



*The San Francisco Chapter of the National Association of Composers/USA presents a new music recital.*

## Composers & Friends

Saturday, February 8, 2025, 2pm

Center for New Music, San Francisco

### PROGRAM

<i>Tether</i>		Monica Chew
	Monica Chew, piano	
<i>Soaring Embers</i>		Dinah Bianchi
	Frank Johnson, piano	
<i>Three Movements for Solo Clarinet</i>		James W. Cook
	James W. Cook, clarinet	
<i>Two Works for Late Winter</i>		Mary Fineman
I. January		
II. Savlanut		
	Mary Fineman, piano	
<i>Pathos</i>		Sheli Nan
I. Las Seis Cuerdas (The Six Strings)		
II. Longing To Leave		
	Steve Zimmerman, baritone; Jeff O'Sammon, guitar	
<i>This Silver Minute of Evening</i>		John G. Bilotta
	Frank Johnson, piano	
<i>Shadows and Ghosts</i>		Ludmila Yurina
	Ludmila Yurina, piano	
<i>Scenes of San Francisco</i>		Amy Stephens
Golden Gate		
Race from Alcatraz		
Among the Mighty Redwoods		
The Lighthouse		
Saturday Stroll		
The Setting Sun		
	Amy Stephens, 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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# Program notes

## Tether

**Monica Chew**

I wrote this piece thinking of the many ways we build community in shared spaces, whether by making music, having tea with friends, or reading in public. These spaces and the rituals they enable are crucial to many people, especially in areas with high cost of real estate such as the Bay Area where I live. Since COVID I've felt that a lot of these spaces, especially art spaces, have become very vulnerable. This piece is dedicated to third spaces, including Center for New Music where this concert is taking place, and Old First Concerts, where it was premiered.

[Monica Chew](#) (she/her) is an Oakland composer and pianist who celebrates presenting rarely performed music and new works from around the world. A "gifted player with an affinity for deeply sensitive expression" (Whole Note), she has composed since 2017. Prior to 2015, she worked nearly a decade as a principal software engineer on security and privacy at Mozilla and Google.

## Soaring Embers

**Dinah Bianchi**

In Dedication to Emma Xiong in Honor of NACUSA's Cascadia Composers 2024 In Good Hands Program, *Soaring Embers* is inspired by Emma's own curiosity of literature and fantastical storylines. Revealed within this momentary tone poem is a glimpse into Ember's first solo flight. With a quick flutter of her wings, the charmingly-whimsical dragon soars up towards the clouds and into the ultramarine empyrean, journeying into the vast unknown.

Award-winning Michigan composer **Dinah Bianchi** seeks to create vibrantly exciting music; music that is sublime, beautiful and with the communicative power that drives the creative spirit of all artists. Her work melds the past with the present, introducing music that exists as an extension of modern tradition and honors forward momentum of the craft through the melding of time, space, and sound. As described by Navona Records, Bianchi's music is "...dynamically powerful... and illustrate(s) the fusion of intricate melodic content with a progressive, and harmonically-charged palette." *Fanfare Magazine* exclaims that, "Bianchi's imagination and personality burst at the seams," and her music, "...cries out to be heard." With this in mind, she is well versed in a variety of musical genres with a portfolio that includes a melange of genres and instrumentation. Well received both nationally and internationally, Bianchi's music has been performed in concert halls located in Europe, Asia, Canada, South America, and the United States. Recently, she completed a recording session for "Chasse Noir" with the Janáček Philharmonic Ostrava in the Czech Republic. The recording was released in August of 2022. Her self-titled album, "Dinah Bianchi: First Impressions," was released by Navona Records on May 3, 2024.

## Three Movements for Solo Clarinet

**James W. Cook**

The first movement of this work, which dates from 2002–03, was the first piece I wrote as a university student, and also was the first in a "modern" idiom (after an adolescence spent composing early-romantic symphonies and the like). In 2020 I finally did what had always seemed inevitable and added two more movements, creating a kind of solo sonata somewhat in the vein of Schoenberg's op. 11, but for clarinet. The last movement, however, is

not radically “athematic” but rather a kind of rondo-finale which takes its inspiration from the last movement of Roger Sessions’s Symphony No. 3. The last note is rebelliously moderate, in a middle register rather than at the extremes as in the preceding movements.

