spoken on African music at workshops and conferences at Harvard University, the European Conference on African Studies, and the International Council for Traditions of Music and Dance world conference amongst others. He is presently a doctoral student in Music Composition at Princeton University.



What is PSK?

A lab for Princeton University composers to collaborate with today's finest performers and ensembles, Princeton Sound Kitchen is a vital forum for the creation of new music. Serving the graduate student and faculty composers of the renowned composition program at the Department of Music at Princeton University, PSK presents a wide variety of concerts and events throughout the year.

Upcoming Princeton Sound Kitchen events

Tuesday, March 25, at 8:00 PM, Taplin Auditorium, Fine Hall

Barbara White: 'Lorica,' Riley Lee

Princeton University faculty member Barbara White creates a new 15-minute work, 'Lorica,' for shakuhachi Grand Master Riley Lee and an ensemble of guest performers. White describes the work as "a blessing, a song of well-wishing, based on original poetry woven together with traditional shakuhachi vocabulary." Lee also performs additional new works by White and graduate student composers.

Tuesday, April 15, at 8:00 PM, Taplin Auditorium, Fine Hall

Generals Concert

Princeton University second-year graduate student composers Gladstone Deluxe, Aliayta Foon-Dancoes, Hannah Ishizaki, and Isaac Santos, in partial fulfillment of the General Examination, create new works in response to the work of other, established artists. Various artists and ensembles perform the new works.

Tuesday, April 22, at 8:00 PM, Taplin Auditorium, Fine Hall

Dance Collaboration

Choreographers / dancers Aaron Choate and Morgan Clune create a host of new short dance works in collaboration with Princeton University graduate student composers.

Tuesday, April 29, at 8:00 PM, Taplin Auditorium, Fine Hall

Elijah Daniel Smith: 'Forbidden Oracles,' ~Nois, Sō Percussion

Elijah Daniel Smith's 'Forbidden Oracles' is a 30-minute work that draws inspiration from the mysterious gospel of the Lots of St. Mary, a Coptic Codex used for divination, translated by Dr. AnneMarie Luijendijk. It will be performed by an octet consisting of two quartets: Sō Percussion and ~Nois saxophone quartet.

Keep up to date about Princeton Sound Kitchen events

on the Current Season page of our website princeton_soundkitchen.org