



NACUSA sf Presents

# Composers & Friends

*New music written by members of the  
San Francisco Bay Area chapter of NACUSA*

Saturday, February 10, 2024, 7:30 p.m.

Center for New Music, San Francisco

## PROGRAM

*whisper, Murmur... SHOUT!* Douglas Ovens

Igor Poklad, clarinet; Douglas Ovens, vibraphone

*Prelude in F# minor* Molly Axtmann

Molly Axtmann, piano

*Duo* Allen Shearer

Dan Flanagan, violin and Vicky Ehrlich, cello

~ Intermission ~

## Awards presentation

*Nancy Bloomer Deussen Young & Emerging Composers Competition*

*The Way I See It Now* Emily Thomas

*Emerging Composer Competition Winner*

- i. ...warmer, warmer, colder... (after "Hot Cross Buns")
- ii. ...brighter, darker, brighter... (after "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star")
- iii. ...rising, falling, rising... (after "London Bridge Is Falling Down")
- iv. ...louder, louder, louder... (after "Frère Jacques")

*Hypnagogia* Malcolm Xiellie

*Young Composer Competition Winner*

Monika Gruber, violin  
Stephen Zielinski, clarinet  
Paul J. Dab, piano

*Dance-Aria*

John Bilotta & Anthony Bilotta

Monika Gruber, violin  
Stephen Zielinski, clarinet  
Paul J. Dab, piano

*Two Dances*

Davide Verotta

Monika Gruber, violin  
Stephen Zielinski, clarinet  
Paul J. Dab, piano



Scan this code for the full program notes and composer biographies.

NACUSA is a non-profit organization founded in 1933 by Henry Hadley, originally as the National Association of Composers and Conductors. It is one of the oldest organizations devoted to the promotion and performance of music by Americans. Each NACUSA chapter typically sponsors several concerts each year which feature music by its members. NACUSA has chapters in Cascadia, East Coast, Great Plains, Los Angeles, Mid-Atlantic, Mid-South, San Francisco Bay Area, the South East, Southern Oregon, and Texas. Started by Nancy Bloomer Deussen and John Webber more than twenty years ago, the San Francisco Bay Chapter has evolved into an active organization with a peak membership of seventy-five composers. It produces four to six concerts each year in the San Francisco Bay Area. Learn more at <http://nacusasf.org>

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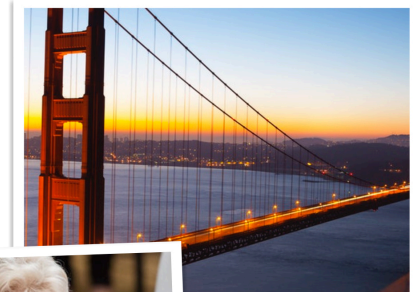
# Nancy Bloomer Deussen

## Young & Emerging Composers Competition

The members of the San Francisco Bay Area chapter of the National Association of Composers, USA are excited to present the winning works from our second annual Young & Emerging Composers Competition, in honor of composer and NACUSAsf founder Nancy Bloomer Deussen.

New and early-career composers in the greater San Francisco Bay Area were invited to enter a work for one or more members of our ensemble. The competition was open to young composers (grades 7–12) and to emerging composers (age 18 and above).

We are pleased to announce the winners of the 2023 competition. The first prize works will be performed at tonight's concert.



### Young Composer Division

First Prize: **Malcolm Xiellie**

*Hypnagogia* for B-flat clarinet, violin, and piano

First Runner-Up: **Michael M. Chang**

*March Diminuito* for clarinet and violin

### Emerging Composer Division

First Prize: **Emily Thomas**

*The Way I See It Now* for B-flat clarinet, violin, and piano

First Runner-Up: **James W. Cook**

*Three Movements for Solo Clarinet*

*The Nancy Bloomer Deussen Young & Emerging Composer Competition is funded in part by a generous anonymous donation through the Vanguard Charitable Trust.*