**James W. Cook** is a summa cum laude graduate of the University of Alabama, where he studied composition with Craig P. First. In 2023 he received the First Runner-Up Award in the Nancy Bloomer Deussen Young and Emerging Composer Competition for the work being performed at this concert, the *Three Movements for Solo Clarinet*, op. 0a.

## **Two Works for Late Winter: January, Savlanut**

**Mary Fineman**

“January” is based on an improvisation. I recall this scenario: sitting at the piano, looking out the window on a somber January day—my son, home from somewhere, (college?) lying on the couch. I improvised and his enthusiasm surprised me—wasn’t he asleep? The final “January” retained many of the original elements.

Savlanut, (pronounced sav-la-noot) translates as “patience” or “endurance” in modern Hebrew. I encountered the word while studying Mussar, an ancient Jewish spiritual tradition that addresses soul traits or virtues. Within that context, its meaning shifts a bit, with further refinement of its definition from teacher Estelle Frankel. She defined “savlanut” as the ability to stay with the present moment, the capacity to stay with discomfort. I was already writing this music and was struck by its own internal discomfort. It wanted to cut itself in half, hurry straight to the party (C major), be anywhere but where it was. It seemed to embody this fundamental struggle.

**Mary Fineman** is an Oakland-based award winning singer/songwriter, composer, pianist, and teacher. Originally from Baltimore, she trained as a classical pianist in Montreal for ten years, taught at Concordia University, and studied jazz at McGill. She accompanied instrumentalists, singers, and dancers. Her music trajectory changed radically in 2003 after visiting an “energy healer.” She suddenly started hearing her own music and began to compose and perform works ranging from art song to pop to orchestral and neoclassical chamber compositions. Performances include the Paramount Theater, Piedmont Piano Company, Chapel of the Chimes, Center for New Music, Palo Alto Performing Arts Center, The Marsh Berkeley, Old First Church in San Francisco, and others. Her work has been featured on classical radio KDFC, WomenofSubstance Radio, Internet Archive, and Call for Scores: Solo Piano by Ensemble For These Times (e4tt.org). She received First Place Prize in Music from the Biennial Competition of the National League of American Pen Women in 2022. She’s most proud of her song cycle for orchestra performed in 2014 by [oaklandsymphony.org](http://oaklandsymphony.org) under the baton of the late Michael Morgan, and again in 2024 with [communitywomensorchestra.org](http://communitywomensorchestra.org) under Martha Stoddard, with Mary as vocal and piano soloist. [www.maryfineman.com](http://www.maryfineman.com) and [youtube.com/maryfineman](https://youtube.com/maryfineman)

## Pathos

Sheli Nan

### Las Seis Cuerdas (The Six Strings)

This piece is a gesture to the sadness one cannot let go of. It is poignant, sad and lost.

The guitar makes my dreams cry  
The whimpers of my soul are lost  
escaped from my rounded mouth

And like the tarantula  
weaving a star shaped web  
catching and trapping my sighs,

My sighs that float in the black and wooded mist

The guitar makes my dreams cry

### Longing To Leave

This piece is a gesture to the fear, terror and longing that is difficult to let go of. There is hope. It is the hope and the need of one's own that propels one forward to trust herself and take the step.

This piece is sung at the crossroads of one's life. We all have these moments of uncertainty and the desire to place our faith in the future.

Whether we are crossing a swaying bridge, leaving a relationship, or even boarding a plane, we want to believe. We look toward the heavens for comfort.

And then we realize that we are alone...all alone. Yet we need to take the step.

The decision is ours.

**Sheli Nan** composes music that defies boundaries. She is a composer, teacher, pianist, harpsichordist, percussionist, and author. Her Baroque and Classical training, coupled with having lived all over the world, produce a unique sound: a 21st century harmony. Giving credit to earlier musical iterations, what she composes is fresh, invigorating, accessible and moving.

Her music is performed locally, nationally, and internationally. She composes for harpsichord, piano, string quartets and quintets, saxophone quartet, tuba/euphonium quartet, clarinet quartets and quintets, bassoon quartet, jazz, chamber music and orchestra. Her choral music encompasses opera, Oratorios and Requiems.

