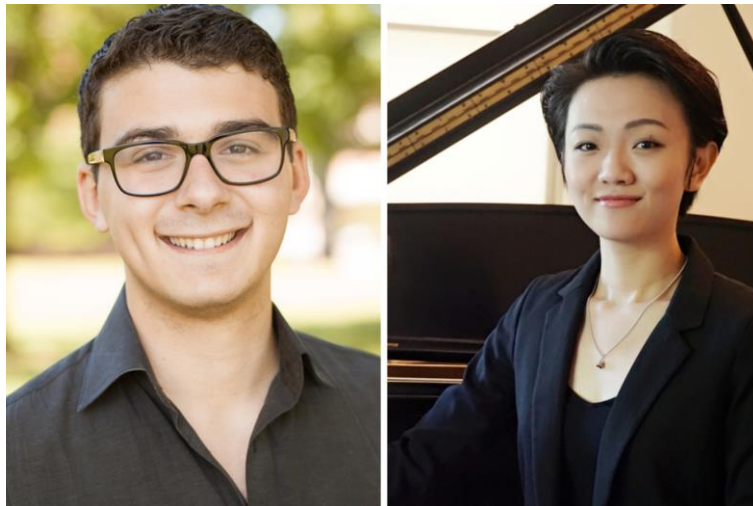


American Composers Orchestra Announces Two Commissions from the 2020 Underwood New Music Readings

Underwood Commission: Paul Novak
CANOA Consortium for Emerging Composers Commission: Dai Wei



Paul Novak: www.paulnovakmusic.com | **Dai Wei:** www.daiweicomposer.com

American Composers Orchestra: www.americancomposers.org

New York, NY – **American Composers Orchestra** (ACO) announces two commission awards for emerging composers **Paul Novak** and **Dai Wei**. They were chosen from six participants in ACO’s 29th **Underwood New Music Readings**, one of the most coveted opportunities for emerging composers in the United States. Paul Novak receives the 2020 **Underwood Commission** while the **CANOA (Composing a New Orchestra Audience) Consortium for Emerging Composers Commission** goes to Dai Wei.

Amidst concerns of the spread of COVID-19, and at the request of the City College of New York, the Readings on March 12 and 13, 2020 were closed to the public and open only to orchestra musicians, composers, and staff. ACO President **Ed Yim** reflects, “We were, of course, gratified that ACO was able to complete this year’s Underwood New Music Readings just before this period of self-isolation had to begin. And now, to be able to look towards the future with this announcement – to a time when we can gather again and make music for audiences – is uplifting.”

Underwood Commission recipient Paul Novak will write a new work to be performed by ACO in a future season. Novak says, “I had a truly magical experience at the Underwood Readings; working with ACO as they brought six new works to life, I could sense their passion for and commitment to the music of our time. I’m so honored to have received this new commission, and I’m looking forward to collaborating again with this fantastic and forward-thinking ensemble!”

Mentor composer **Melinda Wagner** says, “We were all impressed with Paul Novak’s exquisitely constructed piece—the patient bloom of colors, skittering textures, and whimsical clouds of sound. I am very excited about Paul’s Underwood Commission, and I look forward to hearing his new work for ACO.”

The CANOA Consortium Commission for Emerging Composers was created as a way to involve more orchestras in supporting emerging composers and as a way to meet the challenge of going beyond the first performance of a work. By embedding repeat performances into the design of the commission (an opportunity rare for emerging composers), the CANOA Consortium Commission is funded with the generous support of Elizabeth and Justus Schlichting.

“We love symphonic music,” said the Schlichtings. “CANOA was created to help sustain an art form we care very much about. It is based on the idea that bringing new compositions to the repertoire is essential to orchestral life. A key part of CANOA is to support programs that provide talented composers with better ways to develop their orchestral writing skills, and have their work performed. Which is exactly what the Consortium for Emerging Composers provides. We are thrilled to support Dai Wei and look forward to hearing what she creates.”

The consortium commission partners and performance season dates will be announced at a later time.