# Program notes

## Prelude in F# minor

Molly Axtmann

Molly Axtmann (1950–) began playing the piano and composing at age six. Education: Juilliard School (1966–8), B.A. magna cum laude Barnard College (1972) and M.M. in piano performance Manhattan School of Music (1977). Faculty positions: Mannes College of Music in New York City, The San Francisco Conservatory, Community Music Center of San Francisco, The Crowden School, John Adams Young Composers Program at Crowden Center for Music in the Community. Molly produced Young Composers Concerts at Strings Acoustic Showcase (2000–2011) showcasing remarkable young composer-performers ages 9-17. Recordings: *A Year of Days* (2002), original piano solos performed by the composer; *Wild Coast* (2015), a compilation of original compositions for piano, strings and winds; *The Goldberg Variations – J.S. Bach* (2016), solo piano. Molly was a regular accompanist for the Niles Silent Film Museum 2003–2010. She scored *Nosferatu*, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *Metropolis*, and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* among others. In 2012 Molly completed her original 18-minute silent film *Inanna and the Huluppu Tree*. For more information: [inannafilm.wordpress.com](http://inannafilm.wordpress.com). Molly teaches composition, improvisation, theory and piano at her private studio in Oakland. For more information and list of works: [mollyaxtmann.com](http://mollyaxtmann.com)

This prelude is the final track on my CD *A Year of Days*.

## Dance-Aria

John Bilotta & Anthony Bilotta

John Bilotta has spent most of his life in the San Francisco Bay Area. His works have been performed around the world by Rarescale, Earplay, Talea Ensemble, Washington Square Contemporary Music Society, North/South Consonance, Avenue Winds, Casals Trio, Boston String Quartet, Kiev Philharmonic, San Francisco Cabaret Opera, Bluegrass Opera, Boston Metro Opera, Thompson Street Opera, New Fangled Opera, Floating Opera and VocalWorks. He is currently vice-president of NACUSAsf.

Anthony Bilotta, 22, has been composing for orchestra, ensemble, and piano since he was 16. Owing to a class-scheduling error in high school, he landed in a keyboarding class where he was introduced to music for the first time. Quickly praised for his piano skills by his instructors, he was immersed in the art of creation and fell in love with composition. His 27 orchestral suites, ensemble works, and songs demonstrate his ability to evoke emotion across diverse styles and mediums. He is currently collaborating with his great-uncle and mentor, John Bilotta, an experienced opera composer as they work toward a Bilotta masterpiece.

*Dance-Aria* is the opening section of an opera-in-progress on which we have been collaborating. Our intent is that this music will, through a combination of movement, melodic and harmonic gestures, set the context of and anticipate, to some extent, the relationships among the characters and the events that are to follow.

## **whisper, Murmur... SHOUT!**

**Douglas Ovens**

Douglas Ovens presented his *Why the Beatles Stopped Touring* at the Academy of Music and Theater in Tallinn, Estonia on July 10, 2023. Other recent performances have taken place at Azusa Pacific University, Hidden Valley Music Seminars, New Music Santa Cruz, and with the Camerata Chamber Orchestra, Buffalo, NY. He has received commissions from the North/South Chamber Orchestra (NYC), the Lehigh Valley Chamber Orchestra, and the Allentown, Asheville, and University of California, Santa Barbara Symphonies. He has composed music for plays ranging from *The Oresteia of Aeschylus* to Gao Xingjian's *The Other Shore* and Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*, and has been presented in festivals throughout the US, in Europe, Asia and South America. He lives in Pacific Grove with his wife, Cindy. Info at: [douglasovenscomposer.com](http://douglasovenscomposer.com)

In *whisper, Murmur...SHOUT!* I am playing with the ringing quality of the vibes serving to launch melodies emanating from the clarinet. The different ways that sounds evolve from the two instruments drives much of the interplay in the piece. The form is a single movement in three sections. The first is something of an "aria" for clarinet emerging from the sustained sounds of the vibes. The following sections gradually gather momentum, heading to a frenetic(ish) closing.