In November, 2023 Ms. Nan's pieces were performed in San Francisco, and in Palo Alto, California. Pieces were performed in Tacoma, Washington, New York City and Montevallo, Alabama, as well as in Maine and internationally in Ireland at the Limerick Festival. *American Promise* was premiered in New York City this past season.

Sheli has consistently won prizes from The American Prize in Composition. Her opera *SAGA of the 21st Century Girl* received a grant from the Zellerbach Foundation.

## **This Silver Minute of Evening**

**John G. Bilotta**

“notice the convulsed orange inch of moon  
perching on this silver minute of evening...”  
— E. E. Cummings

This “Silver Minute of Evening” consists of six variations performed without pause. The variations modulate, not through a circle of thirds or fifths, but through a circle of whole-tones. As a result, the final variation begins a whole step lower than the first but, as it nears its conclusion, it modulates one last time returning to the original pitch for a final statement of the musical material.

**John Bilotta** has spent most of his life in the San Francisco Bay Area. His works have been performed and recorded by ensembles and soloists in the US and Europe, including Rarescale, Earplay, Washington Square Contemporary Music Society, North/South Consonance, Avenue Winds, Talea Ensemble, Trio Casals, Boston String Quartet, Belfiato Wind Quintet, 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 and serves on the boards of the Society of Composers, Inc., and Goat Hall Productions.

## **Shadows and Ghosts**

**Ludmila Yurina**

Wandering in the space of a dark and half-empty house with a lantern, experiments with different gradations of darkness and shadows inspired me to create a piece in which sounds would reproduce the atmosphere of gloom and mystery.

The intonation circle of the piece is based on atonal elements.

Experiments with the playing of strings, overlaying overtones bring the phonics of the work closer to an almost “electronic” sound, and then as if reproducing the playing of percussion instruments. The unhurried, gradual development of the material leads to a loud dynamic climax, after which the listener is immersed in a whimsical game of overtones and various methods of sound production.

The epigraph to the play can be the words “...no one knows what hides behind a closed door, no one knows what lurks in a dark corner; the unknown, the mysterious plays itself, plays with your emotions, evoking the unknown that lurks in you” (L. Yurina)

The work was written in the Shreyahn Art House (Germany)

**Ludmila Yurina** is a composer, pianist, musicologist, and teacher. She graduated from Kyiv Music College as a pianist and from Kyiv State Tchaikovsky Conservatoire (Ukraine) as a composer, completing her post-graduate courses there as well. She attended workshops with eminent musicians H. Lachenmann, W. Rihm, I. Arditti, G. Staebler, and J. Durand (in Germany). Ludmila Yurina has worked as Associate Professor of the Department of composition at the National Music Academy of Ukraine, specializing in composition, orchestration, and symphony scores reading. She was a guest at few universities with lectures about contemporary Ukrainian music in Stuttgart (Germany), at Texas Christian University, at the City University New York Graduate Center, and at Stanford University (USA). Yurina has participated in numerous international festivals; her works have been performed in Germany, France, Ukraine, USA, Canada, Italy, Finland, Estonia, Israel, etc. She was a Visiting Scholar at the CCRMA, Stanford University in 2011 and 2023/24. Since 2022 Yurina has lived and worked in the Bay Area. She is a teacher of composition and piano, and her students are winners of international competitions in USA, Spain, Ukraine, and Austria. She takes part in concerts and projects in Stanford, San Francisco, New York, and abroad.

## Scenes of San Francisco

**Amy Stephens**

Scenes of San Francisco is a Third Stream suite for solo piano, combining classical form with jazz sensibilities and depicting Amy's favorite spots in and around the city.

1. Golden Gate
2. Race from Alcatraz
3. Among the Mighty Redwoods
4. The Lighthouse
5. Saturday Stroll
6. The Setting Sun

Pianist **Amy Stephens** is a Third Stream and jazz composer. Her award-winning solo piano works include *Scenes of San Francisco*, *A Day at the Beach*, *Becoming Suite*, the *Childhood Excursions* series, and the *'Round the Key Circle* series. Teaching privately since 1993, Amy is a Nationally Certified Teacher of Music and RCM certified teacher. Amy also enjoys serving as a clinician and evaluator for festivals and adjudications. Amy earned several degrees in classical and jazz piano from Indiana University School of Music. [www.amystephens.com](http://www.amystephens.com)