“Dai Wei's music spoke in a clear and vibrant voice—with orchestral flair, drama, and a mystical lyricism entirely its own.” says ACO Artistic Director **Derek Bermel**. Dai Wei states, “It felt so unreal to me the moment that I found out I received the commission. I am so fortunate to be part of this amazing program that embraces new music and gives opportunities to diverse composers.”

About the Underwood New Music Readings

The 29th Annual Underwood New Music Readings were under the direction of ACO's Artistic Director, composer **Derek Bermel**, and were conducted by **George Manahan**, with **Bermel**, and **Melinda Wagner** as mentor composers. The conductor, mentor composers, and principal players from ACO provided critical feedback to each of the participants during and after the sessions. In addition to the Readings, the composer participants took part in Career Development Workshops with industry professionals. This year's New Music Readings attracted nearly 200 submissions from emerging composers around the country.

The Underwood Commission and The Consortium Commission were chosen by mentor composers Derek Bermel and Mindy Wagner and by Music Director George Manahan.

For over a generation, **ACO's Underwood New Music Readings** have provided all-important career development and public exposure to the country's most promising emerging composers, with over 150 composers participating. Readings alumni have won every major composition award, including the Pulitzer, Grammy, Grawemeyer, American Academy of Arts & Letters, and Rome Prizes. Orchestras around the globe have commissioned ACO Readings alumni.

The New Music Readings have launched many of today's top composers, such as ACO's own Artistic Director **Derek Bermel**, **Lisa Bielawa**, **Anthony Cheung**, **Anna Clyne**, **Cindy Cox**, **Sebastian Currier**, **Jennifer Higdon**, **Pierre Jalbert**, **Aaron Jay Kernis**, **Hannah Lash**, **Carter Pann**, **P.Q. Phan**, **Tobias Picker**, **Narong Prangcharoen**, **Paola Prestini**, **Daniel Bernard Roumain**, **Huang Ruo**, **Eric Samuelson**, **Carlos Sanchez-Guiterrez**, **Kate Soper**, **Gregory Spears**, **Joan Tower**, **Ken Ueno**, **Dan Visconti**, **Wang Jie**, **Dalit Warshaw**, **Randall Woolf**, **Nina Young**, and **Roger Zare**.

About the Selected Composers and Their Music

Paul Novak (b. 1998) – as the light begins to drift for chamber orchestra

Paul Novak writes music that is lyrical but fragmented, exploring the subtleties of instrumental color and drawing influence from literature, art, and poetry. He has received numerous national awards, most recently from the ASCAP/SCI Commission, Tribeca New Music, Webster University, and YoungArts Foundation, and has participated in festivals across the country, including the first-ever National Youth Orchestra of the United States Composer Apprenticeship. Novak has collaborated with ensembles including the Austin Symphony, Orlando Symphony, Reno Philharmonic, NYO-USA, the Amaranth and Rosco Quartets, Sō Percussion, Texas New Music Ensemble, NODUS Ensemble, MotoContrario Ensemble, Ensemble Ibis, Blackbox Collective, Face the Music, and Worcester Chamber Music Society; he has worked on interdisciplinary projects with Rice Dance Theatre, poets Ming Li Wu and Erica Cheung, and the Bowdoin Museum.

Originally from Reno, NV, Novak is an undergraduate student at Rice University's Shepherd School of Music, where he has studied with Kurt Stallman, Pierre Jalbert, Anthony Brandt, and Karim Al-Zand. Upcoming projects in Spring 2020 include a commission from the Texas New Music Ensemble, a soprano/contrabass duo for LIGAMENT, and work for viola and ensemble for violist Sebastian Stefanovic. www.paulnovakmusic.com.

Of his piece *as the light begins to drift*, Novak writes, "As a student at Rice, I've become familiar with the unusual and beautiful cloud formations that appear in East Texas skies. *as the light begins to drift* was inspired by their subtle interplay of light and shadow and their flowing, hazy geometries. The work opens with a burst of swirling texture, with spiraling runs and swells entangling in a chaotic sound world. The brass interjects with jagged, syncopated hits as different instruments emerge from and then vanish into the ensemble. After a spiraling downward run, a plaintive English horn melody is accompanied by a canopy of string harmonics and trills. In the second section, crystalline percussion instruments merge with subtle orchestral textures. A clarinet solo leads into a pulsing triplet ostinato, which is passed throughout the ensemble, growing in intensity until it reaches a furious climax. The work closes gently with the return of the English horn, fading to nothing in a halo of shimmering sounds."

