



Saturday, June 11, 2022 | 2:30pm

Zalk Theater, Besant Hill School

OJAI Dusk: How to Fall Apart

Keir GoGwilt *violin* | **Jay Campbell** *cello* | **Julia Eichten** *movement director, dancer*
Yiannis Logothetis *dancer* | **Matilda Sakamoto** *dancer*

Carolyn CHEN

How to Fall Apart World Premiere and AMOC* Commission

How to Fall Apart is by Carolyn Chen in collaboration with
Julia Eichten, Keir GoGwilt, Jay Campbell, Yiannis Logothetis,
and Matilda Sakamoto.

Also thanks to Or Schraiber (dance) and Coleman Itzkoff (cello),
who contributed to the creation of the piece.

This concert is made possible
by the generous support of
Stephan Farber
and **Sound Post Capital**

There is no intermission
during the concert.

ZALK THEATER,
BESANT HILL SCHOOL
8585 OJAI SANTA PAULA ROAD

Carolyn CHEN (b. 1983)

How to Fall Apart started as a conversation with Keir and Jay about musical freedom, listening to natural phenomena, and my efforts to re-wild the eroding slope of my home in Los Angeles. Reflecting on the process of de-paving, sheet-mulching, re-contouring, searching out plants that might survive our increasingly scorching summers — it seemed like pouring sweat into the hope of finding nature a way to come back to hold it all together. Over the next couple of years, a pandemic and a birth, I assembled a list of ways to fall apart, wrote a number of variations on the shape-note tune “Wondrous Love,” and constructed an outline of movement requests — which included games playing with listening, light, and everyday objects in accord with each thematic center, seeking opportunities for each person to work from areas of expertise and inexpertise. Our work together began with this score as a scaffolding, and the piece has emerged gradually through the imaginative contributions of each member of the creative team: Julia Eichten, Yiannis Logothetis, Matilda Sakamoto, Or Schraiber, Coleman Itzkoff, Jay Campbell, and Keir GoGwilt. Special thanks to Justin Decatur, Suzanne Thorpe, George Gwilt, and Dea Lou Schraiber.

—CAROLYN CHEN

Talking, Moving, Playing

For Carolyn Chen, the act of making music allows her “to look into the inner lives of things.” Her artistic credo calls for working with sound as both “a physical phenomenon” and “a socially and historically embedded experience,” defamiliarizing and recontextualizing sources from everyday life as she “weaves musical dialogue from unexpected neighbors.” Along with a widely varied range of solo, chamber, and ensemble pieces, the Los Angeles-based Chen has written for the stage (including the chamber opera *Hoods*, a “mashup of Euripides’ *Hekabe* and *Red Riding Hood*”), installations and conceptual works, and a category she calls “music for people,” such as “an amoeba sunset play to Ravel’s *Boléro* at sunset on Sunset Boulevard” and “undercover actions” to be performed in supermarket settings.

How to Fall Apart was born of a process of collaboration between musicians and dancers. When AMOC*’s Keir GoGwilt asked Chen to write something for violin and cello as well as a pair of dancers, she recalls thinking at first about the intimacy of chamber music, of how we listen to it and how it stages a conversation between people: “How could that conversation between sound and movement be bridged?” Chen at first imagined a string quartet comprising violin and cello (for GoGwilt and fellow company member and cellist Jay Campbell) plus “two other people for whom moving would be their instrument instead of playing a physical string instrument.” As a formal process, the concept was to cross-connect the worlds of music and dance in a way that allows “dancers and musicians to work both within their areas of expertise and also a little bit outside.”

Storytelling and acts of translation also feature prominently in Chen’s work. Since speaking is an “area of inexpertise” equally shared by musicians and dancers (“since it’s an everyday action that neither are professionally trained to do”), she developed a “talking script” including found texts that illustrate the phenomenon of falling apart in some of its countless manifestations. The script—some of it narrated live and other parts pre-recorded—whittles these down to 11 topics arranged in varied thematic categories. Scientific theories and observations are heard side-by-side with folk wisdom and examples from everyday life to explain the myriad ways of falling apart. Chen brainstormed this sequence of situations or topics: stargazing, the mytheme of the world turtle, early theories about the flat earth, erosion, the

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TALKING, MOVING, PLAYING

mechanical universe, the aging body, compost, the layering of croissants, global warming, Pluto and its demotion from planetary status, and the red shift of an expanding universe.

Cosmological theories involving the shape of the universe and how we operate in it, as well as how these have changed over time, provide a unifying theme to this textual layer. *How to Fall Apart*, Chen explains, also explores “how these various stories we tell ourselves come apart and then come together in different ways.” The awe-inspiring grandeur of the narrative of astrophysics, the human body falling as it ages, the sheeting that happens with erosion, how the food we eat is broken down into the components of compost—Chen allows all of these stories to cast a particular spell. She also represents the dialectic between falling apart and being put back together. Compost, for example, in turn “builds fungal networks and microbial universes” that sustain a new generation.

Instead of being “accompanied” by the music, Chen says that the recited texts and stories are the accompaniment, “like a footnote to the music.” A key inspiration for the score is the simple tune “What Wondrous Love Is This,” a shape-note hymn that appealed to Chen because of the tradition of “a gathering of people who sing together but who don’t need to be experts in singing.” She adds that “it’s about life and death and the idea of wonder, which is thematically relevant.”

Her score presents a series of loose variations on the hymn, which is often difficult to recognize within the colorful gestural contexts of Chen’s music. At the outset, for example, Campbell plays harmonics that spell out the tune, but without its rhythmic profile. The cello’s deep bass, starting on a sustained low C, represents the sky through which the harmonics “shine,” as we hear stories about the experience of looking at the stars. For the final section, with its talk of “red shift” and “raisin bread,” Chen makes use of Doppler effects and spatial differentiation.

While collaborating with the musicians and dancers, Chen compiled a list of “prompts” for types of movement and physical gestures—another layer alongside the narration and music.

Her movement outline suggests remaining “at ease” for the opening section of stargazing, while, corresponding to the theme of turtles, Chen refers to the movements mouth and tongue make to pronounce a tongue twister about the price of a turtle compared to a chicken.

Chen and her colleagues remind us throughout that art itself enacts a process of taking apart and putting together again: the composer’s task, as suggested by the root *componere* (to put together, to arrange), here amplified by the energy of bodies in motion.

—THOMAS MAY

This concert is approximately 60 minutes.