



Thursday, June 9, 2022 | 5:00pm
Ojai Art Center

A Passageway Between Shores

Paul Appleby *tenor* | Keir GoGwilt *violin* | Carolyn Chen *composer* | Divya Victor *poet*

Divya VICTOR/Carolyn CHEN	Divya Victor readings from <i>Curb</i> , set by Carolyn Chen
Carolyn CHEN/Divya VICTOR	<i>Absence of Reliable Ghosts</i>
Keir GOGWILT/Celeste ORAM	<i>Craigie Hill</i>
Keir GOGWILT	<i>The Lass of Roch Royal</i>
Celeste ORAM/Jean RITCHIE	<i>Cool of the Day</i>

This concert is made possible
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Claire and David Oxtoby

OJAI ART CENTER
113 S. MONTGOMERY STREET

A Passageway Between Shores

I first met Carolyn Chen when I performed her piece for solo violin, *Regarding Chickens, Death*. The piece encapsulated for me the unique power of Carolyn's imagination, which brings the musical body and instrument in relation to creatures, sensations, micro- and macrocosmic phenomena. Carolyn first read Divya Victor's poetry on the website of the Press at Colorado College. She ended up composing around poems from Divya's book, *Curb*, extending the intense vocality of Divya's recitations into melody, harmony, and accumulating rhythmic refrains, or else accompanying Divya's speech and song with manipulated field recordings. Divya's poems chronicle a vast web of South Asian immigrant experiences in American cities and suburbs, navigating scenes of everyday life, governmental bureaucracy, and instances of domestic terrorism. "Frequency" documents the testimony of Alka Sinha at the sentencing hearing for the death of her husband Divyendu Sinha in 2013. She began her testimony by playing a recording of his

voicemail greeting. *Curb 4* responds to the death of Sunando Sen, a print-shop owner who was pushed off the subway platform into an oncoming train in 2012 by a nationalist who believed that he was responsible for the attacks on the World Trade Center.

My pieces for this program derive from experiments with poetry and music, which began life in collaboration with both Carolyn and composer Celeste Oram. These pieces utilize the "starling" poetry form, which places words on a grid matrix of 27 spaces. Having written in starling form for the last decade, I began experimenting with the ways in which the form amplified the iterative, recursive nature of syntax, registering subtle musical and semantic shifts through variable timing and phrasing. I found "The Lass of Roch Royal" after hearing Paul Appleby sing "The Lass of Augrim": the Irish version of Roch Royal, which appears in James Joyce's story, "The Dead." I found a recording of this continually transfigured

song, sung by Elizabeth Cronin, and recorded by Jean Ritchie. Celeste Oram's arrangement of Jean Ritchie's own song, "The Cool of the Day," follows a similar practice of chronicling poetry and traditional music in ways that disrupt linear notions of cultural transference.

If these webs of influence seem tangled, it is only because they reflect the nature of art-making in a world whose connectedness knows nothing of niche or genre. Our voices are the sum of our experiences, and our experiences are intensely networked: activities of reading, singing, mothering, and fathering are constantly bringing us into unexpected connection with others. In this moment in which our darkest impulses are hell-bent on dividing us, I imagine this work as the practice of tracing our messy globality and illuminating the many passageways connecting us.

—KEIR GOGWILT

This concert is approximately 55 minutes.