## **Duo**

**Allen Shearer**

Composer Allen Shearer has been honored with the Rome Prize Fellowship, the Aaron Copland Award, a Charles Ives Scholarship, residencies at the MacDowell Colony, and grants from the NEA. The premiere production of his opera *Middlemarch in Spring* was named one of the Ten Best Operatic Events of 2015 by the SF Examiner, and one of the year's most notable events in classical music worldwide by the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Subsequent operas *Howards End*, *America*, and *Prospero's Island* also received successful San Francisco premieres. Shearer holds a Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley and diplomas from the Akademie Mozarteum in Austria. His teachers include Andrew Imbrie and Fred Lerdaahl at Berkeley and Max Deutsch in Paris. He is a founding director of the Berkeley new music festival Sonic Harvest, a board member of San Francisco's Ninth Planet, a member of NACUSA, and an affiliate of Broadcast Music, Inc.

This duo for violin and cello started out as work in two movements, *Allegro* and *Andante*. I was surprised when I had finished it that it did not make a satisfying musical experience in that form: the dramatic intensity of the *Allegro* needed to dissipate before going on to the *Andante*. So I added a quiet interlude between the movements, to be played with mutes.

## **The Way I See It Now**

**Emily Thomas**

Emily Thomas grew up in southern California, where she found her home in the clarinet sections of several school music ensembles. A lifelong reader and writer, she enrolled at UC Davis in 2019 to study English but was unable to resist the collegiate "two-for-the-price-of-one" deal and added a major in music to her literature coursework. After falling unexpectedly in love with the study of music, she started composing in 2020 and has only grown more fascinated with it since. Emily moved to San Francisco after graduating and now works in music production and administration for new and classical music ensembles in the Bay Area, freelancing from time to time as a music engraver and copy editor. She has studied composition with Kurt Rohde, Sam Nichols, and Tonia Ko — all to whom she is endlessly grateful for helping take her mind off of books.

I wrote this set of miniatures in the months that followed my college graduation, during which I moved to a new city, started working two new jobs, and began living on my own for the first time. This all-encompassing newness was curbed only by my day-dream imaginings of how the new things might be; even what was familiar seemed to take on a different light, renewed and recolored by my new context. *The Way I See It Now* is about that un/familiarity — the extra moment it takes to recognize a person when you’ve never seen them *here* before; and, on the other hand, the peculiar sense of nostalgia that can somehow seep into something you haven’t before seen or experienced. It’s about the three-note songs that introduced me to music as a kid: songs whose melodies still manage to find me, cut into pieces and disguised in a jingle on the radio or in a tune leaching through a shared wall. Writing this piece was my effort to “find” those songs again, using all that I’ve learned since I lost them.

## Two Dances

**Davide Verotta**

Davide Verotta was born in an Italian town close to Milano and moved to San Francisco as an eager twenty-seven-year-old. A professor at UCSF in biomathematics (gasp) for thirty years, he has been actively involved in the SF new music scene for a good twenty, and eventually left math behind to concentrate exclusively on composing. He studied piano at the Milano conservatory ages ago. Composition is more recent, with studies at SFSU, where he earned an MA, and UC Davis. Davide teaches piano and composition privately and at the Community Music Center in SF. He has received numerous local commissions, international competition prizes, and composition grants. For more information, please visit his web site at [www.davideverotta.com](http://www.davideverotta.com) or his youtube channel [www.youtube.com/DavideVerotta](http://www.youtube.com/DavideVerotta)

As the title says these are two dances for trio, one in two and the other in three. At times whimsical, occasionally abrupt in their transitions, they should leave behind a little bit of a sense of mystery. Who is dancing, really, and why?

## Hypnagogia

**Malcolm Xiellie**

Malcolm Xiellie (b. 2007) began composing soon after beginning studies in piano and drums at age five, and he has been playing with musical ideas for most of his life. He gathers inspiration from a wide variety of musical styles—from baroque to jazz to contemporary—and these influences find their way into his creative expression. Since 2017 his compositions have received multiple honors at the state, regional, and national levels from MTAC, USOMC, and MTNA. In 2022 he earned an Honorable Mention from both ASCAP and BMI for two different piano works. Currently, Malcolm studies composition and piano with John Syzygy and Brian Ciach and sings with the Ragazzi Boys Chorus. He lives with his family in Menlo Park, California.

*Hypnagogia* refers to the liminal state between wakefulness and sleep where sensations and ideas come and go, and where creativity can flourish. The two halves of the piece represent the two differing states of sleeping and waking, though not necessarily in that order; it is left up to the listener to decide which is which.