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The world premiere of
the echoing of tenses
is commissioned by the
Ojai Music Festival with a
generous gift in honor of
Nancy Sanders

There is no intermission
during the concert.

Friday, June 10, 2022 | 5:00pm

Libbey Bowl

the echoing of tenses

Arthur Sze *poet* | Victoria Chang *poet* | Paul Appleby *tenor*
Miranda Cuckson *violin* | Anthony Cheung *piano*

Stewart GOODYEAR

Prelude and Dance from Suite for Solo Violin World Premiere
Miranda Cuckson *violin*

Charles IVES

Sunrise
Paul Appleby *tenor* | Miranda Cuckson *violin* | Anthony Cheung *piano*

Anthony CHEUNG

the echoing of tenses World Premiere

1. The Network (Arthur Sze)
2. Misconjugate (Jenny Xie)

Interlude 1

3. The Golden State (Cathy Park Hong)

Interlude 2: Expenditures (Jenny Xie)

4. In Search Of (Jenny Xie)
5. The Gift (Li-Young Lee)

Interlude 3: Dear Grandmother (Victoria Chang)

6. The Gift (Ocean Vuong)
7. A Guide to Usage: Mine (Monica Youn)

Interlude 4: Sleepers (Arthur Sze)

8. Brownacre (Monica Youn)

Interlude 5: Memory (Victoria Chang)

9. Transfigurations (Arthur Sze)

Arthur Sze *poet* | Victoria Chang *poet* | Paul Appleby *tenor*
Miranda Cuckson *violin* | Anthony Cheung *piano and keyboard*
David Bird *sound design*

Stewart GOODYEAR (b. 1978)
Prelude and Dance from Suite for Solo Violin
(2022)

Charles IVES (1874-1954)
Sunrise (1926)

Anthony CHEUNG (b. 1982)
the echoing of tenses (2022)

I've always found Anthony Cheung's music exquisite, vividly colorful, haunting, and a sophisticated meld of ideas all over the map, made his own. He and I have been friends since we were graduate students, passionately absorbed in music.

When I asked him to write for AMOC*, he sat with the idea a long while and then sent me this poetry by Asian-American writers. He is Chinese-American, I'm half-Taiwanese.

the echoing of tenses threads together the voices of seven writers... different generations, genders, and experiences of America. It's about human experience of tactile and emotional memories, intimate family bonds, and the resonances and confusions of language.

—MIRANDA CUCKSON

Networks of Memory

Where do personal and collective memories connect? How are such memories articulated by poetry, by music, by their combination into still another language? Is each memory "another truth in a vast network of truths," as the poet Arthur Sze ponders in his poem "The Network"? The composer and pianist Anthony Cheung prompts these and related questions with his new song cycle commissioned by the Ojai Music Festival, *the echoing of tenses*. Cheung had not set out initially to write a piece about memory when AMOC* member Miranda Cuckson — who chose music by Cheung as part of her recital at the 2021 Festival — invited him to compose for the company. He began by selecting seven Asian American poets with whose work he felt a special resonance after a period of reading and research, and in dialogue with AMOC*'s co-founder Matthew Aucoin.

"But this theme of memory kept returning in various ways, whether it was

autobiographical or cultural," Cheung explains, "and whether the poets were writing from personal or family experience, or imagining conversations with family members, both living and deceased." He found himself drawn to texts that were "haunted by ideas of memory and that took very individual approaches to that theme." The opportunity to work with singers and texts, Cheung adds, represents a new direction for his music.

The seven poets, all living, range widely in style and personality and come from different generations. In the order in which they appear in *the echoing of tenses*, they include the Santa Fe-based poet and translator Arthur Sze; Jenny Xie, based in New York; Cathy Park Hong, poetry editor of *The New Republic* and author of *Minor Feelings*; Chicago-based Li-Young Lee; Los Angeles poet Victoria Chang, author of the recent *Dear Memory: Letters on Writing, Silence, and Grief*; Ocean Vuong, recipient of a MacArthur "Genius" Award

in 2019; and poet and former lawyer Monica Youn.

Each of the texts is independent, but Cheung, who grew up in a Chinese American family in the San Francisco Bay Area, homes in on shared threads of imagery involving nature, time, the power of language, and intergenerational connections. Musically, he uses textures and tunings to illuminate the poems and lend coherence to the cycle, which is scored for tenor, violin, and piano plus a full-size electronic keyboard. Pre-recorded sounds and instrumental and spoken samples created in collaboration with sound designer David Bird add still another layer.

Working with a program that allows him to use either preset or free tunings, Cheung explains that the combination of acoustic piano with retuned keyboard produces a "microtonal sheen." Although

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NETWORKS OF MEMORY

the cycle is mostly written in “an extended tonal idiom,” the use of microtunings and “collision of tuning systems” generate an aura of ambiguity — “a sweetness but also sourness.”

For the sung material, Cheung tried to match the distinctive lyrical quality of Paul Appleby’s voice, especially for Li-Young Lee’s “The Gift” (a duet for tenor and violin) and the final song, Arthur Sze’s “Transfigurations,” whose “aromas of place and histories seem especially suited to Paul’s naturally lyrical voice.” Other poems are recited — by the poets themselves, whether live (Arthur Sze and Victoria Chang) or in recordings, who will intersperse other poetic recitations with the cycle. Cheung and Miranda Cuckson also recite in alternation while playing their instruments (Jenny Xie’s “In Search Of”), and all three musicians overlap in

a combination of singing and reciting in Monica Youn’s “A Guide to Usage: Mine,” one of the moments where Cheung uses just intonation in a way that emulates how Harry Partch tried “to approximate the contours of the spoken voice in recitation.”

Like Anthony Cheung’s new work, Stewart Goodyear’s Suite for Solo Violin engages with memories inspired by his family background. Although best known as a pianist from Toronto, Goodyear has increasingly turned his attention to composing. For Miranda Cuckson, who was a fellow student at Juilliard, he wrote his recent six-movement Suite. The violinist explains that it combines homages to Goodyear’s dual heritage as Trinidadian on his mother’s side and British on his late father’s. She has selected the third and fourth movements: a rhapsodic Prelude, which leads into the exuberant,

Caribbean-flavored Dance. In the latter, Goodyear blends calypso rhythms with harmonics that imitate the sound of steel pan drums.

As a preamble to *the echoing of tenses*, we hear Charles Ives’s meditation on the passage of time in *Sunrise*—the final piece he wrote, in 1926, before deciding to abandon composition. Ives spent the remainder of his long life revising past works. He left only a sketch for this song, which was edited into a performable version by John Kirkpatrick. Ives also wrote the words, inspired by Thoreau’s *Walden* and conveying “the hope of the New Day.” Opening with the veiled, impressionist sound of muted violin and opaque harmonies, his music poignantly balances its impulse to ascend with gestures of “a dying fall.”

—THOMAS MAY

This concert is approximately 60 minutes.