Dai Wei (b. 1989) – *Samsāric Essay*

Dai Wei is originally from China. Her musical journey navigates in the spaces between east and west, classical and pop, electronic and acoustic, innovation and tradition. She often draws from eastern philosophy and aesthetics to create works with contemporary resonance and reflect an introspection on how multidimensional conflict and tension can create and inhabit worlds of their own. Her artistry is nourished by the Asian and Chinese Ethnic culture in many different ways. Being an experimental vocalist, she performs herself as a Khoomei throat singer in her recent compositions, which filter different experiences and backgrounds as a calling that transcends genre, race, and labels.

She recently served as Young Artist Composer-in-Residence at Music from Angel Fire and Composer Fellow at Intimacy of Creativity in Hong Kong. She has received commissions and collaborations with Utah Symphony Orchestra, Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia, Bang on a Can, Curtis 20/21 Ensemble, Merz Trio, and the Rock School of Ballet in Philadelphia. Her compositions were broadcast by WHYY, Performance Today, Radio Television Hong Kong, and Qinghai Television.

Wei is currently pursuing a doctorate in composition at Princeton University as a Naumburg Doctoral Fellow. She is working on a piece called *Partial Men* for string quartet, live electronics, and voice where she will perform with Aizuri String Quartet. The piece is dedicated to two deceased men who donated their kidneys to her mother, and to many other deceased organ donors who extended other people's lives. www.daiweicomposer.com.

Of her piece *Samsāric Essay*, she writes, "The piece was inspired by a book I was reading called *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, which is written by Sogyal Rinpoche. He says, "The successive existences in a series of rebirths are not like the pearls in a pearl necklace, held together by a string, the "soul," which passes through all the pearls; rather they are like dice piled one on top of the other. Each die is separate, but it supports the one above it, with which it is functionally connected. Between the dice there is no identity, but conditionality."

The title comes from the Sanskrit word Samsara, which is defined as the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. There are three different characters who represent three different lifetimes. They are being reincarnated and intersected by each other and more. It's like a musical hotpot filled with diverse ingredients, and diversity is something we have since day one in our history. At the end of the piece, the orchestra evolves into only one pitch which represents the oneness of everything. As if we can finally rest. And yet, another journey is just about to start."

About American Composers Orchestra

American Composers Orchestra (ACO) is dedicated to the creation, celebration, performance, and promotion of orchestral music by American composers. With commitment to diversity, disruption and discovery, ACO produces concerts, K-12 education programs, and emerging composer development programs to foster a community of creators, audience, performers, collaborators, and funders.

ACO identifies and develops talent, performs established composers, champions those who are lesser-known, and increases regional, national, and international awareness of the infinite variety of American orchestral music, reflecting

gender, ethnic, geographic, stylistic, and age diversity. To date, ACO has performed music by 800 American composers, including over 350 world premieres and newly commissioned works. ACO recordings are available on ARGO, CRI, ECM, Point, Phoenix USA, MusicMasters, Nonesuch, Tzadik, New World Records, InstantEncore.com, Amazon.com and iTunes.

In addition to the Underwood New Music Readings in NYC, EarShot enables orchestras across the country to identify talented young composers. With guidance from ACO, partner orchestras – such as the Detroit Symphony, the Sarasota (FL) Orchestra, the Charlotte Symphony, and the Philadelphia Orchestra – undertake readings, residencies, performances and composer-development programs that speak directly to their communities and leverage local resources.

For nearly two decades, ACO has brought composers and musical teaching artists into New York City public schools through Music Factory. Students in Brooklyn, Bronx, Manhattan and Queens, work directly with professional composers to create and perform original music. ACO also offers the intensive Compose Yourself seminars, during which high school composers will participate in hands-on composition classes, culminating in a performance of student compositions played by ACO's professional musicians.

More information about American Composers Orchestra is available online at www.americancomposers.org.

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This press release is available online at www.americancomposers.org/press-media

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